

## Time to act for climate, nature and people

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The year 2019 will be remembered as a turning point for climate and environment action in Europe. Millions of Europeans and others worldwide have been demonstrating and urging policy makers to take action. Evidence-based scientific assessments, including the European Environment Agency's state of environment report (SOER 2020), stressed the magnitude of the challenges ahead and the urgent need to act. These calls are now turning into a policy roadmap. The European Green Deal presented by the European Commission is a promising start for the critical decade ahead.

*"From students and families to cities and regions, many people across Europe have already been taking action in this direction. But now, the European Green Deal presents an unprecedented opportunity: it sets out a common and coherent vision for an entire continent."*

### **State of Europe's environment: the challenge ahead**

Every five years, the European Environment Agency produces a comprehensive report on the state and outlook of Europe's environment. The sixth edition - 'The European environment — state and outlook 2020', published recently, reinforces growing calls for bold, decisive and immediate action. SOER 2020 shows that European legislation and policy targets have succeeded on many fronts. Air pollutant emissions have gone down, greenhouse gas emissions decreased, a larger share of Europe's land and marine areas are now protected. Europe is recycling an increasing share of its municipal waste. Although significant, the pace of these gains is insufficient in the face of the challenges that lie ahead.

SOER 2020 asserts that our production and consumption systems continue to extract more resources from nature and at a faster pace than nature can replenish over a given period. In addition, the way we produce and consume goods and services releases pollutants into the environment. These pollutants tend to mix and accumulate, impacting ecosystems and human health. When combined with the impacts of the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, our future looks increasingly more fragile. Many communities and groups across Europe are already affected. Farmers face unpredictable weather conditions. Millions of Europeans continue to be exposed to harmful levels of air pollution or experience more frequent flooding. Urban areas continue to take productive arable land, and infrastructure development continues to fragment the landscape. To reverse some of these worrying trends, Europe needs to work with other regions and global partners.

### **Targeting better implementation and key systems**

European countries need to fully implement already agreed legislation. This can certainly deliver further improvements. Nevertheless, SOER 2020 findings also confirm that incremental efficiency gains, such as more efficient cars or cleaner fuels, will not suffice in achieving systemic change. Such steps will not result in a clean mobility system. Sorting municipal waste will not result in a circular economy. Products and production processes need to be designed in ways to keep extracted resources within the economy. To achieve climate neutrality, a circular economy, a zero pollution ambition and a fair society, we need to rethink, redesign and rebuild the key systems that underpin our economies and everyday lives, starting with the energy, food and mobility systems. These changes cannot succeed without supporting the groups that will be affected. A healthy and fair food system needs to reduce chemical use in agriculture and improve landscape management, while ensuring high productivity and better livelihoods for farmers.

These transformative changes require making the right investments to scale up and speed up sustainable solutions, while phasing out or stopping unsustainable and polluting practices. The right investments — in people, innovation and clean

industries — can help create better opportunities and a higher quality of life for everyone.

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### **A promising policy response: European Green Deal**

These key conclusions from our SOER 2020 report are closely reflected in the European Commission's European Green Deal Communication, published last week. The communication outlines an action plan for the next five years, where the von der Leyen Commission will put forward a number of proposals. These include significant increase to Europe's climate objectives, a biodiversity strategy, clean mobility and sustainable finance, supported by closely aligned EU funds, including the Just Transition Mechanism to support people affected by this transition. The deal will be instrumental in delivering Europe's contributions to global goals, including the targets under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The European Commission's European Green Deal and the wide support it received in the European Parliament and the European Council are concrete signs of Europe's vision and determination to set off on a new path towards a sustainable and fair society. It consists of a European policy response to growing calls for bold action by an increasing number of Europeans. In fact, from students and families to cities and regions, many people across Europe have already been taking action in this direction. But now, the European Green Deal presents an unprecedented opportunity: it sets out a common and coherent vision for an entire continent.

Achieving the vision outlined in the European Green Deal will not be an easy task. The communication presented last week is just the beginning of a long process. In this challenging but exciting journey, the European Environment Agency is committed to providing the best available knowledge to support the environment and climate debate in Europe.

source: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/it/segnali/segnali-2020/articles/verso-un2019europa-a-inquinamento-zero>



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