

## European Climate Law: toward carbon neutrality

As part of **the European Green Deal (EGD)**, the **European Climate Law (ECL)** outlines the EU's strategy to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and legally binds the EU to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

*“The EU aims to be climate-neutral by 2050 – an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. This objective is at the heart of the European Green Deal and is a legally binding target thanks to the European Climate Law”* (European Commission, 2023)[1]

### Key Principles

- 1. Climate Neutrality by 2050:** A legally binding target for all EU member states, covering all sectors to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.
- 2. 2030 Emission Reduction Target:** Requires a minimum 55% GHG reduction by 2030 to address the climate crisis and support a fair, cost-effective transition.
- 3. Paris Agreement Alignment:** The ECL aligns with EU's Paris Agreement commitments, ensuring climate action is based on science.
- 4. Monitoring and Accountability:** The law sets up a framework for monitoring and reporting progress. The European Commission can enforce compliance through corrective measures. The EU Parliament is involved as a co-legislator to enhance democratic accountability in the decision-making process.

1. European Commission. 2050 long-term strategy, [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy_en)

**5. Sectoral Contributions:** All sectors, including energy, industry, transport, and agriculture, are required to contribute through specific roadmaps and investments geared towards climate neutrality.

*INFO-BOX: **The Fit for 55** package is a set of proposals introduced by the EU Commission in July 2021 to support the ECL with concrete actions to cut emissions. It includes reforms to the EU **Emissions Trading System (ETS)** such as expanding its scope to more sectors, such as maritime and road transport. The Fit for 55 also expanded renewable energy targets to 40% by 2030, and a Social Climate Fund was established to support vulnerable households.*

## **From Ambition to Action: EU Climate Strategy Challenges**

The EU aspires to lead in global climate efforts, but its current action falls short given the scale of the ecological crisis, its historical emissions, and the need for fair mitigation. While the European Climate Law (ECL) sets a direction for action, several obstacles remain:

- **Diverse national circumstances:** Differences in economic capabilities among EU countries complicate the implementation of uniform policies and targets, as some nations are better equipped than others to reduce emissions [2].
- **Investment needs and financial constraints:** Transitioning to a climate-neutral economy requires significant investment in clean technology and infrastructure, but many EU countries face budgetary limitations, restricting their ability to fund these initiatives [3].
- **Public support and engagement:** Recent backlash against climate policies underscores the need for effective communication and strategies that address public concerns about the costs and lifestyle changes associated with transitioning to a greener economy [4].

2. Kulovesi, K., Oberthür, S., van Asselt, H., & Savaresi, A. (2024). The European Climate Law: Strengthening EU Procedural Climate Governance?. *Journal of Environmental Law*, 36(1), 23-42. [The European Climate Law: Strengthening EU Procedural Climate Governance?](#)

3. European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. (2024). New report: Research and Innovation for Climate Neutrality by 2050: Challenges, opportunities and the path forward. [New report: Research and Innovation for Climate Neutrality by 2050](#)

4. Agora Energiewende (2024): EU policies for climate neutrality in the decisive decade: 20 initiatives to advance solidarity, competitiveness and sovereignty. [\[PDF\] EU policies for climate neutrality in the decisive decade](#)

- **Technological innovation and deployment:** Achieving the EU's climate targets requires industries to rapidly adopt new technologies. However, many of these technologies are not yet economically viable or widely available at the necessary scale.
- **Regulatory frameworks and accountability:** The ECL outlines collective targets but lacks binding commitments for individual member states, leading to potential disparities and accountability issues in national efforts [5].
- **Carbon leakage risks:** There is a risk that industries may relocate to countries with less stringent climate regulations, undermining the EU's emission reduction efforts [6].
- **Social equity:** To address rising energy costs and support those most affected by the transition, the Social Climate Fund (SCF) has been established, but it may not be sufficient to fully mitigate the social impact.

## Biodiversity and Climate Action

The European Climate Law integrates key biodiversity strategies, including the implementation of the Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) regulation to enhance nature-based carbon removals, aligning with broader biodiversity, forest, and soil strategies.

*“Climate change is a primary driver of biodiversity loss. And climate change depends on biodiversity as part of the solution. So clearly the two are linked, and cannot be separated.”*

-Elisabeth Mrema (May, 2022), Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity [8]

5. CAN Europe (2022) “Climate Laws in Europe. Essential for achieving climate neutrality” <https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/climate-laws-briefing-eng.pdf>

6. University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL). (2021). Fit for 55? A progressive business perspective on the EU's transformative climate package. Cambridge, UK: CLG Europe [Fit for 55?](#)

7. European Commission. Land use sector. [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/land-use-sector\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/land-use-sector_en)

8. United Nations. Biodiversity - our strongest natural defense against climate change. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/biodiversity>

## Youth in Action: Securing a Sustainable Future

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns of a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future, which particularly threatens young people's human rights both now and in the future [9]. To address these concerns, the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) has organised consultative meetings to discuss the climate crisis and its implications for young people.

These discussions are part of ongoing efforts to shape recommendations from the Committee of Ministers (CMJ meetings in February 2021 and February 2023) [10]. Additionally, the European Commission's Youth for Climate Action Initiative provides a framework for cross-border climate action projects through dedicated EU youth programs [11].



9. European Council, Jamie Gorman. (2024) Coyote Magazin: Youth eco-activism in Europe: participating in creating another world. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/coyote-magazine/youth-eco-activism-in-europe-participating-in-creating-another-world>

10. European Commission (2018). European Youth For Climate Action. [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-11/initiative\\_6\\_youth\\_en.pdf](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-11/initiative_6_youth_en.pdf)

11. European Commission (2018). European Youth For Climate Action. [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-11/initiative\\_6\\_youth\\_en.pdf](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-11/initiative_6_youth_en.pdf)

Generation Climate Europe (GCE) is the largest coalition of youth-led networks on climate and environmental issues at the European level.

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