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The window for stopping a runaway climate crisis is closing rapidly. Europeans and communities across the globe are increasingly suffering from extreme weather events such as droughts, heatwaves, floodings and forest fires. Meanwhile the loss of ecosystems and biodiversity continues apace, endangering our livelihoods and further amplifying the impacts of the climate emergency. To compound matters, we are grappling with the lasting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, war on our borders, and a cost of living crisis driven by our fossil fuel dependency.

Amidst these challenging times, the 2024 EU elections provide the chance to formulate a coherent response - and offer people hope for a safer, more equitable future. With the right actions, political leaders hold the power to improve the wellbeing and safety of people across the globe, and increase Europe’s autonomy and resilience.

In 2019, the EU elections triggered the inception of the European Green Deal - a meaningful step towards tackling the twin climate and biodiversity crises. Following the 2024 EU elections, political leaders must build on this vision, and ensure all sectors and systems finally become part of the transition.

For the next five years, the EU must make a priority out of fundamentally redesigning its economy to more rapidly wean our dependence off fossil fuels and make full use of the benefits provided by healthy ecosystems. This includes addressing inequalities and ensuring the most vulnerable communities and small businesses do not carry the heaviest burdens of climate and nature action. Sustainable living needs to be made easy, affordable and attractive for everyone.

Leaders must bring an end to reckless calls for a ‘pause’ on further environmental measures, and promoting deregulation, whether it is on nature or on climate. Such actions endanger people’s safety and well-being - and are misplaced as global efforts to date are woefully insufficient and we remain far off course from meeting international commitments to keep global warming to 1.5°C and halt and reverse nature loss.

In this context, WWF has crafted three key actions that need to be central in the EU’s political priorities for the years to come, for the sake of people’s wellbeing and tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. These asks are complemented by ten sets of concrete policy recommendations spanning climate and energy, biodiversity, water, forests, food and farming, wildlife crime, oceans, sustainable finance, governance, and international partnerships. Together, they form a comprehensive roadmap for navigating the challenges posed by climate change and biodiversity loss. By embracing these measures, the EU can lead the way in fostering a resilient, sustainable future for all.
End fossil fuel dependence

WWF asks that all political parties and leaders highlight how their proposals will guarantee the EU rapidly ends its dependence on fossil fuels and builds an affordable clean renewable energy future for all - to ensure our economies are resilient to energy crises, to help stop runaway climate change, and create a healthier environment. Such proposals must also make clear how the needs of workers and communities will be fully addressed during the huge changes that the transition will involve.

As a priority, The EU must set a target of reaching climate neutrality by 2040, to keep the objective of 1.5°C within reach and comply with the Paris Climate Agreement, in order to avoid the worst of the climate crisis.

To end its fossil fuel dependence, the EU must also:

- **Set a target of halving EU energy consumption and reaching a 100% renewable energy system by 2040**, based on well-planned, nature-safe deployment of solar and wind on land and at sea.

- **Set target dates for ending coal, gas and oil use, in that order** while helping the most vulnerable households in accessing clean and affordable energy.

- **Limit the oversized influence of fossil fuel industries** by taxing fossil fuel windfall profits, by banning their use of advertising and sponsorship, and by introducing tighter public scrutiny and proactive transparency.
Prioritise nature for safety and resilience

WWF asks that all political parties and leaders highlight how their proposals will harness the social, economic and environmental benefits provided by healthy ecosystems on land and in the ocean - which are essential for people’s livelihoods, slowing and adapting to climate change and ensuring our food and water security.

As a priority, the EU must fix our broken food system - which is harming our health, the environment, as well as many farmers - and make sustainable food available for everyone.

It must realise sustainable food environments and setting science-based quantitative targets for big food manufacturers, caterers, and retailers on sourcing, advertising, promotion and sales of sustainable and healthy food. These targets should be combined with coherent repurposing of subsidies for agriculture production and the implementation of the other Farm to Fork commitments.

To strengthen its resilience, the EU must also:

- **Double EU and national investments in nature to at least €50 billion annually** including by establishing a new EU fund for nature restoration activities undertaken by farmers, foresters, landowners, fishers and coastal communities and ensuring national governments increase the share of gross domestic product invested in nature.

- **Adopt and implement a new climate adaptation framework that prioritises nature-based solutions** to protect Europeans against climate hazards such as more intense and frequent droughts, heatwaves, floods and fires. By better protecting, restoring and managing nature, we can reduce rising temperatures, better retain water, and increase the resilience of crops and abundance of fish - while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and storing increased levels of carbon.

- **Strengthen the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework**, including by ensuring that all EU Member States adopt and implement ambitious national biodiversity strategies and action plans and at least doubling the EU’s international financial support for biodiversity by 2030.
**Leave no-one behind**

WWF asks that all political parties and leaders highlight how their proposals will help Europeans deal with the rapid socio-economic transition that is now facing us, due to the climate, energy and biodiversity crises, with a focus on vulnerable households and tackling inequalities and an end to hand-outs for big polluters.

As a priority, the EU must remodel its economy by adopting and implementing legal measures to redirect all harmful and wasteful national and EU public expenditure for fossil fuels and nature-damaging activities towards the ecological transition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To leave no-one behind in the transition, the EU must also:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Mandate large scale, EU funded and easily accessible clean energy and energy saving programmes for citizens</strong> that support deep renovation of buildings, access to clean, renewable energy, investment in public and shared transport options, cycling and walking and related infrastructure, and re-skilling and training, so that all Europeans can enjoy the benefits of the green transition and find jobs in the clean industries of the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Introduce reforms to support greater citizen participation in policy development and more political transparency at EU and national levels</strong>, ensuring equal access to information and justice in environmental matters for all citizens across Europe, adopting an overarching EU strategy that empowers and protects civil society and promoting forms of deliberative democracy, such as the use of citizen assemblies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Complete a clear transition finance framework for green private finance</strong>, ensuring that private financial institutions scale up support for the green transition of companies and stop financing harmful activities, and ensuring that greenwashing is avoided.</td>
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DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS BY POLICY AREA
Achieve climate neutrality

By accelerating the transition to a climate neutral economy in a fair and nature-friendly way, Europe will become more resilient and better able to protect its people against future shocks and worsening climate disasters.

WHAT WE NEED

1. Achieve climate neutrality by 2040 at the latest
2. Phase out fossil fuels
3. Build a highly efficient and fully renewable energy system
4. Support a people-led approach to the climate transition
5. Strengthen the Green Deal Industrial Plan
6. Ensure industries pay the real cost of their carbon pollution
7. Set a much higher net removal target for the land use sector
8. Better involve EU citizens in climate policies

INTRODUCTION

A climate neutral future is resilient and prosperous

While the speed and scale of action required may look daunting, achieving climate neutrality is feasible with the technologies and knowledge available to us today. A climate-neutral future is one in which we have a more secure energy supply. It's a world where we have a more resilient environment to grow food in and nature-rich landscapes protecting us from floods and wildfires. It is also a competitive and prosperous society with new job opportunities in fast-growing clean industries and the circular economy. A climate neutral future is more liveable, and will improve our health and wellbeing.
Citizens are demanding climate action now

With the numerous crises European societies have been affected by recently, citizens continue to urge policymakers to intensify their efforts in achieving climate neutrality. Several crises can be addressed simultaneously, such as fossil fuel-induced inflation and the rising cost of living. The EU has so far failed to respond to this adequately and to set emissions targets consistent with the 1.5C goal. It has also failed to fulfil its responsibility regarding historical emissions. To a significant extent, this is due to decades of intensive lobbying by the fossil fuel industry and incumbent industries, which continue to oppose the pace of necessary change in energy transition and promote false solutions.

Another factor contributing to the current situation is a perception amongst some policy makers that the EU is already doing enough compared to the rest of the world, and that the time has come to shift focus to other priorities. Unfortunately, the climate crisis continues to accelerate regardless, and the EU risks falling behind other major economies in the development of clean technologies.

WHAT IS THE EU ALREADY DOING?

Our policies are not in line with the scale of the challenge

In recent years, the EU has adopted a broad spectrum of policy instruments related to climate and energy. These range from overarching regulations such as the EU Climate Law and the Energy Union Governance Regulation; to legislation setting targets for specific sectors, like the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) and the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation; and rules governing topics including renewable energy, energy efficiency and emissions from buildings and various forms of transport. In the most recent reforms, including the Fit for 55 package, the EU has also made headway in adding policies relating to the just transition, including the Just Transition Fund and the Social Climate Fund.

In terms of overall climate governance structures, the EU can therefore rightfully be seen as an international front-runner. However, in practice, the content of various policies often falls short of the magnitude of the challenge we face and fails to align with the underlying science. Additionally, many of these policies include exemptions and loopholes that undermine their potential impact. Most Member States do no more than the minimum required by EU law. In fact, some of them even fail to do that.

Improve public participation and focus more on demand reduction

A common problem, both at EU and Member State level, is the engagement of citizens, which will become ever more important as climate and energy policies move ‘closer to home’ and address issues such as heating, transport and consumption of goods. All these measures are necessary if we are to achieve a just transition to a clean economy, but there is a need for much more effective and comprehensive involvement of EU citizens in the design of the overall transition.

Another systemic issue is the widespread failure in many EU climate and energy policies to address the demand side of the equation. There needs to be a much greater focus on demand reduction, the reuse and recycling of materials and products, the substitution of critical raw materials and material and energy efficiency—all things that can also increase the competitiveness of EU businesses.

Finally, the recent tendency to lean towards environmental deregulation must be addressed. While it is understandable that policy-makers are now focusing on the need to ‘reindustrialise’ Europe, watering down rules on environmental protection or nature restoration is not the way to increase strategic autonomy in clean energy, win public support, and bring back key industrial value chains to Europe. Furthermore, it can also reduce the opportunity for local communities to provide input on planning processes.
OUR DEMANDS

1. Achieve climate neutrality by 2040 at the latest

Europe’s path towards climate neutrality must be faster, with binding targets of 65% emissions reduction by 2030 and zero net emissions by 2040 at the latest.

The EU’s current climate neutrality target is set for 2050, but we must achieve it earlier. The EU must revise the EU Climate Law and Governance Regulation to set a target of reaching climate neutrality in the EU by 2040, and binding national targets that add up to that goal. The Climate Law must also be amended to increase the 2030 emissions reduction target to 65% and to set an intermediate target for 2035, which would be consistent with the 5-year ‘common time frames’ agreed at the 2021 Glasgow Climate Change Conference.

2. Phase out fossil fuels

Europe can, and should, phase out fossil fuels urgently, while disconnecting the fossil fuel industry’s political and commercial influence on our society.

All fossil fuels should be phased out progressively by 2040, starting with a complete phase out of coal by 2030, of gas by 2035, and of oil by 2040. All subsidies for fossil fuels need to end, while helping the most vulnerable households access clean and affordable energy. We also need much tighter regulation on the activities of the fossil fuel industry, including a ban on future exploration and extraction in the EU. Finally, tougher rules and increased transparency on the fossil fuel industry's access to and lobbying of policy makers should be applied to restrict their influence. This includes putting an end to their use of advertising and sponsorship.

3. Build a highly efficient and fully renewable energy system

The EU needs a bold plan to halve its energy demand, and to massively expand renewables such as wind and solar in a people and nature-friendly way.

The Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Directives should be revised to set a target of halving EU final energy demand and reaching 100% renewables by 2040. This ambitious goal necessitates a comprehensive programme for renovating buildings across the continent to reduce heating demand and energy costs. It also involves the widespread electrification of road transport and heating through electric vehicles and heat pumps, including large scale heat pumps linked to thermal storage and district heating. Finally, such a programme requires a massive expansion in the rate of deployment of wind and solar power.
4. Support a people-led approach to the climate transition

The Just Transition in Europe should seek accelerated change for the most disadvantaged households, communities and regions.

To achieve the transition ahead, we need a much stronger, EU-wide, just transition framework to support a ‘people-led’ strategy. Currently, the Just Transition Mechanism only targets a number of specific regions with the highest decarbonisation-related needs, and the Social Climate Fund, intended to provide a buffer for the most vulnerable households and microenterprises, is small compared to the potential scale of help required.

The initial Just Transition Mechanism has demonstrated that we need to seek accelerated change for the most under-resourced households, communities and regions, and enforce ‘polluter pays’ and social justice principles. The strengthened just transition framework should also include an updated and stronger Green & Fair Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights. This plan should introduce binding implementation requirements for the EU’s transition to a clean economy and digital future, including relevant vocational training and support for reskilling workers in preparation for green jobs.

5. Strengthen the Green Deal Industrial Plan

Citizens and our economy will benefit from an EU industrial policy that prioritises the deployment of clean and efficient technologies and that boosts circularity and resource-efficiency, reducing demand for both energy and raw materials.

The Green Deal still lacks a proper industrial plan with sufficient ambition. Presently, it only comprises the Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA), the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) and the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform, aimed at boosting investments in critical technologies in Europe. To enhance its effectiveness, the Green Deal Industrial Plan should adopt a science-based approach, integrating strategies and policies that promote demand-side reduction and resource-efficient measures.

Embracing the principles of a circular economy, the plan should emphasise the reuse and recycling of materials and products. It should prioritise the deployment of clean and energy efficient technologies that help meet the EU 2030 climate targets, by revising the scope of the Net-Zero Industry Act and stepping up the financial incentives involved. Finally, focusing on the deployment of key clean technologies would also be an opportunity for the future of EU industries. Indeed, a robust green deal industrial plan has the potential to help EU industries both to decarbonise on time while increasing their competitiveness.
6. Ensure industries pay the real cost of their carbon pollution

The Emissions Trading System must finally apply the polluter pays principle and stop giving industry free permits to pollute.

The recent ETS reform still allows big polluters to be exempt from paying the full carbon price, and heavy industries continue to receive billions of euros worth of free emissions allowances at the expense of both the climate and taxpayers. The next reform, scheduled to be presented between 2026 and 2027, must put an end to such free permits to pollute. The same principle should also apply to industries covered by the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). In addition, reporting requirements on how Member States spend their ETS revenues should be strengthened to make it more transparent.

7. Set a much higher net removal target for the land use sector

Nature-based carbon dioxide removal needs to play a greater role in the path towards carbon neutrality, with separate binding targets and a major increase in public finance.

Europe’s LULUCF sector, which covers farmland, wetlands, forests and other land, currently absorbs more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it emits, meaning it is a net “carbon sink”. But we need a much higher net removal target for the LULUCF sector if we are to reach climate neutrality overall. We also need to revise the EU Climate Law and the ESR to prevent net removals in the LULUCF sector being used to offset fossil fuel or non-CO2 agriculture emissions from livestock and fertiliser use.

To meet a higher LULUCF target we need a shift to healthier diets, as well as the rapid expansion of nature restoration activities and sustainable agricultural and forestry practices that are a win-win for climate and biodiversity. Such measures not only increase the resilience of carbon stocks to future climate impacts, but also reduce risks to our society, economy, and food supply from extreme weather events such as flooding and heatwaves.

Support for such action could come from a number of sources, including public funding through national support schemes; the Common Agricultural Policy; state revenues from the ETS or other levies on greenhouse gas emitting companies; and voluntary contributions from the private sector. However, removal credits in the land use sector—for example those that may be certified under the proposed EU Carbon Removal Certification Framework—should not be used by companies to avoid obligations under compliance regimes, such as the ETS, or as the basis for carbon neutrality claims.

8. Better involve EU citizens in climate policies

The EU must do more to encourage EU citizens and communities’ engagement in the development of EU climate policies, in order to ensure public support for the transition to a decarbonised society.

To ensure widespread public support for the major changes required over the coming years, there is a need for much more effective and comprehensive involvement of EU citizens. Whether in cities, rural
areas or other communities, citizens must be involved in the design of the overall transition, as opposed to just EU stakeholder consultations on individual policies, which are typically not accessible for the general public.

The use of deliberative democracy approaches, such as citizens’ climate assemblies that consider all relevant policies as a whole, can be helpful in this regard, if they are well-planned and implemented. Such approaches could help counter the risk of public backlash from inadequate, piecemeal public engagement on individual, sectoral policies—whether those are EU level policies or national policies resulting from EU-level targets.
1. 85% of EU citizens think that the EU should invest massively in renewable energy such as wind and solar power, and the war in Ukraine has given new impetus to efforts to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels (Eurobarometer, 2023).

2. We are close to exceeding the global 1.5C target set by the Paris Agreement, and Europe is already well above that figure: data from the past five years put average temperature over land in Europe at 2.2C above pre-industrial levels (Euronews, 2023).

3. Fossil fuels still made up 70% of gross available energy in the EU in 2021, remaining at the same level as in 2020 (Eurostat, 2023).

4. Burning biomass still constitutes almost 60% of renewable energy in the EU, far more than clean technologies such as wind and solar. Burning trees (as opposed to waste from sawmills or paper mills) can increase emissions for decades or centuries compared to fossil fuels (Public letter from scientists to the EU Parliament, 2018).

5. The ETS should make sure the most polluting industries (e.g. steel, cement, chemicals) pay for their emissions, but they were given free emissions allowances that exempted them from having to do so for over half of their emissions (53% between 2013-2021), allowances worth almost €100bn which could have been spent on climate action (WWF, 2022).

6. The deployment of wind and solar energy is saving us billions of dollars every year by replacing imported gas and oil. In the first 7 months of the war in Ukraine, the EU saved €99bn in oil and gas imports thanks to wind and solar power (Ember, 2022).

7. The costs of wind and solar power have fallen dramatically over the last few years, to the extent that they are now in many circumstances the cheapest source of electricity (IRENA, 2017, see graph on page 42). (Our World in Data - based on IRENA data).
• **2024:** Publication of a European Commission Communication on the 2040 climate neutrality target, followed by a legislative proposal to revise the EU Climate Law (likely in early 2025).

• **January-June 2024:** Tentative agreement on the ongoing negotiations on both the Net-Zero Industry Act and Critical Raw Materials Act.

• **June 2024:** Submission of the final version of updated National Energy and Climate Plans by Member States, following a European Commission review.

• **2025:** Review of the CBAM Regulation.

• **October-December 2025:** Submission of a new EU Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) ahead of COP29, which should set out climate action and support on the common timeframe of 2035, taking on the conclusions of the first Global Stocktake.

• **2026:** Entry into force of the EU Social Climate Fund.

• **2026-2027:** Likely timescale for legislative proposals by the European Commission for revising EU climate and energy legislation for the post-2030 period, such as the ETS (phase V), the ESR and the LULUCF Regulation.

• **2027:** Entry into force of the extension of the ETS to road transport and buildings (‘ETS2’).

• **October-December 2027:** Likely timescale for legislative proposal by the European Commission on the regulatory framework for the promotion of energy from renewable sources for the period after 2030.

• **October-December 2027:** Presentation of a European Commission report on the impact of Member State support schemes for biomass, including on biodiversity.
As we all depend on the world’s forests, we need to conserve them to sustain nature’s diversity, benefit our climate, and support human wellbeing.

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Enforce the EU Deforestation Regulation
2. Close the loopholes in the EU Deforestation Regulation
3. Improve the monitoring and reporting of European forests

**INTRODUCTION**

Despite their many benefits, forests are disappearing at an alarming rate

Forest ecosystems and other wooded lands, such as savannahs and wetlands, provide essential ecosystem services—from offering a home to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities and stabilising the climate, to sheltering 80% of the world’s terrestrial animal, insect and plant species, and providing recreational spaces to enjoy nature and important resources for our bio economy.

Yet, forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Between August 2022 and April 2023 alone, the Amazon lost 5,936 km². This was a new record, surpassing by 20% data recorded between August 2021 and April 2022. This problem is not only taking place far abroad. Forests in the EU are also at risk. Of all the forests that are protected under the Natura 2000 network, only 14% are in a favourable conservation status. There are only 3%
Many pledges have been made already

Over the past mandates, the EU made many global commitments, including by signing the Sustainable Development Goals and the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use. This set the EU on the path to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030. The European Commission also presented its new EU Forest Strategy for 2030, taking a proactive approach to increase the resilience of our forests as well as to improve forest management and sustainable demands on forests.

New EU legislation to tackle deforestation cannot become a “paper tiger”

In 2020, about 1.2 million citizens called for a new legislation that would keep products causing deforestation off the EU market. In 2023, a new EU law on Deforestation-free products was finally adopted. The new legislation requires companies on the EU market to assess and reduce the risk of products being linked to deforestation. It includes products linked to soy, palm-oil, timber, coffee, cocoa, cattle and rubber. By carrying out this risk analysis but also by ensuring traceability of these products back to the plot of land where they were produced, EU supply chains will become more transparent and traceable. This will provide EU consumers with the certainty that what ends up on the EU’s supermarket shelves or on their plates is free of deforestation and forest destruction.

However, this law needs to be turned into action. This can be achieved through more harmonised and strict reporting and monitoring of EU forests, as well as through a proper implementation and enforcement of the EU Deforestation Law at the national level through sanctions and controls. Finally, policy-makers must increase the level of ambition by enlarging the scope of law beyond forests, so it effectively prevents deforestation, forest degradation and ecosystem conversion.
1. Enforce the EU Deforestation Regulation

The new EU Deforestation Law, which entered into force in June 2023, requires comprehensive implementation and rigorous enforcement, with sufficient and thorough controls at national level to ensure that deforestation doesn’t sneak onto our supermarket shelves.

The enforcement of the EU Deforestation Law relies on national authorities and customs, equipped with mandates and resources to conduct inspections on products associated with deforestation, whether placed in the EU market or intended for export. Authorities need to be given stringent and strict criteria to conduct checks on all company types through unannounced controls. Proper fines and prosecution should prevent the breach of the regulation, should any non-compliance case be detected.

2. Close the loopholes in the EU Deforestation Regulation

The EU Deforestation Law needs to not only focus on forests but also on other natural ecosystems such as wooded savannahs, grasslands and wetlands. The legislation must also apply to the finance sector.

Presently, the scope of the EU Deforestation Law is limited to forests, leaving out natural and primary other wooded lands such as savannahs. These areas, with significant ecological and social importance akin to forests, face considerable threats from the rapid expansion of large-scale agricultural production. Therefore, they must also be protected from conversion. The European Commission is currently conducting an impact assessment to determine whether the law should extend to cover other wooded land. The results of this assessment will be presented by summer 2024, and should be followed by targeted legislative improvements.

Moreover, the EU must ensure that the regulation encompasses the financial sector starting in 2025. Financial institutions are highly exposed to the impacts of deforestation, ecosystem conversion and associated human rights risks. Besides diverting capital from activities that drive deforestation and ecosystem conversion, these institutions are well-positioned to direct capital towards nature-positive activities that protect and restore these vital landscapes.
3. Improve the monitoring of European forests

There is an urgent need to achieve a more consistent, coherent approach to forest monitoring that looks at the biodiversity, health and resilience of forests but also at the different services forests provide. By implementing a robust set of science-based indicators, we will be able to better understand, survey and protect forests in Europe.

To facilitate informed discussions on forests—covering their protection, restoration, and management—it is imperative to establish a clear, science-based monitoring system. The EU should establish a common monitoring framework, harmonising the collection of high-quality data sufficient that adequately reflects the condition of forests in the European Union and the various ecosystem services they provide.

We also need to streamline reporting on a number of important EU strategies and instruments related to forests. These include nature legislation such as the Habitats and Birds Directives and prospective Nature Restoration Law; climate and energy instruments such as the Renewable Energy Directive and Land Use, Land-use Change and Forestry Regulation (LULUCF); strategies such as the European Green Deal, and the Biodiversity Strategy, Forest Strategy for 2030; and the reporting of EU progress with regards to commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

In addition to better data, Member States should adopt strategic plans in which they set out their approach to spatial planning and the wider measures to achieve a multifunctional forest landscape. Measures to preserve and enhance biodiversity should be taken by private and public forest owners and be integrated into forest management plans. Finally, data on EU forest monitoring from a biodiversity, economic and social perspective should be made accessible to the public.
1. Between 2005 and 2017, EU imports caused 3.5 million hectares of deforestation, emitting 1,807 million tonnes of CO2. This is equivalent to 40% of the EU’s overall annual emissions (WWF, 2021).

2. The EU is the second biggest importer of products that can be linked to deforestation after China, accounting for 16% of the global share of imports between 2005 and 2017 (WWF, 2021).

3. Around 10% of the world’s forests, an area larger than the European Union, have been lost worldwide through deforestation over the past 30 years (European Commission, DG Environment).

4. In Europe, of the forest area that is protected under Natura 2000, only 14% are in a favourable conservation status (EEA, 2021).

**TIMELINE**

- **June 2024**: Presentation of the European Commission’s impact assessment on the inclusion of other wooded land under the EU Deforestation Law.

- **December 2024**: Application of the EU Deforestation Law by companies, starting with large and medium-sized companies.

- **June 2025**: Presentation of an impact assessment by the European Commission on the inclusion of other ecosystems and the financial sector under the EU Deforestation Law.
Far too often, the processes through which EU decisions are made have proven to be unfavourable to climate and environmental considerations. To effectively address both current and future challenges, the EU must enhance its working methods.

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Foster more and better citizen participation
2. Adopt a “Better Compliance” Agenda
3. Enhance the good governance of EU institutions

**INTRODUCTION**

The European Green Deal requires a “whole-of-society” approach

Despite the European Green Deal, policies with significant environmental impacts are often approached in isolation, lacking the necessary leadership to achieve ambitious and tangible results for citizens’ well-being and safety. The environmental crisis can only be solved if we work together. This requires a model where people are placed at the heart of the decision-making process, at both EU and national levels.

While the Green Deal provides a unique political opportunity to confront the existential challenges facing humanity, more work needs to be done to increase Europeans’ trust and confidence in the European institutions for the Deal to attain its goals. The European Commission, European Parliament and Member States each play distinct roles with different starting points, requiring tailored approaches.
Democracy, accountability and governance as key ingredients

Today, the European Union stands as the largest and most successful peace initiative of our time. However, complacency is a luxury we can ill afford. Despite substantial progress, we find ourselves in an era where the foundational values of Europe—democracy and participation, equality and social justice, solidarity, respect for the rule of law, and human rights—are under threat.

Rather than allowing the global and national civic space to shrink, which limits the voice of civil society, including in areas of climate and nature action, we must enhance citizen participation. Exploring greater transparency and innovative democratic approaches, such as citizens’ assemblies at both national and EU levels, is essential. Moreover, once environmental laws have been agreed, national governments and decision-makers must be able to be held accountable by citizens, including through judicial action, to ensure that these laws are more than mere words on paper.

WHAT IS THE EU ALREADY DOING?

Calls for swift enforcement of EU environmental law

The EU’s awareness of Member States’ slow progress in implementing environmental legislation has prompted the European Commission to conduct the “Environmental Implementation Review” since 2017. This regular reporting tool aims to enhance the implementation of EU environmental laws and policies. While valuable for identifying structural gaps in national implementation, WWF emphasises that the Environmental Implementation Review should not replace effective means to ensure Member States comply with legislation. This includes opening infringement cases against Member States failing to adhere to EU environmental laws, especially those displaying a lack of political will to comply with EU law. The Commission must consistently fulfil its role as the guardian of the Treaties, intensifying the use of legal action to halt the poor implementation of EU legislation.

Improving operational methods of EU institutions

The introduction of the Green Deal prompted the European Commission to assign one of its three Executive Vice-Presidents to oversee its adoption and rollout. This new position fostered greater coherence within the Commission, recognising that all sectors, from agriculture to industry, require a profound transformation to ensure a fair and green transition. Initiatives like the Farm to Fork strategy, the EU Deforestation Regulation, and the EU Nature Restoration Law exemplify the potential of adapting governance models to current challenges. Despite these positive steps, other EU institutions, notably the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, have yet to make discernible changes to their internal governance models. They persist in outdated approaches that lead to inconsistent policy outcomes. The imperative for improvements in the working methods of these institutions remains evident.
1. Foster more and better citizen participation

The success of the Green Deal hinges on the active involvement of citizens, communities, and civil society. Unfortunately, their voices often go unheard by national and EU decision-makers, and civil society is often being attacked and restricted.

Civil society plays a key role in ensuring participatory democracy at EU level. By protecting and strengthening civil society, including community groups, non-governmental organisations, labour unions, indigenous groups and faith-based organisations, policymakers can foster greater local, regional and national ownership over the Green Deal.

To improve citizen participation in the Green Deal and other policies, the new Parliament and Commission must lead the adoption of an overarching EU civil society strategy. This strategy should empower and protect civil society, promoting a thriving civic space at both EU and national levels. It must ensure meaningful participation for citizens and civil society in all stages of decision-making; create a safe environment; establish harmonised rules on civil dialogue across EU institutions and Member States; and appoint a Commissioner responsible for Civic Space to oversee the strategy and serve as the first contact point for civil society.

At the same time, no-one should be able to misuse their structural economic power to control policymaking. With more access to decision-makers, the fossil fuel industry has been successfully delaying, weakening and sabotaging greater climate ambition for decades. Through legislative and non-legislative initiatives, the EU should ensure decision-making is protected from fossil fuel and other polluters’ interests at the regional, national and local level.

When citizens’ rights are violated, they must have the right to an effective remedy before a tribunal. A unified EU legal framework guaranteeing effective access to justice in environmental matters can align fragmented rules and address challenges, such as cost and length of procedures, in obtaining justice across Member States, as outlined by the Aarhus Convention.

2. Adopt a “Better Compliance” Agenda

In many fields, the EU already has world-class environmental legislation. Member States lag in implementing crucial EU environmental laws, leading to substantial economic losses - over 55 billion euros annually. To align with the European Green Deal, it’s time for the EU to prioritise a “Better Compliance” agenda.

More than 55 billion euros are squandered annually due to Member States falling short in implementing EU environmental policies and laws. Compliance with EU environmental law is pivotal for attaining the Green Deal’s environmental and climate policy targets—a non-negotiable baseline. Despite persistent calls for better enforcement from Member States and the European Parliament, President von der Leyen’s emphasis on tighter enforcement hasn’t yielded significant changes.
The EU needs to show its political commitment to a “zero tolerance” approach through clear guidelines. This implies the quasi-automatic initiation of infringement procedures when EU environmental law is not respected. Prioritising horizontal topics or strategic cases shouldn’t excuse neglecting individual cases. Urgency demands a bolstering of capacity within the European Commission to enforce environmental legislation comprehensively, aligning with the ecological and climate crisis. Transparency is key, necessitating full disclosure at each infringement step and more frequent use of interim measures in cases where serious or irreversible environmental harm is imminent during proceedings.

In addition, the EU should introduce new legislation on environmental inspections, emphasising Member State responsibility. This legislation would set minimum standards to ensure effective inspections, and empower the Commission to oversee Member State practices and address breaches of EU law, providing overall support in implementation and compliance issues.

3. Enhance the good governance of EU institutions

Thanks to a reform of its governance, the European Commission demonstrated that more consistent and sustainable policies and laws are possible. Yet, other EU institutions continue to lag behind: all EU institutions, and in particular the Parliament and Council of Ministers, should transparently assess their working procedures and governance structures.

While the European Commission has made strides, appointing an Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal and enhancing collaboration on initiatives like the EU Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Parliament and Council of Ministers must now step up. They should refine the composition and mandates of Parliament Committees and Council Working Parties, striving to integrate sustainability across decision-making bodies. Currently, these structures tend to discuss policy solutions in isolation, allowing sectoral and corporate interests undue influence behind closed doors.

Legislation and inter-institutional agreements, or trilogues, should facilitate a comprehensive overhaul of the flawed EU transparency and ethical rules. This includes addressing issues like revolving doors AND second jobs, improving lobby transparency, and disclosing all lobby meetings. In a push for greater transparency, the Commission should make its evaluation studies and impact assessments public upon finalisation, fostering open public debate before draft laws are published. The European Parliament should adopt “roll call votes” as the default method, leveraging the newly-developed post-Covid-19 IT infrastructure. The Council should regularly report on working party proceedings, including EU countries’ positions, and ensure transparency in trilogue negotiations by consistently publishing all documents online before key meetings.
1. Research shows that corporate lobbyists, who account for 58% of all meetings with the European Commission, more than twice the share of NGOs, which only represents 25% (Transparency International EU, 2022).

2. According to Civil Society Europe, only 7 out of 27 Member States are fully transparent when it comes to their operations in Brussels, providing info on staffing, contact details and listing meetings held between the permanent representative and interest representatives (Civil Society Europe, 2023).

3. Nearly one in eight side jobs performed by MEPs are with organisations that have an active interest in influencing EU policy. In the European Parliament’s powerful agriculture committee, eleven of 48 lawmakers have officially declared farming as an external activity. However, the actual percentage is higher, considering that several Members have delegated control of their farming operations to family members (Transparency International EU, 2023).

4. Annually, over 55 billion euros are squandered in unnecessary economic costs, a result of Member States falling short in implementing EU environmental policies and laws (European Commission).

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**TIMELINE**

- **2021:** The European Commission revised its ‘Better Regulation’ guidelines and toolbox. Outlining processes for assessing impacts, consulting citizens and stakeholders, and ensuring coherence when designing new policies and evaluating the application of existing laws. Despite efforts to align all EU policies with the European Green Deal and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and efforts to enhance stakeholder participation, the new guidelines still fall short on a number of key points.

- **2022:** The European Commission carried out its third Environmental Implementation review, after rounds in 2017 and 2019. It emphasised the need for political will to drive the timely, correct and efficient implementation of EU environmental law. The review highlighted variations among Member States and regions, with some excelling in environmental acquis implementation while others lag significantly.

- **2023:** Following the Qatargate corruption scandal, the European Parliament revamped its ethics regime. However, it fell short in implementing necessary changes to better regulate lobbying, address the revolving doors between politics and lobbying, and mitigate potential conflicts of interest for MEPs.
The EU can and should play a leading role by boosting its ‘green diplomacy’, working with partner countries to help them meet their climate and biodiversity objectives, and delivering an inclusive and just transition of their economies and societies.

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Increased funding for external action
2. Stronger targets for climate and biodiversity in international partnerships
3. Prioritising investments in climate adaptation
4. Improve access to EU funding for Civil Society

**INTRODUCTION**

Europe has a global responsibility

The world can only meet the Paris and Kunming-Montreal agreements’ climate and biodiversity objectives if every country is doing its part. As developing countries need sufficient financial, technological and capacity-building support from the richest countries, they rely on the EU’s financial commitments. The EU is the largest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and a major player in international environmental and development agreements, with significant influence over global policies. Yet, the underfunding of EU external funding instruments makes it hard for the EU to shoulder this responsibility, raising serious concerns for larger global challenges looming ahead.
Our global leadership depends on more financial support to developing countries

The EU external budget is one of the most strategic tools and soft power assets of the EU on the global stage. To live up to our promises, significant additional investments will be needed, as global needs have outpaced the funds available in the long-term budget of the EU for 2021-2027. Stepping up our global investments will serve as a compelling testament to the EU leadership in sustainable development, crisis response and global agreements.

The EU must provide confidence that developed countries will succeed in delivering at least $100 billion climate finance per year. Additionally, it's crucial to speed up the increase in financial support in the coming years, aiming for a total provision of at least $600 billion over the 6-year span of 2020 to 2025.

WHAT IS THE EU ALREADY DOING?

The Global Europe instrument has the potential to make the green transition a reality

During the approval of the 2021-2027 EU budget (Multiannual Financial Framework), decision makers increased the spending target for climate action in the international cooperation instrument (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe) to 30%. Additionally, its contribution to the annual Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) biodiversity target is set to be 7.5% from 2024 and 10% from 2026. This boost aims to support vital investments in the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of natural resources, along with climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Despite these targets, there's a growing disparity between the instrument's global ambitions and the available resources. The pace of global needs has outstripped the funds allocated in the long-term budget: by 2023, midway through the 7-year budget cycle, many of the EU's external financing tools and flexibility instruments have nearly reached their limits.

To bridge this gap, it's crucial that the forthcoming package of the new MFF post 2027 and the new EU international cooperation instrument sees the EU and Member States delivering new and additional funding from innovative sources at a scale sufficient to meet their international commitments.
1. Increased funding for external action

In the forthcoming negotiations on the next long-term budget cycle (post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework), policymakers must increase the budget allocated to external instruments.

The primary focus should be on enhancing resources for the International Cooperation Instrument, crucial for delivering new and additional funding to meet EU international commitments. This step will greatly benefit our partner countries by providing substantially increased, sufficient, and easily accessible financial, technological, and capacity-building support.

2. Stronger targets for climate and biodiversity in international partnerships

The EU should include a mandatory spending target of 50% for climate and biodiversity in the post-2027 International Cooperation instrument.

Currently, the International Cooperation Instrument has a 30% binding target for climate-relevant expenditure and a non-binding aspiration to spend 10% on biodiversity. Elevating and broadening this target will ensure the availability of sufficient funds to support measures across sectors that protect and benefit biodiversity, the environment, and the climate, including sustainable food systems and the green transition.

3. Prioritising investments in climate adaptation

The EU should significantly increase adaptation finance to support adaptation measures in developing countries.

The EU should decide to gradually allocate at least 50% of EU climate finance to climate adaptation in developing countries. Priority areas include agriculture, water resources management, disaster risk management, sustainable land and forest management, urban development, energy, coastal zone management, and “climate-proofing” national sustainable development plans. This dedicated funding should be channelled through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Loss and Damage Fund.
4. Improve access to EU funding for Civil Society

Civil society organisations could benefit from adapted funding mechanisms under the new EU International Cooperation instrument and the EU Financial Regulation.

This action aims to provide equal and fair access for civil society organisations to EU funding programmes. Current frameworks tend to favour indirect management by EU Member State agencies or international organisations over other funding modalities deemed burdensome by EU institutions. Improved access could be implemented through transparent funding models that allow civil society organisations to access and manage large-scale programmes (similar to modalities available to international organisations), or through a requirement to include civil society organisations in indirect management.
1. The overall 0.7% Official Development Assistance target (GNI/ODA) stands currently at 0.57% (OECD, 2023).

2. At COP15 in Montreal (2022), the EU committed to significantly increase finance for biodiversity from all sources, aiming to mobilise at least $200 billion annually by 2030 to halt and reverse biodiversity loss (European Commission).

3. According to the latest OECD official data (2021), EU institutions directed only around USD 450 million towards CSO initiatives. These initiatives span areas such as agriculture, food systems, education, climate adaptation, social services, and environmental protection. Notably, this figure accounts for only 2% of the total ODA expenditure by EU institutions in 2021 (CONCORD, 2023).

**TIMELINE**

- **2023-2024**: The EU carries out a mid-term review and evaluation of its 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and NDICI-Global Europe instrument.

- **2025**: The European Commission presents legislative proposals for the post-2027 MFF and the International Cooperation Instrument, which will be followed by negotiations between co-legislators.

- **2028**: The next MFF and International Cooperation Instrument enter into force.
Invest in nature for people and the planet’s wellbeing

Despite world-leading nature laws, European biodiversity continues to plummet. We need to bring Europe’s nature back!

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Make large-scale nature restoration a reality across Europe
2. Provide dedicated funding for nature restoration
3. Step up implementation and enforcement of EU nature laws
4. Support wildlife comeback
5. Adopt binding targets to protect at least 30% of EU land and marine areas by 2030

**INTRODUCTION**

Biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides are fundamental for our society

Protecting and restoring nature is not just about saving wildlife. Nature contributes to our overall health and wellbeing. More than half of the global economy depends on nature and all the services it provides. Healthy ecosystems are also a fundamental tool in tackling the twin climate and biodiversity crises and they make Europe more resilient to extreme weather events.

Healthy ecosystems like forests, peatlands and seagrass meadows help reduce emissions and sequester millions of tonnes of carbon each year. They also increase our resilience to climate change impacts like flooding, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires and are crucial for ensuring food security. However, over 80% of Europe’s habitats are in poor condition and only 23% of species monitored under the EU Nature Directives, the Birds and Habitats Directives, are in good health. Now, more than ever, we need strong laws to save our citizens and nature.
From commitment to results

In 2020, the EU adopted the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. This landmark strategy sets the (non-binding) commitment to protect at least 30% of the EU land and sea area by 2030, with 10% of EU land and sea area strictly protected. Policymakers also committed to increasing the conservation status of a third of the habitats and species that are currently not in good status. Some of these goals are being translated into legally-binding targets and measures via the EU Nature Restoration Law, currently undergoing adoption by the European Parliament and Member States. This new law will complement the already existing EU Birds and Habitats Directives, a cornerstone legislation that introduced the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. With more and more targets and commitments in place, the next EU political mandate must shift its focus to implementation, investment and enforcement.

Addressing the root causes of nature loss

Policymakers will also have to address the underlying drivers causing the loss of biodiversity. There are many pressures on nature, such as intensive agriculture, overfishing, land take, pollution, unsustainable forestry and climate change. Biodiversity must be mainstreamed in all EU policies that cause these pressures. This includes the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and the EU’s wide array of climate and energy policies. Accelerating the development of renewables, along with nature conservation and restoration, is crucial for addressing the climate and biodiversity crises; these two solutions should not be pitted against each other. The deployment of solar and wind energy can be done in harmony with nature, and should be grounded in inclusive ecosystem-based spatial planning.

Only serious political determination, effective enforcement of existing and new legislations, as well as credible investments in large-scale restoration will empower Europe to bend the curve and protect our last remaining natural places.
1. Make large-scale nature restoration a reality across Europe

Policymakers must complete the adoption of the Nature Restoration Law by swiftly adopting implementing acts and progress on the drafting of National Restoration Plans at Member State level.

Significant steps of the legislative work on the Nature Restoration Law will need to be finished in the next 5 years. Once the Law has come into force, EU policymakers must focus on adopting the necessary implementing acts to guide the implementation, including clarity on monitoring methods and defining the satisfactory levels for indicators. At the national level, Member States must take an important first step by drafting the National Restoration Plans. These plans need to be adopted in a participatory way, based on science and with the involvement of key stakeholders.

2. Provide dedicated funding for nature restoration

The EU must adopt a comprehensive approach to funding nature protection and restoration, including creating a Nature Restoration Fund in the next EU multiannual budget from 2028 onwards.

Financing nature is an investment, not a cost: investing 1€ in nature restoration brings 8€ in return in economic benefits. Yet, the funding gap for nature is a long standing issue which hampers the full and effective implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. The new obligations, stemming from the Nature Restoration Law, will only increase this financing gap. A study initiated by the European Commission finds that at least €48 billion are required annually between 2021 and 2030 to deliver the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, including nature restoration. The funding gap amounts to nearly €19 billion a year from 2021 to 2030, totalling €187 billion over the whole period.

To close this gap, EU and national investments in nature must be doubled to at least €50 billion annually. This entails, among other measures, the establishment of a new EU fund for nature restoration activities undertaken by farmers, foresters, landowners, fishers and coastal communities, and ensuring national governments increase the share of gross domestic product invested in nature.

3. Step up implementation and enforcement of the EU nature laws

Set effective management of the existing Natura 2000 network as a policy priority.

The EU Birds and Habitats Directive (BHD) is the EU’s cornerstone for nature protection. However, it’s been more than 30 years since their introduction and these two pieces of EU law are still not fully enforced. Despite Natura 2000 sites covering 18% of the EU land area, most of the protected habitats are still in
4. Support wildlife comeback

Iconic European species are an integral part of Europe’s natural heritage, playing a vital role in maintaining ecosystem balance and biodiversity. They must be protected.

Large carnivores, including wolves, have been making a remarkable comeback to Europe’s landscapes. Their return is a considerable conservation success and a clear sign that the legislative framework set out by the Habitats Directive is paying off. Humans’ coexistence with large carnivores can cause conflicts with socio-economic interests. Solutions to prevent and mitigate those conflicts exist, but awareness is still low and implementation has been patchy. Nature conservation as well as coexistence between people and large carnivores in Europe must continue to be supported by sound policymaking, driven by science-based data, rather than opinions and populist agendas.

In November 2018, a Pan-European Action Plan for Sturgeons was adopted by the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention), and recommended for implementation under the Habitats Directive in May 2019. The action plan covers eight species, one of which, the ship sturgeon, went extinct on EU territory in 2022, despite being protected under the EU Habitats Directive. This is a stark warning that more efforts are needed to implement the Sturgeon action plan. Otherwise, other species will go extinct as well.

5. Adopt binding targets to protect at least 30% of land and marine areas by 2030

As part of the 2024 midterm review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU needs to agree on legally-binding targets to protect at least 30% of its land and sea area, including strict protection of 10% of its land and sea area.

The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 already contains a non-binding commitment to establish a coherent and effectively managed protected area network. By 2030, this network should cover at least 30% of EU land and 30% of the EU sea area, including one-third (10% of the EU land and of the EU sea area) that is strictly protected. The strategy also commits that all remaining old-growth and primary forests in Europe will be strictly protected.

To achieve these targets, the European Commission proposed a voluntary “Pledge & Review” process by Member States. The Biodiversity Strategy also stated that if during the evaluation it turns out that the voluntary process is not working, additional measures, including legally-binding measures, will be considered. To date, only a handful of EU Member States have submitted their pledges, despite the deadline of the end of 2022. This clearly indicates that the voluntary approach is ineffective, and the protected areas targets must be legally binding for the EU to fulfil its commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework.
1. 81% of protected habitats and 63% of species in the EU are in a poor or a bad conservation status (EEA, 2020).

2. 75% of land surface and 66% of the ocean area is impacted by human activities, while 85% of wetlands area has been lost worldwide (WWF, 2022). Globally, vertebrate wildlife populations have declined by two-thirds in less than 50 years.

3. 1 out of 5 bird species in Europe is threatened or near threatened by extinction, while 1 out of 3 bird species declined over the last few decades (EU Red List of Birds 2021).

4. According to several studies, investing 1€ in nature restoration brings 8€ in return in economic benefits (IEEP, 2023).

5. Restoring all degraded terrestrial habitats that are listed under the EU Habitats Directive could sequester 84 million tonnes of carbon a year, which is roughly equivalent to 300 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. This amount is comparable to the annual greenhouse gas emissions of Spain or the combined emissions of the Benelux countries (WWF, 2022).

6. 84% of crops in the EU are at least partially dependent on pollination by insects. Yet, their numbers have decreased by 75% in the last 30 years. In the future, the absence of insects would reduce yields by a quarter to a third (European Parliament Research Service, 2021).

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**TIMELINE**

- **2024-2025**: Member States are in the process of drafting Nature Restoration plans, as required by the EU Nature Restoration Law

- **January-March 2024**: The European Commission reports on progress on the implementation of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy

- **December 2024**: COP16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, where by member states have to submit National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

- **June 2025**: The European Commission publishes its proposal for the new EU long-term budget for 2028 onward

- **2026**: The European Commission, with the support of the EEA, publishes the EU’s 2026 State of Nature Report, assessing the progress made under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives

- **2028**: The new EU long-term budget for 2028 onward enters into force

- **2030**: Final evaluation of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
When ocean ecosystems thrive, people thrive. The ocean feeds billions of people, stores carbon, delivers millions of jobs, and provides safety and security to millions of individuals and communities vulnerable to the threat of climate change and natural disasters.

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Adopt an EU Ocean Package
2. Reform the governance of ocean policies
3. Strive for low-impact, transparent and sustainable fisheries
4. Adopt binding targets to protect 30% of marine areas by 2030
5. Ensure nature-friendly deployment of offshore renewables for People

**INTRODUCTION**

Our ocean holds the key to a resilient and climate-neutral future

European seas are not in a good environmental status. Despite being among the most overexploited in the world, there is still time to heal European seas and coastal areas. Policymakers can make sure that our ocean is able to sustain nature and people in both the short and long term. Balancing our activities within marine ecosystems is instrumental to achieving our international commitments to limit global warming to under 1.5°C and reverse the loss of biodiversity. This includes the deployment of nature-friendly, circular offshore renewable energy, nature restoration, and the transition to low-impact fisheries.
We need to phase-out harmful activities and their subsidies at sea

From overfishing to pollution, heatwaves, rising acidity, ecosystem loss and biodiversity collapse, our ocean faces many crises. It has simultaneously played a paramount, if silent role, in mitigating climate catastrophe, absorbing 25% of all carbon dioxide emissions and capturing 90% of the excess heat generated by these emissions to date. However, the European Union, which has the largest maritime territory on Earth, has yet to put forward an ambitious agenda to help marine and coastal ecosystems adapt and recover in a changing climate. This remains a critically missing piece of the climate adaptation puzzle.

Policymakers need to put our ocean at the heart of EU environmental and climate policies. In doing so, they can help address the root causes of ecosystem degradation, from unsustainable fishing practices to gas and oil exploration and exploitation, without forgetting maritime transport, pollution, dredging, and coastal development.

WHAT IS THE EU ALREADY DOING?

Implementation gaps cause the EU to underperform

While the von der Leyen Commission played a key role in international fora to achieve several landmark agreements on ocean protection, such as the High Seas Treaty, it unfortunately disregarded its own domestic agenda. European marine legislation suffers from two critical flaws: poor implementation and policy incoherence.

On the one hand, Member States have not met the requirements of key directives such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD), the Habitats and Birds Directives and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). National governments are not enforcing the rules set out by these legislations, thus contributing to the degradation of the marine ecosystems and continuing the funding of harmful practices.

On the other hand, outdated blue policies that are misaligned with the European Green Deal objectives have created difficulty for stakeholders to ensure coherence when implementing policies. Most of the EU marine legislative framework predates the adoption of the Green Deal and its time-bound objectives to achieve climate neutrality and protect and restore ecosystems.

Bring the ocean to the centre of EU environmental policies

Only strong commitments from policymakers to comprehensively align all marine-related policies in line with the objectives of the Green Deal will enable meaningful and long-lasting change. To succeed, marine-related policies must foster sustainable blue economic activities on the basis of an ecosystem-based approach that considers the carrying capacity of our seas with protection and restoration measures. Harmful human activities and subsidies that support them must be discontinued. With the upcoming reform of the long-term budget of the EU, funds should be reoriented to provide the necessary economic incentives for the people and industries most closely tied to our seas. This way, we can foster innovation and the effective transition of fisheries and maritime activities to ensure the long-term health, sustainability and resilience of our seas.
OUR DEMANDS

1. Adopt an EU Ocean Package

The incoming European Commission must propose a legislative Ocean Package in its first one hundred days, consisting of an overarching EU Ocean Framework and a supporting Ocean Fund.

A new legislative EU Ocean Package should create an overarching framework that ensures greater coherence between existing and new environmental, energy, maritime and fisheries policies in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. It should also make these policies fit for preserving, protecting and restoring our seas. The Package should acknowledge that the protection, preservation, restoration and management of the ocean, its biodiversity and its resources is a common responsibility for all stakeholders. It should also establish the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable ocean which supports the livelihoods of EU citizens in a fair and equitable way. A dedicated Ocean Fund should financially support relevant stakeholders in their transition towards ecosystem-based management of their activities.

2. Reform the governance of ocean policies

The European Parliament, the European Commission and Council of the EU should improve how they decide on ocean policies.

More comprehensive governance of ocean policies requires an overhaul of Brussels-based, ocean-related decision-making bodies. The next European Parliament needs to establish a Committee for Maritime Affairs that will be responsible for deliberating on all ocean-related policies, including the scope of the current Committee on Fisheries and the restoration and protection of the marine environment. In addition to the Common Fisheries Policy, this committee should be responsible for topics such as maritime extractives, transport and offshore renewables. In the next College of Commissioners, one of the Vice-Presidents should overview ocean policy, ensuring the delivery of the legislative Ocean Package as well as bridging environment and marine-related policies. In parallel, at least once per rotating Council Presidency, a dedicated discussion on maritime policies should bring all relevant sectoral ministers to the same table.
3. Strive for low-impact, transparent and sustainable fisheries

Under the guidance of the European Commission, national governments need to better support and encourage those fishing the most sustainably, by following the joint recommendations of the Technical Measures Regulation and by fully implementing article 17 of the CFP.

The Common Fisheries Policy provides a robust basis to achieve sustainable fishing activities, but will only deliver if fully implemented. This is unfortunately not the case today, as several provisions are not respected. To achieve the goals of the CFP, Member States must propose a roadmap to align national and regional measures for transitioning EU fisheries towards low-impact and ecosystem-based fisheries management.

Additionally, policymakers must ensure a level playing field between EU and foreign fishing operators, in order to leverage the EU’s market power and its global leadership in promoting sustainable fisheries practices. A first step would be to implement the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies that prohibits harmful fisheries subsidies. Harmful fisheries subsidies are the main driver leading to the widespread depletion of the world’s fish stocks. The EU must protect its Single Market by introducing mirror clauses in EU laws to prevent the import of products that do not respect our sustainability standards. It should also strive to improve and harmonise import controls across the EU to ensure that imported products are not coming from Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fisheries (IUU).

4. Adopt binding targets to effectively protect at least 30% of marine areas by 2030

As part of the 2024 midterm review of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, the EU needs to agree legally-binding targets to protect at least 30% of its seas, including making at least 10% of marine areas strictly protected.

To achieve the objectives outlined in the Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy of protecting 30% of Europe’s land and seas, with 10% under strict protection, the European Commission introduced the “Pledge & Review” process. In this voluntary approach, Member States were required to report to the Commission on the designation and the conservation status of protected areas by 2022. Unfortunately, the voluntary approach is weak and insufficient; only a handful of EU Member States submitted their pledges on time, and only a few have implemented an ecosystem-based approach to manage their marine protected areas.

Without any legally-binding targets, marine protected areas will remain de facto paper parks, and the EU will fall short on achieving its internal and international commitments. Therefore, the European Commission needs to capitalise on the upcoming review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy’s implementation in 2024 to agree on a roadmap to achieve effective nature protection. Turning voluntary pledges into legal requirements will be a first step forward.
5. Ensure nature-friendly deployment of offshore renewables

The EU must revise the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive to ensure that an ecosystem-based approach is applied when deploying offshore renewables, allowing the EU to meet both its renewable energy and biodiversity targets.

In the future, offshore renewable energy infrastructure will require more and more space for the EU to achieve climate neutrality, and for the Member States to deliver their commitment of deploying 140 GWs of offshore wind by 2030 in the Baltic Sea and North Sea. While important, such expansion cannot be done at the expense of nature. Offshore renewables should not be deployed in marine protected areas, provided that alternative locations can be found. In addition, to ensure coherence and fairness in the energy transition, driving circular economies in all phases of offshore renewables deployment is key to protect marine and coastal ecosystems.

To ensure a nature-friendly deployment of offshore renewables and to prevent any conflicts among blue industries, the EU must revise the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD). Adopted ten years ago, it is not aligned with the objectives of the Green Deal, and not fit for purpose in tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis. Updating the MSPD will make it more coherent with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Nature Restoration Law, the SFD, and the CFP. Its revision must implement a legally-binding and common ecosystem-based approach to all activities related to the sustainable blue economy. It should also ensure a moratorium for deep seabed mining.
1. Cumulatively, the exclusive economic zones of all EU Member States form the largest maritime territory in the world. The EU coastline is 68,000 km long—more than three times longer than that of the United States, and almost twice that of Russia (EEA, 2020).

2. In 2019, less than 2% of European seas have been designated as true marine protected areas, despite claims of over 12% of them being protected. This is because the areas designated for protection lack effective management plans (WWF, 2019).

3. Fishing within scientifically-recommended limits would support the restoration of depleted fish populations and increase seafood catches, thereby creating an estimated 20,000 to 60,000 jobs in the Northeast Atlantic region and delivering up to €1.5 billion in additional annual revenue (WWF, 2021).

4. The EU strategy on offshore renewable energy, adopted in 2020, sets targets for an installed capacity of at least 60 GW of offshore wind and 1 GW of ocean energy by 2030. In the first half of 2023, EU Member States committed to double this target to 111GW.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**TIMELINE**

- **Now**: Ongoing infringement procedures by the European Commission against certain Member States for failing to implement the MSPD and/or the MSFD.

- **Autumn 2023**: Member States discuss and review their marine protected areas pledges for the Baltic region, the Atlantic and Macaronesia region, and the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

- **October 2023 - March 2024**: The European Commission publishes its assessment on implementation of the MSFD.

- **Early 2024**: The European Commission publishes its second assessment on the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation and Member States’ capacity to protect sensitive or unwanted species and habitats.

- **March 2024**: Deadline for Member States to submit their 2030 roadmaps under the EU Action Plan to protect and restore marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries, detailing the national measures they will propose to minimise fisheries impacts on marine ecosystems.

- **End 2024**: The European Commission publishes an impact assessment for an MSFD revision and, if deemed necessary, a legal proposal in 2025.

- **By 2025**: Member States will map and designate ‘acceleration areas’ to deploy offshore renewable energy according to the Repower EU package.

- **By 2025**: Belgium, France and Denmark will update their national maritime spatial plans. Other governments are encouraged to also revise and improve their maritime spatial plans.
Promote sustainable finance

The EU can become the catalyst that kick-starts the world’s transformation to sustainable and inclusive economies. Sustainable finance is a key lever, offering major opportunities for everyone.

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Close gaps between EU sustainability reporting laws
2. Align transition finance with environmental objectives
3. Integrate environmental risk into prudential rules
4. Improve investor due diligence and director’s engagement
5. Ensure retail finance policies foster sustainability

**INTRODUCTION**

No sustainability economy exists without a sustainable financial system

A sustainable economy provides good quality of life for people, stays within the limits of the planet and keeps global warming well below the 1.5°C threshold. Finance is a critical component of the EU and global economies. With EU banks, investors, insurers and other financial institutions providing essential services and possessing almost 4 times more financial assets than non-financial corporations, the financial sector is a key stakeholder in the economy. We therefore need to build a sustainable financial system in order to achieve sustainable economies.
The transition offers major opportunities, but the status quo bears growing costs

Transforming our financial system is a challenge that requires bold leadership, an integrated strategy and a strong commitment to action. We cannot improve—or even maintain—our well-being on a business-as-usual path. At the same time, this transformation offers enormous opportunities to create a better future for everyone.

By 2030, the EU needs to have set up a consistent EU regulatory framework. This framework should ensure the alignment of financial portfolios with EU and global sustainability objectives, notably the Climate Paris Agreement and the Global Biodiversity Framework, and mitigate sustainability-related financial risks.

WHAT IS THE EU ALREADY DOING?

Turning the EU’s sustainable finance legislation into action

The Commission launched its first-ever Sustainable Finance Action Plan in 2018, later updated in 2020. As a result of this Action Plan, several new pieces of legislation primarily aimed at improving corporate sustainability reporting were tabled. Landmark agreements include the EU Taxonomy, the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). These achievements must now be fully implemented, and policymakers should fill in the remaining gaps.

Complete the transition towards sustainable finance regulatory framework

The next mandate should eliminate the inconsistencies between sustainable finance policies and the European Green Deal to accelerate credible portfolio alignment of financial institutions with EU and global environmental objectives. The EU should clarify which 1.5°C climate scenarios will be used as the reference by the market as well as sectoral pathways for hard-to-abate sectors. In parallel, public finance de-risking tools should be scaled up to leverage private finance and close the funding gap to achieve EU sustainability objectives. Finally, the European Central Bank and national central banks need to integrate climate and nature issues into prudential supervision and monetary policy implementation more quickly in order to manage the systemic risks posed by global warming and ecosystem collapse to the financial system.
1. Close gaps between EU sustainable reporting laws

By adopting targeted amendments, the EU should address inconsistencies and gaps in its corporate sustainability reporting framework to improve data quality and policy effectiveness while decreasing complexity.

Companies, including financial institutions, need clear environmental targets and transition plans rooted in science to align their business models with environmental objectives. The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the EU cornerstone for corporate sustainability reporting, specifies how companies need to report their targets and plans. To complement this legislation, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive is set to create requirements for large companies to establish climate targets and transition plans. The Directives are either recently adopted or in the adoption process, and they will both need implementation soon.

However, some inconsistencies and gaps remain in the EU corporate sustainability reporting framework, making the policies less effective while adding unnecessary complexity. To fix these issues, targeted amendments are needed in the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive as well as in the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation.

2. Align transition finance with environmental objectives

Developing an “extended” environmental taxonomy will clarify and accelerate transition finance.

The EU has made important strides in clarifying what constitutes ‘green finance’ by creating the EU Taxonomy. However, it has yet to make clear what ‘transition finance’ means for the financial sector. This is important to differentiate between assets that can be refurbished to become sustainable (e.g. energy renovation of buildings) and assets that should be decommissioned in a timely way (e.g. coal plants). Transition finance also includes an end to investments in new unsustainable assets (e.g. upstream fossil fuels). Due to this ambiguity, risks of ‘transition-washing’ are growing, while some companies struggle to explain and get funding for their transition. For the EU to achieve its environmental objectives, it is crucial that policymakers define and clarify transition finance consistently in the EU sustainable finance regulatory framework.

The EU Platform on Sustainable Finance has already proposed to extend the EU Taxonomy framework to three categories in a traffic-light system. This means sorting economic activities into green, yellow, and red categories, depending on whether they are environmentally sustainable, intermediate, or unsustainable. Other countries like Singapore, Indonesia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Canada are already developing such systems. In the EU, Germany and France have publicly called for extending the EU Taxonomy to foster transition finance; it should enable the market to clarify what activities can transition out of the unsustainable space and into the intermediate or green space. This is a vital tool that will allow the EU to clarify what transition finance is and accelerate the green transition of companies.
3. Integrate environmental risk into prudential rules

Prudential rules are banks and assurance safety nets. These rules guarantee the financial safety and stability of institutions and of the broader financial system. However, they still don’t integrate environment-related financial risks adequately, and fail to disincentivise the financing of environmentally-harmful activities.

Sustainability-related financial risks are still not properly integrated into prudential rules for banks (Capital Requirement Regulation) and insurers (Solvency Directive). These risks, still largely hidden, are steadily growing. In fact, the European Central Bank recently found that almost 75% of EU bank loans to companies are highly dependent on nature. This means that those activities are vulnerable to environmental risks such as climate change, natural disasters, resource depletion and biodiversity loss. If those risks are not addressed, they could pose a serious threat to the stability of financial institutions and our financial system as a whole.

It is evident that a further review of the EU prudential rules will be necessary in the next five years, since minimum capital requirements (so-called ‘pillar 1’ requirements) themselves are not currently being amended.

Credit ratings also need to more properly integrate sustainability-related financial risks in a transparent manner. This is another key lever to ensure that financial institutions will take these risks into account in their finance decision-making: they use credit ratings on a daily basis.

4. Improve investor due diligence and director’s engagement

The EU needs to improve investors’ due diligence and engagement on sustainability issues by revising the Shareholder Rights Directive by 2025.

With the CSDDD, the EU will require environmental and social due diligence by large companies and ensure they set climate targets and transition plans to align their business model or portfolios with the Paris Agreement. Building onto the CSDDD, the EU should revise the Shareholder Rights Directive (SRD) by 2025.

Through this revision, shareholder engagement with investee companies needs to be aligned with EU sustainability goals and stewardship standards are needed for that purpose. As part of this comprehensive approach, the EU also should link the variable remuneration of directors to the achievement of sustainability objectives.
5. Ensure retail finance policies foster sustainability

An overwhelming majority of households wants to invest or use money sustainably but EU retail finance policies fail to ensure it. Changes in four pieces of EU financial legislation are needed to create a sustainable retail finance framework.

60% to 80% of households want to invest sustainably, and 40% want their money to have a positive impact on sustainability. However, the market is failing to match this demand. To achieve this, several obstacles need to be removed. To this end, the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MIFID), the Insurance Distribution Directive (IDD), the Shareholder Rights Directive (SFDR) and the Mortgage Credit Directive have to be revised in a targeted way.

Sustainable funds should be systematically proposed to retail investors and explained in a clear way. There must also be clearer classification of sustainable funds with minimum requirements to avoid greenwashing. In addition, households need to be able to access attractive green loans and mortgages to do an energy renovation of their house and buy preferably green products.

Finally, supervisors and regulators must monitor the above-mentioned issues for the financial institutions they supervise with adequate capacity and expertise.
1. Without proper climate mitigation, costs of climate risks could lead to a 10% decrease in EU GDP by 2100 (European Central Bank, 2022).

2. An overwhelming majority of retail investors, ranging from 60% to 80%, want their money to be invested in a sustainable way, as consistently indicated by various studies in recent years (BNPP AM, 2019).

3. 80% of pension holders remain in their default funds; This implies that without including sustainable funds in the default options, pension holders are very unlikely to choose them (Pensions Age, 2021). In 2010, France enacted a law mandating that certain occupational pension funds include at least one sustainable fund by default in their offer. This successful initiative, initially targeting the promotion of sustainable funds, was extended in 2019 to all types of occupational pension funds (Label ISR, 2023).

4. An additional €620 billion is needed annually to meet the objectives of the European Green Deal and REPowerEU (European Commission, 2023). Such amounts will only be achievable with both public investments and increased funding from the private sector. The challenge is not a lack of money but rather its misallocation.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- **2025**: First periodic 3-year review of the EU Taxonomy Regulation.
- **2025-2026**: Review of the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation.
- **2025-2026**: Revision of the Shareholder Rights Directive (TBC).
- **2026**: Review of the Mortgage Credit Directive (TBC).
- **2026**: Review of the European Sustainability Reporting Standards, specifying the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.
The way we produce and consume food is harming our health and degrading our environment to a level we cannot afford. We must urgently make healthy and sustainable food accessible to all.

**WHAT WE NEED**

1. Make accessibility to sustainable and healthy food a priority
2. Adopt a new law to transition to a sustainable EU food system
3. Establish an EU Common Food Policy
4. Mobilise the EU budget to make our food system more resilient
5. Engage all levels of governance in the transformation of our food system

**INTRODUCTION**

People want to eat healthy and protect their planet—it is time to step up efforts

We need EU food policies that benefit everyone and protect nature. Making healthy and sustainable food the most affordable and accessible option will have a positive impact on people’s health while incentivising food producers to adopt more sustainable practices.

Our food system is slowly but steadily changing: industries are investing to increase their sustainability standards in order to meet growing consumer demand as citizens want to transition to more sustainable diets. It is now time for robust investments and policy measures that will make sustainable and healthy food more accessible to all European citizens.
Our current model of food production and consumption is failing everyone

Global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine shed light on the dysfunctional nature of our food systems. This includes poor conditions for workers across the food supply chain and our reliance on imported agricultural inputs, such as fertilisers. These factors, in combination with geopolitics and inflation, made food prices soar. To make things worse, climate change is threatening our long-term food security, with more frequent and intense floods, hail and droughts destroying crops and harvests.

As a result, the food poverty paradox is more and more evident: many households are left unable to afford even a calorie-sufficient diet and, in parallel, food-related diseases and malnutrition, including obesity, are soaring. This situation affects everyone, especially the most vulnerable citizens and farmers, as well as nature.

To address the myriad of interconnected challenges, we need to fix the structural issues and inequalities of our food systems. Policymakers must simultaneously address food supply and demand.

WHAT IS THE EU ALREADY DOING?

Double down on a social approach to food system transformation

Food inflation is the biggest concern for EU citizens, and ensuring access to good food—food that is both sustainable and healthy—for all is essential. Therefore, targeted social policies will be crucial to alleviate the impacts of the crisis on those most affected, particularly low income households. In 2023, the EU was supposed to present an ‘EU Sustainable Food Systems Law’, which aimed to improve access to healthier, greener and more affordable diets. Unfortunately, the proposal was delayed, thus leaving a serious gap in the transition of agrifood policies.

Overhaul food and farming EU policies at the same time

Concerted and far-reaching policy action is required at all governance levels to build truly sustainable and resilient food systems. The EU has an instrumental role to play. In the next mandate, policymakers will have the opportunity to support transformative measures through the next Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and the revision of the next EU long-term budget. These policies and their financial allocations need to transform not only the way we produce food but also food environments to ensure that healthy and sustainable choices are the most accessible, affordable, and attractive options.
OUR DEMANDS

1. Make accessibility to sustainable and healthy food a priority

The EU needs to unlock investment opportunities for the industry and adopt an evidence-based, long-term vision for sustainable food systems, with a focus on enhancing human health, environmental resilience and social equity.

A major pillar of our societies and economies, food systems are becoming increasingly vulnerable to external shocks. As it stands today, our food systems are damaging the health of EU citizens and contributing to serious environmental degradation. Everyone should be able to buy healthy food with low environmental footprint at an affordable price. The EU’s Farm to Fork Strategy, adopted in 2020, represents a first step in addressing these issues, but more needs to be done. Taking inspiration from the long-term vision in other areas, such as the energy sector, it is now time for all the EU institutions to act decisively on food and agriculture. Access to good food must become a top political priority.

2. Adopt a new law to transition to a sustainable EU food system

The EU must adopt and implement quantitative and binding targets, at both national and EU levels, in order to drive a just transition in how we produce, trade, process, and consume food.

Securing an ambitious EU Legislative Framework for sustainable food systems is critical to fill the gap between the ecological transition and food-related policy. An overarching framework law will be useful to set the basis for transforming the EU food system, and should be taken forward as one of the most pressing priorities by the next political majority.

As part of this new law, the EU should adopt science-based quantitative targets that aim to mainstream agroecology and fully traceable, low-impact fisheries in food production; phase out the use of synthetic agricultural inputs; and align diets with science-based recommendations. This will foster a sustainable, fair and healthy model for food producers and consumers in Europe—with binding standards for European products also applying to all imported products from third countries.

This legislative framework will be the way forward to promote policy coherence, strengthen Europe’s resilience, and mainstream sustainability at all levels of the supply chain. All actors must be taken into account: these targets should engage big manufacturers, caterers and retailers in the transition. It should also cover sourcing, advertising, promotion, and food sales. It should include food offered in public procurement and school meals, which, given their educational perspective, play a crucial role in involving youth in food system transformation.
3. Establish an EU Common Food Policy

The Farm to Fork Strategy needs to be turned into a comprehensive Common Food Policy, with a dedicated Vice-President for Food Systems.

The Farm to Fork Strategy is the EU’s first-ever cross-cutting policy initiative that addresses the entire food supply chain. Yet, there was a lack of political prioritisation needed to turn it from a strategy into a set of actionable policies. This is why the next European Commission needs to take the strategy forward and transform it into an EU Common Food Policy.

Under the leadership of the European Commission’s Vice-President for Sustainable Food Systems, the EU must put sustainable food at the heart of its climate and environmental agenda—as one of its most pressing priorities. A Common Food Policy will better support the transition of the food supply chains and ensure healthy, affordable food for all Europeans.

4. Mobilise the EU budget to make food systems more resilient

The EU’s long-term budget must put an end to environmentally and health-detrimental subsidies, gradually repurposing direct income support payments under the CAP to prioritise areas that promote sustainable food production.

Until now, economic sustainability has been the priority objective for the CAP. Considering that almost one third of the EU budget is devoted to the CAP, agricultural funds must be coherently repurposed to support farmers in the transition to more resilient and sustainable food production. A just transition mechanism should be put in place in order to help those farmers whose livelihoods will be significantly affected by the phasing out of direct payments. Furthermore, funds must only reward the most sustainable agricultural models. Similarly, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) can play a pivotal role in funding more sustainable seafood production.

5. Engage all levels of governance in the transformation of our food systems

The EU must call on Member States to adopt and implement national food strategies in line with the Green Deal, and to facilitate the participation of citizens and food producers in national and EU legislative processes.

While significant progress has been made at the EU level to integrate diverse policy areas related to food, a greater effort is now needed across all other governance levels. A major responsibility lies with national and subnational governments, which must not only implement EU policies coherently across ministries, but also play a greater role in building a common vision for a diverse food system. Member States should adopt a food system approach at national level and set national food strategies in line with the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy. National food strategies should holistically target all the policy components that have the potential to make food production and consumption sustainable, including education, fiscal policy and welfare schemes.

To facilitate the participation of engaged citizens and food producers in national and EU policy-making, local food policy councils must be involved or created. At European level, a multi-stakeholder food policy Council could play a monitoring role, and help evaluate and anticipate the risks in the food supply chain.
1. 76% of European consumers think that their governments should make environmentally friendly food cheaper, and half would even agree to make unsustainable food products more expensive (WWF, 2022).

2. A recent poll revealed that sales of plant-based food items across 13 European countries have grown by 22% since 2020, with the market reaching a record €5.7 billion in 2022 (GFI Europe).

3. The EU food system fosters unhealthy consumption, which significantly contributes to the rise of non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. These account for 80% of the disease burden in EU countries, and are the leading causes of avoidable premature deaths. Cardiovascular disease alone cost EU health care systems almost €111 billion in 2015, while cancer cost the EU almost €97 billion in 2018 (European Commission, 2021).

4. The world already produces enough food to nourish everybody. Research has shown that current crop production is sufficient to feed not just today’s global population, but the projected 9.7 billion people in 2050. However, radical changes are needed in the food system for this to be feasible, from cutting waste to improving production and the socioeconomic conditions that enable people to access the global food market. The most drastic transformation lies with shifting diets, especially in the EU, with intensively raised meat and dairy being replaced with plant-based foods (The Lancet, 2019).

5. Global consumption of seafood has more than doubled in the last 50 years, with an average current consumption of around 25 kilograms per person in the EU every year. With an expected growing global population, the demand for seafood protein will only increase further. We must act to decrease our consumption, particularly in developed countries where alternative proteins, vitamins and fatty acids are easily sourced from other foods, including legumes and vegetables (European Commission, 2018).

6. Global meat consumption has increased in past decades—with the United States, Australia and Argentina topping the list with more than 100 kg of meat per person every year. At the EU level, we consume on average 3 times the weekly quantity of red meat recommended by WHO, which is 80% higher than the global average (WHO, 2013).

7. Cutting meat consumption by 30%, equivalent to eliminating meat twice a week, and substituting it with plant-based alternatives and whole foods could potentially reduce annual CO2e emissions by 700 million tons by 2030. This reduction is nearly equivalent to the total global emissions from the aviation industry. Additionally, it would release a carbon sink the size of India, significantly decrease water pollution, and lower the risk of non-communicable diseases, including cancer (Madre Brava, 2023).

8. Climate change has already reduced global agricultural productivity growth by 21% since 1961 (Ortiz-Bobea et al., 2021), and it has been identified as one of the primary causes of food insecurity, together with conflicts (FAO). We need to act now to cut emissions from agriculture and increase our resilience to climate change by stopping farmland biodiversity loss.

9. Direct payments (as part of the first pillar of the CAP) led to a higher concentration of land in fewer holdings. In fact, the number of farms in the EU decreased by about 37% in the relatively short period between 2005 and 2020, and 3% of holdings use 52% of the Utilised Agricultural Area (Eurostat, 2022). Moreover, direct payments are badly distributed and mainly benefit large farmers who already have more financial capacity than smaller farmers: half of the farmers are small farmers under 5ha and need to share among them only 6% of the direct payments.
• **2025**: The European Commission publishes a legislative proposal for the new EU long-term budget from 2028 onward.

• **2025**: The European Commission publishes a legislative proposal for the next EU Common Agricultural Policy from 2028 onward.

• **2025-2027**: Parliament and Member States discuss and adopt the Commission proposals on the long-term EU Budget and CAP.

• **2028**: Entry into force of the new EU Budget and CAP.
We rely on freshwater for drinking, producing food and energy, navigating, supplying our industry and enjoying leisure activities. But recent floods, droughts and wildfires have shown that we cannot take the health of our rivers, floodplains, wetlands, lakes and groundwater for granted anymore.

Clean and abundant water, once taken for granted, is now a luxury

Water is one of our most vital natural resources, yet clean and plentiful water is becoming a luxury, even within our continent. From producing food to protecting us from floods and sequestering carbon, the EU is dependent on healthy rivers, floodplains, wetlands, lakes and groundwater. Good water management in Europe is more important than ever to cope with increasing water stress, floods, wildfires, and to protect citizens by meeting their most basic needs for clean water.

For years, and despite very strong EU water legislation, we have been mismanaging water. By regulating rivers, building channels, dams (including hydropower plants) and dikes, we have modified the shape and

WHAT WE NEED

1. Adopt a water and Climate Resilience Law
2. Fully enforce the EU Water Framework Directive
3. Prioritise the restoration of free-flowing rivers in Europe
4. Exclude new hydropower in Europe
The climate crisis is ramping up the pressure on water

The climate crisis is worsening the degradation of freshwater ecosystems by, for instance, exacerbating water stress. In recent years, droughts and floods have occurred more frequently and intensely. In 2022, for example, commercial navigation was halted for several weeks on the Rhine, drinking water supply was interrupted for several days in more than a hundred villages in France, and some branches of the river Po’s delta ran completely dry due to droughts.

To deal with water stress, as well as more frequent and intense floods, policymakers should pursue stronger, more resilient and more integrated water management policies. Limiting water abstraction, ensuring steady flows in rivers, or retaining water in the landscape with natural water retention measures can help water-dependent sectors, such as agriculture, energy and navigation, adapt to the effects of climate change. As the Global Commission of the Economics of Water says, “we will fail on climate change if we do not solve water”.

A strong legal framework, but poor implementation and enforcement

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Floods Directive address water management issues and, to a large extent, the water-related impacts of climate change. Both directives were assessed as fit for purpose in 2019 after a Fitness Check review. However, these directives, and in particular the WFD, are poorly implemented and suffer from a lack of enforcement in Member States. More than twenty years after the adoption of the WFD, Member States are still far from delivering on their obligations and over half of Europe’s rivers, floodplains and lakes are not healthy.

Mainstreaming freshwater in sectoral legislation

Water needs to be mainstreamed in other sectoral legislations, such as energy, where the impacts of hydropower on nature are not properly considered. It also needs to be part of policies on climate, biodiversity, transport and agriculture. Water policies could also benefit from new funds, redirected from harmful subsidies towards the deployment of nature-based solutions.

And while the EU recognises the importance of water in its Climate Adaptation Strategy, the latest revision of the strategy (2021) fails to suggest any concrete targets, deadlines or specific measures to restore our freshwater ecosystems and increase water resilience.
OUR DEMANDS

1. Adopt a Climate Resilience Law

A new Climate Resilience Law, with strong ambition on freshwater, should set legal requirements for ecosystem-based adaptation, using nature as a buffer to floods, droughts and wildfires. This means that climate and water adaptation requirements should be added to existing environmental legislation to ensure the EU addresses the climate and biodiversity crises together.

The EU already has ambitious legislation in place to protect vulnerable freshwater ecosystems, but even stronger freshwater protection and sustainable management is more important than ever. Europe needs it to cope with water stress, and to make our economy and ways of living more resilient to more frequent and intense droughts, floods and wildfires.

The Climate Resilience Law should include flagship measures on water management that make water available for nature and for people. Without sufficient, well-managed and good quality water in the landscape, there won’t be enough good quality water for people. A climate resilience law should set up natural ‘water reserves’ in water-stressed areas, where critical water supplies - including groundwater - and their catchments are protected and restored, and mandate “ecological flows”. The law should provide adequate finance for protecting and restoring natural “sponge” landscapes, such as floodplains or wetlands. Most of these measures would enhance existing legislation, such as the Water Framework Directive.

In addition, the EU should phase-out subsidies for activities which are: harmful to river morphology (such as hydropower), likely to generate excessive water consumption (such as agriculture), or likely to alter water quality, natural water retention in the landscape, and groundwater. The EU should redirect harmful subsidies to more sustainable practices, such as agroecology, or the environmental refurbishment of existing hydropower plants.

2. Fully enforce the EU Water Framework Directive

The European Commission must step up the enforcement of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and live up to its responsibility of safeguarding EU law.

The WFD was assessed as ‘fit for purpose’ in 2019. However, an evaluation concluded that its implementation has been slow due to a lack of political will, lack of funds and lack of consistency between water policy, sectoral EU policies and budgets such as agriculture, energy and transport. The call of the von der Leyen Commission for ‘zero tolerance for non-compliance’ must be heeded and the many episodes of water pollution and over abstraction must not remain unpunished. The next European Commission must increase its legal resources in order to step up enforcement and pursue any impunity.
3. Prioritise the restoration and protection of free-flowing rivers in Europe

Protecting free-flowing rivers across Europe and restoring them through barrier removal and floodplain restoration can contribute to halt freshwater biodiversity loss and increase societies’ resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Free-flowing rivers build our resilience to droughts, floods and wildfires by keeping water in the landscape. Rivers that flow naturally also benefit agriculture (through improved soil fertility, soil moisture and crop yields), tourism, and our well-being. In addition, river restoration creates short and long-term employment. The implementation of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy target on the restoration of free-flowing rivers should be a priority, and a new, legally-binding target should be set as soon as possible for 2040. This is also key to keeping the commitment made in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) which included inland waters in global conservation and restoration targets for the first time (targets 2 and 3).

The EU should also enhance the protection of our last free-flowing rivers. Europe has the most obstructed river landscape in the world, with over one million barriers. Despite the protection mechanisms provided by the WFD and EU Birds and Habitats Directives, our remaining wild rivers are under pressure from hydropower and large-scale river engineering projects for inland navigation. In 2021, wetlands (which include the natural floodplains bordering free-flowing rivers) were identified as one of the carbon-rich ecosystems that should be strictly protected by 2030. The Commission should assess whether the EU is on track to reach this target. If not, it should develop a strategic planning approach that identifies the need to protect free-flowing river stretches across the EU and strengthens their legal protection.

4. Exclude new hydropower in Europe

The EU’s Renewable Energy Directive must exclude new hydropower, so that new hydropower cannot count towards renewable energy targets. No new hydropower projects in Europe should receive EU funding.

The EU should not support the development of any new hydropower plants given the massive harm they cause to the environment. Hydropower destroys habitats, reduces water flows, increases riverbed incision and impedes fish migration. The economic benefits generated by hydropower in Europe are estimated to be €30 billion per year. In comparison, the annual economic benefits from healthy freshwater ecosystems are at a staggering €11 trillion, surpassing the former 300 times. The non-monetary benefits of freshwater ecosystems include water purification, soil health enhancement, carbon storage, and community protection from extreme floods and droughts.

When revising the Renewable Energy Directive in 2023, the EU failed to exclude new hydropower from its scope. In the next revision of the Renewable Energy Directive (by the end of 2027 at the latest), this mistake must be corrected.

In addition, no new hydropower projects in Europe should receive EU funding. The EU should only finance the environmental refurbishment of existing hydropower plants to reduce their environmental impacts.
1. 40% of Europe’s surface waters are not in good condition (Europe’s Environment Agency, 2018).

2. Direct economic benefits of freshwater ecosystems, such as water consumption from households, irrigated agriculture and industries, amount to a minimum of nearly €1 trillion annually in Europe. The non-monetary benefits—which include water purification, soil health enhancement, carbon storage, and community protection from extreme floods and droughts—are ten times higher than the economic benefits, bringing in approximately €10 trillion per year (WWF, 2023).

3. 56% to 65% of Europe’s wetlands were drained for agriculture. Enhancing a river’s flood water retention areas, such as wetlands, can decrease flood exposure by up to 70% (IEEP, 2022).

4. One in three freshwater fish species in Europe are currently threatened with extinction, and migratory freshwater fish populations have seen a 93% collapse since 1970, (Living Planet Index for Migratory Freshwater Fish Report, 2020).

5. In addition to the tragic loss of human lives, the July 2021 floods in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands resulted in more than €46 billion in economic losses, according to insurers.

6. Europe is already saturated with 21,387 hydropower plants. Despite this, 8,785 additional plants are planned or under construction and 28% of all planned hydropower plants are built in protected areas (WWF, RiverWatch, GEOTA and EuroNatur, 2019).

DID YOU KNOW?

1. January-March 2024: The European Commission reports on progress on the implementation of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy.


4. October-December 2027: Tentative legislative proposal from the European Commission on the regulatory framework for the promotion of energy from renewable sources for the period after 2030.

5. End of 2027: Deadline for the achievement of good status for all rivers, lakes and transitional and coastal waters in the EU under the Water Framework Directive.
Wildlife crime is devastating for endangered species and a growing risk to our societies' economic development and security. Unfortunately, most cases still go unpunished or undetected.

Wildlife crime, an issue closer to home than you might think

Wildlife crime is one of the main drivers of the decline of global wildlife and remains a significant challenge for the EU. Our continent is a major destination for wildlife products coming from all over the world but also from the EU itself: European species, such as songbirds, eels and sturgeons, all fall victim to illicit trade. Besides its repercussions on the environment, wildlife crime also exerts significant impacts on our economy, our health, and our security.

WHAT WE NEED

1. Fully implement the EU Environmental Crime Directive
2. Comprehensively execute the EU Action Plan Against Wildlife Trafficking
3. Champion the adoption of a Global CITES Resolution against financial crime
4. Combat the illegal trade in protected species

INTRODUCTION
Pushing for a better enforcement of the existing legislation

While the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (WTRs) and the currently revised Environmental Crime Directive have proven to be crucial sets of legislations to regulate wildlife trade in the EU, their implementation remains insufficient. Better enforcement of their legal requirements is a necessary first step. Wildlife crime, like other environmental crimes, is still not taken seriously or prioritised by competent authorities (governments, enforcement, judiciary, etc.). This means that there is a lack of detection, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of wildlife crime cases, which maintains a climate of impunity for offenders. Lack of data and specialisation, insufficient human and financial resources, and limited cross-border cooperation also hamper efforts to tackle wildlife crime.

Prioritising a comprehensive approach

Putting wildlife crime at the heart of the EU’s environmental agenda is essential. On the legislative side, the EU should increase synergies with other relevant legislation such as the Birds and Habitats Directives or the Digital Services Act for issues related to online trade. On the practical side, the EU should strengthen cross-border collaboration within the EU, via Eurojust and Europol, and with non-EU countries acting as source, transit and destination for wildlife.

To support existing legislation, the EU has implemented an Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking since 2016, and revised it in 2022. The Action Plan includes measures to be implemented by the EU and its Member States at the national, regional and international level, and embraces a holistic approach from source to consumer.
1. Fully implement the EU Environmental Crime Directive

The EU should adopt, transpose and implement a robust Environmental Crime Directive.

The Environmental Crime Directive has the potential to create a level-playing field across the EU, especially on what constitutes effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal sanctions. It also includes key provisions related to resources and training for competent authorities, investigations, data collection, and national strategies, which are critical to improve the way environmental crimes are tackled in the EU.

2. Comprehensively execute the EU Action Plan Against Wildlife Trafficking

The EU needs to implement the new EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking at the national, regional and international level.

Once fully implemented, the Action Plan will prove effective in addressing key challenges related to wildlife crime in Europe and worldwide. This involves engaging on issues such as demand reduction, sustainable use of wildlife, gender and human rights, corruption, private sector engagement, capacity building for enforcement and judicial authorities, cooperation, One Health, support to third countries, etc. However, the European Commission alone cannot ensure the success of the Action Plan. It is crucial that the EU Member States be at the forefront of its implementation for it to achieve its goals.

3. Champion the adoption of a Global CITES Resolution against financial crime

The EU should support the adoption of a new CITES Resolution on Preventing, detecting, investigating and disrupting financial crime and illicit financial flows arising from activities conducted in violation of the Convention.

Addressing money laundering and systematically enabling asset recovery are essential means to support wildlife crime investigations, especially to disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups. This has already been acknowledged under CITES. However, there is still no dedicated Resolution on this topic that could build on existing commitments and recommendations under the Convention. As the EU recognises the importance of tackling illicit financial flows related to wildlife crime, notably in its new EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking, it should support the adoption of a new CITES Resolution on financial crime to raise the global importance of this issue.
4. Combat the illegal trade in protected species

The EU should address the trade in non-CITES listed species protected in their countries of origin that are smuggled in the EU.

There are species not protected under CITES or EU law, but protected in their countries of origin and for which there are no grounds to stop the trade once they reach the EU market, even if they were extracted from the wild and exported illegally. This can have disastrous effects, especially in the case of endemic species with high biodiversity value. The European Commission should make use of Annex B of the Wildlife Trade Regulations to ensure the swift and strong protection of these species.
1. Europe represents 34% of export transactions and 38% of import transactions for legal international trade in CITES listed species, making it one of the main markets for legal wildlife products in the world (CITES, 2022).

2. Europe is home to eight species of sturgeons and all except one (which is Endangered) are Critically Endangered according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Yet, poaching and illegal trade persists. For example, a study found that one-third of caviar and meat products were illegally sold in the lower Danube region (WWF, 2021).

3. Environmental crimes are the third most lucrative crime category globally, costing between approximately €6 and €246 billion annually to society, according to Interpol. This makes environmental crimes a fast growing economic sector, with an estimated annual rate of 5% to 7% globally—two to three times the rate of the global economy (WWF, 2022).

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**TIMELINE**

- **Late 2023:** Adoption of the revised Environmental Crime Directive, followed by national transposition (current discussion for a transposition period between 18 and 30 months) and implementation.

- **2024:** European Commission investigates the need for new legislations on wildlife trade and work on exotic pets.

- **2025:** CITES CoP20.

- **2027:** The five-year cycle of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking comes to an end, and is likely followed by a revised plan.

- **2030:** Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework goals and targets to be achieved.
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