

Our vision for a prosperous and sustainable industry: a positive blueprint for the future

We, the undersigned representatives from civil society and industry, come together in recognition of the urgent need to transform our industrial landscape towards a prosperous sustainable future. Our ambition is clear: to strive towards a zero-pollution, toxic-free, socially just, resource-preserving and decarbonized industry as envisioned by the Green Deal.

Industry plays a vital role in providing jobs, fostering personal and community pride, and generating income. However, we acknowledge that it also carries environmental and health impacts. As such, it is imperative for EU institutions, industry leaders, the research community, and civil society to collaborate closely in addressing these challenges.

We believe in the power of partnership to foster innovation and drive positive change. By aligning our efforts, we can support and amplify the endeavours of vanguard businesses committed to leading the transition towards a toxic-free, resource-preserving and climate positive future.

Therefore, we pledge our commitment to implementing a comprehensive blueprint that positions the EU as a global frontrunner in detoxification, de-pollution, decarbonization and restoration. Through collective action, we will work tirelessly to achieve our shared goals, ensuring sustainable competitiveness and a prosperous future for generations to come.

1. The European Green Deal is key for a prosperous European industry and a safe, sustainable and resilient EU

It is crucial that the EU not only continues to support but accelerates the implementation of the European Green Deal and its core principles, showcasing our global leadership in sustainable economic transformation. Embracing the European Green Deal is not just a moral imperative but a strategic and forward-looking necessity, offering our industry a predictable path to sustainable prosperity by intertwining economic sustainability and leadership with health and environmental stewardship. Far from being a cost, it is an investment in our future to ensure a high level of protection for human health and environment, the vitality of industries and the preservation of nature. This commitment is essential for maintaining Europe's competitive edge, fostering job creation, and securing a healthier, toxic-free environment.

- Implement the Zero-Pollution Action Plan through a “Toxic-Free and Zero-Pollution Compatibility Check” for new or revised pieces of relevant legislation, as well as state aids and subsidies.
- Integrate key EU principles as the Precautionary, Pollution Prevention and Polluter Pays Principles, Do No Significant Harm, One Health and Energy Efficiency First in all relevant pieces of legislation. Focus on prevention of harmful consequences of industrial activities and restoration of inherited environmental damages.
- Improve synergies between environmental and industrial policies by, for instance, creating interlinkages among carbon pricing and standards-based approaches such as minimum energy efficiency performance levels and forward-looking best available techniques.
- Accelerate the phase out of the most harmful chemicals and fossil fuels, particularly all forms of subsidies not aimed at their phase out, to break the EU dependency on undemocratic regimes, improve air, soil and water quality and tackle the climate, pollution and biodiversity crises at once.
- Ensure that industry operates within planetary boundaries while respecting Just Transition principles and the EU social standards, as set out by the European Pillar for Social Rights.

2. Focus public investments on deploying effective solutions with proven success at scale

Research in disruptive solutions for achieving the EU Green Deal Goals is supported, in particular where important environmental trade-offs materialise. Whilst increasing public investments to close the green funding gap are still needed, we must focus them to further scale up proven and available and innovative (disruptive) techniques able to ensure a rapid and efficient achievement of health, environmental and strategic autonomy goals at once. Funding should not enable a lock in of activities at the origin of pollution. In parallel, high social criteria should be considered.

- Prioritise the implementation of circular economy strategies, such as chemical, material and energy sufficiency and efficiency, substitution of critical or carbon-intensive materials, measures to lower the need for raw materials, energy and other feedstocks and ensure detoxified material cycles.
- Condition public investments to clear social criteria, such as reskilling and the creation of high-quality apprenticeship and graduate roles, decent work, respect for social and labour rights, social inclusion.
- Boost the availability of renewable energy and ancillary technologies (e.g. grids, storage) and the electrification of domestic energy uses and industrial processes while focusing the use of carbon management strategies for residual emissions with no other mitigation options.
- Ponder technology neutrality with risks of lock-in effects (e.g. CCUS to enable lock in for continued fossil fuel-based production options) and stranded assets and prevent dilution of public funds into risky and unproven technologies. CCUS may be considered as a last resort for dealing with residual emissions of processes where no substitute option exist.
- Establish a long-term EU public investment fund to support a green and socially just industrial transformation to boost confidence in the transition and strengthen economic and social cohesion by ensuring that governments can make long-term investments.

3. Boost the demand for zero-negative impact and circular products

EU policies have often primarily concentrated on supply-side, technology-focused measures, and much less on demand-side initiatives, despite bringing multiple co-benefits compared to those prioritising supply-side technological solutions. The aim should be to create stable markets for circular, decarbonised and depolluted products and discourage consumption of hazardous and GHG-intensive products and services. It is time to balance the focus and give priority to demand-side measures to deliver the best ratio of zero to negative external impact per product or service provided.

- Embed efficiency and sufficiency at the core of EU policies as a systemic approach to incentivise the innovation needed to drive the saving of energy, chemicals, water and other key materials through infrastructure and process improvements, as well as behavioural changes.
- Create lead markets for the uptake of decarbonised and depolluted and circular materials and products by unleashing the potential of Green Public Procurement and private buyer initiatives with strong social conditionalities, starting with material intensive sectors such as buildings and vehicles.
- A reversal of burden of proof is needed for the manufacturer of substances of concern. Ensure a rigorous enforcement of the “no data, no market” principle, adopt the “no safe, no market” and “no evidence of absence of harm, no right to pollute” principles and accelerate the phase out and substitution of chemicals of concern, incentivize and support responsible business and safer and sustainable chemicals, make toxic-free products the norm.
- Empower consumers and make the safer and the more sustainable choice the easy choice.

- Design policies to curb demand for hazardous chemicals, energy and carbon-intensive materials through material and energy sufficiency and efficiency, chemical and material substitution and circular economy.

4. A socially just industrial transition: take immediate action to protect, restore, integrate and strengthen communities

Ensure a full protection, restoration, integration and strengthening of just transition measures into industrial policies to have all of society on board in the transition. Committing social justice across our societies through systemic changes in labour rights, social protection, taxation and redistribution, macro-economic and fiscal rules, the rules that govern corporations and quality public services.

- Communities near pollution hotspots (such as PFAS) should see justice by having thorough pollution prevention action, monitoring, remediation, ground sanitation, health and other plans implemented in response to their needs, and having the polluting companies held accountable for the costs of pollution prevention at source and compensation. The polluter pays principle should apply to make companies contribute to independently managed funds dedicated to depollution.
- Carbon-pricing policies need to be complemented by redistributive policies to mitigate adverse social impacts and regional imbalances, to help people to embrace sustainable solutions.
- Recognise the need to preserve and improve social standards along industrial value chains in industrial and trade policies and make reskilling and upskilling of workers mandatory and with the full respect of due diligence measures to eradicate human rights violations and health and environmental harms from value chains.
- Keep the involvement of workers and communities at the centre of industrial transformation processes.

5. Ensure a level playing field and make the EU a global frontrunner by leading by example

The green industrial transition must support high-quality jobs in Europe with strong health and environmental standards. All economic players willing to enter the EU Single Market must comply with such standards, making the EU a safe haven for industry undertakings in line with planetary boundaries. To avoid the ecological decline caused by industrial activities, it is in the interest of the EU to create a race to the top for environmental and social standards and to create a global level playing field. Moreover, European institutions should work together with representatives of the Global South and lay the basis for local procurement, joint-ventures, technology transfer, knowledge sharing and investment to mobilise the transition in developing countries.

- Establish “reciprocity clauses” going beyond carbon emissions to oblige companies willing to enter the EU Single Market to comply with the EU social and environmental standards.
- Start a “European Green Deal diplomacy” to promote dialogue with like-minded countries around the world to encourage de-pollution and decarbonisation of industrial production, replicating the climate diplomacy happening in many international fora.
- Ensure their investments and projects align with the thematic areas of the Global Gateway (digital, energy, and transport) in line with the specific needs and interests of the Global South, including the respect of human rights and environmental agreements.
- Stop double standards of exporting to third countries highly hazardous chemicals, including pesticides that are banned in the EU.

6. Avoid the people vs environment narrative

Transparency, public participation, civil and social dialogue are key to strengthen social acceptance and justice. Fair and science-based rules are pivotal to guide investments and ensure predictability,

while transparency and public participation are at the basis of public acceptance and buy-in of any industrial operation. Rules should be streamlined, notably through digital infrastructure, but not at the expenses of health and environmental protection, scientific robustness, public deliberation and transparency of permitting and assessment procedures. Industry's sustainability and competitiveness cannot be secured by degrading further our climate, environment, health and society or disregarding public acceptance.

- Make digital safety information, permitting and digital reporting the norm; provide for public, user friendly tools to enable tracking of progress to deliver on the toxic-free and zero-pollution ambitions by all actors.
- Ensure efficient permitting and authorisation procedures through a substantial increase of dedicated staff in the relevant public authorities and pre-permitting consultations and deliberations.
- Use robust data and scientific evidence for effective policymaking to ensure that information on potential hazards and substances of concern are made available to value chains, as could be galvanised by the Industrial Emissions Portal, the European Chemicals Agency's SCIP database and product passports.
- Consider go-to areas and already polluted sites to be decontaminated (brownfields) for the deployment of industrial installations and clusters according to robust and science-based spatial planning and resist the temptation to weaken protection status or deregulate access to protected areas and endangered species for the sake of industrial development.

This Blueprint is an initiative from the European Environmental Bureau, endorsed by the following signatories (*status: 14 May 2024*):

ACCESSa - Association for the Catalytic Control of Emissions from Stationary Sources to Air

Bond Beter Leefmilieu

Canopea

Child Rights International Network (CRIN)

ClientEarth

ECOCITY

ECOS - Environmental Coalition on Standards

EurEau - European Federation of National Associations of Water Services

European Environmental Bureau

Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo (ECODES)

Génération Futures

Hazardous Waste Europe

HEJSupport

Hogar sin Tóxicos

Ingenieurbüro für Umweltschutztechnik

Kaya - Belgian Coalition of Ecopreneurs

Plastic Change

Resortecs

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Women Engage for a Common Future

ZERO

