



**ESDN**REPORT

# **EUROPE'S POSITION AS LEADING CHANGE AGENT AGAINST THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS**

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

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ESDN Office



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## Introduction

The science is clear that we are putting extreme pressures on the planet. The Triple Planetary Crisis – Climate Change, Pollution and Biodiversity loss – refers to the three main interlinked issues that humanity currently faces. The cascading effect of this crisis is causing a heavy toll on individuals, communities, and economies and imperiling life on the planet. Although the rapid degradation of planetary resources is evident, and ecological overload is manifesting, the international community is still not doing enough to mitigate these impacts either as individual or collective threats (UNFCCC 2022, UNDP 2022).

This discussion paper provides input on the European Sustainable Development Network's (ESDN) Annual Conference 2022, entitled "Europe's Position as Leading Change Agent against the Triple Planetary Crisis – Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss and Pollution", which will take place in Bucharest, Romania on 4-5 October 2022. This ESDN event is organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Romanian Prime Minister's Office – Department of Sustainable Development. The conference will bring together policymakers and experts from

different stakeholder groups from all over Europe to learn, exchange, and share their experiences. This document gives an overview of International and European policies addressing Climate Change, Pollution and Biodiversity loss, and current trends on new policies and legislations to come, as well as open questions, which are crucial to be addressed.

**Climate Change** is the most pressing issue facing humanity today. The consequences of climate change already today manifest through increased intensity and severity of droughts, water scarcity, wildfires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity. **Chapter 1** summarises the main policies to mitigate Climate Change on global and European levels, as well as recent developments and discussion on this.

**Biodiversity loss** refers to the decline or disappearance of biological diversity, which includes animals, plants and ecosystems. The reasons for biodiversity loss include everything from overfishing to habitat loss (e.g. deforestation to make way for development) to desertification due to climate change. Biodiversity is the baseline for everything

on the planet – as in the end it is all interlinked. Biodiversity loss impacts food supplies and access to clean water – putting dramatic risks on the future of the planet (UNGCC2022). **Chapter 2** provides overview on policies to address Biodiversity loss, lists the policy instruments for biodiversity conservation and introduces European Biodiversity Strategy.

**Pollution** is the largest cause of disease and premature death in the world. COVID-19 crisis demonstrated how strong linkages between environment and health are and how important it is to address such linkages urgently and systematically (The World Bank 2022).

**Chapter 3** is dedicated to air-, water- and soil pollution' prevention policies and international cooperation. It gives overview of European integrated approach.

# CHAPTER 1

## CLIMATE CHANGE

In 2020, European Environmental Agency (EEA) reported a remarkable progress towards meeting the EU's climate and energy targets. The estimates have shown that in 2020 there was an achievement of Europe's 20-20-20 goals for climate change mitigation, renewable energy deployment and energy efficiency gains. This keeps Europe well on track in its journey towards climate neutrality by mid-century (EEA 2020). However, European Environmental Bureau (EEB) warns that while The European Green Deal (EGD) was launched with plan to deliver a set of deeply transformative policies that would "reconcile the economy with our planet, to reconcile the way we produce, the way we consume, with our planet and to make it work for our people", there are some missed opportunities. Such, The Climate Neutrality target is only binding at EU level, contains no phase out date for fossil fuels use, is weak on governance, lacks binding targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency at national level, is weak on the polluter pays principle (ETS review), and missed opportunities on animal numbers, nutrient management and meat consumption. Stronger governance mechanisms are needed to ensure that

the EU becomes climate-resilient by 2050 (EEB 2022).

### Main policies to address Climate Change

Climate change is defined as the biggest challenge of humanity by the European Environmental Agency (EEA 2022). Its effects can be already observed: temperatures are rising, extreme weather events occur more frequently, glaciers and snow are melting, and the global sea level is rising. This leads to a series of social, environmental and economic risks, which needs to be addressed through policy measures (EUROSTAT 2022).

**On the global level, the main policies to address Climate Change include:**

- **The UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol**, agreed in 1997, which was a first step towards achieving more substantial global emission reductions.
- **Paris Agreement**, adopted in 2015, aimed to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. As of 28 September 2017, 166

countries have joined the Paris Agreement.

- **Climate Action SDG 13**, which is part of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

The European Union (EU) has been one of the most active in environmental protection through the formulation of policies aimed at preserving the health and well-being of citizens and protecting natural resources. (Cifuentes-Faura J., 2022)

**The European Union main policies to address Climate Change include:**

- **The European Green Deal**, approved in 2020 as a policy initiative, aims to set the EU on the path to a green transition, with the ultimate goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050. An impact assessed plan establish an increase of the EU's greenhouse gas emission reductions target for 2030 to at least 50% and towards 55% compared with 1990 levels. The plan is to review each existing law on its climate merits, and introduce new legislation on the circular economy, building renovation, biodiversity, farming and innovation.

- **Adaptation strategy 2013**, the European Commission (EC) adopted its new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change on 24 February 2021. The new strategy sets out how the European Union can adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change and become climate resilient by 2050. The Strategy has four principle objectives: to make adaptation smarter, swifter and more systemic, and to step up international action on adaptation to climate change.

## Recent developments

While the [European Green Deal](#) outlines the transformation of the EU into a climate neutral, fair and prosperous society, the agreement in April 2021 on the European Climate Law enshrines the EU's commitment to reaching climate neutrality by 2050 in EU law. The European Climate Law sets out a framework for climate action and increases the EU's ambition for 2030, with a new goal to reduce net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55 % by that year and to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050.

Several measures were adopted for achieving this commitment:



- reducing energy consumption in transport, buildings and industries;
- increasing the share of renewable energy, as well as shifting to sustainable agriculture; and
- strengthening carbon sinks (EEA 2021).

When it comes to energy policy, the EC has also proposed **the Fit for 55 package**, which includes the new and revised EU climate and energy legislation. The package comprises an interconnected set of measures in the area of energy, transport, taxation and climate policies, and includes strengthened and expanded carbon pricing, targets, standards and support measures. In addition, the Commission proposes to increase the target for natural carbon sinks from 225 million tonnes (Mt) of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents to 310 Mt. (EUROSTAT 2022)

[The European Climate Pact](#) was agreed to support action by people across Europe. It focuses on connecting interested individuals, communities and organisations to share knowledge, as well as develop, implement and scale up solutions. This initiative is organized to support The Green Deal. By pledging to the Pact, European stakeholders commit

to taking concrete climate and environmental actions in a way that can be measured and/or followed up.

[The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy](#) was launched in 2008 in Europe with the ambition to gather local governments voluntarily committed to achieving and exceeding the EU climate and energy targets. The Covenant of Mayors is a bottom-up approach to energy and climate action. The initiative now gathers 9,000+ local and regional authorities across 57 countries drawing on the strengths of a worldwide multi-stakeholder movement and the technical and methodological support offered by dedicated offices.

## Impact of COVID-19 on Climate Change

Greenhouse gas emissions have been falling in recent decades, with a record drop in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reducing fossil fuel consumption. While net carbon removals from land use, land use change and forestry have declined, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from new passenger cars will need to fall further to meet the EU target. In addition, the EU continues to face intensifying climate impacts as



surface temperatures rise. Economic losses due to climate-related events have increased in recent years, although these remain highly variable from year to year. More local and regional governments have signed up to the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy initiative for implementing mitigation and adaptation actions. Financial support is significantly progressing, both inside and outside the EU with climate-related expenditure for developed countries being topped up. (Strategic Plan 2020-2024, DG ENVIRONMENT)

However, globally speaking, the stress of the pandemic has reinforced nation-first mentalities, deepened inequalities, and weakened the multilateral system. The Carnegie Europe underline that to fight global warming, governments must move beyond thinking in such narrow national terms and re-energize foreign policy as a crucial tool of effective climate action.

### Current policy discussions

The policy discussions around Climate Change in the EC, specifically in the Directorate-General (DG) Environment, are centered around topics of: (1)

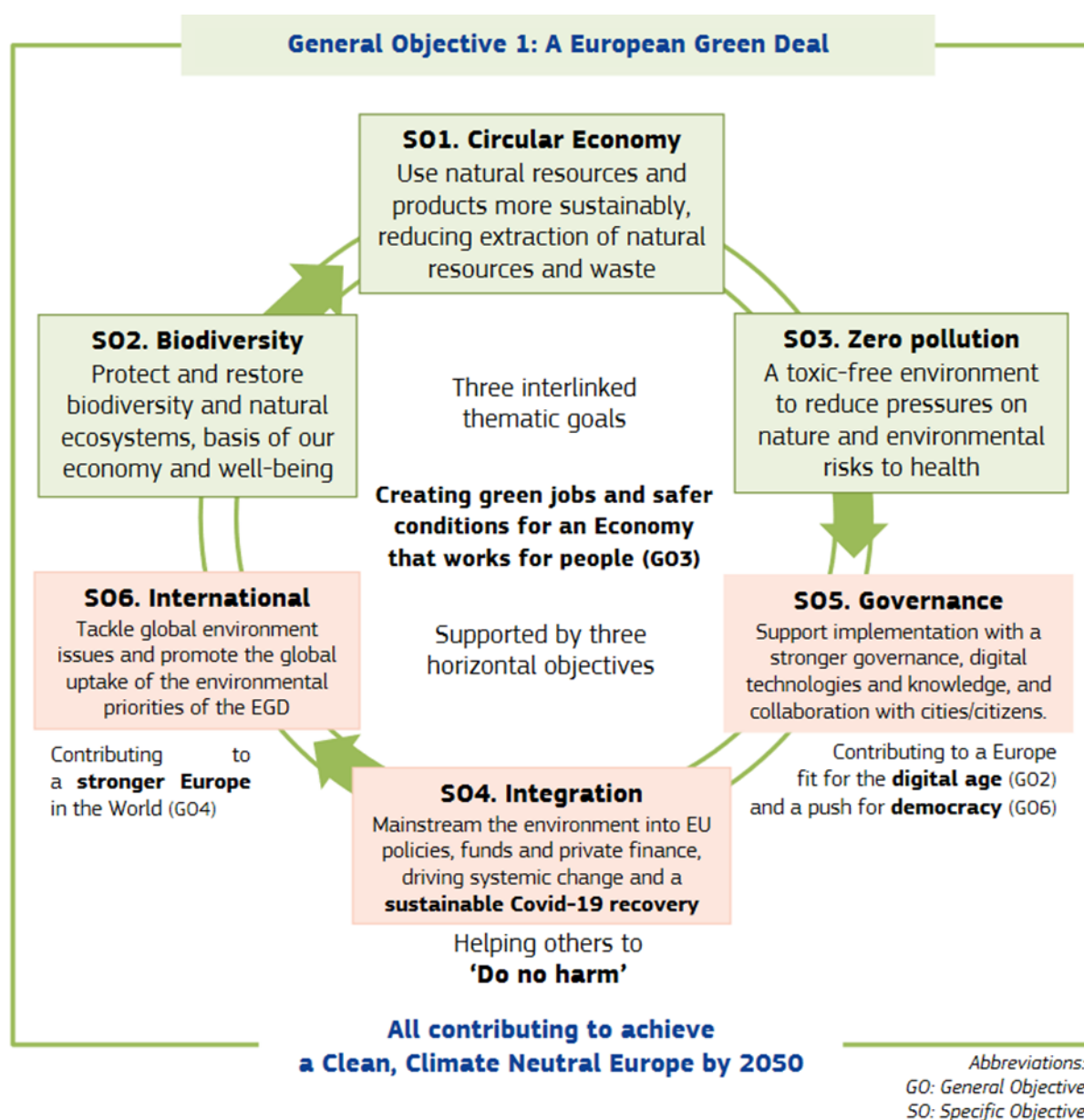
implementation of the Green Deal, through setting the objectives around Circular Economy, Biodiversity, Zero Pollution, Integration, Governance and International policy; (2) mainstreaming environmental considerations across policies and activities while ensuring that the Green Deal does no harm; (3) Applying circular economy principles; and (4) strengthening environmental governance.

DG Environment will lead the main environmental priorities of the European Green Deal in the next years (2020-2024). The Green Deal is the guiding framework for DG Environment's policy and is classified as General Objective 1, where specific objectives include Circular Economy, Biodiversity, Zero Pollution, Integration, Governance and International policy (Image 1). EU Environment policy is key to achieve a climate-neutral Europe and transforming the products and value chains with the biggest environmental impacts. A good understanding of environmental impacts needs to underpin the transformative changes towards more sustainable food, energy, mobility, and building systems. (Strategic Plan 2020-2024, DG ENVIRONMENT)

The DGs not only put their efforts towards mainstreaming environmental considerations across policies and activities, but also to make sure that the Green Deal does no harm. The DG will give careful consideration to the social and employment effects of environmental policies and, in line with the just transition ambition, strive to leave no one behind. Applying circular economy principles will open up new opportunities for Europe's industry, businesses and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs, contributing to an economy that works for people. Increasing the use of new technologies to support policy development, implementation and enabling circular business models, while at the same time reducing the environmental impact of digital products and services, will be the main DG's contribution to the Digital Europe. By strengthening environmental governance, the DG will be contributing to a push for European democracy (general objective 6). Considering the many important initiatives that are to be developed, the DG will prioritise better regulation when designing new policies, aim for targeted regulation that achieves objectives, and bring benefits

at minimum cost. For the period 2020–2024, DG ENV's communication activities will centre round the EGD, promoting circular economy and sustainability, biodiversity protection and emissions reduction; actions to improve health and quality of life will be highlighted, to connect with citizens and in line with the zero pollution ambition. The DG will actively participate in the preparation and promotion of corporate communication campaigns. (Strategic Plan 2020–2024, DG ENVIRONMENT)

Image 1. A European Green Deal: framework of the main objectives, DG Environment of the EC (Source: Strategic Plan 2020-2024)



On the European Green Deal, the Commission's focus will be aligning relevant climate and energy legislation to the newly proposed targets. This will be brought together in a "Fit for 55 Package", which will cover everything from renewables to energy efficiency first, buildings, as well as land use, energy taxation, effort sharing and emissions trading and a wide range of other pieces of legislation.

Climate and energy diplomacy will remain a priority with the external partners. As mentioned in President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the Commission will propose a carbon border adjustment mechanism to help motivate foreign producers and EU importers to reduce their carbon emissions, while ensuring a level-playing field conducive to trade in a WTO-compatible way.

DG ENV puts forward a series of measures on smart and sustainable transport, including a revision of the Regulation on the trans-European transport network and of the Directive on intelligent transport systems. It continues the implementation of the circular economy action plan, looking at eco-design and sustainable products, in

particular circular electronics, including improving the collection, reuse and repair of mobile phones, laptops and other devices.

This reflects that the European Green Deal goes far beyond cutting emissions. DG ENV follows up to the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 and farm to fork strategy, notably to boost organic production, restore degraded ecosystems, protect the oceans and coastal regions, protect, restore and sustainably manage forests, and to reduce the risk of products associated with deforestation on the EU market. DG ENV also works on bringing innovative feed additives to the market to reduce the environmental impact of livestock farming. (Strategic Plan 2020-2024, DG ENVIRONMENT)

## Open questions

1. How the current energy crises and invasion of Ukraine might influence the implementation of the Green Deal and the Fit for 55 measures?
2. How to reinforce the EU's role on the global level to encourage other countries to address Climate Change?

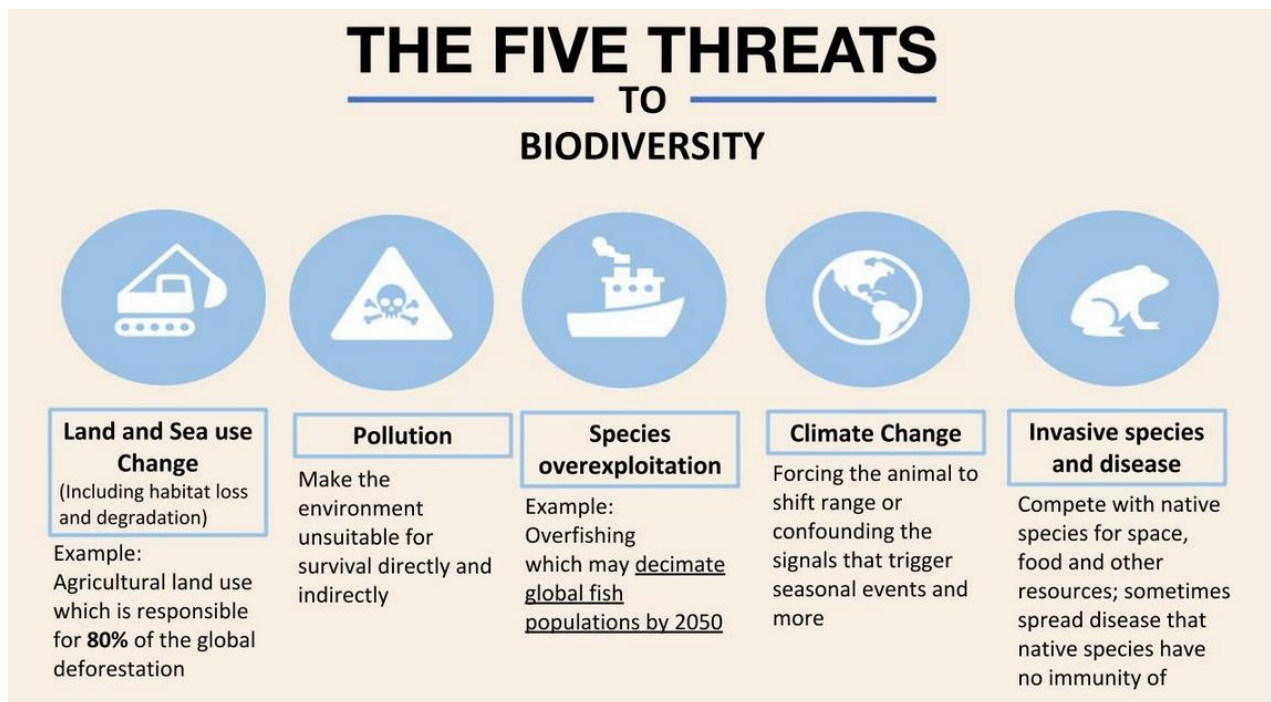
3. What are the pros and cons of the European approach in addressing the Climate Change?
4. How can the implementation of the Green Deal on the European level and on the member states level can support each other?

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## CHAPTER 2

### BIODIVERSITY LOSS



Source: *Living Planet Report 2020*, WWF.

The global Living Planet Index continues to decline. It shows an average 68% decrease in population sizes of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish between 1970 and 2016. A 94% decline in the LPI for the tropical sub regions of the Americas is the largest fall observed in any part of the world. Since the industrial revolution, human activities have increasingly destroyed and degraded forests, grasslands, wetlands and other important ecosystems, threatening human well-being. 75% of the Earth's ice-free land

surface has already been significantly altered, most of the oceans are polluted, and more than 85% of the area of wetlands has been lost. (WWF, LIVING PLANET REPORT 2020)



## Main policies to address biodiversity loss

Biodiversity-related conventions work to implement actions at the national, regional and international level in order to reach shared goals of conservation and sustainable use.

**Several international conventions focus on biodiversity issues:**

- **The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** entered into force on 29 December 1993. The objectives of the CBD are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from commercial and other utilization of genetic resources (biological material which contains genes and/or metabolic material that may be derived from genes). The agreement covers all ecosystems, species, and genetic resources.

To implement the protocols of the CBD, **the UN Biodiversity Conference** is held regularly – Despite on-going efforts, biodiversity is deteriorating worldwide and this decline is projected to worsen with business-as-usual scenarios. The UN Biodiversity Conference will convene

governments from around the world to agree to a new set of goals for nature over the next decade through the Convention on Biological Diversity post-2020 framework process. The framework sets out an ambitious plan to implement broad-based action to bring about a transformation in society's relationship with biodiversity and to ensure that, by 2050, the shared vision of living in harmony with nature is fulfilled. The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Biodiversity Convention ([COP 15](#)) is planned for December 2022.

- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), 1975**

The CITES aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Through its three appendices, the Convention accords varying degrees of protection to more than 30,000 plant and animal species.

- **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.**

The CMS, or the Bonn Convention aims to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species throughout their range. Parties to the CMS work together



to conserve migratory species and their habitats by providing strict protection for the most endangered migratory species, by concluding regional multilateral agreements for the conservation and management of specific species or categories of species, and by undertaking co-operative research and conservation activities.

(CBD, 2022)

On the European level, the following policies address the biodiversity loss:

- **The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 (BDS)** – the Commission adopted the BDS in May 2020, building on the experience with the previous biodiversity framework and input from a range of stakeholders. The BDS sets out specific targets, commitments and measures to tackle pressures on biodiversity and restore degraded ecosystems. Developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the BDS takes full account of the crisis and aims to contribute to the recovery, build longer-term resilience and help prevent future similar crises. All of this will guide DG ENV's work under this specific objective, which mirrors the BDS

headline commitment to put Europe's biodiversity forward.

- **The Birds Directive** – is the oldest piece of EU legislation on the environment and one of its cornerstones which was unanimously adopted in April 1979. Amended in 2009, it aims to protect all European wild birds and the habitats of listed species, in particular through the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA).
- **The Habitats Directives**, a directive adopted by the European Community in 1992, ensures the conservation of a wide range of rare, threatened or endemic animal and plant species. Some 200 rare and characteristic habitat types are also targeted for conservation in their own right.
- **Natura 2000** – Stretching over 18% of the EU's land area and more than 8% of its marine territory, Natura 2000 is the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world. It offers a haven to Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

Table 1. Policy instruments for biodiversity conservation

Regulatory (command-and-control) instruments	Economic instruments	Information and other voluntary instruments
Restrictions or prohibitions on use (e.g. trade in endangered species and CITES)*	Price-based instruments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Taxes (e.g. on groundwater extraction, pesticide and fertiliser use)</li> <li>– Charges/fees (e.g. for natural resource use, access to national parks, hunting or fishing license fees)</li> <li>– Subsidies to promote biodiversity</li> </ul>	Ecolabelling and certification (e.g. organic agriculture labelling schemes; labels for sustainably harvested fish or timber)
Access restrictions or prohibitions (e.g. protected areas; legislated buffer zones along waterways)	Reform of environmentally harmful subsidies	Green public procurement (e.g. of sustainably harvested timber)
Permits and quotas (e.g. for logging and fishing)	Payment for ecosystem services	Voluntary approaches (e.g. negotiated agreements between businesses and government for nature protection or voluntary offset schemes)
Quality, quantity and design standards (e.g. commercial fishing net mesh-size specifications)	Biodiversity offsets/biobanking	Corporate environmental accounting
Land use and marine spatial planning (e.g. ecological corridors)	Tradable permits (e.g. individual transferable quotas for fisheries)	
Planning tools and requirements (e.g. environmental impact assessments [EIAs] and strategic environmental assessments [SEA])	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Liability instruments</li> <li>– Non-compliance fines</li> <li>– Performance bonds</li> </ul>	

Source: Based on OECD (2013), Scaling-up Finance Mechanisms for Biodiversity, OECD Publishing,

## Recent developments

[The EU's biodiversity strategy](#) for 2030 is a comprehensive, ambitious and a long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The strategy aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030, and contains specific actions and commitments. It is the proposal for the EU's contribution to the upcoming international negotiations on the global post-2020 biodiversity framework. As a core part of the European Green Deal, it will also support a green recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

**In the post-COVID-19 context,** the strategy aims to build our societies' resilience to future threats, such as:

- the impacts of climate change;
- forest fires;
- food insecurity; and
- disease outbreaks – including by protecting wildlife and fighting illegal wildlife trade.

The strategy contains specific commitments and actions to be delivered by 2030:

- Establishing a larger EU-wide network of protected areas on land and at sea;
- The EU will enlarge existing Natura 2000 areas, with strict protection for areas of very high biodiversity and climate value; and
- Launching an EU nature restoration plan.

Through concrete commitments and actions, the plan is for EU countries to put in place effective restoration measures to restore degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.

As part of this plan, the Commission proposed the EU's first ever Nature Restoration Law, which includes an overarching restoration objective for the long-term recovery of nature in the EU's land and sea areas with binding restoration targets for specific habitats and species.

## Introducing measures to enable the necessary transformative change

The strategy highlights unlocking funding for biodiversity, and setting in motion a new, strengthened governance framework to:

- ensure better implementation and track progress;
- improve knowledge, financing and investments; and
- better respecting nature in public and business decision-making

## Introducing measures to tackle the global biodiversity challenge

These measures will demonstrate that the EU is ready to lead by example to address the global biodiversity crisis. In particular, working towards the successful adoption of an ambitious global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

## Implementation

Two online tools track progress in implementing the strategy:

- an online actions tracker provides up-to-date information on the state

of implementation of the strategy's many actions

- a targets dashboard shows progress to the quantified biodiversity targets set by the Strategy, at the EU level and in the Member States

(The EU Biodiversity strategy, 2022)

## Current policy discussions

At EU level, the DG Environment (ENV) works on the topic of Biodiversity in collaboration with other services, in particular DGs CLIMA, AGRI, SANTE, REGIO and MARE.

- The DG ENV is working on the legislative proposal for legally binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems. This will focus on ecosystems' potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.
- Protected areas will be expanded across the EU, building on the Natura 2000 network, notably for areas of high biodiversity value on land and water.

- DG ENV will explore options to strengthen the governance framework. Nature protection will be a priority in the DG's strategic approach to enforcement, while additional efforts will be deployed to help Member States fully implement existing nature legislation, including on invasive alien species.
- Work with stakeholder groups will continue, inter alia on natural capital accounts and sustainable finance, through the EU Business and Biodiversity Platform (Strategic Plan 2020–2024, DG ENVIRONMENT)

DG ENV is monitoring trends relevant to the new EU Biodiversity Strategy, such as the percentage of areas under the Natura 2000 network, and the grassland butterfly index. The conservation status of species and habitats are fundamental indicators for DG ENV and subject to mandatory reporting under the Habitats and Birds directives.

## Open questions

1. What are the pros and cons of the legislative proposal for legally

binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems?

2. How effective was the Natura 2000 so far? Is it relevant for the expansion or other measures might be more efficient?
3. How do you see the position of the EU on Biodiversity loss?
4. What are the possibilities to increase the actorness for the EU on the global governance stage in Biodiversity topic?

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# CHAPTER 3

## POLLUTION

Pollution is the largest environmental cause of disease and premature death. Global health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic are reminders of the strong linkages between environment and health and of the need to address such linkages systematically. (The World Bank 2022). In this section air-, water-, and soil- pollution related policies are addressed.

### Main policies to address pollution

International cooperation on air pollution:

- [UNECE's Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution](#) initiated due to the public outcry against the detrimental impacts of Acid Rain in Europe, the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) was signed in 1979 and entered into force in 1983. As the first regional environmental convention, CLRTAP has been instrumental in the reduction of key harmful pollutants in both Europe and North America. With 51 parties out of UNECE's 56 Member States, the Convention covers most of the region. Over the past 30 years, the Convention has been extended

by 8 Protocols, focused upon setting strict reduction targets for releases of pollution for the protection of human and environmental health. Each of these Protocols targets pollutants, such as sulphur, nitrogen oxide, persistent organic pollutants, volatile organic compounds, ammonia, and toxic heavy metals.

- **International Union of Air Pollution Prevention and Environmental Protection Associations (IUAPPA)**  
Founded in 1964, the Union has had a long-term interest in the relationship of air pollution and climate. The Union's activities are now pursued within the framework of its 'One Atmosphere' Strategy enunciated in the Vancouver Declaration of 2010. This proposed action on SLCPs has the highest priority for international atmospheric policy, along with the strengthening of global atmospheric governance and a renewed focus on the long-term ecosystem and biodiversity impacts of air pollution.

Global policies for prevention of water pollution:

- [Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses](#)



[and International Lakes Water](#). The Convention aims to protect and ensure the quantity, quality and sustainable use of these transboundary water resources by facilitating and promoting cooperation. The Water Convention started as a regional convention for the Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The Convention was adopted in Helsinki, Finland, in 1992 and entered into force in 1996. In 2003, the Convention's Parties agreed to amend the treaty to make it possible for any United Nations Member State to accede to this instrument. In 2016, the Convention officially became a global legal framework for transboundary water cooperation available for all Member States.

- [UN Environment Programme](#) promotes nature-based solutions to water resources management, including for water quality, and is contributing to the topic for the 2018 World Water Day and 2018 World Water Development Report, coordinated by UNESCO WWAP (World Water Assessment Programme).

- **Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) – Water and sanitation.** The 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) bring water quality issues to the forefront of international action by setting Goal 6 specifically aiming to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” to respond to the pressing challenges posed by water quality issues.

Water quality is addressed also under other SDGs, such as the goals on health, poverty reduction, ecosystems and sustainable consumption and production, recognizing the links between water quality and the key environmental, socioeconomic and development issues (Goals 1, 3, 12, 15 and Targets 1.4, 3.3, 3.9, 12.4, 15.1). The clear focus on water quality in the SDGs demonstrates growing attention on the urgent need to improve water quality worldwide.

#### International cooperation for soil:

- [The Global Soil Partnership \(GSP\)](#) is a globally recognized mechanism established in 2012 with the mission to position soils in the Global Agenda

and to promote sustainable soil management. The Partnership, hosted by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, UN), works hard to improve soil governance to guarantee productive soils towards food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable development for all.

- [The Global Symposium on Soil Pollution](#) In May 2018, FAO (UN) and its Global Soil Partnership (GSP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) organized the Global Symposium on Soil Pollution (GSOP18) to bring together science and policy to understand the status, causes, impacts and solutions to soil pollution.

#### European policies for prevention of air-, water- and soil pollution:

- On 12 May 2021, the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan: **"Towards a Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil"** – a key deliverable of the European Green Deal. The zero pollution vision for 2050 is for air,

water and soil pollution to be reduced to levels no longer considered harmful to health and natural ecosystems, and that respect the boundaries with which our planet can cope, thereby creating a toxic-free environment.

- [Chemicals strategy](#) – The European Commission published a chemicals strategy for sustainability on 14 October 2020. It is part of the EU's zero pollution ambition, which is a key commitment of the European Green Deal. The EU's chemicals strategy aims to better protect citizens and the environment, as well as boost innovation for safe and sustainable chemicals.

## Zero pollution policies – towards an integrated approach



Source: The EC, 2021

- **Soil Thematic Strategy** adopted in tackles the full range of threats to soil in a comprehensive and coherent way. It creates a common legal framework to ensure that EU soils stay healthy for future generations and remain capable of supporting the ecosystems on which our economic activities and our well-being depend.

### Recent developments

The **COVID-19 crisis** has increased the urgency of stepping up action “Towards a Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil” and to protect human health and the environment and ensure societal resilience.

**Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform** was established as a part of the implementation of the Action Plan. The Commission, in cooperation with the

Committee of the Regions, set up this Platform to achieve the zero pollution ambition. The Platform is designed to mainstream the zero pollution agenda. It should bring together stakeholders and experts of different policy areas, such as health, agriculture, research and innovation, transport, digitalization and the environment. It gives an opportunity to create co-ownership, promote collaboration, and foster integrated solutions to maximize synergies with decarbonization and post-COVID 19 recovery efforts (Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform, 2022).

The Platform will help deliver on the flagship initiatives and actions set out in the Zero Pollution Action Plan by

- defining a common vision on how to achieve zero pollution objectives;
- bringing together actors from different communities and areas of expertise to tackle inter-related challenges, such as strengthening a joint environment and health agenda; and
- developing and sharing good practices on cross-cutting topics.

## Current policy discussions

Current work of DG Environment include:

- The EU legal framework for chemicals will be simplified and strengthened, in collaboration with relevant DGs, in particular, GROW and SANTE. The new framework will reflect scientific evidence on the risks posed by nanomaterials, endocrine disruptors, very persistent chemicals, hazardous chemicals in products and the combination effects of substances, issues on which the DG has developed a substantial knowledge base, inter alia through the evaluation of existing policies and legislation. Measures to improve collaboration with EU agencies and scientific bodies will be developed to move towards the 'one substance – one assessment' principle, thereby enhancing transparency when prioritizing action on chemicals. (Strategic Plan DG ENV 2021).
- The DG will devise measures to help to enhance the EU's autonomy in the production of pharmaceuticals and disinfectants, promote research and support the creation of a green and sustainable manufacturing capacity

in Europe. Once adopted, the chemicals strategy will also enable the EU to be at the forefront of international activities and contribute to the sound management of chemicals at global level (Strategic Plan DG ENV 2021).

## Open questions

1. What are advantages and disadvantages of the integrated approach for air, water and soil pollution in the European approach, considering that these topics are addressed separately on the global scale?
2. Is this target feasible – “zero pollution for 2050 is for air, water and soil pollution to be reduced to levels no longer considered harmful to health and natural ecosystems”? What is necessary to be able to reach this target?
3. What exactly would you expect from the stakeholder engagement in implementing the action “Towards a Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil”?
4. How the EU’s role can be reinforced in Global Partnerships to reduce pollution? And how the European experience can be promoted?

## Recent developments

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