

EU Environmental Strategy until 2020

Human prosperity and a healthy environment should by then be anchored within an innovative, circular economy where nothing is wasted and where the full value of biodiversity is recognised and protected. Growth will be based on energy use that minimises greenhouse gas emissions and natural resources will be used sustainably: a model for green global development.

Humanity is exhausting the planet's resources faster than they are being replenished, and increasing scarcity is pushing up prices. In order to achieve sustainable growth and remain globally competitive, the EU has to make the transition to a greener, low-carbon economy, stewarding its raw materials and resources sustainably. Up to 40 % of Europe's water is being wasted, for example, as are large quantities of food. New technologies are needed to reduce or recycle waste, to generate green energy, and to lessen the environmental impact of human consumption. The EU already has the most comprehensive body of environmental protection laws in the world and these provide the basis for the new programme.

Where do we want Europe to be in 2020?

Three priorities should be the heart of Europe 2020:

- Smart growth – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- Sustainable growth – promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
- Inclusive growth – fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.

These three priorities are mutually reinforcing; they offer a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century.

There are already targets for greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency and renewables, water and air quality, waste, chemicals, biodiversity, natural resources, and more. Legislation is only effective when applied correctly though, so it is vital to implement the current legislation – both to save money and to ensure a healthier environment.

Applying waste regulations alone could save the EU €72 billion a year. Implementing the Clean Air Package adopted in December 2013 would result in benefits to citizens' health worth €40 billion every year.

