



European
Commission



LIFE-funded **NGOs'**
contribution to tackling
**climate
change**

Climate
Action



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Foreword



Founded in 1992, LIFE is the EU's financial instrument for the environment and climate action. While the majority of LIFE budgetary resources are dedicated to funding projects, the programme continues to award annual operating grants to support the activities of EU-level environmental and climate NGOs.

The LIFE Regulation ((EC) No 1293/2013) states that "operating grants shall support certain operational and administrative costs of non-profit making entities which pursue an aim of general Union interest, are primarily active in the field of environment or climate action and are involved in the development, implementation and enforcement of Union policy and legislation".

A call for proposals for NGOs active in the fields of environment and climate change is published regularly on the Commission's website. Following the submission of applications, a number of NGOs that match the call criteria are selected for funding, according to the quality of the applications, the amounts requested and the total budget available. Typically, around 30 NGOs every year are supported by LIFE funding. Until 2015, NGOs were funded on a yearly basis. The first biennial funding period was introduced for the period 2016-2017, which has continued in the current period of 2018-2019.

The call's award criteria are: the NGOs' contribution to EU environmental and/or climate policies, their effectiveness in identifying and addressing new/emerging issues, and their role as catalysts between citizens and the EU institutions. NGOs must be non-profit making, independent and active at the European level. In particular, they must have members in at least three EU Member States.

The aim of this funding is to strengthen NGOs' participation in environmental and climate policy-making and implementation. This process should be as open and wide reaching as possible, and for this reason the engagement of all stakeholders, including other NGOs, is strongly encouraged.

European NGOs play a valuable role in preparing position papers, carrying out research studies and raising the awareness of EU citizens of climate and environmental issues. They also form essential members of many expert groups.

Moreover, NGOs play an important role in the development of policy and the setting of policy targets. They contribute feedback on specific policy areas, highlighting difficulties and barriers to implementing policy, loopholes that need to be addressed and particular aspects of the policy framework that could be tightened. It is a two-way street: NGOs also demonstrate how policy can be effectively and efficiently implemented. They show how results can be achieved on the ground in line with EU environmental and climate policies.

This is the fourth time a brochure has highlighted activities carried out by environmental and climate NGOs that have been awarded LIFE operating grants. The aim of this publication is to underline the contribution made by these NGOs to climate action, a relevant policy area for many of them. Indeed, the latest call for proposals specifically refers to activities concerning climate-relevant legislation such as the 2030 climate and energy package, the roadmap for moving to a competitive low-carbon economy in 2050 and the Union's adaptation strategy to climate change.

Angelo Salsi
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Executive Summary

Towards a climate-neutral future

For a wide range of environmental NGOs the LIFE Operating Grant is a valuable resource, enabling them to operate in Brussels and to be at the heart of decision-making on climate change. Those featured in this brochure demonstrate their capacity to address the challenge.



The decisions that we make today about which technologies to invest in and where research is most needed will determine the type of future we will see tomorrow.

This is very much the message of the 2° Investing Initiative think tank, which addresses the need to keep temperature rises to below 2°C by ensuring that investments in financial markets are carbon neutral and do not contribute to global warming. It advocates greater transparency in financial reporting.

The low-carbon economy of the future will only be achieved when policies on transport, development, energy and the environment all point in the same direction. From highlighting the climate issues associated with building dams on the Danube for hydropower to addressing those related to the destruction of forests for biofuels, LIFE-supported NGOs are making a valuable contribution to the EU's policy response to climate change.

For example, organisations such as Carbon Market Watch have led campaigns to raise awareness among policymakers of the need to reform the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), which it says has inadvertently provided windfall profits for some of Europe's most polluting industrial sectors. While other NGOs such as CEE Bank-watch Network have been particularly engaged in efforts to phase

out fossil fuels, preventing new coal-fired thermal power plants from being built in the Western Balkans and Romania. Still other NGOs have advocated mainstream climate change adaptation measures, such as the restoration of floodplains, into EU policy.

Furthermore, NGOs such as CAN Europe have highlighted 'loopholes' in the Effort Sharing Decision legislation. It is addressing issues related to countries applying for exceptions. The focus is always to ensure that EU policy is effective in enabling Member States to reach their climate objectives.

Many NGOs believe that the proposed Governance Regulation will serve as an opportunity to usher in long-term thinking, given that it obliges Member States to develop national plans on climate action. Under the Paris Agreement, countries must report annually on their progress in this area, and NGOs have welcomed moves to streamline reporting that ensures cooperation across government departments. Indeed, environmental campaigners have emphasised that the new regulation could serve as an example to the world of how to rise to the ambitions of Paris and even go beyond.

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Towards Effective Climate Change Policy

Photo: © CAN Europe



“The ultimate goal is to radically de-carbonise the EU’s economy by 2050.”

The impact of rising global temperatures on the environment, biodiversity and human health is becoming better understood, more widely acknowledged and more clearly observed. Climate change also affects biodiversity, wildlife, forestry habitats, the marine environment... in fact, the activities of most environmental NGOs in some way, indirectly and directly, also address issues related to our changing climate.

For some of the NGOs featured in this brochure, the goal of a low or even zero-carbon future is at the heart of their mission, while for others, measures to lower emissions and halt global temperature rise are also needed to combat pollution and habitat loss.

In recent years, the EU has introduced some ambitious climate change targets and NGOs have encouraged policymakers and governments to ensure that these objectives are met – and in some cases made even more ambitious or brought into line, where needed, with international targets, such as the goals of the Paris Agreement that aim to keep a global temperature rise below 2°C this century compared to pre-industrial levels. At present, the average global temperature is calculated to be around 0.85°C higher than it was in the late 19th century, with temperatures rising for the past three decades consecutively.

The vast majority of scientists agree that such global warming is manmade, resulting from the burning of fossil fuels, the cutting down of forests, increased livestock farming and the use of nitrogen-based fertilisers and fluorinated gases. All these ‘industrial’ activities have produced greenhouse gases or diminished the Earth’s ability to sequester these emissions. The EU has set targets for reducing these greenhouse gas emissions as outlined in the 2020 climate and energy package and the 2030 climate and energy framework. By 2030 the EU is aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% compared with 1990 and to increase energy efficiency by 27%. The ultimate goal is to radically de-carbonise the EU’s economy by 2050.

The key policy instruments for achieving this end include the Emission Trading

Scheme (EU ETS) and the Effort Sharing Decision. The EU ETS sets a cap on the total amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted by all participating installations (factories, power stations etc.), while permitting allowances for emissions to be auctioned off, allocated for free and subsequently traded. The Effort Sharing Regulation sets binding national greenhouse gas targets in sectors falling outside the scope of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme for each Member State, collectively amounting to a 30% cut in emissions by 2030.

The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Paris in 2015 and resulted in a landmark agreement that leads the way in climate action. It obliges signatories to determine, plan and regularly report their own contribution to mitigating global warming. Many of the NGOs featured in this publication have played a valuable role in making sure that EU climate change legislation is fit for purpose and provides an effective framework for achieving global climate goals, such as those outlined in the Paris Agreement.





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Climate Change Mitigation

NGOs helping shape ambitious emission reductions

NGOs have played a key role in promoting measures for mitigating the impact of climate change, campaigning for stricter control of emissions and against harmful industrial practices.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change mitigation as an intervention to “reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases”, with the aim of reducing risks to human life.

Thus mitigation encompasses efforts to phase out fossil fuels through the use of renewable sources that release fewer emissions, as well as activities to restore or preserve habitats such as peat bogs that serve as carbon sinks.

Revising energy legislation

Mitigation is a strong focus of the EU's efforts to keep the rise in global temperatures below 2°C. NGOs and policymakers both recognise that urgent action is needed if targets are to be met.

“Coal has no real future in meeting EU energy targets.”

Photo: © LIFE12 ENV/IT/000308





“The EU budget should incentivise ‘over-achievement’ of the targets of its energy directives.”

Investments in low-carbon technologies would not only help climate action efforts, but would also give Europe a competitive edge in the coming years. NGOs are thus eager to highlight the need for long-term thinking, particularly those environmental organisations concerned by the impact of climate change on biodiversity loss.

WWF, for example, has long campaigned for the reduction of carbon emissions from the energy sector through its European Policy Office. “Our suggestion back in 2011 was to ask for a 100% renewable energy-based system globally, and we’re looking at what that means for Europe,” says Imke Lübbecke, head of WWF’s Climate & Energy Policy Unit.

The NGO advocates for renewables in EU legislation such as the Clean Energy Package, “the main venue for renewing targets and reviewing energy efficiency and market design/governance”. The package of measures, which was unveiled in 2016, aims to provide the stable legislative framework that is needed to facilitate such a transition towards clean energy. The ‘Clean Energy for All Europeans’ proposals focus on making the EU energy sector more competitive and sustainable, and are a step towards creating the type of energy union advocated by WWF, but the NGO wants the proposals to go much further. It would like to see the introduction of a capacity market in which countries can build up a reserve of renewable energy that other countries (which do not have sufficient renewable resources) can pay to access.

However, WWF does not support the use of capacity payments to keep polluting fossil fuel plants online. “A limit on the subsidies

which can go to power plants that emit over a certain amount of CO₂ – an ‘Emissions Performance Standard’ – should be put into place, in order to speed up the phase-out of toxic coal,” Ms Lübbecke says. The Renewable Energy Directive requires the EU to fulfil at least 20% of its total energy needs with renewables by 2020. This target was updated in 2016 to at least 27% of the EU’s energy consumption coming from renewables by 2030. Moreover, EU energy policy also promotes greater investment in energy efficiency at all stages of the energy chain, from production to final consumption. The Energy Efficiency Directive of 2012 established binding measures to reach the EU’s 20% energy efficiency target by 2020, which was updated in 2016 to 30% by 2030.

Environmental NGOs, such as Climate Action Network Europe, argue that coal has “no real future” in meeting these energy targets. Wendel Trio, director of CAN Europe, emphasises that we need to see beyond coal if “the Paris agreement is to be implemented in Europe”. Nevertheless, he recognises that for some EU countries coal is still part of “what the energy mix of the future should look like”.

Coal-fired power stations, however, are responsible for almost 18% of EU’s greenhouse gas emissions, according to WWF, which is calling for a strict cap on the amount that they can emit. Such an Emissions Performance Standard should be set at 350g of CO₂ per kWh – significantly below the Commission’s proposal of 550g – in order to exclude coal and inefficient gas from the EU’s electricity mix. Such a move would “provide a clear investment signal for the decarbonisation of the sector... binding climate, renewable energy and

efficiency targets”, says Darek Urbaniak, senior energy policy officer, WWF EPO.

CEE Bankwatch Network has co-authored with CAN Europe a report that quantified the amount of money from the EU budget and the European Investment Bank that is supporting fossil fuels. “It’s billions!” says David Holyoake, EU policy officer of Bankwatch, adding that “our obligations under the Paris Agreement on climate change include requirements for all signatories to redirect financial flows away from fossil fuels”.

The NGO is campaigning for an economy based on the well-being of EU citizens. On its dedicated website, www.peoplesbudget.eu, it joins the chorus of voices calling for the next EU budget to exclude fossil fuels. It wants to see “incentives for Member States to aim higher” than the goals of the Clean Energy for All package.

Mr Holyoake believes that the EU budget should incentivise “over-achievement” of the targets of the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Directives. The 78 organisations behind its People’s Budget campaign see it as an opportunity to transform Europe and reconnect it to its citizens. “The budget is what will give shape to the new priorities of the new Europe,” he says. Directing money to energy efficient households would be “good for people, good for energy sources and good for climate change”.

Trading emissions

A key tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions cost effectively is the EU's Emission Trading Scheme, which operates on a 'cap and trade' principle.

The ETS sets a cap on the total amount of certain greenhouse gases that can be emitted by installations, such as power plants and factories, that is then lowered over time so that total emissions fall. Within this limit, companies receive or buy emission allowances which can be traded as needed. Companies can also buy limited amounts of international credits from emission-saving projects around the world.

The scheme is in its third phase (2013-2020) and aims to achieve in the sectors covered 21% lower emissions compared to 2005, when it was launched. It is the world's largest functioning carbon market and has spurred countries around the world, such as Canada, China and South Korea, to implement similar schemes in order to put a price on carbon pollution. The NGO, Carbon Market Watch, has led an active campaign in recent years to improve the European scheme, highlighting the issues that Femke de Jong, EU policy director, says have "plagued the system and have led to a carbon price that is too low to fully drive the transition to a zero-carbon economy. We are calling for incentives to phase out fossil fuels and put direct investments into clean technologies".

The NGO tackled the main barriers to the scheme such as the heavy lobbying against a "meaningful carbon price" and the lack of capacity of civil society to counter industry allegations. It started an inventive myth-buster campaign to expose the often misleading claims by industrial corpora-

tions based on a Monopoly theme. As part of this initiative, it produced eye-catching cards in the style of the board game to highlight that the polluter pays principle is not being applied under the scheme. "The EU's carbon market has so far paid the polluter and allowed industries to make profits from their pollution, while claiming to be punished by it," Ms de Jong says.

Carbon Market Watch's analysis showed that several multinationals, such as steel manufacturer ArcelorMittal, have benefited from the trading scheme. One of the Monopoly-themed handouts using information from ArcelorMittal's own financial reports stated that the steel company has "made over €400 million from the EU ETS over the last five years". Highlighting the windfall profits made by certain companies led the European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety to exclude the cement industry from receiving free emission allowances and start paying for its emissions.

But the NGO is eager to emphasise that its approach is not to go after industry but to come up with solutions for bring-

ing industrial sectors in line with the Paris climate goals and increasing their competitiveness in a zero-carbon world. "We've tried to raise awareness that the ambition of ETS does not get us on a pathway to reach the EU's 2050 objectives and that this is hampering low-carbon innovation," argues Ms de Jong. "We succeeded in mobilising Member States to remove surplus emission allowances from the system, so the oversupply in the market doesn't undermine future climate ambition – and this was adopted in the final agreement. EU policymakers moreover agreed to invest more than €10 billion of ETS revenues in low-carbon innovations."

Carbon Market Watch also focused on the issue of fossil fuel subsidies from Europe's carbon markets being used specifically by eastern European countries, such as Poland, to extend the lifetime of their ageing coal power plants. "Countries heavily reliant on coal for their electricity generation wanted to use EU ETS revenues to upgrade their coal plants, which would have made the EU ETS the biggest subsidy scheme for coal," Ms de Jong says. Through awareness-raising in

Photo: © LIFE07 ENV/FR000178



“The EU’s carbon market has allowed industries to make profits from their pollution.”

Poland, a media campaign and presentations to the European Parliament, however, the NGO managed to stop this from happening in what it believes was a “big win” for phasing out subsidies for coal.

The NGO was one of several environmental groups working on this issue and its campaign supported WWF’s efforts to highlight the problem of industry benefitting from the scheme. WWF co-organised a “stunt” at the European Parliament in the lead-up to Christmas 2016 which featured an ‘Emissions Trading Santa’ giving out presents to polluters. However, it says that the agreement to lower the supply of ETS allowances was disappointing, given that the impact won’t take hold for five years. The NGO is also unhappy that Bulgaria and Romania were granted exemptions that allow them to reinvest ETS funds into fossil fuels.

“Environment policies should live up to the EU’s agreed principle that the polluter pays. But the EU has just agreed an Emissions Trading System reform that does quite the opposite. It allows Europe’s largest emitters to be paid to pollute,” says Sam Van den Plas, senior climate policy officer, WWF EPO.



Photo: © CAN Europe

“Forest restoration should not stall climate efforts in other sectors.”



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Tackling emissions across all sectors

Sectors not covered by the EU ETS sector, such as agriculture, transport, buildings and waste, offer further opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Emissions related to these sectors are addressed in the Effort Sharing Decision that sets binding annual emission targets for Member States for the period 2013–2020, expressed as percentage changes from 2005 levels.

The decision allows less wealthy countries to increase emissions in these sectors in recognition that relatively higher economic growth is likely to be accompanied by higher emissions. Such increases, however, are limited to below projected business-as-usual growth rates.

The Effort Sharing Decision was superseded by the Effort Sharing Regulation in 2016. While Wendel Trio of CAN Europe acknowledges that the new regulation is a “useful tool”, he emphasises that the accounting of emissions raises several issues for the next phase up to 2030. The end point of an overall 30% reduction in emissions for the EU as a whole has been established, but the question of where to start remains, he says. “Countries don’t know exactly what their ‘real’ emissions will be in 2021, so they do a kind of a projection, which is open to much discussion as it determines how many emission allowances will be distributed in 2021 and so on.” If that starting point is lower, then there will be fewer emission allowances in play.

A second issue relating to the Effort Sharing Regulation that NGOs are highlighting is the problem of loopholes. Several Member States have proposed granting exemptions for specific areas that are of most concern to them – e.g. Finland has lobbied

for forest-rich countries and Ireland for countries highly dependent on agriculture. In other words, some Member States are asking for other countries to make the ‘effort’ for them, argues Mr Trio. CAN Europe and other NGOs worked with think tanks such as the Öko-Institute to calculate the impact that these loopholes have on the total amount of additional greenhouse gas emissions. The “substantial” figures were then widely communicated.

Carbon Market Watch is also focusing on loopholes in the Effort Sharing Regulation. One of these loopholes is the use of land-use offsets to compensate for emissions in, for example, the agricultural sector – i.e. the planting of forests that at least temporarily absorb carbon from the atmosphere in order to continue to rely on fossil fuels. It is emphasising that while forest restoration is key to keeping global warming in check, this should not stall climate efforts in other sectors.

Loopholes pose the risk of stalling climate action, particularly in the farming sector in the coming decade. “This would be a very dangerous trajectory for agriculture to be on, to basically do nothing, do nothing, do nothing, and then suddenly after 2030 you would need to make very steep cuts in emissions,” says Femke De Jong. Carbon Market Watch is thus encouraging coun-

tries to see beyond these loopholes and adopt policies that support sustainable and climate-friendly farming practices and food consumption.

Farm land can also be allocated to produce biomass as a way of carbon offsetting – but Carbon Market Watch is eager to point out that burning biomass still produces greenhouse emissions and is by no means carbon neutral. It could moreover be harvested unsustainably, all factors that further underline the need for a consistent regulatory framework, the NGO claims. This call is echoed by CAN Europe, which is also highlighting the difficulties of comparing fossil fuel emissions with those relating to land-based activities such as forestry. Mr Trio emphasises that the carbon calculation of cutting down a forest not only includes directly related emissions but also those that are then not absorbed by the trees.

“For us it’s very important that you have two separate policies whereby you try to reduce your emissions and to reduce the use of fossil fuels, while at the same time trying to increase the protection and restoration of your forests. Do not mix them up with each other, because the CO₂ of one is not 100% comparable with the CO₂ of the other.”

Joined-up land-use policy

Covering 40% of the EU's territory, forests play a major role in mitigating climate change.

The health and protection of our forests, and the people dependent on them, is the central focus of the environmental NGO Fern, which is particularly concerned by the threat that bio-energy poses to this vital mitigation role.

More than 60% of the bioenergy produced in Europe comes from woody biomass, according to Fern. It is thus calling for a radical overhaul of renewable energy policy to acknowledge the scale of the destruction to forests for biomass and the overall negative impact on climate change.

"Burning forests for energy has an impact on emissions first and foremost," says Saskia Ozinga, co-founder of Fern. "Because the energy density of biomass is lower than coal, if you're going to burn whole trees you're actually releasing more CO₂ than coal. And we already need to keep the current forest area standing, and expand and restore it, to stay within the 1.5 degrees [limit of global temperature rises]."

Fern has highlighted that if Member States follow their national renewable energy action plans, then in 2020 the whole of the EU's first wood harvest would be taken up with meeting renewable targets – leaving no wood spare for paper and furniture production etc. It has campaigned therefore for EU subsidies to be diverted away from bio-energy to other renewable sources, such as solar, wind and tidal power. Should bio-energy continue to be part of the energy mix, then the NGO says that it must be

based on residues and waste, and not on trees, in accordance with what it believes were the original intentions of the Renewable Energy Directive.

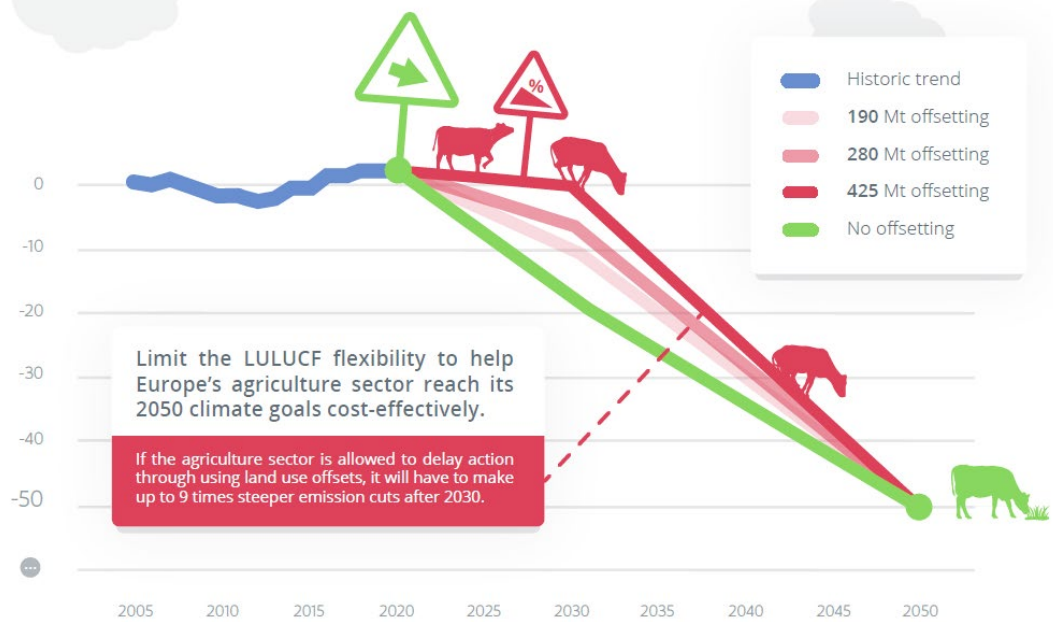
Under the LIFE work programme, Fern's campaign has thus focused on establishing limits on subsidies and strict criteria for sustainable biomass – but it has also focused on the health cost of bioenergy. "We got health experts to look at the data on how burning biomass was leading to early deaths, and the figures are also pretty high. If you exclude the industrial installations and just look at the normal wood furnaces that people have at home, it's already 40 000 deaths in Europe a year," says Ms Ozinga.

The need to radically revise the Renewable Energy Directive is "a battle we are slowly winning" even though she is cautious about the outcome of the current revision. "The one thing that we have so far achieved is that there are no subsidies for large-scale inefficient electricity-only installations in the new proposal that's going to the Parliament and the Council."

The NGO has also initiated a second campaign on the land-use aspect of bio-energy. Its approach was to produce case studies that illustrate the impact of wood cutting at certain sites across Europe. It collected these in a publication that was downloaded 4 000 times by policymakers and other NGOs active in the area to support their national campaigns. "It can be a subject that is full of technical details, and the aim was to really underline that these are real forests that are being cut down and burnt," says Richard Wainwright, communications manager.

In 2016, the European Commission introduced a legislative proposal to integrate greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use-change and forestry (LULUCF) into the 2030 climate and energy framework. Environmental NGOs, such as Fern, point out that had LULUCF been integrated into EU policy instruments for achieving its 2020 emissions target, it would have reduced the effort required of other sectors to reduce emissions.

EFFORT SHARING REGULATION THE COST OF INACTION IN AGRICULTURE



*Source: EEA (2016) data. We have assumed 20% emission cuts in agriculture between 2020-2030 (in line with ESR reduction pathway) and that the sector makes full use of the LULUCF offsets. The 2050 agriculture objective is from SWD (2014).
Infographic: © Carbon Market Watch/Transport & Environment/Birdlife International/IFOAM EU Group/FERN

Its research shows that including LULUCF in the Effort Sharing Decision reduces the overall emission reduction target by 3-7%, meaning that instead of 40% by 2030 the EU target would be 33-37%. Fern has worked to ensure the LULUCF Regulation does not undermine the current economy-wide target of 40% emission reductions.

To illustrate its arguments, Fern created a website (lulucf.org) that ranked Member States according to their positions on the LULUCF Regulation. Its ranking put Finland, Estonia and Poland on the bottom and Germany and the UK on top, but moreover generated much media interest. Fern has worked to make climate impacts of forest management visible and highlighted the need to use forests in ways that keep carbon out of the atmosphere. This has played a role in ensuring the final LULUCF Regulation that is to be adopted by the Council and European Parliament in early 2018 is more transparent than the previous rules.

Furthermore, the NGO has been advocating since 2015 for an EU action plan to protect forests in order to meet its climate change commitments. "If you want the EU to commit to halting de-forestation, you need to look at policies on consumption, trade, energy, climate and development... so, we came with a whole series of reports that said that if we are serious about these commitments then this is what they need to do in these and these areas," emphasises Ms Ozinga.





Photo: © LIFE08 NAT/FIN/000596/Mikko Tiira

Wetlands International EA

Accounting for wetlands

Another major habitat type for mitigating climate change is wetlands. Along with other NGOs, the LIFE-supported NGO, Wetlands International-European Association, is advocating mandatory accounting for managed wetlands to replace the current voluntary accounting on a national level.



“The EU agreed on mandatory accounting of emissions from managed wetlands.” from 2026.”

“All emissions should be accounted for, including emissions from managed wetlands,” affirms Lea Appulo, policy and advocacy officer – climate and DRR. But Wetlands International EA argues that Member States won’t account for emissions from managed wetlands if they are given a choice.

The European Commission, Parliament and Council have recently agreed on mandatory accounting of emissions from managed wetlands as of 2026. The category ‘managed wetlands’ includes peatland drained and used for peat extraction and peatlands used for settlement and other land incl. infrastructure, e.g. windmills. According to the NGO, countries will be incentivised to restore and sustain wetlands and peatlands in Europe.

The NGO has also focused on the conversion (drainage) of peatlands to grow crops, such as maize, for biofuel. It is calling for this practice to be stopped, given that draining peatlands produces emissions. If peatlands are going to be utilised, it argues that this should be done wet. “We are promoting a new type of alternative land use called paludiculture,” says Cy Griffin, Euro-

pean programme manager. This technique ensures that growing crops for biomass or insulation for buildings, among other uses, contributes to climate change mitigation – but once the land is wetted, farmers can no longer apply for agricultural subsidies. Wetlands International EA is therefore advocating a change of rules on this issue. Moreover, rewetting degraded peatlands prevents the oxidation process, thus preserving their function as carbon stores, stops subsidence which could cause flooding risks, and prevent fires.

To keep peat bogs intact, the message is clear: do not touch. Says Ms Appulo: “If you touch them, you will start releasing emissions, and you won’t stop this process by growing something on them. They will keep releasing what they have, and the only way to stop the release of these emissions is to rewet them.” In other words, the NGO is seeking to make the case that regardless of the purpose, draining peatlands will contribute to a net increase in climate change effects. As part of this effort, it is joining other environmental NGOs, such as Fern, in the fight to end “perverse” subsidies for crop-based biofuels.



Climate Change Adaptation

Increasing Europe's resilience

Ensuring that Europe is resilient to the effects of climate change, including extreme weather, is essential for well-being and prosperity. **Adaptation means anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking appropriate action to prevent or minimise the damage they can cause, or taking advantage of opportunities that may arise.**

In 2013 the European Commission adopted an EU strategy on adaptation to climate change that aims to make Europe more climate resilient. Some examples of adaptation measures include: using scarce water resources more efficiently; adapting building codes to future climate conditions and extreme weather events; constructing flood defences and raising the levels of dykes; developing drought-tolerant crops; and choosing tree species and forestry practices less vulnerable to storms and fires.

The EU encourages Member States to develop their own strategies and provides funding to help them build up their adaptation capacities and take action. It also seeks to 'climate proof' vulnerable economic sectors by mainstreaming adaptation measures in EU policies and programmes. Better decision-making is also promoted by the strategy based on addressing knowledge gaps and developing a European climate adaptation platform (Climate-ADAPT).



WWF-DCPO •
Wetlands International EA

Adapting to a changing climate

Adaptation is a key area of climate action on which the LIFE-supported NGO, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme Office, has focused. The office coordinates WWF's conservation activities across a 19-country region of Central and South-eastern Europe that covers a wide range of habitats.

"On adaptation, we are trying to ensure that the work that we're doing to secure ecosystem services – for example on forest protection and management and wetland conservation and restoration – takes into account climate change," says managing director, Andreas Beckmann.

Toward this aim, the NGO held a workshop for its members to introduce the latest developments in climate change adaptation and the means to integrate them into the on-the-ground conservation projects that the organisation is carrying out – such as restoring wetlands and reconnecting Danube floodplains.

One of the main consequences of rising global temperatures is the increased frequency of extreme weather events. To address the challenge of droughts and flood risks, the NGO Wetlands International EA has focused on ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation. "Environmental degradation is not linked to cli-

mate change only, but we see that wrong decisions are being made with regards to investments around ecosystems," says Lea Appulo. Wetlands International EA is working with a range of European Commission directorates-general in order to mainstream Eco-DRR and climate change adaptation into all EU policies.

"Some people blame climate change directly for the problems, but quite often it's because our infrastructure is poorly adapted to a changing climate," says Cy Griffin, the European programme manager of Wetlands International EA.

The NGO contributed to and supported the launch in Brussels of the report "Water shocks: Wetlands and human migration in the Sahel" produced by Wetlands International (head office) that drew attention to the worsening condition of wetlands in the region, undermining livelihoods and forcing people to migrate to look for food and water, including to Europe. The report was

promoted at several events in Brussels at which the NGO explained that while rainfall levels have recovered since the high-profile droughts of the 1980s, water-related risks persist due to the damming of rivers.

In Africa, as in Europe and elsewhere in the world, large floodplains have provided very productive grazing areas for local people for centuries, but once these floodplains become disconnected – i.e. following the construction of a dam – livelihoods are threatened.

The NGO is campaigning for dams to maintain adequate flow rates to limit impacts downstream, while in Europe it advocates the restoration of floodplains in order to "slow flood events". It highlights that the channelling of rivers to create drained land for agriculture has produced another source of risk. In times of "very erratic rainfall, these channels don't store water, and then when the water comes in a flash flood you create flooding problems," explains Mr Griffin.



“Our infrastructure is poorly adapted to a changing climate.”

Balancing hydropower pros and cons

WWF-DCPO argues that while hydroelectric power can make a contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, its impact on river ecosystems can also lower resilience to climate change impacts.

Photo: © LIFE07 NAT/A/000010



This relates to the planning of “hundreds” of hydropower stations in Central and South-eastern Europe, especially on smaller water courses. The organisation’s advocacy focuses on the simple equation that the benefits of ‘clean’ hydropower, in comparison to other energy sources, do not necessarily offset the damage to water systems and the related impact on biodiversity, ecosystems and the climate.

“It’s a fine balance,” says Andreas Beckmann of WWF-DCPO, but he cautions that the system of subsidies for renewables is open to abuse under the regulatory framework. “What was missing were clear guidelines for clarifying under what circumstances it makes sense to build these hydroelectric plants and in which circumstances it does not.”

This problem has now been addressed. The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River brought together the hydropower and environmental lobbies, including WWF, at a series of meetings and seminars focussed on hydropower, and these resulted in some agreed basic guidelines and best practices, including use of best available technology and no-go areas for hydropower where maintaining nature and ecosystem services should prevail. The guidelines were formally accepted by all of the 14 Danube countries working together under this river commission.

But adoption of guidelines on paper does not necessarily mean adoption in practice. WWF-DCPO has thus also focused on promoting implementation of the hydropower guidelines. “One of the big problems in Romania, for example, is that we had a lot of hydropower going into corridors of protected areas, which were pristine from a biodiversity perspective, and these were not the right places to develop,” he says. The NGO achieved a moratorium on developing projects in these areas. Furthermore, the around 300 small hydropower plants that were planned in Slovakia have been dramatically cut to 30 or so by applying the guidelines.

“Some accuse us of being against development,” says Mr Beckmann. “In fact, we are for a development that ensures that we do not lose more than we gain. And having clear guidelines gives clarity and security to investors, allowing them to invest more efficiently.” Adherence to guidelines offers assurance to investors that don’t want to see their projects scuppered down the line by an environmental campaign.



“Clear guidelines give clarity to investors.”

Towards a green infrastructure network

Environmental NGOs have thus in different ways promoted the link between building up Europe’s green infrastructure and adapting to climate change. The European Commission adopted in 2013 an EU-wide strategy for promoting investments in green infrastructure that restore ecosystems and habitat connectivity. Specifically, the strategy aims to develop a Trans-European Network for Green Infrastructure in Europe, TEN-G, similar to existing networks for transport, energy and ICT.

Wetlands was among several NGOs to back the creation of TEN-G, and it is disappointed that such a network will not be supported in the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Nevertheless, it is continuing to highlight the need for a network of natural areas that are protected from being exploited for economic activities. “Natura 2000 is useful for protecting habitats that are particularly important for species or are important in themselves, but I think we now need to look at bigger, cross-sectoral policies, such as agriculture and water policy, and how they can also deliver environmental benefits,” says Mr Griffin.

He adds that revisions to the Common Agricultural Policy acknowledge the climate role that agriculture can play, as well as how much the sector is starting to suffer from water loss related to climate change. With periods of very low rainfall being experienced by many countries in recent years, we are already starting to pay the price of not investing further in green infrastructure, he says. “This is where I think that a stronger legal basis for green infrastructure would help.”

Photo: © LIFE05 ENV/ID/000485/Mario MANTHEY

Improving cities' resilience



Photo: © LIFE08 ENV/LV/000451

“Wetlands act as natural sponges, contributing to reduced flood peaks further downstream closer to major urban centres.”

Three-quarters of Europe's population lives in towns and cities. Urban areas are especially affected by climate change, adding to the pressure of overcrowding, aging infrastructure and increasing pollution from transport and industry.

This is why mitigation efforts have also focused on how to make our urban areas more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

NGOs strongly promote the adoption of urban climate change adaptation strategy and planning along with the accession of European cities and local authorities to the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, the main vehicle for EU support to cities for climate change adaptation. To this end, NGOs foster exchange of experiences and good practice in implementing green infrastructure in cities, combating the urban heat island effect and controlling flood risk across Europe.

Wetlands International EA carried out a study on how restoring the sponge function of wetland soils could be an effective measure for the Rhine catchment area. The study included a cost-benefit analysis of this measure in the middle mountains of the Rhine basin for flood and drought risk reduction. Rather than the use of basins or polders to retain water, restoring the floodplains and the wetlands and peatlands to serve as natural sponges was proposed. "This measure should be implemented at well-chosen locations in the middle-mountains, where much precipitation occurs. It would therefore contribute to reducing flood peaks further downstream, closer to major urban centres, where interventions can be more costly," explains the organisation's Cy Griffin.

The NGO thus advocates taking an integrated basin approach to urban flooding and its study highlights the interdependency of the urban and rural.

Together with the Italian Centre for River Restoration (CIRF), Wetlands International EA also looked at case studies from existing databases, including the LIFE project RESTORE and the FP7 project REFORM. It produced a review of 13 case studies from across Europe with the aim of highlighting good examples of integrated restoration so as to raise awareness of its potential in urban regeneration schemes, flood risk management, green infrastructure and spatial planning. Rather than being exhaustive, this review aimed to foster discussion on measures for integrated restoration among policymakers and stakeholders.

Good examples of waterways restoration in and around urban areas included actions taken at two French rivers, Ondaine and Yzeron. On the first river, the approach was to uncover culverts and bring streams back to life, and thus generate cost savings in culvert maintenance, as well as improve ecological value and water quality. The second assessed the impact of enlarging the riverbed and reshaping the river on the town of Charbonnières-les-Bains. "Before and after photos clearly show the benefits of thinking of rivers not as channels, but as natural features for the public to enjoy," says Cy Griffin. However, he emphasises that stronger evidence of the benefits is still required in order to scale up river restoration in the EU.





Climate governance and information

Making the case for environmentally-conscious decision making

Green finance – that is, making investments in areas that minimise environmental impacts, for example electromobility – is attracting much interest among policymakers and businesses.

While a range of NGOs are focusing on ensuring the EU's budget respects environmental issues across all policy areas, a few NGOs are specifically campaigning for green investment as an important way of meeting future climate targets. **They are making the clear argument that taking a long-term view on key issues such as transportation and technology offers enterprises a secure framework in which to invest in green solutions.**

Governance

Energy Union governance – a mystery beast



The LIFE operating grants allow many environmental NGOs to play a valuable role in monitoring policy commitments and ensuring that they are enforced. Good governance is at the heart of the EU's drive to reach its climate objectives.

“Environment and energy ministers must cooperate on climate reporting.”

This issue is particularly relevant at present amid discussions and planning of the next EU funding period 2021-2030. CAN Europe is one of many NGOs that see the proposed Governance Regulation as an opportunity to bring forward some much-needed, long-term thinking. The regulation will oblige Member States to develop National Environmental and Climate Plans for the period up to 2030, as well as develop longer-term plans for the next 30 to 50 years.

These national plans should include policies to greatly reduce emissions, policies to improve performance on energy efficiency and boost the use of renewable energy, and plans for phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, says Wendel Trio, CAN Europe. The NGO has moreover campaigned to ensure that these 10-year plans align with longer-term plans. “They should not be completely separate; they should be part of the same exercise, and that’s not yet agreed,” he says.

A key element concerns the annual reporting on climate progress required under the UN’s Framework Convention on

Climate Change. Such reporting is already carried out in some specific areas, such as emissions, but it is now recognised that reporting needs to be streamlined to give a clearer overall picture. According to Mr Trio, however, some countries are reluctant to push forward in this area, given that it would require greater cooperation among different government departments such as energy and transport. CAN Europe therefore called upon both environment and energy ministers to cooperate on this issue and mobilised its members to ensure that the relevant ministries recognised the added value of increased cooperation.

The WWF’s European Policy Office has also focused on governance, creating a governance ‘beast’ to highlight the importance of the issue. Each part of the beast’s body represented an aspect of what it is calling for in the Governance Regulation – for example, the beast’s wings represented the need for high ambition while its sharp eyes enabled it to see ahead to 2050. The beast was presented at events in the European Parliament.

“The Governance Regulation provides the means for implementing the Paris Agree-

ment in the EU. That’s why it’s so important that MEPs vote to include a new 2050 greenhouse gas reduction target, and make sure that Member State plans are consistent with meeting it.” says Alex Mason, senior renewable energy policy officer at WWF EPO. Specifically, the NGO is encouraging MEPs to back a report by European Parliament rapporteurs Claude Turmes and Michele Rivasi along with compromise amendments to “make the new regulation an example to the world of how to implement the Paris Agreement”.

NGOs have also held Member States’ feet to the fire to honour their current commitments. CEE Bankwatch Network produced a report called ‘Enfant Terrible’ that highlighted how governments were failing to spend 20% of their funding on climate action as required under the current spending period. Its research found that only 7% was being spent on climate mitigation. “The detail and the number crunching was quite powerful and got us noticed...We need to tighten up the rules and improve the governance framework,” says David Holyoake.

2° Investing Initiative

Investing in a greener future



Photo: © LIFE08 ENV/E/000136

Long-term planning is very much central to the focus of NGO 2° Investing Initiative (2°ii). Its overarching objective is to align financial markets with climate goals, emphasising that “the investment decisions that we make today will determine what the economy will look like tomorrow,” says Jakob Thomä.



Photo: © LIFE10 ENV/E/000495



While the need to de-carbonise the economy sooner or later is generally acknowledged, a policy announcement to be zero-carbon by 2050 isn't helpful for investors who are mostly only interested in the immediate future. "Many climate change impacts are long term, which might just be 10-15 years, but from a financial market perspective that might be the equivalent of 5 000 years," Jakob Thomä says.

But one way of overcoming this problem is to promote greater transparency in financial markets. To this end, the NGO organised in collaboration with the French government an award that recognises best practice in disclosure for institutional investors. This award, which the LIFE grant helped finance, "allowed investors to understand what it means when the law says disclose your alignment with two-degree climate goals," says Jakob Thomä, director of the think tank.

Though it was a French initiative to encourage investments in enterprises that are committed to keeping global temperature rises to below 2°C, a total of 30 investors from across Europe participated by disclosing their investments to a climate evaluation. "Through this we mobilised further reporting and traction in other European countries," he adds.

Investors are willing for their portfolios to become 100% green, but they want a smooth transition in order to be able to plan for it, the NGO argues. It campaigned therefore for a reduction in extraneous transaction costs that would allow all types of financial investors, including small pension funds, to conduct climate analysis and implement a climate strategy.

"Investors are willing to become 100% green."

Selected NGOs tackling climate change



WWF European Policy Office - WWF EPO

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. European Policy Office contributes to this by advocating for strong EU environmental policies on sustainable development, nature conservation, climate and energy, marine protection, sustainable finance and external action.

Email: akohl@wwf.eu • Phone: +32 2 743 88 00 • Website: www.wwf.eu



Climate Action Network Europe vzw-asbl - CAN Europe

CAN Europe is Europe's largest coalition working on climate and energy issues. CAN Europe focuses on preventing climate change and promoting sustainable climate and energy policy in Europe.

Email: wendel@caneurope.org • Phone: +32 2 894 46 70 • Website: www.caneurope.org



CEE Bankwatch Network - Bankwatch

The CEE Bankwatch Network is today the largest network of grassroots environmental groups in countries of Central and Eastern Europe and a leading force in preventing dubious public investments that harm the planet and people's well-being in this region and beyond.

Email: main@bankwatch.org • Phone: +420 274 822 150 • Website: www.bankwatch.org



Carbon Market Watch - Zentrum für Entwicklung & Umwelt

Carbon Market Watch advocates policies that support sustainable development, environmental integrity and good governance. The NGO draws on its strong technical expertise to scrutinise carbon markets and campaign for effective climate protection.

Email: eva.filzmoser@carbonmarketwatch.org • Phone: +32 2 335 3661

Website: www.carbonmarketwatch.org



Stichting Fern - Fern

Fern focuses on the policies and practices of the EU in regards to the protection of forests and the rights of those living in forested areas. Fern campaigns on climate change issues, illegal logging, bioenergy and the drivers of deforestation.

Email: Hannah@fern.org • Phone: +32 2 894 4694 • Website: www.fern.org



Wetlands International - European Association

Wetlands International raises awareness about wetland ecosystems, advocating sustainable use of wetlands for the benefit of people and nature by linking science, policy and practice.

Email: cy.griffin@wetlands.org • Phone: +31 (0) 318 660 910 • Website: <https://europe.wetlands.org/>



WWF International Danube-Carpathian Programme - WWF-DCPO

WWF-DCPO coordinates and leads WWF's conservation activities across the 19-country Danube-Carpathian region. The overall goal is to 'Save the Green Heart of Europe', the area dominated by the Carpathian Mountains and drained by the Danube River.

Email: office@wwfdcp.org • Phone: +43-1-52 45 470 • Website: www.panda.org/dcpo



2° investing Initiative - 2ii

The 2°ii carries out international collaborative research projects on climate, the financial sector and financial policies. Its overarching objective is to align the financial sector with the international goal of limiting global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

Email: ivo@2degrees-investing.org • Phone: +33 1 42 81 19 97 • Website: www.2degrees-investing.org

A number of LIFE publications are available on the LIFE website: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/index.htm>
A number of printed copies of certain LIFE publications are available and can be ordered free-of-charge at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/order.htm>

LIFE “L’Instrument Financier pour l’Environnement” / The financial instrument for the environment

The LIFE programme is the EU’s funding instrument for the environment and climate action

Period covered 2014-2020

EU funding available approximately €3.46 billion

Allocation of funds

Of the €3.46 billion allocated to LIFE, €2.59 billion are for the Environment sub-programme, and €0.86 billion are for the Climate Action sub-programme. At least €2.8 billion (81% of the total budget) are earmarked for LIFE projects financed through action grants or innovative financial instruments. About €0.7 billion will go to integrated projects. At least 55% of the budgetary resources allocated to projects supported through action grants under the sub-programme for Environment will be used for projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity. A maximum of €0.62 billion will be used directly by DG Environment and DG Climate Action for policy development and operating grants.

Types of projects

Action Grants under the Environment and Climate Action sub-programmes are available for the following:

- > “Traditional” projects – these may be best-practice, demonstration, pilot or information, awareness and dissemination projects in any of the following priority areas: LIFE Nature & Biodiversity; LIFE Environment & Resource Efficiency; LIFE Environmental Governance & Information; LIFE Climate Change Mitigation; LIFE Climate Change Adaptation; LIFE Climate Governance and Information.
- > Preparatory projects – these address specific needs for the development and implementation of Union environmental or climate policy and legislation.
- > Integrated projects – these implement on a large territorial scale environmental or climate plans or strategies required by specific Union environmental or climate legislation.
- > Technical assistance projects – these provide financial support to help applicants prepare integrated projects.
- > Capacity building projects – these provide financial support to activities required to build the capacity of Member States, including LIFE national or regional contact points, with a view to enabling Member States to participate more effectively in the LIFE programme.

Operating grants

The LIFE programme also supports the operations of EU-level environmental NGOs through the competitive and transparent awarding of operating grants. This funding aims to strengthen the participation of NGOs in the dialogue process in environmental policy making and in its implementation.

Further information

More information on LIFE is available at <http://ec.europa.eu/life>.

How to apply for LIFE funding

The European Commission organises annual calls for proposals.

Full details are available at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/life.htm>

Internet <http://ec.europa.eu/life>, www.facebook.com/LIFE.programme,
twitter.com/lifeprogramme, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/life-programme>

LIFE Publication / LIFE-funded NGOs contribution to tackling climate change

