



# Environment



**The EU has some of the world's highest environmental standards, which protect nature and people's quality of life, green the economy and achieve careful and rational use of natural resources.**

Environmental challenges know no boundaries. That is why we must tackle them through cooperation both within the EU and with the rest of the world.

**Protecting the environment** and promoting sustainable growth go hand in hand. Environment policy can play a key role in creating jobs and stimulating investment. Green innovations can be implemented and exported, making Europe more competitive and improving people's health and well-being.

## What the EU does

The 7<sup>th</sup> EU **environment action programme** guides the EU's environmental policy until 2020, and sets out a vision of where the EU should be by 2050. This includes living in an environment where nothing is wasted, natural resources are managed sustainably and biodiversity is protected, valued and restored.

The programme concentrates action in three key areas:

- protecting, conserving and enhancing the EU's natural capital;
- turning the EU into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy; and
- safeguarding EU citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being.

The EU is working to safeguard natural resources and halt the decline of endangered species and habitats. **Natura 2000** is a

network of protected natural areas across the EU, where sustainable human activities can coexist with rare and vulnerable species and habitats. Water, air pollution and chemicals are among people's top environmental concerns. To safeguard people from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being, EU policy aims to guarantee **safe drinking** and **bathing** water, improve **air quality**, reduce **noise** and reduce or eliminate the effects of **harmful chemicals**.



Using materials and resources for as long as possible, and designing products to be more durable and easier to reuse and recycle, are among the goals of the EU's **Circular Economy** Action Plan. One cornerstone of the Action Plan is the **Plastics Strategy**, which aims to make all plastic packaging in the EU reusable or recyclable by 2030 and takes action to reduce single-use plastics. Rethinking products' life cycles will help to manage precious resources more sustainably, minimise waste and make Europe more resilient as regards the supply of raw materials.

Environmental concerns do not stop at the EU's borders. As the world's population continues to grow, the EU is playing a leading role in international efforts to promote sustainable development. More action is needed to ensure that air, oceans and other water resources are kept clean, that land and ecosystems are used sustainably and that climate change is kept to manageable levels.



Find out more: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/environment\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/environment_en)



# Getting in touch with the EU

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Questions about the European Union? Europe Direct can help: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11, <http://europedirect.europa.eu>

This factsheet is part of the publication **'The European Union: What it is and what it does'**. An interactive version, containing links to online content, is available in PDF and HTML format at: <http://www.publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en/>

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