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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

2025 Environmental Implementation Review

Country Report - BELGIUM

Accompanying the document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

2025 Environmental Implementation Review for prosperity and security

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Executive summary

In May 2016 the European Commission launched the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), a regular reporting tool based on analysis, dialogue and collaboration with EU Member States to improve the implementation of existing EU environmental policy and legislation ⁽¹⁾. Following previous cycles in 2017, 2019 and 2022, this report assesses the progress made while describing the main outstanding challenges and opportunities regarding environmental legal implementation in Belgium. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the implementation performance and draw attention to the most effective ways to address the implementation gaps that impact human health and the environment and hamper the economic development and competitiveness of the country. The report relies on detailed sectoral implementation reports collected or issued by the Commission under specific environmental legislation.

The main challenges set out below have been selected from Part I of this report, 'Thematic areas', taking into consideration factors such as the gravity of the environmental implementation issue in light of the impact on the quality of life of citizens, the distance to target, and financial implications. In Belgium such challenges have been lingering since the first Environmental Implementation Review in 2017 and require urgent action.

Belgium is one of the EU's best performers on circular economy as regards resource productivity, secondary materials use and waste management. Belgium is in the category of countries not considered at risk of missing the municipal and packaging waste targets. However, the market for recycled products is still limited and needs to grow to provide economic opportunities for products that are collected separately and recycled. Further progress could be made by introducing new economic instruments to prevent waste by avoiding the incineration of reusable or recyclable waste – especially in the Brussels Region – and by making the reuse and recycling of waste more economically attractive.

Belgium is in the process of updating its national biodiversity strategy to align its objectives with the EU and global 2030 targets. A revised draft of the national biodiversity strategy, which now includes the comments and suggestions received during public consultations ⁽²⁾, is available. Its adoption is envisaged by early 2025. The coverage of Natura 2000 and nationally protected areas in Belgium is below the EU average. There is still room for further consolidation of the protected area coverage, as

illustrated by the recent designation of two national parks in the Walloon Region. However, for marine protected area, Belgium ranks above the 30 % EU target.

The problem of nitrogen deposition affecting natural areas and ecosystems is tackled by the nitrogen decree of 24 January 2024, which aims to progressively reduce nitrogen deposition in Natura 2000 sites. However, several appeals have been made against the decree. Organic farming practices in Belgium are below the EU average and have not significantly contributed to achieving the target of farming 25 % of the EU's agricultural land organically by 2030.

Belgium has not met the objectives of the Water Framework Directive given the heavy impact of pollutants from agriculture on the quality of groundwater / surface waters. Pollution of groundwater and surface waters by nitrates remains widespread in Flanders.

Urban wastewater collected in Belgium is overall being properly treated as required by EU law. Belgium has yet to transpose the new nitrogen decree into its national legal system.

The overall **environmental investment** needed to enable Belgium to meet its main environmental objectives is EUR 3.7 billion per year, broken down as follows: circular economy (EUR 886 million); pollution prevention and control (EUR 1.5 billion); and water (EUR 1.4 billion). , Additional investment is needed over current levels in order to meet these environmental objectives and address climate change; this is known as **the investment gap**. Annually in Belgium, it represents around 0.67 % of the national gross domestic product, which is lower than the EU average (0.77 %).

With regard to **environmental governance**, Belgium needs to (i) ensure that relevant information on environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment procedures (including on public participation opportunities and the publication of final decisions) is electronically accessible; (ii) provide information on the average duration of all steps in the EIA process; (iii) ratify the amendment to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment; and (iv) improve access to courts for the public concerned in national environmental cases and eliminate practical barriers, such as excessive costs. On the **positive side**, Belgium continues to properly

⁽¹⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Delivering the benefits of EU environmental policies through a regular Environmental Implementation Review, COM(2016) 316 final of

27 May 2016, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A316%3AFIN>.

⁽²⁾ <https://www.health.belgium.be/fr/consultation-publique-sur-le-projet-de-la-mise-jour-de-la-strategie-nationale-de-la-belgique-sur-0>.

implement the Inspire Directive, and both Flanders and Wallonia introduced single-permit procedures (environmental and urban) for renewable energy source projects. Good practices identified in the past include

specialised environmental review boards for EIAs (2022) and a report on inspections by the Flemish Prosecutions Office (2017).

Part I: Thematic areas

1. Circular economy and waste management

Transitioning to a circular economy

Advancing the transition to a circular economy in the EU will reduce the environmental and climate impact of our industrial systems by reducing input materials, keeping products and materials in the loop for longer and reducing waste generation, thus decoupling economic growth from resource consumption. A circular economy has considerable potential to increase competitiveness and job creation and will also promote innovation and provide access to new markets. With the 2020 circular economy action plan (CEAP)⁽³⁾ measures either in place or legislatively advanced, EU Member States will now have to focus on a swift and effective implementation.

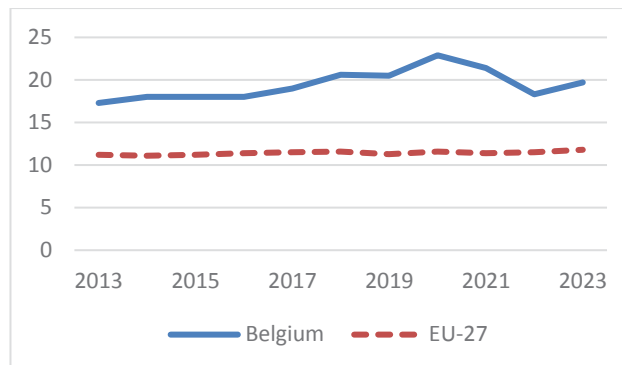
The 2020 CEAP launched the legislative process for a set of initiatives that will now have to be implemented by national governments across the EU. These initiatives were all introduced following a holistic life-cycle approach, with measures addressing the different stages of a product's life cycle, from design through use to end of life.

In the CEAP, the EU sets as its overarching objective the doubling of its circular material use rate (CMUR) by 2030.

The CMUR is a measure of one aspect of circularity: the share of the total amount of material used in the economy that is accounted for by recycled waste. A higher CMUR value means that more secondary materials were used as a substitute for raw materials, thus reducing the environmental impacts of extracting primary material.

Figure 1 shows that the circular use of material in Belgium increased from 2022 to 2023, reaching 19.7 % after a downward trend since 2020. In 2023, the CMUR in Belgium was well above the EU average of 11.8 %. As of 2023, Belgium was the EU's fourth most advanced country for circular secondary material usage, behind the Netherlands (30.6 %), Italy (20.8 %) and Malta (19.8 %).

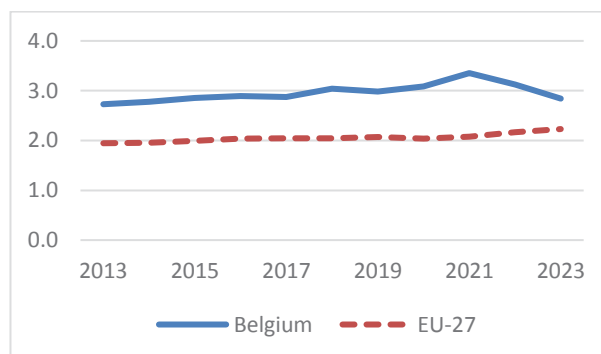
Figure 1: CMUR (%), 2013–2023



Source: Eurostat, 'Circular material use rate', env_ac_cur, last updated 13 November 2024, accessed 10 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_ac_cur/default/table?lang=en.

Resource productivity measures the total amount of materials directly used by an economy in relation to gross domestic product (GDP). Improving resource productivity can help to minimise negative impacts on the environment and reduce dependency on volatile raw material markets. As shown in Figure 2, Belgium generated EUR 2.84 per kg of material consumed in 2023, putting Belgium well above the EU's average of EUR 2.23 per kg for resource productivity. However, the latest data show there has been a recent decline in Belgian resource productivity.

Figure 2: Resource productivity (EUR/kg), 2013–2023



NB: The unit of measure used is EUR/kg chain-linked volume (2015). Chain-linked volumes focus on changes on quantities and prices of commodities in previous years, taking account of inflation, and are indexed to the nearest appropriate year, in this case 2015.

Source: Eurostat, 'Resource productivity', env_ac_rp, last updated 7 August 2024, accessed 9 December 2024,

⁽³⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A new circular economy action plan for a cleaner and more competitive Europe, COM(2020) 98 final of 11 March 2020, [https://eur-](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A98%3AFIN)

[lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A98%3AFIN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A98%3AFIN).

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_ac_rp/default/table?lang=en.

Policies and measures

In parallel with European initiatives under the CEAP, Member States are encouraged to adopt and implement circular strategies at the national, regional and city levels. These should be tailored to each national and local reality, to harness the proximity economy's⁽⁴⁾ potential, while following the principles of a holistic whole-value-chain approach.

Since the launch of the online European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform in 2017⁽⁵⁾ national, regional, and local authorities have used the platform to share their strategies, roadmaps and good practices, for example alternative business models and innovative technologies.

In December 2021 Belgium adopted a new full-fledged action plan for a circular economy 2021–2024 at the federal level⁽⁶⁾. This plan aims to encourage opportunities related to the circular economy in terms of innovation, job creation and competitiveness in Belgium. This plan, and the transition to a circular economy in general, also aim to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Through this plan, the federal state will activate the levers and competences at its disposal, in particular product policy, consumer protection policy, public procurement and tax policy. Regional plans are the driving force behind Belgium's transition at the policy level.

In the Brussels Region, the regional government adopted the Brussels regional programme for a circular economy⁽⁷⁾ in 2016 with 111 measures laying out a strategy to transition from a linear to a circular economy by 2025. The programme set a 10-year implementation framework to move Brussels' economy towards a circular model. To ensure the programme is kept up to date and remains relevant, it is revised every 18 months. From April 2022, it has been included in the regional strategy for economic transition 2022–2030⁽⁸⁾.

The Walloon waste resources plan, adopted in 2018 following a broad public consultation, already included among its strategic directions operational objectives and regional policy measures for the prevention and management of household and industrial waste and a major focus on resource circularity. The plan deals with

waste generally and focuses specifically on the reduction of food loss and waste, the recovery of biowaste and plastics, better management of construction and demolition waste, the efficiency of extended producer responsibility systems and the fight against fly-tipping. In addition, the Circular Wallonia regional strategy was adopted on 4 February 2021. This strategy uses a participatory process to take a systemic approach to the transition towards a circular economy. It identifies six priority value chains: construction and buildings; plastics; metallurgy (including rare/critical metals and batteries); water; textiles; and the food industry and food systems. The implementation report of the Circular Wallonia strategy was published in September 2024.

In the Flemish Region, the Vision 2050 strategy was approved in 2016. It identified the circular economy as one of the seven transitions needed by 2050 and launched a policy process for increased circularity. Other important circular economy policies and measures in the Flemish Region can be found in the *Circular Economy Country Profile 2024 – Belgium* report, published by the European Environment Agency (EEA)⁽⁹⁾.

The Local Materials Plan 2023–2030⁽¹⁰⁾ for household waste and similar industrial waste was approved by the Flemish government on 26 May 2023. It was declared to the European Commission as both a prevention programme and as a waste management plan. The plan aims for an absolute stabilisation of total waste production, a decrease in certain specific waste streams, an increase in reuse, a 30 % decrease in residual waste and a decrease in incineration and littering. The plan contains several obligations for local authorities and over 70 actions that will be taken by the Flemish government in the coming years to reach the objectives.

The Flemish Region has also had an action plan on circular food loss and biomass in place since 2021 and one on plastics since 2020. Implementation of both action plans is ongoing, with goals set for 2025.

As part of the country's recovery and resilience plan (RRP)⁽¹¹⁾, the Flemish Region adopted a recovery plan for Flemish resilience⁽¹²⁾, aiming to support an accelerated shift towards a maximum circular economy through European funds. The Belgium Builds Back Circular federal investment plan is set to invest EUR 28.97 million from 2022 to 2026 in order to stimulate research and

⁽⁴⁾ European Commission, 'Proximity and social economy ecosystem', European Commission website, https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy_en.

⁽⁵⁾ Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (<https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/en/strategies>).

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.health.belgium.be/fr/plan-d'action-federal-pour-une-economie-circulaire-2021-2024>.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://www.circulareconomy.brussels/a-propos/le-prec/?lang=en>.

⁽⁸⁾ https://shiftingeconomy-brussels.translate.goog/?x_tr_sl=fr&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en-US&x_tr_pto=wapp.

⁽⁹⁾ https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-ce/belgium_2024-ce-country-profile_final.pdf.

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://ovam.vlaanderen.be/lokaal-materialenplan-2023-2030>.

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://nextgenbelgium.be/fr/>.

⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/relanceplan-vlaamse-regering-vlaamse-veerkracht>.

development in companies and research institutions on the following three pillars: eco-design, substitution of substances of concern, and raising awareness and informing small and medium-sized enterprises about the circular economy.

In 2024 a new infringement procedure was opened against Belgium for not meeting the agreed collection rate of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) in 2021 (INFR(2024)2121).

Green public procurement

Public procurement accounts for a large proportion of European consumption, with public authorities' purchasing power representing around 14 % of EU GDP. Public procurement using green or circular criteria (life-cycle analysis, PaaS (platform as a service), second hand) can help drive the demand for sustainable products that meet reparability and recyclability standards.

In Belgium, a detailed strategy on sustainable public procurement has been in place for the federal government departments since 2014, combining the green and social aspects of public procurement. A revision of this strategy was announced in 2022. Specific regulations in the context of sustainable public procurement were adopted for wood (2005), vehicles (2009, 2010 and 2022) and energy efficiency (2013), with specific legislative and policy documents in the country's three regions and at the federal level.

Green public procurement criteria have been developed by the Flemish Region and at the federal level thanks to initiatives by several departments. In most cases, the EU green public procurement criteria are the basis for national-level discussions with stakeholders. To date, federal green/sustainable public procurement criteria have been developed for about 70 product and service groups.

Sustainable public procurement is anchored in the new 2024–2029 coalition agreement of the Flemish government. The coalition agreement states that the Flemish government must pursue a sustainable procurement policy. Coordination is provided between the actions offered by the various policy domains, whereby all partners involved in an action are jointly responsible for achieving it. Current actions include the sustainable public procurement criteria tool, which offers sustainability criteria to all public buyers, and the roll-out of the CO₂ Performance Ladder, which is aimed at structurally reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) impact of the works sector.

Recently, a tool has been created for sustainable public procurement⁽¹³⁾. It implements soft criteria. The tool is a collaboration with the Dutch government. There is also a federal website for sustainable purchases⁽¹⁴⁾.

The Brussels Region has a framework with three levels: (i) developing standards, for example for clean vehicles and sustainable buildings construction and renovation; (ii) providing information, training sessions and help desk advice; and (iii) establishing a mandatory framework for the public authorities dependent on the Brussels Region.

On 4 February 2021, the Walloon Region adopted its first strategy for the circular economy. Public procurement is identified therein as a lever to initiate the region's transition to a circular economy. The strategy outlines several goals for 2025, such as:

- 50 % of relevant public procurement contracts will integrate circular economy principles or circular criteria;
- 75 % of public ICT contracts will be circular and ethical;
- all public demolition/deconstruction contracts and subsidised contracts will include a materials inventory and selective deconstruction;
- reuse materials will be used in all public works contracts and progressively in works subsidised by the Walloon Region.

In March 2024 the Walloon Region launched a call for applications for support for contracting authorities in rethinking their procurement policies to incorporate more circular considerations. These public authorities will be supported commensurately with their level of experience. Tools, meetings and capacity-building workshops will complement this initiative to maximise the promotion of circular transition in public procurement. A meeting between buyers and suppliers of circular offers will be organised to foster dialogue between the public and the private sectors. The Walloon waste resources plan formally provides for supporting the prevention and recovery of construction and demolition waste through public works contracts, in particular by imposing the use of recycled materials. Furthermore, the updated 2024 edition of the standard specifications for building works⁽¹⁵⁾ includes the obligation for construction companies to complete a construction site waste management plan according to an established model, and to sort waste into different categories in order to maximise the recovery and circularity of materials. These clauses must now be integrated into the special specifications and implemented.

⁽¹³⁾ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/het-facilitair-bedrijf-overheidsopdrachten-en-raamcontracten/duurzame-en-innovatieve-overheidsopdrachten/acties-en-goede-voorbeelden/mvoo-criteriatool>.

⁽¹⁴⁾ <https://www.gidsvoorduurzameaankopen.be/nl>.

⁽¹⁵⁾ <https://batiments.wallonie.be/home.html>.

A study on recommendations for the federal government regarding circular procurement was produced in 2024.

Following the example of France, federal legislation was passed in 2024, creating a reparability index for dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, pressure washers, lawnmowers and laptops. The repair score will be displayed in shops starting in May 2025.

The European Commission has highlighted a best practice from Belgium in this area: Materialenbank⁽¹⁶⁾, based in Leuven, is a project launched in 2020 as a joint effort between the Leuven City Council, Atelier Circuler (a non-profit organisation active in the woodworking sector) and Wonen en Werken (a social economy organisation that provides employment opportunities to people from disadvantaged backgrounds). Its main activity consists of finding construction waste materials (mainly wood and stone) in the Leuven area of the Flemish Region and recovering, processing and reselling them. Reclaimed materials are purchased and used in the Leuven area by local renovation contractors as well as the municipal government, the local hospital and the local university. Materialenbank closes the circle in terms of the use of building materials and contributes to the circular and social economy of the city of Leuven.

The EU Ecolabel and the eco-management and audit scheme

The number of EU Ecolabel products and the number of eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS)-registered organisations in each country provide some indication of the extent to which the private sector and national stakeholders in that country are actively engaged in the transition to a circular economy. The EU Ecolabel is awarded to products with best-in-class environmental performance. EMAS is a voluntary environment management scheme aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of organisations.

As of September 2024, Belgium had 3 947 Ecolabel products out of the EU total of 98 977, and 68 Ecolabel licenses out of the 2 983 awarded, showing good take-up with regard to both products and licences⁽¹⁷⁾. Moreover, 59 organisations from Belgium are currently registered in EMAS, four more than in 2021⁽¹⁸⁾.

No priority actions specifically on the circular economy and not related to waste were suggested in the 2022 environmental implementation review (EIR) country report.

2025 priority action

- Speed up the transition to a circular economy by implementing an updated national strategy and the EU framework and recommendations, in particular to complement it with upstream circularity measures.

Waste management

Turning waste into a resource is supported by:

- (i) addressing the full life cycle of products, from conception to end of life, by setting requirements on the design of products to ensure that they are more sustainable;
- (ii) fully implementing EU waste legislation, which includes the waste hierarchy, the obligation to ensure separate collection of waste, landfill diversion targets, etc.;
- (iii) reducing waste generation per capita and in absolute terms;
- (iv) increasing the recycling rates of waste containing critical raw materials (CRMs), with a view to reducing dependencies and building resilient value chains, and stimulating demand for recycled content in all products;
- (v) limiting energy recovery to non-recyclable materials; and
- (vi) phasing out landfilling of recyclable or recoverable waste.

One of the main objectives of the EU waste law is to decouple economic growth from its environmental impacts.

The EU's approach to waste management is based on the waste treatment hierarchy: prevention, preparing for reuse, recycling, recovery and, as the least preferred option, disposal (which includes landfilling and incineration without energy recovery).

All legislative proposals in the field of waste management put forward by the Commission since 2021 are intended to encourage Member States to promote better product design, to require producers to cover the costs of managing the waste resulting from their products and to ensure that waste is managed at the higher levels of the waste hierarchy.

⁽¹⁶⁾ <https://www.leuven.be/materialenbank#welke-materialen/>.

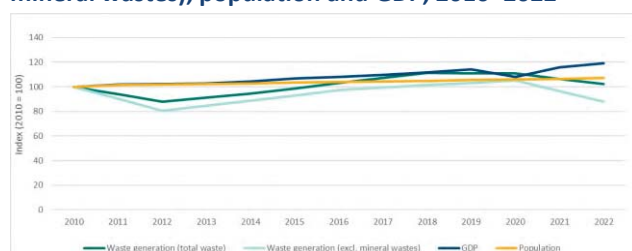
⁽¹⁷⁾ European Commission, 'EU Ecolabel facts and figures', European Commission website, accessed 9 January 2025, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/eu-ecolabel/businesses/ecolabel-facts-and-figures_en.

⁽¹⁸⁾ As of October 2024. European Commission, 'EMAS register', European Commission website, accessed 9 January 2025, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/emas2/public/registration/list>.

Waste generation in Belgium shows an increasing trend from 2012 onwards, followed by a decrease in 2022 (Figure 3). Overall, no clear decoupling of waste generation from economic growth is visible over the 12-year period.

Belgium's overall performance in waste generation and management is good. This can be seen by taking into account the indicator for recycling and circular material use combined with the country's production of waste per capita, which is below the EU average.

Figure 3: Generation of waste (total and excluding major mineral wastes), population and GDP, 2010–2022



NB: Waste generation data for odd years are interpolated.

Sources: Eurostat, 'GDP and main components (output, expenditure and income)', nama_10_gdp, accessed 15 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama_10_gdp_cust_om_9301905/default/table; Eurostat, 'Generation of waste by waste category, hazardousness and NACE Rev. 2 activity', env_wasgen, last updated 30 September 2024, accessed 22 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_wasgen/default/table?lang=en; Eurostat, 'Population change – Demographic balance and crude rates at national level', demo_grind, accessed 15 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/demo_grind/default/table?lang=en&category=demo.demo_ind.

Critical raw materials

In Belgium, waste management is a regional competence. The three Belgian regions have established regulatory frameworks concerning waste, including waste flows that contain significant amounts of CRMs, and are in line with existing EU legislation. Legislation on the separate collection and recycling of WEEE, batteries and end-of-life vehicles is in place. The most important instruments are extended producer responsibility schemes for these waste streams.

Each regional government has also concluded specific environmental conventions/agreements with the organisations representing the sectors concerned.

The regions impose recycling targets of 95 % for ferrous and non-ferrous metals from the dismantling and treatment of WEEE, batteries and end-of-life vehicles.

These targets are largely met for the relevant waste streams. The regions require specific reporting on the treatment of these waste streams (quantities of waste respectively reused, recycled, recovered and disposed of; treatment methods; material flows resulting from treatment; etc.).

The Walloon decree of 9 March 2023 on waste, material circularity and public cleanliness specifically mentions CRMs.

The first version of Circular Wallonia aims to increase the implementation of the circular economy in public procurement. A great deal of awareness-raising, information-sharing, education and support work is under way to enable public authorities (municipalities, administrations, etc.) to incorporate circular clauses into public works, supply or service contracts. However, no effort has been made to specifically increase the use of secondary CRMs. This could be the subject of a new focus as part of the new version of the Circular Wallonia strategy in order to match the priorities of the Critical Raw Materials Act.

In the Brussels Region, there is no specific strategy with regard to CRMs. The regional resources and waste management plan (2018) indirectly addresses CRMs through general strategic objectives or by specifically targeting waste streams that are identified by the Futuram project. A new plan will be adopted by the government in 2025 and will include a specific strategy related to CRMs, in accordance with the EU legislation on CRMs.

In the context of the Flemish Region, a study was carried out by Circular Flanders with a link to CRMs⁽¹⁹⁾. Circular Flanders is a partnership of Flemish authorities, companies, civil society, and academia to reflect on and discuss the Flemish circular economy⁽²⁰⁾.

Finally, under the umbrella of the Belgian federal action plan for the circular economy 2021–2024, several projects are ongoing that may consider CRMs, though none of the projects specifically targets these materials.

Overall, the regional policies may benefit from focusing more specifically on CRM recuperation from relevant waste streams.

Construction and demolition waste

Construction and demolition waste accounts for almost 40 % of all waste generated in the EU. A recent study⁽²¹⁾

⁽¹⁹⁾ <https://ce-center.vlaanderen-circulair.be/nl/publicaties/publicatie-2/17-circular-economy-and-the-energy-transition-potential-of-a-flemish-circularity-hub-for-ev-li-ion-batteries>.

⁽²⁰⁾ [Circular Flanders - Hub of the Flemish Circular Economy](#).

⁽²¹⁾ European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Cristobal Garcia, J., Caro, D. et al., *Techno-economic and environmental assessment of construction and demolition waste management in the European Union*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024,

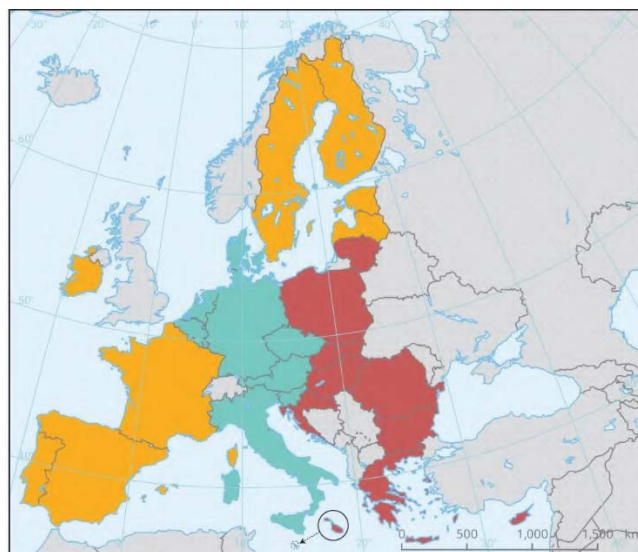
by the Joint Research Centre shows that preparing for reuse and recycling operations are preferred over incineration and landfilling from an environmental perspective for most of the different streams of construction and demolition waste. However, the economics are often unfavourable for preparing for reuse and recycling compared with incineration and landfilling. If available technology were to be applied, it is estimated that an increase in preparing for reuse and recycling of construction and demolition waste in Belgium would lead to 33 Mt of GHG emission savings annually (more than the combined annual GHG emissions from Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg).

The preparing for reuse and recycling rate of mineral construction and demolition waste in Belgium in 2022 was 53.2 % compared with the EU average of 79.8 %. Measures to further increase the preparing for reuse and recycling rate of construction and demolition waste include separate collection at source, for instance through digitalised pre-demolition audits ⁽²²⁾ (so-called resource assessments); extended producer responsibility and other economic instruments; and upstream measures such as increasing the recycled content in construction products and the circular design ⁽²³⁾ of construction works.

Boosting implementation – the 2023 Waste Early Warning Report

This section focuses on the management of municipal waste ⁽²⁴⁾, for which EU law sets mandatory recycling targets. In June 2023, the Commission published the *Waste Early Warning Report* ⁽²⁵⁾ identifying the general trends in waste management and the Member States at risk of missing 2025 waste targets (see Figure 4). Belgium is in the category of countries not considered at risk of missing the municipal and packaging waste targets.

Figure 4: Member States' prospects of meeting the preparing for reuse and recycling targets for municipal waste and packaging waste



- Member States not at risk of missing either the 55 % preparing for reuse and recycling target for municipal waste and the 65 % target for packaging waste
- Member States at risk of missing the preparing for re-use and recycling target for municipal waste but not at risk of missing the recycling target for packaging waste
- Member States at risk of missing both targets
- Outside coverage

Sources: EEA, 'Many EU Member States not on track to meet recycling targets for municipal waste and packaging waste', briefing No 28/2022, Copenhagen, 2023, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/many-eu-member-states>. Reference data © ESRI.

Under certain conditions, EU waste legislation enables some Member States to postpone the deadlines for reaching certain waste management targets for municipal and packaging waste. Member States that want to make use of this possibility have to notify the Commission 24 months in advance of the deadline and submit an implementation plan laying out the steps they envisage to reach the postponed targets within a new time frame.

<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC135470>.

⁽²²⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, *EU Construction & Demolition Waste Management Protocol including guidelines for pre-demolition and pre-renovation audits of construction works – Updated edition 2024*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d63d5a8f-64e8-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽²³⁾ European Commission, *Circular Economy – Principles for buildings design*, Brussels, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/39984>.

⁽²⁴⁾ Municipal waste consists of (i) mixed waste and separately collected waste from households, including paper and cardboard, glass, metals, plastics, biowaste, wood, textiles, packaging, WEEE, waste batteries and accumulators, and bulky waste, including mattresses and furniture; and (ii) mixed waste and separately collected waste from other sources, where such waste is similar in nature and composition to waste from households (Directive 2008/98/EC, Article 3.2b).

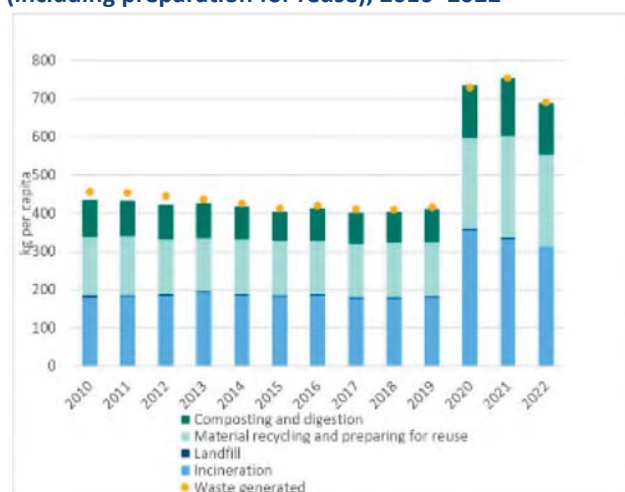
⁽²⁵⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/waste-early-warning-report_en.

Regarding the 2025 targets, 11 Member States, not including Belgium, have used this prerogative. On the other hand, the Commission is pursuing enforcement actions against those Member States that, based on data submitted to the Commission, do not achieve the targets of the Waste Framework Directive ⁽²⁶⁾, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive ⁽²⁷⁾ and the Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment ⁽²⁸⁾.

Municipal waste

In Belgium in 2022, the rate for recycling and preparation for reuse was 55 % for municipal waste, and the recycling rate was 80 % for packaging waste. Less than 2 % of municipal waste is landfilled.

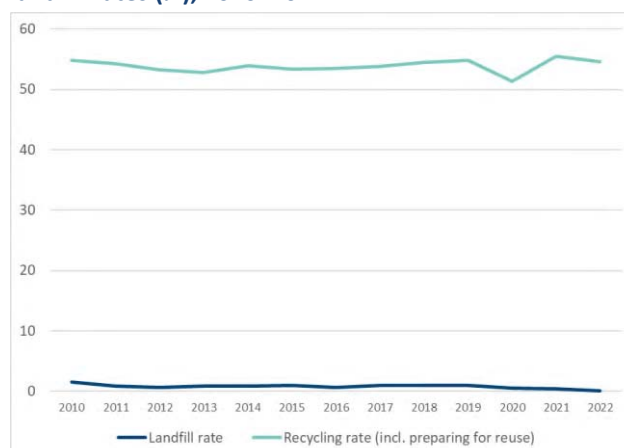
Figure 5: Municipal waste management and recycling (including preparation for reuse), 2010–2022



Source: Eurostat, 'Municipal waste by waste management operations', env_wasmun, accessed 22 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASMUN/default/table.

While Belgium performs comparatively well already, there is still room for improvement, especially by diverting waste from incineration to recycling. For example, separate collection could be improved in the Brussels Region. On the other hand, Belgium has reinforced the provisions for biowaste collection, with some plans to expand food waste collection.

Figure 6: Recycling (including preparation for reuse) and landfill rates (%), 2010–2022



NB: There is a break in the series in 2020. As of reference year 2020, new reporting rules apply for calculating recycled municipal waste pursuant to the targets laid down in Article 11.2(c–e) of Directive 2008/98/EC. However, it is unclear based on the information available whether these new reporting rules have been fully implemented in Belgium yet.

Source: Eurostat, 'Municipal waste by waste management operations', env_wasmun, accessed 22 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASMUN/default/table.

Packaging waste

The recycling rates for packaging waste materials have stayed relatively stable over the past decade, with the exception of plastics packaging, which increased above the 2025 target in 2022.

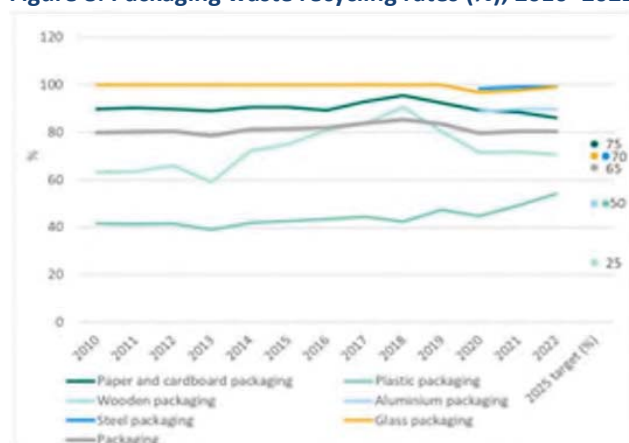
⁽²⁶⁾ Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste and repealing certain Directives, [Directive - 2008/98 - EN - Waste framework directive - EUR-Lex](#).

⁽²⁷⁾ European Parliament and Council Directive 94/62/EC of 20 December 1994 on packaging and packaging waste (OJ L 365, 31/12/1994, p. 10–23), [Directive - 94/62 - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

⁽²⁸⁾ Directive 2012/19/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (OJ L 197, 24.7.2012, p. 38), [Directive - 2012/19 - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

Figure 7: Packaging waste generation, 2010–2022

Source: Eurostat, 'Packaging waste by waste management operations', env_waspac, last updated 23 October 2024, accessed 28 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASPAC_custom_842634/default/table?lang=en.

Figure 8: Packaging waste recycling rates (%), 2010–2022

NB: As of reference year 2020, the rules for calculating recycled packaging waste have changed, pursuant to Article 6a of Directive 94/62/EC. Belgium has been applying the new calculation rules since reference year 2020.

Source: Eurostat, 'Packaging waste by waste management operations', env_waspac, last updated 23 October 2024, accessed 28 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASPAC_custom_842634/default/table?lang=en.

Policies to encourage waste prevention

Waste management plans and waste prevention programmes are instrumental to the full implementation of EU waste legislation. They set out key provisions and

investments to ensure compliance with existing and new legal requirements (e.g. on waste prevention, on separate collection for certain waste streams, on recycling and on landfill targets).

Belgium's waste prevention programmes are developed at the regional level. In the **Brussels Region**, the waste prevention programme is integrated into the resources and waste management plan 2018–2023. The **Flemish Region** integrates its waste prevention programme into several programmes and plans, with prevention and reuse as priority areas, including within the local materials plan 2023–2030. The **Walloon Region's** waste prevention programme is part of the Walloon waste resources plan and aims to optimise resource use and promote waste prevention actions, with reuse being a priority area.

Policies to encourage separate collection and recycling

Separate collection is prevalent in Belgium. There are differences in separate collection rates between the regions (the Brussels Region at 40 % in 2021 versus the Flemish and Walloon Regions at 70 % and 75 % respectively in 2022). These figures relate to household waste, and the gap should indeed be closed. The gap can be attributed to the particularity of the Brussels Region, which is a fully urban area where sorting is often more complex than in rural areas. The resource and waste management plan provides measures to improve performance despite the complex situation⁽²⁹⁾. Belgium and especially the Flemish Region have focused on collecting waste separately and on recycling waste over the past 10 to 15 years. However, the market for recycled products is still limited and needs to grow to provide economic opportunities for the separately collected and recycled products. In addition, recycled products and secondary recycled materials have to compete with non-recycled and primary raw materials. A recent trend has been that more complex products are being placed on the market, making it more challenging to repair, dismantle or recycle them. There is also a lack of transparency about the contents of products, making recycling more difficult.

Belgium will need to make further efforts to meet the more ambitious recycling targets for the period up to 2035⁽³⁰⁾, in particular the related target to reduce the incineration of municipal waste, which has gradually increased from 42.8 % in 2017 to 45 % in 2022.

⁽²⁹⁾ Commission staff working document – Country Report Belgium 2020, SWD(2020) 500 final of 26 February 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584543810241&uri=CELEX%3A52020SCO500>, p. 69. The following documents from Bruxelles Environnement confirm this hypothesis: https://document.environnement.bruxelles/opac_css/elecfile/RA

[P_2020_BenchmarkACR.pdf](#); https://app.bruxellesenvironnement.be/multimedia/ZeroWasteFastForward_Colloque-11022020.pdf (slide 189).

⁽³⁰⁾ Directive (EU) 2018/851, Directive (EU) 2018/852, Directive (EU) 2018/850 and Directive (EU) 2018/849.

Both the Flemish and Walloon Regions report that around 70 % of their municipal waste is collected separately ⁽³¹⁾, whereas the Brussels Region reports that only around 37 % is collected separately ⁽³²⁾. In 2023, biowaste collection became mandatory in the Brussels Region with the aim of improving its recycling rate, and it is required for all households and companies in the Flemish and Walloon Regions from 2024 onwards, unless composted at the source. Furthermore, all three regions have banned the use of lightweight plastic bags. In 2022, Belgium had a recycling rate for packaging of 80 %, well above the EU average (65.4 %) ⁽³³⁾.

Policies to discourage landfilling or incineration

All three Belgian regions already have a system in place that taxes incinerated waste, and they all encourage heat recovery from waste incineration. Further progress could be made by introducing new economic instruments to prevent waste by: (i) avoiding the incineration of reusable or recyclable waste (especially in the Brussels Region); and (ii) making the reuse and recycling of waste more economically attractive.

The 2022 EIR listed two priority actions for Belgium. The country has made some progress in shifting reusable and recyclable waste away from incineration, including through economic instruments, but there is still further potential. Belgium has made substantial progress in ensuring that regional waste management plans are in line with the revised Waste Framework Directive.

2025 priority actions

- Further shift reusable and recyclable waste away from incineration, including through economic instruments.
- Improve separate collection at the source e.g. through economic instruments, investing in infrastructure for separate collection, sorting and recycling, and increasing public awareness.
- Increase the collection and recycling rate of waste electronic and electric equipment (WEEE).
- Invest in waste prevention measures to reduce the total amount of waste generated.

⁽³¹⁾ OVAM, <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/54649>, 2023, p. 12; *Vivre la Wallonie*, No 35, 2017, p. 15.

⁽³²⁾ Bruxelles Environnement, *Plan de gestion des ressources et dechet (PGRD) – Rapport d'activité (2018–2023)*, Brussels, 2024,

https://document.environnement.brussels/opac_css/doc_num.php?explnum_id=11178.

⁽³³⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Packaging_waste_statistics

2. Biodiversity and natural capital

Global and EU biodiversity frameworks

Biological diversity and healthy ecosystems are critical for our societies, underpin our economies and well-being and are essential for climate change adaptation and mitigation. The Kunming–Montreal global biodiversity framework (GBF), adopted in December 2022, sets comprehensive and measurable targets to tackle biodiversity loss by 2030. To implement this global framework and integrate biodiversity considerations into national decision-making, the EU – as well as all Member States – had to submit national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), or to communicate national targets aligned with the global targets, by the end of 2024.

The EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 (BDS) aims to put EU biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. It sets quantified targets intended to protect and restore nature and manage ecosystems in a sustainable manner, as well as measures to enable implementation and commitments to support global biodiversity. A BDS actions tracker ⁽³⁴⁾ and a dashboard of indicators ⁽³⁵⁾ provide information on implementation progress.

The recently adopted EU Nature Restoration Regulation ⁽³⁶⁾ is the first EU-wide, comprehensive law of its kind and a key instrument for the EU to deliver on the global biodiversity targets for 2030. It lays down an overarching objective at the EU level to put in place effective restoration measures on 20 % of EU land and sea by 2030 and for all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. To achieve this, it sets binding targets for Member States to restore and maintain ecosystems, as well as an effective implementation framework based on national restoration plans.

The BDS is the main instrument used by the EU to deliver on its obligation under the GBF. The Commission has submitted to the Convention on Biological Diversity its report on GBF-aligned EU targets that stem from the BDS and from other policy instruments under the European

Green Deal.

Member States' NBSAPs need to provide coherent frameworks for national delivery on the global and EU 2030 biodiversity targets. In line with the global obligations, NBSAPs should also include a biodiversity financing plan and a capacity-building plan, based on needs assessments, as well as an overview of the national indicators used to measure progress.

Belgium is in the process of updating its national biodiversity strategy to align its objectives with EU and global 2030 targets. A drafting group was set up in 2023 including representatives from the federal government, the three regions (the Flemish, Brussels and Walloon Regions) and the three language communities (Flemish-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking). A revised draft of the national biodiversity strategy, which now includes the comments and suggestions received during public consultations ⁽³⁷⁾, is available. Its adoption is envisaged by early 2025. [To be updated in 2025]

The EU aims to allocate to biodiversity objectives at least 7.5 % of annual spending under the EU budget in 2024, rising to 10 % in 2026 and 2027.

For details on biodiversity financing and investments for Belgium, see Chapter 5.

2025 priority action

- Submit to the Convention on Biological Diversity an updated NBSAP or national targets following the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Nature protection and restoration – Natura 2000

Natura 2000 ⁽³⁸⁾, the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world, is key to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Birds and Habitats Directives.

⁽³⁴⁾ EU Biodiversity Strategy Actions Tracker (<https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/actions-tracker/>).

⁽³⁵⁾ EU Biodiversity Strategy Dashboard (<https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/EUBDS2030-dashboard/?version=1>).

⁽³⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (OJ L 2024/1991, 29.7.2024), <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1991/oj>; see also the Commission web page on the law (https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en).

⁽³⁷⁾ <https://www.health.belgium.be/fr/consultation-publique-sur-le-projet-de-la-mise-jour-de-la-strategie-nationale-de-la-belgique-sur-0>.

⁽³⁸⁾ Natura 2000 comprises sites of community importance (SCIs), designated pursuant to the Habitats Directive, as well as special protection areas (SPAs), classified pursuant to the Birds Directive. Numbers of protected areas in Figure 9 do not add up to the total of SCIs plus SPAs, because some SCIs and SPAs overlap. A special area of conservation (SAC) is an SCI designated by a Member State.

These objectives are to ensure the long-term protection, conservation and survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats and the ecosystems they underpin. Key milestones towards meeting the objectives of the Birds and Habitats Directives are (i) the setting up of a complete and coherent Natura 2000 network; (ii) the designation of sites of community importance (SCIs) as special areas of conservation (SACs) ⁽³⁹⁾; and (iii) effective management of all Natura 2000 sites through the setting of site-specific conservation objectives and measures.

Setting up a complete and coherent network of Natura 2000 sites

The setting up of a complete and coherent network of Natura 2000 sites is a cornerstone of the EU's international commitments, under the BDS and GBF, to legally protect a minimum of 30 % of its land area and 30 % of its sea area by 2030.

Meeting these commitments requires the full implementation of Article 3 of the Habitats Directive. The Natura 2000 network should represent a complete and coherent ecological network composed of sites hosting natural habitat types and species of community interest. The Natura 2000 network enables the natural habitat types and the species' habitats concerned to be maintained or, where appropriate, restored to a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

The implementation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the setting up of the Natura 2000 network are regional responsibilities in Belgium, shared between the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Regions. The Natura 2000 network in Belgian marine waters is a federal competence.

Belgium is home to 59 habitat types ⁽⁴⁰⁾ and 86 species ⁽⁴¹⁾ covered by the Habitats Directive. The country also hosts breeding populations of 188 bird taxa, 83 of which are listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive ⁽⁴²⁾.

As shown in Figure 9, in 2023, 12.7 % of the national land territory of Belgium was covered by Natura 2000 sites (EU average 18.6 %), with special protection areas (SPAs) classified under the Birds Directive covering 10.4 % (EU-27

average 12.8 %) and SACs under the Habitats Directive covering 10.7 % (EU-27 average 14.3 %) of the territory.

The coverage of the Belgian marine part of the North Sea by Natura 2000 sites is 1 317 km² (38 % of the Belgian marine area), combining two SACs (covering 1 178 km² or 34 % of the marine area) and three SPAs (covering 316 km² or 9 % of the marine area).

Taking into consideration both the Natura 2000 network and other nationally designated protected sites, Belgium legally protects 14.7 % of its land area (EU-27 average 26 %) and 37.8 % of its marine area (EU-27 average 12.3 %) ⁽⁴³⁾.

While the completeness of the Belgian Natura 2000 network is considered to be high overall, there remain some insufficiencies in relation to Habitats Directive Annex II species that have recolonised Belgium recently, such as *Canis lupus* (Flemish and Walloon Regions) and *Cucujus cinnaberinus* (Flemish Region).

For bird species, there is currently an insufficient designation of SPAs for breeding populations of two Annex I species (*Anarhynchus alexandrinus* and *Asio flammeus*) as well as for the breeding populations of a range of SPA trigger species (e.g. *Limosa limosa* and *Larus fuscus*). Since the designation of the SAC Vlakte van de Raan, which encompasses the previously adopted SCI Vlakte van de Raan, network sufficiency can be assumed for the marine part of the network of sites under the Habitats Directive.

The coverage of Natura 2000 and nationally protected land areas in Belgium is below the EU average. While this can be explained by the above-average level of urbanisation and the very high population density, there is still room for further consolidation of the protected area coverage, as illustrated by the recent designation of two national parks in the Walloon Region. However, with regard to protected marine areas, Belgium ranks above the 30 % EU target.

⁽³⁹⁾ SCIs are designated pursuant to the Habitats Directive, whereas SPAs are designated pursuant to the Birds Directive. Figures of coverage do not add up because some SCIs and SPAs overlap.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ EEA, 'Number of habitats and species per Member State', Article 17 dashboard, Annex I total, 19 December 2019, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/general-information-on-habitats-and-species-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived>.

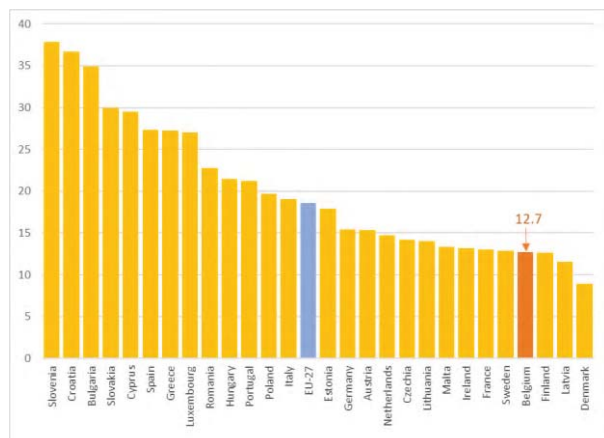
⁽⁴¹⁾ EEA, 'Number of habitats and species per Member State', Article 17 dashboard, Annex I total, 19 December 2019, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/general-information-on-habitats-and-species-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived>.

[charts/general-information-on-habitats-and-species-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived](https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/general-information-on-habitats-and-species-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived).

⁽⁴²⁾ EEA, 'Number of bird species/populations per Member State', Article 12 dashboard, Annex I total, last updated 11 May 2023, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/general-information-on-bird-species-populations-article-12-national-summary-dashboards-archived>. This counting only takes into account bird taxa for which information was requested.

⁽⁴³⁾ Eurostat dataset [env_bio4](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1), protected area percentage for 2022, accessed 12 March 2025. .

Figure 9: Natura 2000 terrestrial protected area coverage per Member State (%), 2023



Source: EEA, 'Natura 2000 Barometer', 2023 data, accessed March 2025, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/natura-2000-barometer-dashboards>.

Designating special areas of conservation and setting site-specific conservation objectives and measures

To ensure that SCIs contribute to the objectives of the Habitats Directive, Member States must designate them as SACs, setting site-specific conservation objectives based on the ecological needs of the species and habitats present on the sites. Such site-specific conservation objectives should define attributes and targets that describe the habitats' or species' condition as favourable or unfavourable, addressing key pressures and threats. Under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, Member States must establish and implement measures to achieve these objectives.

All Belgian Natura 2000 sites proposed under the EU Habitats Directive have been designated as SACs.

Both the Walloon and Flemish Regions have regional conservation objectives for their network of sites.

For the Flemish Region, these objectives have been broken down into site-specific conservation objectives for all SACs and SPAs. As a result of the spatial assignment of areas with SAC designation to conservation objectives, a significant share of the land within the Flemish Natura 2000 sites is excluded from any target setting. Although located inside the network for SACs, this land therefore remains de facto unprotected.

Furthermore, it seems that the Flemish Region has not set any site-specific objectives for any migratory bird species not listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive, despite the EU significance of certain migratory breeding bird

populations in the region. The Walloon Region does not yet have site-specific conservation objectives for its Natura 2000 sites. Instead, it applies a unique land-parcel-specific legal protection regime to all land parcels within the Natura 2000 network, which seems to be effective in terms of both preventing deterioration and steering restoration measures (see below for further details).

The setting of conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites in the Flemish and Walloon Regions is a work in progress. Priority measures have been identified in the designation acts for each SAC and SPA.

Any landowner in the Flemish Region, public, private or non-governmental organisation (NGO), may apply for a 'nature management plan' on a voluntary basis and receive subsidies for nature management after approval of the plan. The submission and approval of nature management plans is a continuing process. At the moment, approximately 65 % of the site-specific conservation objectives for habitats are under appropriate management, meaning that their management is approved in a nature management plan. The nitrogen decree, adopted in 2024, states that appropriate management should be in place for all site-specific conservation objectives by 2030.

The problem of nitrogen deposition affecting natural areas and ecosystems is tackled by the nitrogen decree of 24 January 2024, which aims to progressively reduce nitrogen deposition in Natura 2000 sites, with the goal of reaching by 2045 levels that do not cause degradation to protected habitats. The decree includes mandatory and unpopular measures, such as significantly reducing pig numbers in the Flemish Region by 2030. However, several appeals have been made against the decree.

The Walloon Region, on the other hand, has a scheme to prevent site-level deterioration that applies to all individual land sections within the Natura 2000 network, irrespective of their ownership status. This scheme is based on a combination of (i) a legal regime of general restrictions; and (ii) land-parcel-specific restrictions based on the current land-use and restoration potential of individual land parcels (the so-called management units). The scheme covers 100 % of the area of the Walloon Natura 2000 network. In addition, site-specific management plans are currently being drawn up as part of the ongoing LIFE Belgian nature integrated project ⁽⁴⁴⁾. In addition, under Article 72 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of 2 December 2021, agricultural and forestry compensation is granted annually to compensate for the specific disadvantages associated with the designation of areas as Natura 2000 sites.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ <https://biodiversite.wallonie.be/fr/life-integre.html?IDC=6174>.

There are currently no identified deficiencies in the Brussels Region for the designation of SACs or for conservation objectives and measures. The Brussels Region has set site-specific conservation objectives for all SACs, including the description of general conservation measures for the target habitats and ecological demands for the target species. These objectives, measures and ecological demands are being further developed in more detailed management plans for specific subsites within the network.

The most worrying deficiency in the management of the Belgian Natura 2000 network is the lack of effective management of the marine Natura 2000 sites. Site-specific conservation objectives have been set for the two marine SACs (Vlaamse Banken and Vlakte van de Raan). However, not all required conservation measures have yet been adopted (missing are those affecting fisheries). A first proposal for measures to restrict bottom trawling via a joint recommendation under the common fisheries policy was rejected by the European Parliament in 2018. In 2019 the federal government started a new process in order to come to a new, scientifically underpinned proposal for measures restricting bottom trawling. Given its extremely damaging nature, Belgium should ensure that this practice is not carried out in violation of both Articles 6(2) and 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. The adoption in 2016 of the Royal Decree clarifying the procedures for the implementation of Natura 2000 improved the fulfilment of these articles, as an appropriate assessment is now mandatory for many activities, including sand extraction. A revision of the Marine Environment Act was adopted on 11 December 2022.

As regards the three marine SPA areas, site-specific objectives have not yet been formulated. The overall objective is to maintain their current status and their function as foraging areas for marine bird species. For the Vlaamse Banken and the three SPAs, management plans containing a variety of measures have been adopted. The existing sites are currently being damaged in an almost systematic way, notably through regular bottom trawling (including from non-Belgian vessels, which are allowed to fish in Belgian waters according to the EU's common fisheries policy). Management measures addressing the impact from fisheries are to be adopted via a joint recommendation (see above for the marine SACs).

Recovery of species

One objective set by the BDS is that, by 2030, there should be no further deterioration in conservation trends or the status of any protected species. The BDS also states that

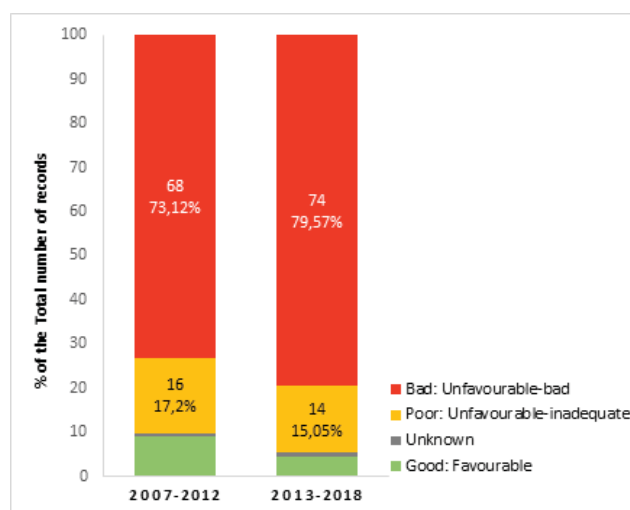
Member States should ensure that at least 30 % of species not currently in favourable conservation status achieve that status or show progress towards doing so (e.g. by exhibiting positive population dynamics or stable or increasing range and habitat size), by 2030. According to the EEA, based on reporting required under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive, a quarter of species in the EU were of good conservation status as of 2018 ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

One of the primary objectives of the Habitats Directive is the maintenance of or restoration to favourable conservation status of all species of community interest. Moreover, the Birds Directive also aims to ensure that all wild birds in the EU enjoy a secure status. In order to achieve these objectives, it will be necessary to address key pressures and threats. The Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive lay down a framework of species protection rules and rules on the conservation of habitats and species in order to combat these threats.

Under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive, Member States are required to report on the conservation status of habitats and species every six years. The current reporting cycle, covering the years 2019 to 2024, is due for submission in July 2025.

According to the report submitted by Belgium on the conservation status of habitats and species covered by Article 17 of the Habitats Directive for 2013–2018, the share of habitats assessed to be in good conservation status in 2018 was 4.3 %.

Figure 10: Assessments of conservation status of habitats for the 2007–2012 and 2013–2018 reporting periods



NB: The values shown for 2007–2012 with those for 2013–2018 are not necessarily directly comparable because changes in area conservation status in a Member State may result from changes to methods or use of better data, rather than reflecting genuine changes.

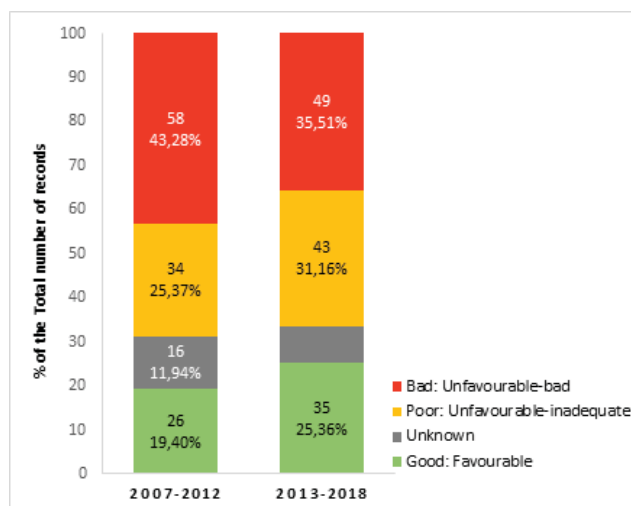
⁽⁴⁵⁾ EEA, *State of Nature in the EU: Results from reporting under the Nature Directives 2013–2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020,

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020>.

Source: EEA, 'Conservation status and trends of habitats and species', 19 December 2019, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/conservation-status-and-trends-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived>.

For protected species, the share assessed to be in good conservation status in 2018 was 25.4 %.

Figure 11: Assessments of conservation status of species for the 2007–2012 and 2013–2018 reporting periods



NB: The values shown for 2007–2012 and 2013–2018 are not necessarily directly comparable because changes in area conservation status in a Member State may result from changes to methods or use of better data, rather than reflecting genuine changes.

Source: EEA, 'Conservation status and trends of habitats and species', 19 December 2019, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/conservation-status-and-trends-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived>.

With regard to birds, 56 % of the breeding species in Belgium showed short-term increasing or stable population trends in 2013–2018. For wintering species requiring the designation of SPAs, the corresponding figure is 7.6 % for 2013–2018, but there is a large proportion (69 %) of bird species with unknown short-term trends ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

All Belgian regional authorities are currently implementing measures dedicated to restoring populations of species that have shown deteriorating conservation status trends in the most recent reporting under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive. To achieve the objectives of EU nature legislation in terms of favourable conservation statuses for these species, these efforts must be continued and, ideally, upscaled.

The 'floating islands' in the Brussels port ⁽⁴⁷⁾ (introduced by Bruxelles Environnement, Ecorce, Ecocéan, Biomatrix,

Canal It Up and Port de Bruxelles) is a good-practice example for nature-based solutions in an urban environment. It consists of 84 floating ecosystem modules creating 224 m² of floating habitat, in which 17 native plant species provide a habitat for birds, fish and pollinators, while some phytodepuration plants help to filter the water.

2025 priority actions

- Finalise the establishment of site-specific conservation objectives and measures for all Natura 2000 sites (including by adopting their management plans) and ensure their effective implementation.
- Reinforce action for habitats and species with unfavourable conservation status through, for example, restoration measures, increased connectivity, better policy coordination and integration, and increased funding.

Recovery of ecosystems

Agricultural ecosystems

The BDS works alongside the common agricultural policy (CAP) to support the transition to sustainable agriculture.

The strategy has set five common agriculture-related targets for 2030, namely to:

- reduce by 50 % the overall use of – and risk from – chemical pesticides;
- reduce by 50 % the use of more hazardous pesticides;
- reduce by 50 % losses of nutrients from fertilisers (which will result in a 20 % reduction in the use of fertilisers) while ensuring that there is no deterioration of soil fertility;
- restore at least 10 % of agricultural area to have high-diversity landscape features; and
- increase the area under organic farming to at least 25 %.

The "Vision for agriculture and food" ⁽⁴⁸⁾ adopted by the European Commission in February 2025, sets a roadmap to an agri-food system that is attractive, competitive, sustainable and fair for current and future generations. To ensure a sustainable future for EU agriculture, it is crucial that these four priority areas are pursued together, and that public and private support are adequately targeted toward this objective.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ EEA, 'Winter population trends', Article 12 dashboard, last updated 11 May 2023, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/winter-population-trends-article-12-national-summary-dashboards-archived>.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ *We Love Brussels*, 'Floating green islands launched in the Port of Brussels', 27 April 2022, <https://welovebrussels.org/2022/04/floating-green-islands-port-of-brussels/>.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/vision-agriculture-and-food_en

The CAP and national CAP strategic plans are key instruments to facilitate and strengthen the efforts of European farmers to protect biodiversity and the environment at large. The Commission approved Member States' CAP strategic plans in 2022 for the programming period 2023-2027. The CAP is the largest source of funding for contributing to the implementation of EU environmental policy, this is particularly true for biodiversity. Strategic plans should continue to support the protection of soil, water, air quality and biodiversity.

While certain CAP result indicators focus on the national measures favouring sustainable agriculture practices that regenerate ecosystems, the impact of these measures is difficult to assess. The uptake of the eco-schemes is voluntary for farmers.

The utilised agricultural area in Belgium increased from 1 333 910 hectares in 2012 to 1 368 310 hectares in 2021 and decreased to 1 361 910 ha in 2022 ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Landscape features are small fragments of non-productive and (typically, but not strictly) semi-natural vegetation present in, or adjacent to, agricultural land. They provide ecosystem services and support for biodiversity. The indicator 'share of agricultural land covered with landscape features' is the ratio between the area covered by non-productive landscape features and the area covered by agricultural land. Based on the landscape features estimates of the Land Use/Cover Area Frame Survey, the share of agricultural land covered with non-productive landscape features in Belgium is 5.6 %, which corresponds to the EU average.

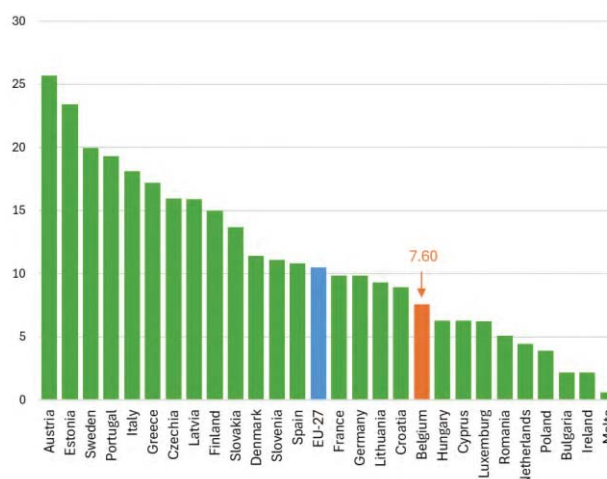
In 2024, the CAP basic regulations were amended ⁽⁵⁰⁾, inter alia, regarding the standards for good agricultural and environmental conditions (GAEC) of land. These changes removed the obligation for farmers benefiting from CAP area-related support to have a minimum share of 3–4 % of non-productive areas or landscape features on their farms. The amended regulation does not remove the obligation under GAEC 8 to retain existing landscape features, but sets out an obligation for Member States to establish and provide support for eco-schemes, covering practices for the maintenance of non-productive areas,

such as land lying fallow, and for the establishment of new landscape features on arable land.

The recently adopted Nature Restoration Regulation ⁽⁵¹⁾ focuses on the restoration of agricultural ecosystems and requires Member States to put in place measures that aim to achieve an increasing trend at the national level for at least two out of three indicators for agricultural ecosystems ⁽⁵²⁾. One of these indicators is the 'share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features'.

Organic farming practices are highly beneficial to biodiversity. As shown in Figure 12, it is estimated that 7.6 % of Belgium's utilised agricultural land area is used for organic farming. This is below the EU average of 10.50 % ⁽⁵³⁾. This is not contributing much to achieving the target of 25 % of the EU's agricultural land being organically farmed by 2030.

Figure 12: Share of total utilised agricultural area occupied by organic farming per Member State (%), 2022



Source: Eurostat, 'Area under organic farming', sdg_02_40, accessed 5 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_02_40/default/table?lang=en.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Eurostat, 'Utilised agricultural area by categories', tag00025, accessed 5 December 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tag00025/default/table?lang=en>.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/1468 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 amending Regulations (EU) 2021/2115 and (EU) 2021/2116 as regards good agricultural and environmental condition standards, schemes for climate, environment and animal welfare, amendment of the CAP strategic plans, review of the CAP strategic plans and exemptions from controls and penalties (OJ L, 2024/1468, 24.5.2024), <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1468/oj>.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending

Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (OJ L, 2024/1991, 29.7.2024), <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1991/oj>.

⁽⁵²⁾ 'Grassland butterfly index', 'stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils' and 'share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features'.

⁽⁵³⁾ Last available information from Eurostat, currently under review; see also European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 'Agriculture biologique au sein de l'union européenne', https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c67458ed-ec50-4762-ae68-341763ab93c2_fr?filename=factsheet-organic-farming_fr.pdf&prefLang=en.

2025 priority actions

- Step-up efforts to further reduce nitrogen deposition, in particular in Natura 2000 sites with nitrogen-sensitive species and habitats.
- Implement eco-schemes and agri-environmental measures and practices to address the environmental needs of Belgium.
- Implement and scale up the uptake of organic farming practices.

Soil ecosystems

Soil is an essential, finite and extremely fragile resource. Its increasing degradation poses a threat to EU food security and climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation.

The EU soil strategy, adopted in November 2021, aims to support soil protection, sustainable soil management and the restoration of degraded soils to achieve the Green Deal objectives as well as land degradation neutrality by 2030.

This entails:

- preventing further soil degradation;
- making sustainable soil management the new normal;
- taking action for ecosystem restoration.

The proposed directive on soil monitoring and resilience⁽⁵⁴⁾ aims to introduce the first comprehensive legislation on the protection of all soils in the EU. Should the directive be adopted, Member States will have to transpose it into national legislation and implement it, starting with putting in place the governance systems and a sound monitoring framework building on existing national soil monitoring frameworks. The objective of the proposed directive is to provide better and more comparable soil health data with the view of attaining healthy soils by 2050.

Degradation of soil ecosystems encompasses several aspects. The proposed directive requires Member States to assess soil health according to a set of common indicators and to define the necessary regeneration measures. The area of soil that is sealed is an important factor in monitoring land-use change and represents an important pressure on nature and biodiversity. Other soil issues related to land degradation are soil erosion, soil compaction, loss of soil organic carbon, soil contamination, soil salinisation and the presence in soil of nitrogen and phosphorus in excess. The impact assessment accompanying the proposal, which builds on

the data available in the EU Soil Observatory, points to the following soil degradation issues in Belgium⁽⁵⁵⁾.

In about 35 % of the area, excessive concentrations of nutrients (phosphorus concentrations above 50 mg/kg and nitrogen concentrations above 50 kg/ha) are found in soils, particularly in the northern part of the country. Unsustainable soil erosion by water, wind, tillage and harvest affects 17 % of the national territory, which represents 63 % of croplands.

Grasslands

Grasslands are among the most diverse ecosystems in the EU; they can contain as many as 80 different plant species per square metre and are home to a large variety of animals, ranging from small insects, birds and rodents to large herbivores. Grasslands are essential for agriculture and livestock herding. Natural grasslands also play an important role in storing carbon. However, changes in agricultural practices and land uses have caused grasslands to disappear at an alarming rate, making them one of Europe's most threatened ecosystems.

In the latest report in accordance with Article 17 of the Habitats Directive (from 2019), all species-rich grassland habitats in Belgium still have unfavourable conservation status, and often still show further declines in terms of area and habitat quality.

Species-rich grasslands in Belgium are mainly under pressure from the abandonment of traditional nature-friendly management practices and from land-use intensification (high levels of fertilisers and excessive mowing frequencies), as well as from atmospheric nitrogen deposition, this pressure being particularly important in the Flemish Region.

However, in the parts of Belgium within the continental biogeographical region (i.e. the south-east including the Ardennes), positive trends are reported for three (out of a total of 10) Annex I grassland habitats, largely as a result of the extensive habitat restoration measures carried out since 1995 in the form of a number of successful initiatives by the LIFE Belgian nature integrated project. For other grasslands, however (in particular for species-rich hay meadows), the measures undertaken so far are still insufficient to reverse the overall negative trend.

In the parts of Belgium within the Atlantic biogeographical region (the Flemish Region and the north-western parts of the Walloon Region), the status of grasslands is worse, as not one single parameter for any of the seven grassland

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on soil monitoring and resilience (Soil Monitoring Law), COM(2023) 416 final of 5 July 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023PC0416>.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Commission staff working document – Impact assessment report – Annexes, SWD(2023) 417 final of 5 July 2023, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/IMPACT%20ASSESSMENT%20REPORT%20ANNEXES%20SWD%2023_417_part4.pdf.

habitat types is reported to show a positive trend, which is consistent with the overall finding of higher land-use pressures and excessive nitrogen deposition in that part of the country.

For several key grassland habitat types, the remaining high-quality areas in Belgium are now almost entirely restricted to nature reserves within Natura 2000 sites. These reserves are owned and managed either by the state or by conservation NGOs.

To achieve the objectives of EU nature legislation, the efforts to restore the coverage and habitat quality of species-rich grasslands in Belgium must be continued and, ideally, upscaled.

Wetlands/peatlands

Wetlands act as water sources and purifiers; they are the planet's greatest natural carbon stores and they are crucial to agriculture and fisheries. Peatlands are a special type of wetland dominated by peat-forming plants such as *Sphagnum* mosses. Nearly all peatlands in the EU are habitat types listed in Annex I to the Habitats Directive. Drained peatlands under intensive agricultural use constitute only 3 % of the EU's utilised agricultural area. At the same time, they are responsible for 25 % of the GHG emissions from the EU's agricultural sector. Restoring peatlands brings multiple benefits, as peatlands improve water retention and quality, store carbon, reduce GHG emissions and increase biodiversity.

In the latest report in accordance with Article 17 of the Habitats Directive (from 2019), all wetland habitats in Belgium still have an unfavourable conservation status. However, with the exception of one specific habitat in the continental biogeographical region that is naturally confined to very small and highly scattered areas ('Petrifying springs with tufa formation'), conservation status trends show that Annex I wetland habitats in Belgium are no longer deteriorating.

Within the continental biogeographical region (i.e. the south-eastern parts of Belgium including the Ardennes), positive trends are reported for four out of a total of six Annex I wetland habitat types, largely as a result of extensive habitat restoration measures carried out since 1995 in the form of a number of successful initiatives by the LIFE Belgian nature integrated project.

Within the Atlantic biogeographical region (mostly the Flemish Region), the situation is less positive, however, as the restoration measures taken so far, despite covering significant areas, have not yet translated into any positive conservation status trends. This is consistent with the overall finding of higher land-use pressures and excessive nitrogen deposition in that part of the country.

Both the Walloon and the Flemish CAP strategic plans have applied GAEC 2 to the protection on wetlands and peatlands since 2023.

To achieve the objectives of EU nature legislation, the efforts to restore wetland habitats in Belgium must be continued and, ideally, upscaled.

Forest ecosystems

Forests are important carbon sinks, and conserving them is vital if the EU is to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The EU forest strategy for 2030, adopted in July 2021, is a plan of actions to promote the many services that forests provide. Its key objective is to ensure healthy, diverse and resilient EU forests that contribute significantly to the achievement of the EU's biodiversity and climate ambitions. About 27 % of the forest area in the EU is covered by habitat types listed in Annex I to the Habitats Directive. Moreover, forests host several species protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives, including those for which there is a requirement to designate Natura 2000 sites and to protect breeding sites and resting places.

Several Commission guidelines on forestry management were published in 2023. They covered biodiversity-friendly afforestation, reforestation and tree planting; closer-to-nature forest management; and defining, mapping, monitoring and strictly protecting primary and old-growth forests. Further guidance on payment schemes for ecosystems services has also been published.

In 2023, the Commission proposed a new forest monitoring law ⁽⁵⁶⁾ that aims to create a comprehensive forest knowledge base, address information gaps and enable a better response to growing pressures on forests.

Assessments show that, of the 27 % of EU forest area protected under the Habitats Directive, less than 15 % is of favourable conservation status ⁽⁵⁷⁾. The share of forested areas in the EU with a bad conservation status

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a monitoring framework for resilient European forests, COM(2023)728, 22 November 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM\(2023\)728&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM(2023)728&lang=en)

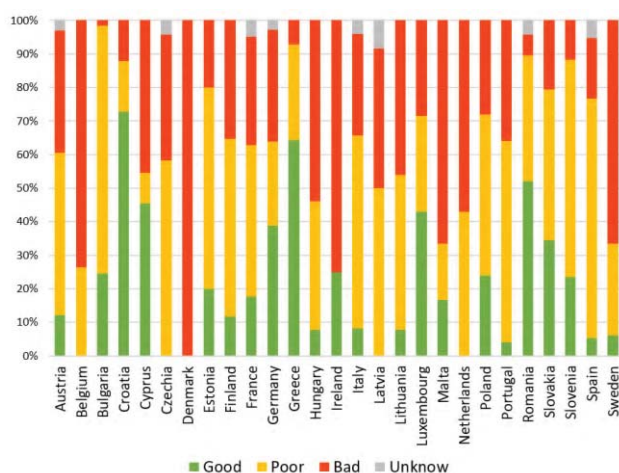
⁽⁵⁷⁾ EEA, *State of Nature in the EU: Results from reporting under the Nature Directives 2013–2018*, Publications Office of the European

Union, Luxembourg, 2020, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020>.

increased from 27 % in 2015 to 31 % in 2018.

Forests covered 22.8 % of Belgium's land area in 2020 ⁽⁵⁸⁾, and the situation of forest habitats protected under the Habitats Directive is particularly worrying, as more than half of the protected forests assessed have a poor status ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

Figure 13: Conservation status of forests protected under the Habitats Directive per Member State (% assessments), 2013–2018



Source: Commission staff working document – New EU forest strategy for 2030, SWD(2021) 652 final of 16 July 2021, p. 24, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0652.

The EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) ⁽⁶⁰⁾ prohibits the placing on the EU market of illegally harvested timber.

On 29 June 2023, the Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) ⁽⁶¹⁾ entered into force ⁽⁶²⁾. The regulation seeks to guarantee that products in the EU that are made using any of seven listed commodities have no links to deforestation. The Regulation on Deforestation-free Products repeals the EU Timber Regulation.

2025 priority action

- Improve conservation status of forests by promoting sustainable forest management and ensuring compliance with the Habitats Directive before granting/renewing permits for forest logging.
- Bring levels of nitrogen deposition under the critical threshold to allow forest habitat types protected under the Habitats Directive to recover.

Marine ecosystems

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) requires Member States to achieve good environmental status (GES) for their marine waters. To that end, Member States must draw up marine strategies for their marine waters and cooperate with other Member States sharing the same marine region or subregion. These marine strategies comprise different steps to be developed and implemented over six-year cycles.

Since the 2022 EIR report, no additional data regarding Member States' set of GES characteristics for each descriptor in the MSFD have become available. Nevertheless, Member States had to report updates by 15 October 2024, and these are being assessed by the Commission. In the context of this round of reporting, in accordance with the MSFD and the Commission GES decision ⁽⁶³⁾, Member States must include as part of their set of GES characteristics any threshold values for the descriptors in the MSFD that may have been established in cooperation with other Member States at the EU or regional level ⁽⁶⁴⁾. Belgium reported the data relating to Articles 8, 9 and 10 as required by Article 17 of the MSFD; these data is now under the assessment of the Commission

The Commission assessed the updated monitoring programme reported by Member States in 2020 ⁽⁶⁵⁾. At that time their updates on the elements, features and

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Forest information system for Europe, 'Countries – FISE country factsheets', forest information system for Europe website, accessed 9 January 2025, <https://forest.eea.europa.eu/countries>.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Commission staff working document – Stakeholder consultation and evidence base, SWD(2021) 652 final of 16 July 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0652>.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market (OJ L 295, 12.11.2010, p. 23), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32010R0995>.

⁽⁶¹⁾ European Commission, 'Regulation on deforestation-free products', European Commission website, accessed 9 January 2025, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products_en.

⁽⁶²⁾ The law will apply to large and medium-sized companies starting on December 30, 2025, and to micro and small enterprises starting on June 30, 2026.

⁽⁶³⁾ Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 of 17 May 2017 laying down criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters and specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment, and repealing Decision 2010/477/EU (OJ L 125, 18.5.2017, p. 43), <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2017/848/oj>.

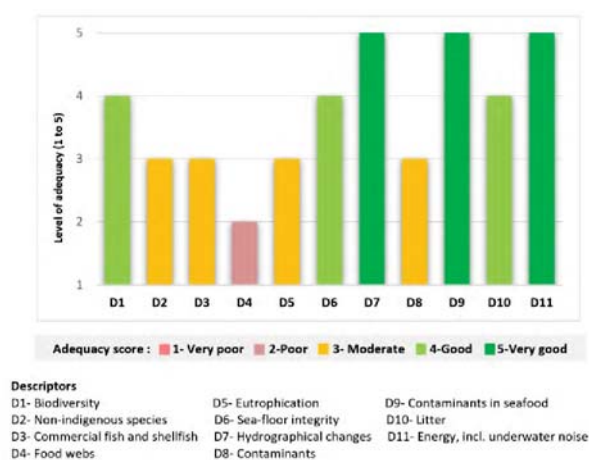
⁽⁶⁴⁾ Communication from the Commission of 11 March 2024 – Commission notice on the threshold values set under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC) and Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 (OJ C, C/2024/2078, 11.3.2024), <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/2078/oj>.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/C_2023_2203_F1_COMMUNICATION_FROM_COMMISSION_EN_V5_P1_2532109.PDF.

parameters identified monitoring gaps. The Commission recommended that Member States should prioritise work to address those gaps at all levels of implementation of the MSFD.

Member States also reported their updated programmes of measures, which are required under Article 13 of the MSFD and which must be updated every six years. The Commission has assessed Member States' programmes of measures.

Figure 14: Level of adequacy of Belgium's updated programme of measures under Article 13 of the MSFD (2022 reporting exercise)



Source: Technical assessment carried out by the European Commission, pursuant to Article 16 of the MSFD, based on the data reported by Belgium in March 2022.

Belgium's updated programme of measures scores unevenly across the different descriptors. Measures for biodiversity (D1), sea-floor integrity (D6), hydrographical changes (D7), contaminants in seafood (D8), litter (D10) and energy (D11) showed positive adequacy ('good' or 'very good').

For non-indigenous species (D2), commercial fish and shellfish (D3), eutrophication (D5) and contaminants (D8), the assessment revealed moderate adequacy, signalling room for progress in defining effective and comprehensive measures in these areas. For instance, while measures for D2 adequately considered the introduction of non-

indigenous species via shipping, they did not cover risks of introduction through aquaculture or offshore wind farms. Lastly, measures for food webs (D4) were assessed as poorly adequate, emphasising the need for targeted actions addressing more directly the pressures on this descriptor.

Prevention and management of invasive alien species

Invasive alien species (IAS) are a major cause of biodiversity loss in the EU. Besides inflicting direct and indirect damage on nature and the economy, some IAS also carry and spread infectious diseases, posing a threat to humans and wildlife. Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 (the IAS Regulation) aims to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse impacts of IAS on biodiversity. It focuses action on a list of IAS of EU concern (the 'Union list'), which is regularly updated ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

The third update of the Union list ⁽⁶⁷⁾ entered into force on 2 August 2022. The fourth update is in preparation.

The IAS Regulation ⁽⁶⁸⁾ currently lists 88 species subject to restrictions on keeping, importing, selling, breeding, growing and releasing into the environment. Member States are required to take measures to (i) prevent the introduction of IAS, (ii) ensure early detection and rapid eradication of IAS and (iii) manage species that are already widespread on their territory.

This aligns with target 6 of the GBF to reduce the introduction of IAS by at least 50 % by 2030 and minimise their impact.

Preventing the introduction and spread of IAS, and managing them, including through eradication and control, can result in a substantial cost saving. Studies estimate that the total cost of IAS in Europe (damages and management) amounted to EUR 116.61 billion between 1960 and 2020 ⁽⁶⁹⁾. More recent studies have put this cost at USD 28 billion per year in the EU, increasing to

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2016/1141 of 13 July 2016 adopting a list of invasive alien species of Union concern pursuant to Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 189, 14.7.2016, p. 4), as amended by Commission Implementing Regulations (EU) 2017/1263, (EU) 2019/1262 and (EU) 2022/1203, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02016R1141-20220802&from=EN>.

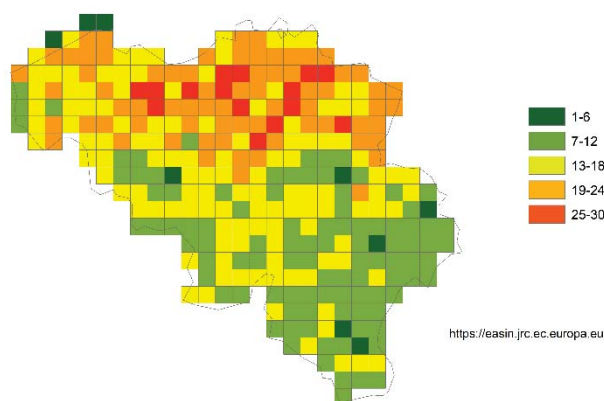
⁽⁶⁷⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R1203>.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species (OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 35).

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Haubrock, P. J., Turbelin, A. J., Cuthbert, R. N. et al., 'Economic costs of invasive alien species across Europe', *NeoBiota*, Vol. 63, 2021, pp. 153–190.

USD 148.2 billion by 2040 ⁽⁷⁰⁾, and at USD 423 billion annually at the global level ⁽⁷¹⁾.

Figure 15: Number of IAS of EU concern, based on available georeferenced information for Belgium, 2024



NB: This includes 40 species recorded in the previous EIR (2021) and 21 new additions. Of these new additions, 12 were already on the Union concern list in 2021, and nine were added later under Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1203.

Total invasive alien species of Union Concern in the country: 61

This includes 40 species recorded in the previous EIR (2021) and 21 new additions. Of these new additions, 12 were already on the Union Concern list in 2021, and 9 were added later under Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1203.

In June 2022 Belgium adopted its national action plan on the unintentional introduction and spread of IAS.

2025 priority action

- Step up implementation of the IAS Regulation, including with regard to enforcement and the capacity of inspection authorities.

Ecosystem assessment and accounting

The BDS calls on Member States to better integrate biodiversity considerations into public and business decision-making at all levels and to develop natural capital accounting.

Similarly, target 14 of the GBF ⁽⁷²⁾ aims to ensure the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policy and planning and, as appropriate, national accounting. This requires effective and coherent biodiversity observation and reporting on ecosystem condition in the EU ⁽⁷³⁾.

The amended Regulation (EU) 691/2011 on European environmental economic accounts ⁽⁷⁴⁾ introduces new requirements for Member States to report on the condition of ecosystems including urban ecosystems, croplands, grasslands, forest and woodlands, coastal beaches, dunes and wetlands. Data reported by the Member States will feed into the second European ecosystem assessment, due in 2027, and can also be used to support policy decisions.

An ecosystem assessment is an analysis of the condition of ecosystems and the pressures acting on them, as well as the benefits that they provide to people, either directly or indirectly through the economy.

In Belgium, environmental policy related to land-use planning is regionalised. Therefore the priorities, knowledge gaps, support needed and state of research depend on the region. The Brussels Region has not taken any initiatives yet in developing natural capital accounting. The Walloon Region has just started implementing its Nature Value Explorer tool ⁽⁷⁵⁾. Therefore the information provided mainly focuses on the Flemish Region.

A key motivation for developing natural capital accounting for the Flemish Region relates to the ambition to bring

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Henry, M., Leung, B., Cuthbert, R. N. et al., 'Unveiling the hidden economic toll of biological invasions in the European Union', *Environmental Sciences Europe*, Vol. 35, No 1, 2023, p. 43.

⁽⁷¹⁾ IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), *Summary for Policymakers – Invasive alien species assessment*, Bonn, 2023, <https://www.ipbes.net/document-library-catalogue/summary-policy-makers-invasive-alien-species-assessment>.

⁽⁷²⁾ Decision 15/4 adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity: Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (<https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>).

⁽⁷³⁾ European Commission: Joint Research Centre and EEA, *EU Ecosystem Assessment – Summary for policymakers*, Publications

Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/81ff1498-b91d-11eb-8aca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 691/2011 as regards introducing new environmental economic accounts modules, COM(2022) 329 final of 11 July 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2022:329:FIN>.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ <https://ipbes.net/policy-support/tools-instruments/natuurwaardeverkenner-nature-value-explorer>.

together and structure data in support of better policy and public debate. Thematic policy prioritises four research subjects: climate; health; the monitoring of sustainable development goals and development of indicators beyond GDP; and the monitoring of land-use change. In the Flemish Region, both the extent account and the ecosystem supply and use accounts (in physical and monetary terms) are published.

Challenges identified by this data in the Flemish Region relate to carbon storage in biomass; the health effects of green space; functional biodiversity and its contribution to the supply of ecosystem services; and the accuracy of the base layers of the land-use/land-cover map. Moreover, the relevant data, knowledge, skills and resources are scattered across different entities, which impedes building appropriate ecosystem models.

An increasing number of platforms, networks and communities of practice involve businesses in protecting biodiversity, including the EU Business & Biodiversity Platform⁽⁷⁶⁾. These platforms and communities are key tools for promoting and facilitating natural capital

assessments among businesses and financial services providers.

Natural capital assessments help private businesses to better understand both the negative and positive impacts that they have on nature, and to appreciate how nature contributes to their success. Such understanding contributes to the implementation of the EU's BDS.

Two of Belgium's 2022 priority actions on (i) supporting the mapping and assessment of ecosystems and their services and (ii) the development of natural capital accounting cannot be assessed due to lack of data and will be assessed in the next cycle of the EIR. The other priority action on supporting national business and biodiversity platforms is assessed as having made substantial progress since there are two business and biodiversity networks active in Belgium, and both are active members of the EU Business & Biodiversity Platform.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ The EU Business & Biodiversity Platform (https://green-business.ec.europa.eu/business-and-biodiversity_en) aims to promote the business case for biodiversity to businesses and financial institutions

through workshops, seminars, reports and a cross-media communication strategy.

3. Zero pollution

Clean air

EU clean air policies and legislation have successfully reduced emissions of key air pollutants and significantly improved air quality, which is now moving towards the levels recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). This has resulted in clear health benefits and reduced adverse impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity. However, to achieve the WHO-recommended levels, more efforts are needed, including full compliance with EU legislation. To guide these efforts, the EU zero pollution action plan sets targets for 2030 relative to 2005. These are to reduce the health impacts of air pollution by 55 % and to reduce the EU ecosystems threatened by air pollution by 25 %.

The EU has developed a comprehensive suite of air quality policies⁽⁷⁷⁾. These set health-based EU air quality standards⁽⁷⁸⁾ and stipulate Member States' national emission reduction commitments⁽⁷⁹⁾ for several air pollutants.

Air quality in Belgium is generally good with some exceptions.

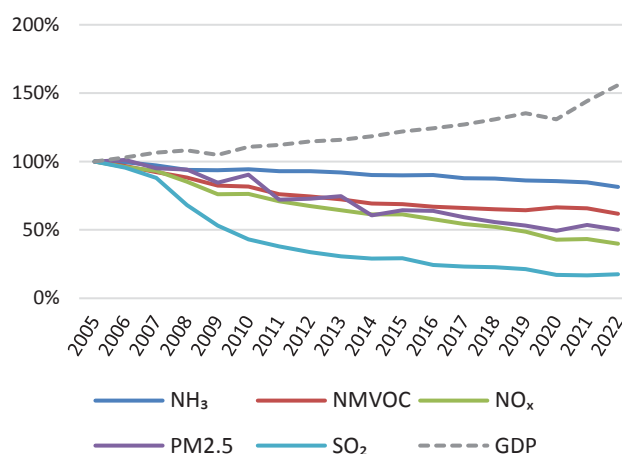
The latest available annual estimates (for 2022) by the EEA⁽⁸⁰⁾ for Belgium attribute 4 100 deaths each year (or 41 300 years of life lost (YLL)) to fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5})⁽⁸¹⁾; 1 200 deaths each year (or 12 300 YLL) to nitrogen dioxide (NO₂)⁽⁸²⁾; and 1 400 deaths each year (or 13 700 YLL) to ozone⁽⁸³⁾.

The emissions of several air pollutants have decreased significantly in Belgium since 2005, while GDP growth has continued (see Figure 16). According to the inventories submitted under Article 10(2) of the National Emission Reduction Commitments Directive (NECD)⁽⁸⁴⁾ in 2024, Belgium meets its emission reduction commitments for 2020–2029 for air pollutants NO_x, non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC), sulphur dioxide (SO₂),

ammonia (NH₃) and PM_{2.5}. According to the projections submitted under Article 10(2) of the NECD in 2023, Belgium is projected to meet its emission reduction commitments for 2030 onwards for NO_x, NMVOC, SO₂, NH₃ and PM_{2.5}.

Belgium submitted its updated national air pollution control programme (NAPCP) to the Commission on 27 April 2023.

Figure 16: Emission trends of main pollutants / GDP in Belgium (%), 2005–2022



Source: EEA, 'National air pollutant emissions data viewer 2005–2022', 25 June 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/air-pollution/national-air-pollutant-emissions-data-viewer-2005-2022>.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ European Commission, 'Air', European Commission website, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air_en.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ European Commission, 'Air quality standards', https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/air-quality/eu-air-quality-standards_en.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ European Commission, 'Reducing emissions of air pollutants', https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/reducing-emissions-air-pollutants_en.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ EEA, *Harm to human health from air pollution in Europe: Burden of disease status*, briefing No 21/2024, Copenhagen, 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/harm-to-human-health-from-air-pollution-2024>.

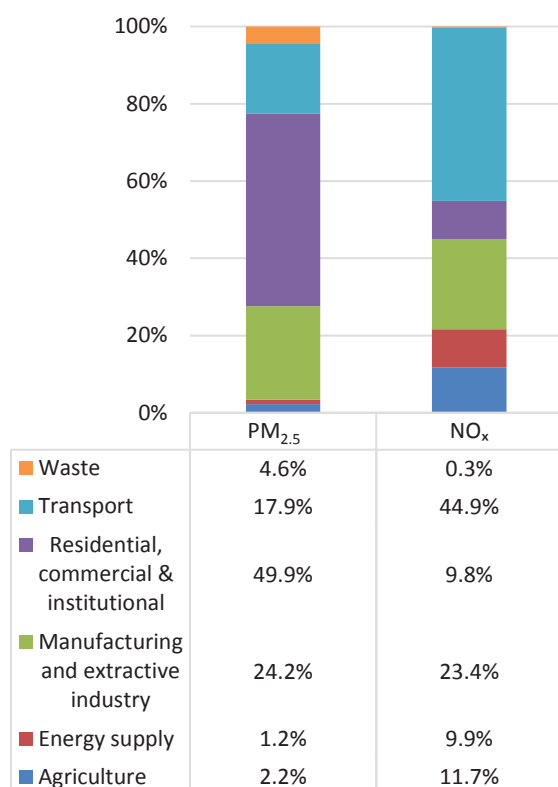
⁽⁸¹⁾ Particulate matter (PM) is a mixture of aerosol particles (solid and liquid) covering a wide range of sizes and chemical compositions. PM₁₀ refers to particles with a diameter of 10 µm or less. PM_{2.5} refers to particles with a diameter of 2.5 µm or less. PM is emitted from many human sources, including combustion.

⁽⁸²⁾ Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) here pertains to a group of gases called NO_x, which also comprises nitrogen monoxide (NO). NO_x is emitted during fuel combustion – for example, from industrial facilities and the road transport sector.

⁽⁸³⁾ Low-level ozone is produced by photochemical action on pollution. This year, for the first time, the impact of long-term exposure to ozone has also been taken into account. In previous analysis by the EEA, only the impact of short-term exposure was estimated.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Directive (EU) 2016/2284 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2016 on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants, amending Directive 2003/35/EC and repealing Directive 2001/81/EC (OJ L 344, 17.12.2016, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2016.344.01.0001.01.ENG.

Figure 17: PM_{2.5} and NO_x emissions by sector in Belgium (%), 2022



Source: EEA, 'National air pollutant emissions data viewer 2005–2022', 25 June 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/air-pollution/national-air-pollutant-emissions-data-viewer-2005-2022>.

In 2023, exceedances above the limit values set by the Ambient Air Quality Directive (AAQD) ⁽⁸⁵⁾ were registered for NO₂ in two air quality zones ⁽⁸⁶⁾ in Belgium. Furthermore, the target value for arsenic concentration has not been met in one air quality zone ⁽⁸⁷⁾.

Persistent breaches of air quality requirements, which have severe negative effects on health and the environment, are being followed up by the European Commission through infringement procedures covering all Member States concerned, including Belgium for exceedances of NO₂ limit values (INFR(2016)2005). The aim is that appropriate measures are put in place to bring all air quality zones into compliance.

In the 2022 EIR, Belgium received three priority actions. The first priority action was to further reduce emissions in

the context of the NAPCP. Belgium has fulfilled this as current emissions have been reduced to meet the 2020–2029 as well as the 2030-onwards emission reduction commitments. The second priority action was to ensure full compliance with EU air quality standards and maintain downward emission trends. Based on the latest data, Belgium has made some progress in this regard. Since 2019, downward emission trends have been reported for all main air pollutants. However, exceedances above limit values and target values remain for NO₂ and arsenic, requiring further action. The third priority action received by Belgium was to ratify the amended Gothenburg Protocol, the Protocol on Heavy Metals and the Aarhus Protocol, which has been fulfilled.

2025 priority actions

- As part of the NAPCP, take action to reduce emissions of air pollutants.
- Ensure full compliance with the current AAQD standards, also in light of future stricter requirements under the revised AAQD.

Industrial emissions

The main objectives of EU policy on industrial emissions are to:

- protect air, water and soil and to prevent harmful effects on human health and the environment;
- prevent and manage waste;
- improve energy and resource efficiency, including water;
- contribute to decarbonisation.

The cornerstone of the policy is the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED), which was revised in 2024 ⁽⁸⁸⁾. The revision improves the directive's contribution to the zero pollution objective. It has a strong focus on innovation, and builds solid links between depollution, decarbonisation and circularity, making it a key regulatory tool to accompany the green transformation of EU industry by 2050.

The overview of industrial activities regulated by the IED below is based on data reported to the EU Registry in 2022 ⁽⁸⁹⁾.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Directive 2008/50/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (OJ L 152, 11.6.2008, p. 1), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008L0050>.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Antwerp and Ghent.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ EEA, Eionet Central Data Repository (<https://cdr.eionet.europa.eu>).

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial and livestock rearing

emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (OJ L 334, 17.12.2010, p. 17), as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1785 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02010L0075-20240804&qid=1725983863299>.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ EEA, European Industrial Emissions Portal, <https://industry.eea.europa.eu/>, 2022 being the baseline year for all reports.

In Belgium, around 2 457 industrial installations are required to have a permit based on the IED.

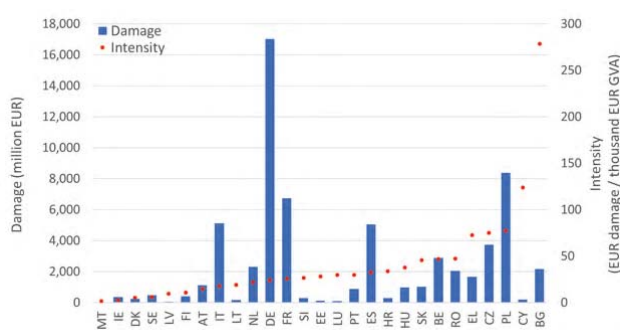
The industrial sectors in Belgium with the most IED installations in 2022 were: (i) intensive rearing of poultry or pigs (44 %); (ii) waste management (19.6 %); (iii) chemicals production (10.8 %); (iv) food and drink production (7.7 %); and (v) surface treatment of metals (7.5 %).

Figure 18 shows the damage to health and the environment due to the main industrial air pollutants. As this depends, among other factors, on the size of the industrial sector in each Member State, the figure also shows the ratio between the damage and the industrial activity (expressed in gross value added (GVA)), which gives an indication of the emissions intensity. Belgium has the seventh highest damage level and is also the Member State with the seventh highest emissions intensity, above the EU average of EUR 27.5/EUR 1 000 GVA.

The main industrial contributors to emissions to air ⁽⁹⁰⁾ are:

- ‘other activities’ (mostly the surface treatment of metals, the intensive rearing of poultry or pigs and the production of pulp paper) for NMVOCs, NH₃, copper (Cu), zinc (Zn), cadmium (Cd), nickel (Ni) and PM_{2.5};
- metal production for lead (Pb), arsenic (As) and SO_x;
- chemicals production for NMVOCs, NO_x, SO_x, Ni, As and mercury (Hg);
- electricity production for NO_x, Zn, As, Hg, Ni, chromium (Cr), Cd, Pb and dioxins;
- waste management for dioxins.

Figure 18: Industrial air pollution damage and intensity per Member State, 2021

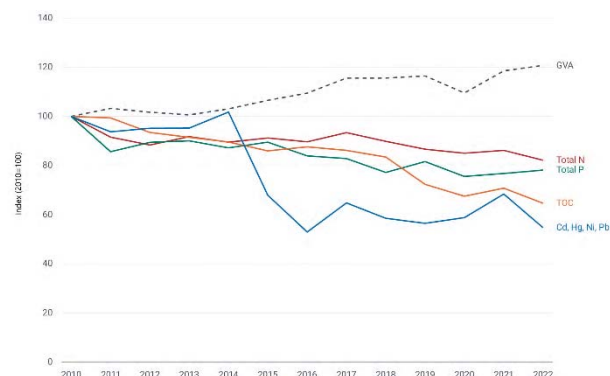


Source: EEA, ‘Industrial pollution intensity indicators – EU large industry air pollution damage costs intensity’, European Industrial Emissions Portal, 2024, <https://industry.eea.europa.eu/analyse/industrial-emissions-indicator>.

Overall, the industrial emissions to water in the EU have decreased over time for all the main pollutants. On average in the EU, they appear to be decoupled from

industrial activity, which has increased over the same period (expressed in GVA), as shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Industrial releases of pollutants to water and industrial activity in the EU-27



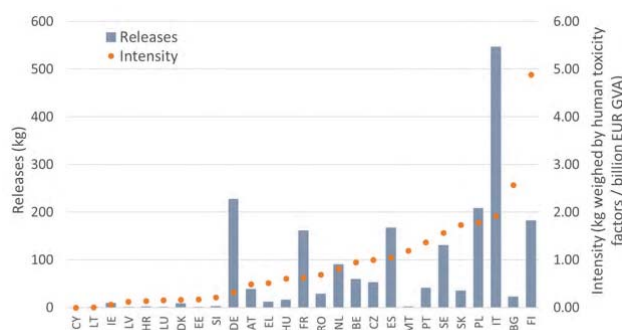
NB: Cd, cadmium; Hg, mercury; Ni, nickel; Pb, lead; total N, total nitrogen; TOC, total organic carbon; total P, total phosphorous.

Source: EEA, ‘Industrial pollutant releases to water in Europe’, 30 May 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/indicators/industrial-pollutant-releases-to-water>.

With regard to Belgium in particular, Figure 20 shows the industrial emissions of heavy metals to water, taking into account the human toxicity of each metal, as well as emissions intensity, based on the ratio with industrial activity (expressed in GVA).

Belgium has the 9th highest amount of emissions of heavy metals to water and is in the 11th position for emission intensity (above the EU average intensity of 0.864 kg/EUR 1 billion GVA).

Figure 20: Industrial releases and intensity of heavy metals to water per Member State, 2022



Source: EEA, ‘Industrial pollution intensity indicators – EU large industry water pollution intensity’, European Industrial Emissions Portal, 2024, <https://industry.eea.europa.eu/analyse/industrial-emissions-indicator>.

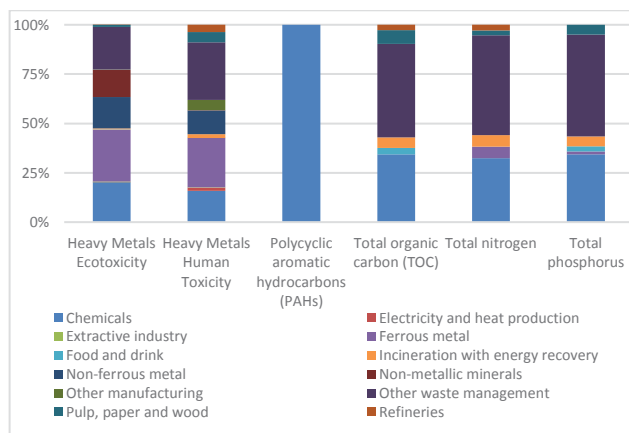
As shown in Figure 21, the main industrial contributors to emissions to water in Belgium are: (i) landfills for municipal waste; (ii) pulp and paper production (for nitrogen, phosphorous and total organic carbon); (iii) the

⁽⁹⁰⁾ European Environment Agency, LRTAP, Air pollutant emissions data viewer (Gothenburg Protocol, LRTAP Convention) 1990-

2022, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/air-pollution/air-pollutant-emissions-data-viewer-1990-2022>.

metals industry; (iv) chemicals production and (v) landfills for heavy metals.

Figure 21: Relative releases to water from industry in Belgium (%), 2022



Source: EEA, 'Industrial reporting under the industrial emissions Directive 2010/75/EU and European pollutant release and transfer register Regulation (EC) No 166/2006 – ver. 12.0 Sep. 2024 (tabular data)', EEA Geospatial Data Catalogue, 13 September 2024, <https://sdi.eea.europa.eu/catalogue/srv/api/records/cf5e54c1-be99-4426-bcad-baa26c4f27a0?language=all>.

IED provisions on public information and participation require Member States to adopt transposition legislation enabling members of the public to have access to relevant information and participate in the approval process for potentially polluting installations. Thus, the public and NGOs, alongside competent authorities, play a role in ensuring compliance of these permits with EU legislation. The IED contains mandatory requirements on environmental inspections, requiring a site visit to take place at least every one to three years, using risk-based criteria. In addition, IED enforcement provisions require Member States to determine effective, proportionate, and dissuasive penalties applicable to infringements of IED-based national provisions. In the revised directive, the provisions set that worst infringements can be sanctioned by fines of at least 3% of the annual EU turnover of the legal person. The revised IED also introduces a right to compensation for people whose health has been harmed by such infringements.

The development of best available techniques (BATs), BAT reference documents and BAT conclusions ensures effective collaboration between stakeholders and enables better implementation of the IED.

Since the 2022 EIR, the Commission has adopted BAT conclusions for: (i) ferrous metal processing; (ii) the textiles industry; (iii) common waste gas management and

treatment systems in the chemical sector; and (iv) smitheries and foundries.

The Commission relies on the efforts of national competent authorities to implement the legally binding BAT conclusions and associated BAT emission levels in environmental permits. This should result in considerable and continuous reductions in pollution.

2025 priority actions

- Reduce industrial air pollution damage and intensity.
- Reduce industrial releases to water, and their intensity.
- Engage with industry and environmental NGOs to ensure proper contribution to and implementation of BAT conclusions and ensure timely updates to permits following the publication of BAT conclusions.
- Ensure effective public participation and access to justice in relation to the IED.

Major industrial accidents prevention – Seveso

The main objectives of EU policy on the prevention of major industrial accidents are to:

- control major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances, especially chemicals;
- limit the consequences of such accidents for human health and the environment;
- continuously improve the prevention of, preparedness for and response to major accidents.

The cornerstone of the policy is Directive 2012/18/EU (the Seveso III Directive ⁽⁹¹⁾).

The overview below of industrial plants regulated by the Seveso III Directive ('Seveso establishments') is based on data reported on eSPIRS (e-Seveso Plants Information Retrieval System) for 2022–2024 ⁽⁹²⁾ and the report by Belgium on the implementation of the Seveso III Directive for 2019–2022 ⁽⁹³⁾.

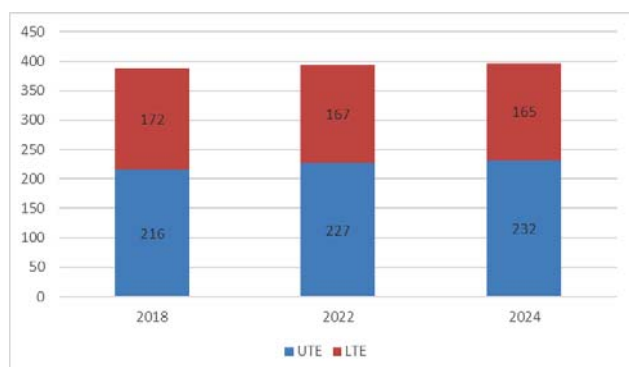
In Belgium, in 2024, of the 397 Seveso establishments, 165 are categorised as lower-tier establishments and 232 as upper-tier establishments (UTEs) based on the quantity of hazardous substances likely to be present in them. The UTEs are subject to more stringent requirements. The change in of the number of Seveso establishments since 2018 is presented in Figure 22.

⁽⁹¹⁾ Directive 2012/18/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances, amending and subsequently repealing Council Directive 96/82/EC (OJ L 197, 24.7.2012, p. 1), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2012/18/oj>.

⁽⁹²⁾ <https://espairs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/espairs/content>; data extracted in September 2024.

⁽⁹³⁾ As provided for by Article 21(2) of the Seveso III Directive.

Figure 22: Number of Seveso establishments in Belgium, 2018, 2022 and 2024

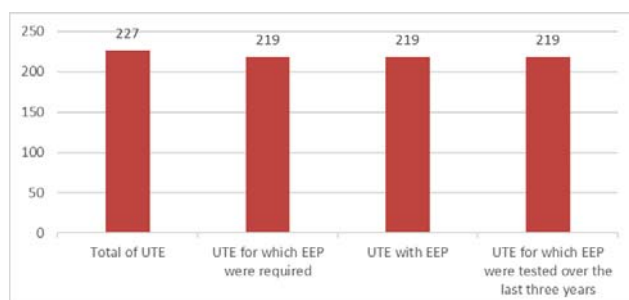


NB: LTE, lower-tier establishment.

Sources: European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, Assessment and summary of Member States' implementation reports for Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU (implementing Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d57d74-735b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>; eSPIRS data, extractions from 2022 and 2024; Analysis and summary of Member States' reports on implementation of Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances according to the format established by Commission Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU - Publications Office of the EU, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9bd73087-e9b8-11ef-b5e9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

Member States are required to draw up external emergency plans (EEPs) for certain UTEs. These EEPs are essential to allow proper preparation and effective implementation of the necessary actions to protect the environment and the population should a major industrial accident occur. According to Belgium, in 2022, an EEP was required for 219 UTEs out of 227 UTEs in total; 219 UTEs had an EEP and all of these EEPs had been tested over the last three years. The summary of EEPs in Belgium is shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23: Situation regarding EEPs in Belgium, 2022



Sources: European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, Assessment and summary of Member States' implementation reports for Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU (implementing Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d57d74-735b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>; eSPIRS data, extractions from 2022 and 2024; Analysis and summary of Member States' reports on implementation of Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances according to the format established by Commission Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU - Publications Office of the EU, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9bd73087-e9b8-11ef-b5e9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

(⁹⁴) No data available for Greece

[/publication/94d57d74-735b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d57d74-735b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search); eSPIRS data, extractions from 2022 and 2024; Analysis and summary of Member States' reports on implementation of Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances according to the format established by Commission Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU - Publications Office of the EU, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9bd73087-e9b8-11ef-b5e9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

The following types of information are permanently available for all Seveso establishments in Belgium: (i) information for the public referred to in Annex V to the Seveso III Directive, especially about how the public concerned will be warned if there is a major accident; (ii) information about appropriate behaviour in the event of a major accident; and (iii) information containing the date of the last site visit.

The shares of UTEs for which information on safety measures and requisite behaviours in the EU-27 was actively made available to the public in recent years are presented in Figure 24(⁹⁴). This provision on knowledge is an important provision of the Seveso III Directive, as awareness by the public of this information may ameliorate the consequences of a major industrial accident.

Figure 24: Share of UTEs for which information on safety measures and requisite behaviours was actively made available to the public per Member State (%), 2022



N.B. No data available for Greece.

Sources: European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, Assessment and summary of Member States' implementation reports for Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU (implementing Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/94d57d74-735b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>; eSPIRS data, extractions from 2022 and 2024; Analysis and summary of Member States' reports on implementation of Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances according to the format established by Commission Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU - Publications Office of the EU, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9bd73087-e9b8-11ef-b5e9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

Mercury Regulation

The Mercury Regulation establishes measures and conditions concerning the use and storage of and trade in mercury, mercury compounds and mixtures of mercury, the manufacture and use of and trade in mercury-added products and the management of mercury waste, in order to ensure a high level of protection of human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds. The revision of the Mercury Regulation adopted in 2024 sets out rules to address the last intentional uses of mercury in the EU by phasing out the use of dental amalgam by 1 January 2025 except when deemed strictly necessary by the dental practitioner based on the specific medical needs of the patient, and prohibiting the manufacture and export of additional mercury-containing lamps from 1 January 2026 or 1 January 2027 (depending on the lamp category).

Measures should have been put in place in Belgium to ensure a socially and economically sound phase-out, including the training of dental practitioners and adequate reimbursement for the alternatives to dental amalgam through the health insurance scheme. The Commission is monitoring whether the phase-out of dental amalgam has taken place under the terms and conditions of the regulation. Belgium will also need to ensure that the manufacture and export of mercury-containing lamps are prohibited by the deadlines required by the Mercury Regulation.

Noise

The Environmental Noise Directive ⁽⁹⁵⁾ requires a common approach to avoid, prevent and reduce the harmful effects of noise. The designated authorities are responsible for making and approving noise maps and action plans for agglomerations, major roads, major railways and major airports. Member States decide on noise limits that are not set at the EU level. Nevertheless, the zero pollution action plan sets as a 2030 target a 30 % reduction compared with 2017 in the share of people chronically

disturbed by transport noise.

Excessive noise from aircraft, railways and roads is one of the main causes of environmental health-related issues in the EU. It can cause ischaemic heart disease, stroke, interrupted sleep, cognitive impairment and stress ⁽⁹⁶⁾.

In Belgium, environmental noise is estimated to cause at least around 670 cases of ischaemic heart disease annually ⁽⁹⁷⁾ and some 140 000 people to suffer from disturbed sleep⁽⁹⁸⁾.

Based on the latest set of information analysed, Belgium has completed its noise mapping of agglomerations, roads, railways and airports.

Action plans for noise management for agglomerations, roads, railways and airports must be updated and submitted to the Commission every five years. The deadline for reporting noise action plans under the most recent reporting cycle was 18 January 2025; these plans have not been assessed as yet.

Belgium received no priority action on this topic in the 2022 EIR.

2025 priority action

- Complete and implement action plans on noise management.

Water quality and management

EU legislation and policy requires that the impact of pressures on transitional waters, coastal waters and fresh waters (including surface waters and groundwater) be significantly reduced. Achieving, maintaining or enhancing a good status of waterbodies as defined by the Water Framework Directive will ensure that EU citizens and the environment benefit from good-quality and safe drinking and bathing water. It will further ensure that the nutrient cycle (nitrogen and phosphorus) is managed in a more sustainable and resource-efficient way.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise – Declaration by the Commission in the Conciliation Committee on the directive relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise (OJ L 189, 18.7.2002, p. 12), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32002L0049>.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ WHO, *Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region*, Copenhagen, 2018, <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289053563>.

⁽⁹⁷⁾ These figures are an estimation by the EEA based on: (i) the data reported by Member States on noise exposure covered by Directive 2002/49/EC for the round of noise mapping of 2022; (ii) European Topic Centre on Air Pollution, Transport, Noise and

Industrial Pollution (ETC/ATNI), *Noise Indicators under the Environmental Noise Directive 2021: Methodology for estimating missing data*, Eionet report ETC/ATNI No 2021/06, Kjeller, 2021; and (iii) the methodology for health impact calculations in European Topic Centre on Air Pollution and Climate Change Mitigation (ETC/ACM), *Implications of environmental noise on health and wellbeing in Europe*, Eionet report ETC/ACM No 2018/10, Bilthoven, 2018, https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-atni/products/etc-atni-reports/eionet_rep_etcacm_2018_10_healthimplicationsnoise.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ More information on the adverse health effects of noise pollution is available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/human/noise/noise-2>

Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive ⁽⁹⁹⁾ is the cornerstone of EU water policy ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. The Water Framework Directive and other water-related directives ⁽¹⁰¹⁾ form the basis of sustainable and integrated water management in the EU. They aim to achieve a high level of protection of water resources, prevention of further deterioration and restoration to good status. These objectives are very important for the EU's competitiveness, strategic autonomy and security, yet have become even more challenging in the face of climate change affecting our precious water resources.

The Water Framework Directive establishes a procedural framework for reaching good surface water ecological and chemical status and good groundwater quantitative and chemical status. This implies monitoring and classification of all waterbodies, assessment of pressures and impacts and identification of the most cost-effective measures to achieve the objectives of the directive. The directive dates from 2000 and set an initial deadline of 2015 for achieving its objectives, with the option to extend the deadline to the end of 2027. Every six years, Member States must report their river basin management plans (RBMPs) to the Commission. They should cover river basin districts in their countries, some of which may be shared with other countries. The Commission has assessed the third cycle of RBMPs, which were to be submitted by March 2022, and reported its findings to the European Parliament and to the Council on 4th February 2025⁽¹⁰²⁾.

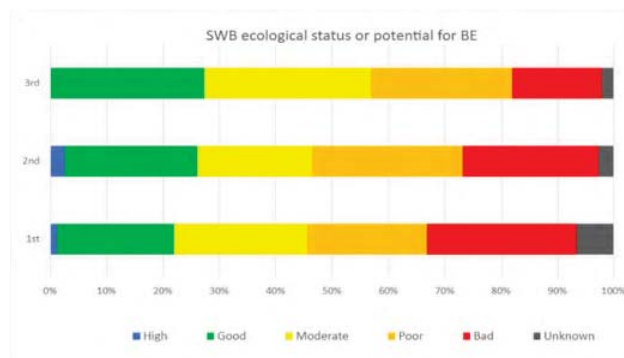
Belgium has 560 surface waterbodies (533 rivers, 18 lakes, 7 transitional bodies, 1 coastal body, 1 territorial body) and 81 groundwater bodies, divided over four river basins (Scheldt, Meuse, Rhine and Seine), which are subdivided into eight river basin districts.

It follows from the assessment of the third RBMPs that there has only been a minor improvement in the ecological status/potential of surface waterbodies, and no improvement in their chemical status compared with the status reported in the second RBMPs (covering 2015–2021). Heavily modified water and artificial waterbodies must reach good ecological potential rather than good ecological status, which means that all measures must be

taken to mitigate the adverse impact of the sustainable human development activities causing the waterbody to be heavily modified/artificial, while not significantly affecting these activities.

The following figures show the evolution of the ecological status/potential and the chemical status of surface waters, and of the quantitative and chemical status of groundwater in 2010, 2015 and 2021.

Figure 25: Ecological status/potential of surface waterbodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



Only 27.4 % of surface waterbodies have a good or high ecological status/potential. Most of these are in the Walloon Region (43 %), whereas the Flemish Region only has 0.5 %. All three surface waterbodies in the Brussels Region have below good potential. The North Sea coastal waterbody has a moderate status.

The main challenges come from agricultural (nitrates and pesticides pollution), population density (land use and wastewater discharges) and hydromorphological pressures. Legacy pollution and transboundary pollution are also problems.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32000L0060>.

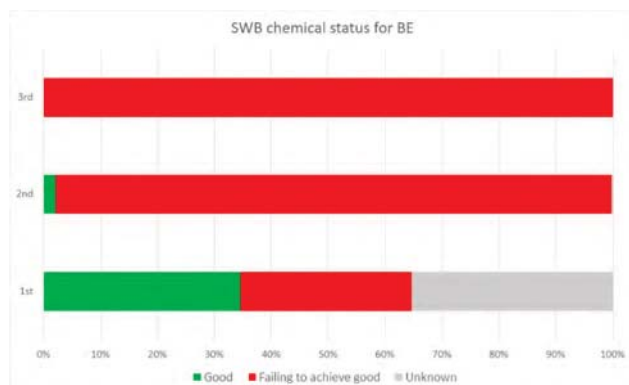
⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water_en.

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ These include the Groundwater Directive (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32006L0118>), the Environmental Quality Standards Directive (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/105/oj>), the Floods Directive (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32007L0060>), the Bathing Water Directive (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32006L0007>), the UWWTD (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32010L0075>).

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31991L0271>), the new Drinking Water Directive (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020L2184>), the Nitrates Directive (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A31991L0676>), the MSFD (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008L0056>) and the IED (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32010L0075>).

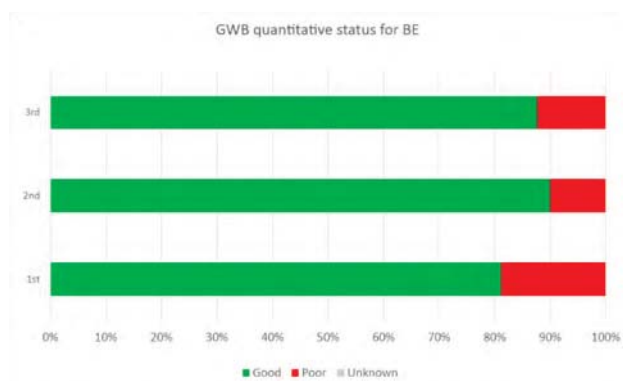
⁽¹⁰²⁾ ENV - Bibliothèque

Figure 26: Chemical status of surface waterbodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



Failure to achieve good chemical status is mostly due to ubiquitous persistent bioaccumulative and toxic substances (uPBTs), which are difficult to address and often have transboundary sources. In the Flemish and Brussels Regions, these uPBTs are mainly mercury, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and heptachlor, and in the Walloon Region, they are mainly mercury and polybrominated diphenyl ethers. Non-uPBT substances causing poor chemical status are largely metals (Pb, Cd and Ni) along with industrial chemicals (nonylphenol and di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate).

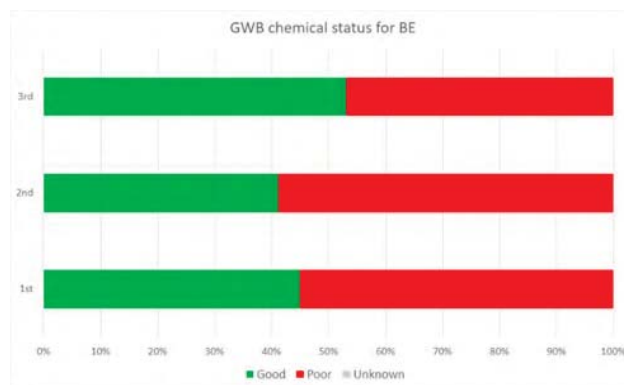
Figure 27: Quantitative status of groundwater bodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



There has been a slight decrease in groundwater bodies with good quantitative status since the second RBMPs, with 10 out of 81 having poor quantitative status, nine of which are in the Flemish Region.

Water abstraction is a significant and increasing pressure, and 40 out of 81 groundwater bodies (mainly in the Flemish Region) have been identified as at risk of failing to achieve good quantitative status by 2027.

Figure 28: Chemical status of groundwater bodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



For the Flemish Region, the top five pollutants causing failure to achieve good chemical status in groundwater bodies are nitrates, potassium, pesticides, N,N-dimethylsulfamide and bentazone. For the Walloon Region, failure is mainly due to nitrates, phosphates and pesticides, which are all associated with agricultural activities.

Until the end of 2027, Member States can apply for time-related exemptions, subject to providing evidence of compliance with the strict criteria set out in the Water Framework Directive. After 2027, the possibilities for applying for exemptions will be much more limited.

A positive point is that the third Belgian RBMPs are based on a solid impact assessment of the main pressures/impacts; a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of existing measures and a gap analysis; and a shortlist of additional measures based on effectiveness, technical feasibility, support, costs and benefits. In the Flemish Region, the Flemish Blue Deal sets out an ambitious plan to combat water scarcity and manage drought risks, and the 'great river acceleration' special action plan includes over 1 000 actions to reduce, inter alia, the impacts of nitrates and phosphates from agriculture.

In 2024, the Commission opened a legal case (INFR(2024)2231) alleging that Article 11(3) of the Water Framework Directive must be understood as requiring that authorisations for abstraction of and discharge into water are always subject to periodic review and that the review interval should not exceed 12 years. Belgian (regional) law does not always require review or has review intervals that are too long. The reply is outstanding.

2025 priority actions

Without prejudice to the list of recommended actions in the Commission report to the European Parliament and to

the Council on the assessment of the third RBMPs, the following priority actions can be highlighted:

- Improve river continuity and ecological flows, boosting efforts to introduce nature-based solutions to reduce hydromorphological pressures.
- Ensure periodic reviews of permits for discharges, abstractions and other water uses, including hydropower pressures.
- Reduce pollution from nutrients, chemicals, metals and saline discharges.
- Better justify exemptions to the achievement of good status.
- Improve the classification of water bodies and strengthen monitoring systems.
- Develop more robust programmes of measures, tackle obstacles identified in the implementation of measures and ensure adequate financing for implementation, including through better use of the cost recovery and polluter pays principle.

Floods Directive

Every six years, following the same reporting cycle as the RBMPs, all Member States also report their flood risk management plans (FRMPs), based on the flood hazard and risk maps (FHRMs) and the preliminary flood risk assessments drawn up during the second cycle (2016–2021).

The Commission assessed the FRMPs and reported its findings to the European Parliament and to the Council on 4th February 2025, together with the assessment of the RBMPs.

The main progress resulting from the assessment of the second FRMPs is that all of Belgium's FRMPs now include a clear and explicit description of the measures with regard to their aims, location, implementation process and timeline, as well as their costs (for the FRMP as a whole in the case of the Flemish Region, and for individual measures, for all three regions). Furthermore, all FRMPs report geographic coverage for all measures. Very importantly, the second FRMPs describe climate impacts

on flooding and prioritise addressing the impacts of climate change on flood risk to a greater extent. There is better international and interregional cooperation, as well as broad stakeholder involvement.

2025 priority actions

- FRMPs should provide details on how the FHRMs were used in the choice of measures and how to consider pluvial flooding.
- Consider future climate scenarios in the FRMPs.
- Better explain the choice and implementation of flood prevention and protection measures (prioritisation, monitoring, costs of measures).

Drinking Water Directive

The recast Drinking Water Directive is now applicable, and Member States were required to transpose its provisions into their national legal systems by 12 January 2023. Since the entry into force of the recast directive, the Commission has adopted several delegated and implementing acts establishing (i) a watch list of substances and compounds of concern for drinking water ⁽¹⁰³⁾, (ii) a methodology for measuring microplastics in drinking water ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ and (iii) an EU system for testing and approving materials that will be allowed to be in contact with drinking water ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. Member States will have to take these various Commission acts into account when implementing the recast directive.

Finally, the Commission has now received data from Member States on the quality of drinking water in 2017–2019. The quality of drinking water (supplied by large water suppliers) in Belgium does not give rise to concern ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

From January 2026, the European quality standards for PFAS in drinking water will apply, ensuring harmonised Member States reporting of PFAS monitoring data in the future.

Bathing Water Directive

The Bathing Water Directive requires Member States to monitor and assess bathing water. It requires that, during

⁽¹⁰³⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/implementing-decision-drinking-water-directive-watch-list_en.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2024/1441 of 11 March 2024 supplementing Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council by laying down a methodology to measure microplastics in water intended for human consumption (notified under document C(2024) 1459) (OJ L, 2024/1441, 21.5.2024), http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_del/2024/1441/oj.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ OJ L, 2024/365, 23.4.2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2024/365/oj; OJ L, 2024/367, 23.4.2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2024/367/oj; OJ L, 2024/369, 23.4.2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2024/369/oj; OJ L, 2024/368,

23.4.2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2024/368/oj; OJ L, 2024/370, 23.4.2024,

http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2024/370/oj; OJ L, 2024/371, 23.4.2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2024/371/oj; see the Commission web page on all six delegated acts for more information (https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/delegated-acts-drinking-water-directive_en).

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ In summary, the compliance for all parameter groups in Belgium was at least 98.52 % in 2017, 98.83 % in 2018 and 98.71 % in 2019.

the bathing season, Member States disseminate to the public information on bathing water quality actively and promptly. In particular, notices banning or advising against bathing should be rapidly and easily identifiable.

Figure 29 shows that in 2023, out of the 130 Belgian bathing waters, 88 (67.7 %) were of excellent quality, 39 (30 %) were of good quality and 3 (2.3 %) were of sufficient quality. No bathing waters were found to be of poor quality. Detailed information on Belgian bathing waters is available from a national portal ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ and via an interactive map viewer from the EEA ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.

Figure 29: Bathing water quality per Member State (%), 2023



Source: EEA, *European Bathing Water Quality in 2023*, briefing No 04/2024, Copenhagen, 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/european-bathing-water-quality-in-2023/>.

Nitrates Directive

The latest Commission report on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾, dating to 2021, warns that nitrates are still causing harmful pollution to water in the EU. Excessive nitrates in water are harmful to both human health and ecosystems, causing oxygen depletion and eutrophication. Cleaning of waters by national authorities or farmers, where it has been undertaken, has had a positive impact on the drinking water supply and on biodiversity. It has also benefited the sectors – such as fisheries and tourism – that depend on biodiversity and on a good supply of drinking water. Nevertheless, excessive fertilisation remains a problem in many parts of the EU. The report on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive covering 2020–2023 will be available in 2025.

The analysis of Belgium's RBMPs has identified nutrients from agriculture as an important pressure on groundwater / surface waters that affects their good

status and is one of the main causes of not meeting the Water Framework Directive objectives. In July 2024, the Commission decided to refer Belgium to the Court of Justice for its failure to take reinforced action against the pollution of water by nitrates (under Article 5(5) of the Nitrates Directive) ⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

According to the latest information available on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive, the pollution by nitrates of groundwater and surface waters remains widespread in the Flemish Region. The Flemish Region has seen significant increases in certain areas and stable values in other areas, but at levels exceeding the threshold of 50 mg/l for nitrates or remaining very close to that threshold. Almost all (97 %) surface waters in the Flemish Region were reported to be in a eutrophic state by the end of 2019. Thus, what was identified as a rather positive trend in the previous EIR reports has now turned into a clearly negative trend, with the pollution of water by nitrates in the Flemish Region being among the highest in the EU. In the Walloon Region, reporting shows that pollution levels are less worrisome overall, with concentrations in groundwater generally showing a trend of reduction. However, for surface waters, some monitoring stations in the Walloon Region are starting to show an upward trend, and 15 % of surface waters are eutrophic.

2025 priority action

- Tackle nutrient pollution, especially nitrates from agriculture, through the implementation of the Nitrates Directive.

Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive

The Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) aims to protect human health and the environment from the effects of untreated urban waste water. It therefore requires Member States to collect and treat (secondary or biological treatment) waste water in all urban areas of more than 2 000 people, and to apply a more stringent treatment than secondary, with nitrogen and/or phosphorus removal, to the waste water generated in urban areas, also known as agglomerations, of more than 10 000 people, before they are discharged into waters and their catchments, when they are sensitive to nitrogen and/or phosphorus (i.e. eutrophic or tending to become eutrophic).

Overall, in Belgium, the compliance rate is 95 % in 2020. Only five agglomerations, generating 456 000 population

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ For the Flemish Region, www.kwaliteitzwemwater.be, and for the Walloon Region, <http://environnement.wallonie.be/baignade>.

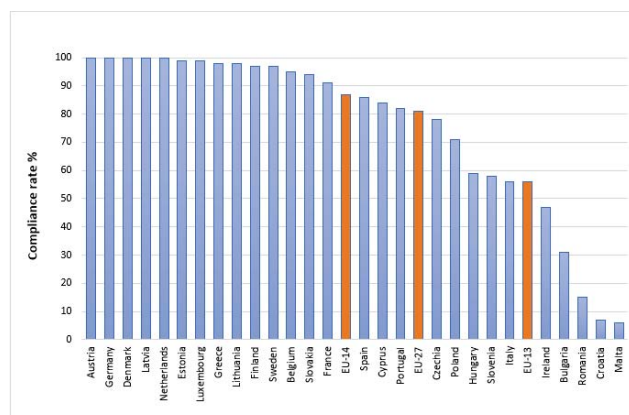
⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ EEA, 'State of bathing water', EEA website, 2024, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/bathing-water/state-of-bathing-water>.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water/nitrates_en.

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Case INFR(2022)2051.

equivalent of urban waste water, did not comply with the requirements of the directive.

Figure 30: Proportion of urban waste water that fully complies with the UWWTD (%), year 2020



Source: European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, Fribourg-Blanc, B., Dhuygelaere, N., Berland, J. and Imbert, F., 12th technical assessment of UWWTD implementation – Final version, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, [12th technical assessment of UWWTD implementation - Publications Office of the EU](#).

The directive has been revised⁽¹¹¹⁾ in order to, among other things, strengthen existing treatment standards and establish a new additional treatment of micropollutants in urban waste water. Other new requirements relate to moving towards energy neutrality for the sector, establishing an extended producer responsibility system to ensure sustainable financing of micropollutant treatment by the most polluting industries and ensuring access to sanitation, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups. Belgium has until 31 July 2027 to transpose the new directive into its national legal system.

The evaluation of 2022 priority actions for water reveals that, despite some progress made, Belgium has not fully implemented the UWWTD.

2025 priority action

- Take the necessary measures to ensure full implementation of the current UWWTD, taking into account the new requirements of the recast directive.

Chemicals

The EU seeks to ensure that chemicals are produced and used in a way that minimises any significant adverse effects on human health and the environment. In October 2020, the Commission published its chemicals strategy for sustainability towards a toxic-free environment⁽¹¹²⁾, which led to some systemic changes in EU chemicals legislation. The strategy is part of the EU's zero pollution ambition – a key commitment of the European Green Deal.

The EU's chemicals legislation⁽¹¹³⁾ provides a baseline protection for human health and the environment. It also ensures stability and predictability for businesses operating in the internal market.

Since 2007, the Commission has gathered information on the enforcement of the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) Regulation and the Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) Regulation. In December 2020, the Commission assessed the Member States' reports⁽¹¹⁴⁾ on the implementation and enforcement of these regulations⁽¹¹⁵⁾. It is apparent from the Commission's report that there are still many disparities in the implementation of the REACH and CLP Regulations, notably in the area of law enforcement. Recorded

⁽¹¹¹⁾ [Directive \(EU\) 2024/3019 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 November 2024 concerning urban wastewater treatment \(recast\)](#).

⁽¹¹²⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Chemicals strategy for sustainability: Towards a toxic-free environment, COM(2020) 667 final of 14 October 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A667%3AFIN>; Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures, amending and repealing Directives 67/548/EEC and 1999/45/EC, and amending Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 (OJ L 353, 31.12.2008, p. 1), https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/c6b6a31d-8359-11ee-99ba-01aa75ed71a1.0004.02/DOC_2.

⁽¹¹³⁾ Namely, Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals (REACH), establishing a European Chemicals Agency, amending Directive 1999/45/EC and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 793/93 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1488/94 as

well as Council Directive 76/769/EEC and Commission Directives 91/155/EEC, 93/67/EEC, 93/105/EC and 2000/21/EC (OJ L 396, 30/12/2006, p. 1), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006R1907>; and Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures, amending and repealing Directives 67/548/EEC and 1999/45/EC, and amending Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 (OJ L 353, 31.12.2008, p. 1), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02008R1272-20221217>.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ European Commission, *Technical assistance to review the existing Member States reporting questionnaire under Articles 117(1) of REACH and 46(2) of CLP – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/8ee3c69a-bccb-4f22-89ca-277e35de7c63/library/a4abce8c-8425-455f-b7e6-0ead917bde6b/details>.

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ In line with Article 117(1) of the REACH Regulation and Article 46(2) of the CLP Regulation.

compliance levels in Member States, generally quite stable over time, appear to be getting slightly worse. This may be because: (i) enforcement authorities are becoming more effective in detecting non-compliant products/companies; and (ii) more non-compliant products are being placed on the EU market.

In August 2021, the Commission published a measurable assessment of the enforcement ⁽¹¹⁶⁾ of the two main EU regulations on chemicals using a set of indicators on different aspects of enforcement. Since 2021, the list of chemicals subject to restrictions has been expanded as new entries have been added to Annex XVII of REACH ⁽¹¹⁷⁾.

In 2023, new hazard classes were added to the CLP Regulation, and the revision of the regulation was tabled (published on 20 November 2024) ⁽¹¹⁸⁾. The new hazard classes cover endocrine disruptors and persistence-related hazards while the revision of the regulation encompasses new rules on online sales to better tackle non-compliances observed over the years. Also in 2023, the Conference of the Parties of the Stockholm Convention (COP) decided to include, in its Annex A (which lists banned substances), three new chemicals ⁽¹¹⁹⁾. The Commission is working on the delegated acts to include these substances in Annex I to the Persistent Organic Pollutants Regulation by 2025 at the latest.

Responsibility for checking compliance with REACH in Belgium lies within the following authorities:

- the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment; the Directorate-General for Environment; and the Federal Environmental Inspection (also responsible for checking compliance with the CLP Regulation);
- the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue (also responsible for checking compliance with the CLP Regulation);
- in the Flemish Region, the Environment Department – Enforcement Section;
- in the Brussels Region, Bruxelles Environnement;

- in the Walloon Region, the Directorate-General for Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment.

A reporting exercise for Member States from Article 117 of the REACH Regulation and Article 46 of the CLP Regulation is conducted every five years. Results of the coming one are expected in 2025, hence the absence of new national-specific data on enforcement since 2022.

In 2022, Belgium had not yet devised a REACH enforcement strategy. It only had a CLP strategy, which was partially implemented ⁽¹²⁰⁾. The implementation of the REACH Regulation is partly a federal competence, partly a regional competence and partly a competence of individual local communities. The complexity of the application and enforcement of the REACH Regulation requires a coordinated approach. The National Forum REACH ensures a coordinated approach to the controls of the various authorised inspection services. In accordance with Article 17 of the agreement of cooperation from 17 October 2011 between the federal and regional authorities, the National Forum REACH draws up annually a national plan in view of coordinating the control policy in Belgium. This annual plan is submitted for advice to the Belgian REACH Committee.

The Federal Environmental Inspection also establishes a detailed annual inspection plan covering its activities under the Law on Product Standards (including REACH and CLP Regulations). With regard to enforcement, Belgium prioritises areas that are the most sensitive to consumers (children and the general public). According to the last reporting exercise, in 2019, 17.5 full-time equivalent workers were allocated to the enforcement of the Law on Product Standards by the Federal Environmental Inspection (including, but not limited to, REACH and CLP enforcement) ⁽¹²¹⁾. Note that regional inspection services are also competent for REACH enforcement.

Every year, Belgium participates in EU coordinated enforcement projects called REACH-EN-FORCE (REF) projects. In 2020, Belgium participated in one such project

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, *REACH and CLP Enforcement: EU-level enforcement indicators*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e5c3e461-0f85-11ec-9151-01aa75ed71a1/>.

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ These are substances in tattoo inks and permanent make-up, *N,N*-dimethylformamide, formaldehyde (and formaldehyde releasers), lead in PVC (polyvinyl chloride), siloxanes (D4, D5, D6) and, finally, microplastics.

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/2865 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2024 amending Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures, OJ L, 2024/2865, 20.11.2024, p.1 ([Regulation - EU - 2024/2865 - EN - EUR-Lex](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2865/oj)).

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ These are methoxychlor, dechlorane plus and UV-328. In the case of the pesticide methoxychlor, there are no exemptions from the ban. However, for the two plastic additives, dechlorane plus and

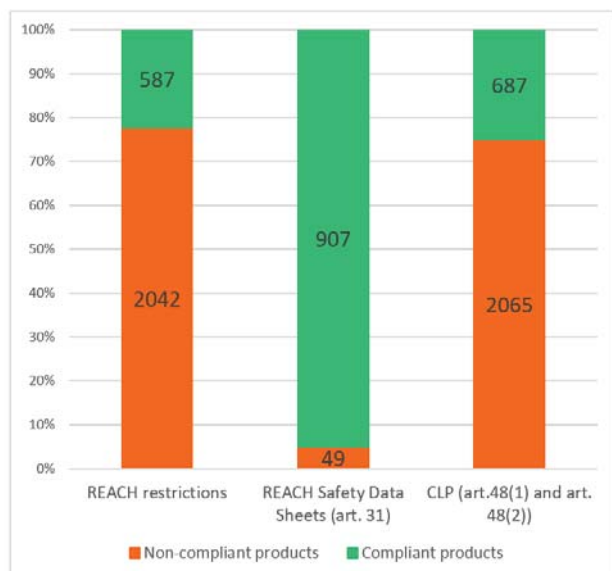
UV-328, the COP decision lists some time-limited specific exemptions.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ European Commission, *Technical assistance to review the existing Member States reporting questionnaire under Articles 117(1) of REACH and 46(2) of CLP – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p. 76, <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/8ee3c69a-bccb-4f22-89ca-277e35de7c63/library/a4abce8c-8425-455f-b7e6-0ead917bde6b/details>.

⁽¹²¹⁾ European Commission, *Technical assistance to review the existing Member States reporting questionnaire under Articles 117(1) of REACH and 46(2) of CLP – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p. 74, <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/8ee3c69a-bccb-4f22-89ca-277e35de7c63/library/a4abce8c-8425-455f-b7e6-0ead917bde6b/details>.

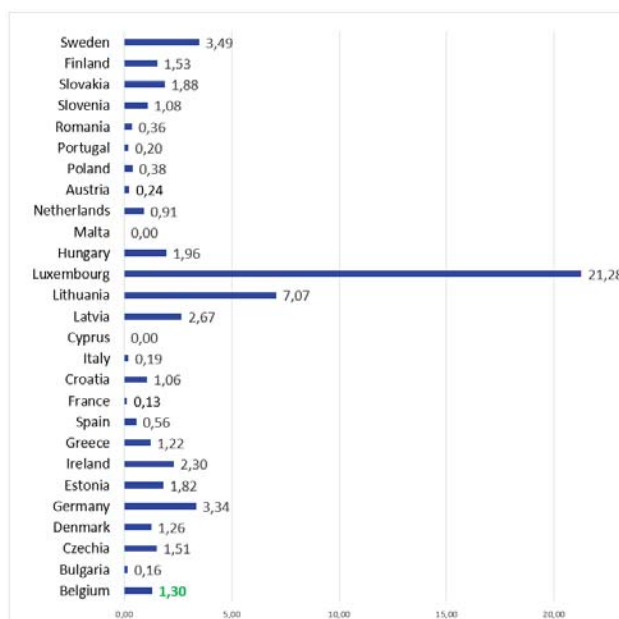
on products sold online, called the REF-8 project ⁽¹²²⁾. The project report was completed in November 2021, so it could not be taken into account in the previous EIR.

Figure 31: Compliance of imported products – results of the REF-8 project (%)



A risk approach was used for the targeting of controls in order to maximise the chances of identifying non-compliance. Therefore, the non-compliance rates presented above cannot be considered the average non-compliance rates of products in the EU. However, the proportion of non-compliance cases found in the REF-8 project are of concern.

Figure 32: Number of REF-8 controls performed per 100 000 inhabitants (EU average = 1.24)



Belgium's level of participation in the REF-8 project was around the EU average, which is rather low because of the lack of involvement of certain large Member States.

Based on this project and others conducted with the help of the European Chemicals Agency in the past years, online sales have been proven to correspond consistently to higher non-compliance rates in controls performed across the EU, in particular when related to imported products.

In 2022, Belgium received two priority actions: to upgrade administrative capacities in implementation and enforcement towards a policy of zero tolerance for instances of non-compliance; and to fully implement the enforcement strategy for the CLP Regulation and devise and implement a strategy for the enforcement of the REACH Regulation. In the absence of reporting since 2022, no progress has been reported and these priority actions remain valid in 2025.

2025 priority actions

- Upgrade administrative capacities in implementation and enforcement to move towards a policy of zero tolerance of non-compliance.
- Increase involvement in the activities of the Forum for Exchange of Information on Enforcement of the European Chemicals Agency, including in the coordinated enforcement projects, called REFs.

⁽¹²²⁾ European Chemicals Agency, *REF-8 project report on enforcement of the CLP, REACH and BPR duties related to substances, mixtures and articles sold online*, Helsinki, 2021, p. 20,

https://echa.europa.eu/documents/10162/17088/project_report_ref-8_en.pdf/ccf2c453-da0e-c185-908e-3a0343b25802?t=1638885422475.

- Increase customs checks and checks of products sold online with regard to compliance with chemicals legislation.

4. Climate action

The impacts of climate change have continued to increase in recent years, inflicting damage and suffering in the EU and around the world. Globally, 2023 was the hottest year on record, while Europe has been warming twice as quickly as the global average, and is now the fastest-warming continent. The frequency and severity of extreme climate events are also increasing. Against this backdrop, the EU has demonstrated its determination to implement the European Green Deal and to become climate neutral and resilient by 2050, ensuring sustainable competitiveness and supporting EU industry in the net-zero transition. The European Climate Law is the EU's response to the need for action. It sets the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and a midterm target of a reduction in GHG emissions of at least 55 % by 2030, and outlines the adaptation efforts necessary to adjust to climate change's present and future impacts. Almost all the 'Fit for 55' proposals set out in the European Green Deal have been agreed in law, and the European Commission recommended a new intermediate climate target of a 90 % reduction in emissions by 2040. In 2024, the Member States submitted updated national energy and climate plans (NECPs) for 2021–2030, reflecting the increased ambition of the revised EU legislation. In 2024, the European Commission also released, jointly with the EEA, the first-ever European climate risk assessment.

Over the last three decades, since 1990, the EU has achieved steady decreases in its emissions, reaching a running total in 2022 of – 32.5 %⁽¹²³⁾. However, the EU and its Member States need to step up their implementation efforts and accelerate emissions reduction to stay on track to reach their targets of a 55 % reduction in net GHG emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. Between 1990 and 2022, net GHG emissions of Belgium decreased by 28%, making it one of the countries with below-average decrease.

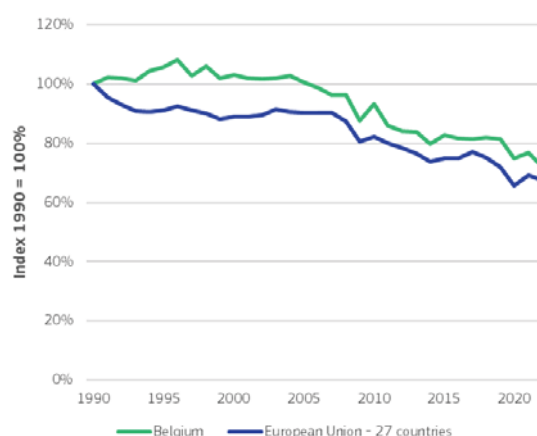
The 'Fit for 55' legislative package reflects the need to speed up the green transition. It includes (i) strengthening and expanding the EU emissions trading system (ETS), with the creation of a new, second, ETS for transport and buildings together with a dedicated Social Climate Fund to help citizens during the transition; (ii) increasing targets under the effort sharing regulation; and (iii) a revised regulation for Land Use, Land Use Change and

Forestry⁽¹²⁴⁾. The package has been fully adopted, and the Member States have been implementing the legislation.

The key strategic document at country level is the NECP⁽¹²⁵⁾. Belgium had not submitted the NECP by the end of March 2025. The legal deadline for the submission was in June 2024.

To minimise the impacts of climate policies on vulnerable people and sectors, Belgium is using the Just Transition Fund and will use Social Climate Fund from 2026 (for more information, see Chapter X Finance).

Figure 33: Total GHG emissions (excluding international aviation) (%), 1990–2022



The EU emissions trading system

The EU ETS is the key tool for reducing GHG emissions cost-effectively across all Member States. It is the world's biggest carbon market, covering around 40% of the EU's total GHG emissions from electricity and heat generation, the manufacturing industry, aviation within Europe⁽¹²⁶⁾ and, from 2024, maritime transport also.

The system sets a limit or cap on the total amount of GHGs that can be emitted at the EU level. Within this limit, companies buy emissions allowances (one allowance gives the right to emit 1 tonne of CO₂ eq (carbon dioxide equivalent)), in auctions or through trading allowances with others. The cap is reduced annually to ensure that overall emissions in the sectors covered decrease over time.

⁽¹²³⁾ EU net domestic emissions, including the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector and excluding international aviation.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ A full overview of the Fit for 55 package is available at https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal/fit-55-delivering-proposals_en.

⁽¹²⁵⁾ More information about NECP is on the dedicated website https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-strategy/national-energy-and-climate-plans-necps_en.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ Flights between the Member States including departing flights to Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The emissions under the ETS decreased by 45% from 2005 to 2023.

In 2023, only 23 % of GHGs emitted by Belgium's ETS installations came from power generation, much below the EU average of 57 %. The chemical industry emitted more than a quarter (28 %) of the total emissions from all industry sectors, refineries one fifth (20 %), cement and lime production also nearly one fifth (17 %), the metals industry emitted 18 %, and 18 % of the emissions came from other industries. Between 2019 and 2023, the power sector registered a significantly higher emissions reduction (33 %) than the industry sectors (16 %). Between 2013 and 2023, GHG emissions declined by 37 % in power generation and by 15 % in the industry sectors, with larger reductions in the cement and lime industry. This resulted in a 22 % reduction overall.

From 2027, a new ETS, called ETS2, for buildings, road transport and additional sectors (mainly industry not covered by the current ETS) will become fully operational⁽¹²⁷⁾. Member States should have notified full transposition the provisions of the revised EU ETS Directive related to the new ETS2 into national law by 30 June 2024. Belgium did not communicate full transposition into national law by this deadline. The Commission therefore opened an infringement procedure against Belgium on 25 July 2024, by sending a letter of formal notice for failing to fully transpose the provisions into national law.

Belgium has since partially notified transposition of the relevant provisions of the ETS 2 Directive to the Commission. The monitoring and reporting requirements and the obligation to hold a permit to carry out activities under ETS2 will commence on 1 January 2025..

The Commission also opened infringement procedures against Belgium on 25 January 2024, by sending a letter of formal notice for failing to fully transpose previous revisions of ETS Directive⁽¹²⁸⁾ into national law. Belgium has since notified partial transposition of either one or both revisions to the Commission. In the absence of a complete transposition, the Commission may decide to issue a reasoned opinion.

Effort sharing

The Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR)⁽¹²⁹⁾ covers GHG emissions from domestic transport (excluding CO₂ emissions from aviation), buildings, agriculture, small industry and waste. Emissions from these sectors account for around 60 % of the EU's domestic emissions. The

regulation sets the EU-wide target to reduce emissions from the effort sharing sectors by 40 % by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. This overall target for the EU translates to binding national emission reduction targets for each Member State. Belgium's target is -47%.

In addition to the 2030 targets, Member States have annual GHG emissions limits (annual emission allocations), reducing every year until 2030.

There is some flexibility to take account of annual fluctuations in emissions, by trading emissions and transfers from the ETS and LULUCF.

Based on historical emissions and the most updated projections Belgium will need to implement new measures and/or use available flexibilities to achieve its 2030 ESR target.

Projected gap is 4.4 percentage points to the 2030 target.

The largest contributor is the domestic transport sector, which accounted for 38 % of all effort sharing emissions in 2022.

Continued momentum is crucial to accelerate the take-up of zero-emission transport in Belgium. Passenger transport in Belgium is split by means of transport broadly in line with the EU average (share of passenger cars is 85 %). At 2.6 % in 2023, the share of battery electric vehicles in Belgium's passenger cars fleet has grown dynamically (EU average is 1.2 %), as has the number of publicly accessible charging points, reaching 35 000 in 2023, or one charging point for every eight e-vehicles (above the EU average of 1:10). Freight is predominantly transported by road. At 12 %, inland waterways transport more than twice the share of freight than the EU average (5.4 %). Belgium has the second highest share of electrified railway lines in the EU, at 87 % (EU average is 56 %).

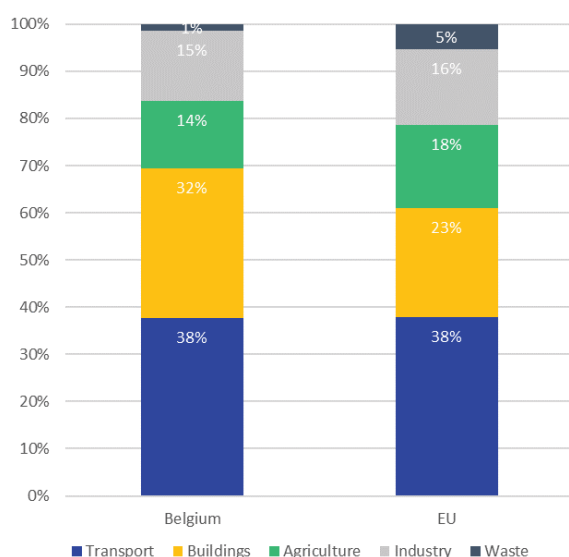
Buildings accounted for 32 % of effort sharing emissions and have decreased by 32 % since 2005. Nevertheless, Belgium needs to step up its efforts in the residential sector to achieve a meaningful contribution to its 2030 reduction target for energy consumption by buildings. Share of renewable energy in heating and cooling of 10 % remains very low compared to the EU average (25 %).

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Directive (EU) 2023/959 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2023.130.01.0134.01.ENG).

⁽¹²⁸⁾ Directive - 2023/959 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023L0959>) and Directive -

2023/958 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023L0958>).

⁽¹²⁹⁾ Regulation (EU) 2018/842 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/842>).

Figure 34: Effort-sharing emissions by sector (%), 2022

Land use, land-use change and forestry

The LULUCF sector plays a significant role in achieving the EU's climate neutrality goal. In the EU, this sector absorbs more GHGs than it emits, removing significant volumes of carbon from the atmosphere. Thus, it is the only sector with negative emissions.

Belgium's LULUCF sector has been a net carbon sink since 1990, albeit removals have been decreasing.

Belgium's target in 2030 is to enhance land removals by an additional -0.3 Mt of CO₂ equivalent compared to the yearly average of the period 2016–2018. The latest projections show a surplus compared to the 2030 target of -0.3 Mt of CO₂ equivalent. Therefore, Belgium is on track to meet this target.

Adaptation to climate change

Halting all GHG emissions would still not prevent climate impacts that are already occurring. Therefore, adaptation to climate change is also a key component of climate policy.

Belgium has one out of three regions identified as a hotspots of climate risks most affected by climate change – low-lying coastal regions ⁽¹³⁰⁾.

Water management is increasingly identified as a key affected sector, and for all sectors the water-related hazards, fluvial and pluvial floods and droughts, are signalled. The climate protection gap in Belgium is low,

indicating decent insurance coverage for all risk categories, including floods (the highest risk).

Belgium adopted its national adaptation strategy and plan in 2010 and 2017 respectively. At this moment, steps are being taken to update both documents.

The first risk assessment by CERAC, which identifies the climate related risks within 5 thematic clusters will play a key role in this renewal.

The Regional and Federal Adaptation Plans have been updated recently.

2025 priority actions

European Commission identified four priority actions in the [2022 edition](#) of the review.

There is some progress in reducing emissions in transport sector, but emissions per capita and per passenger km remains above EU average.

There is a progress regarding hydrogen and carbon capture, use and storage. Belgium invests in hydrogen infrastructure (a backbone pipeline, a pipeline to France and receiving terminals), and has five hydrogen candidate projects for the next (PCI)/(PMI) list. It is also active in carbon capture and storage, with projects intending to capture and transport CO₂ from the industrial areas around the ports of Antwerp-Bruges and Gent to storage under either the Dutch or the Norwegian continental shelf. In 2023 the EU first CCS transport from Antwerp to Denmark and the storage under the sea in Denmark was realised.

Belgium displays positive developments in terms of increased renewable energy capacity installed, development of energy infrastructure, including for hydrogen, energy efficiency measures. However, further efforts are needed to accelerate the clean energy transition. Belgium is highly dependent on fossil fuels and remains dependent on imports from non-EU countries for most clean energy technologies.

2025 priority actions

- Submit the final energy and climate plan (NECP)⁽¹³¹⁾.
- Implement all policies and measures that are needed to achieve targets laid down in the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) and the Land Use and Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation.

⁽¹³⁰⁾ European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA). 2024, <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/eu-adaptation-policy/key-eu-actions/european-climate-risk-assessment>.

⁽¹³¹⁾ The plan will be assessed and the assessment, providing more detailed priority actions, will be available on the Commission website at [National energy and climate plans](#).

Part II: Enabling framework: implementation tools

5. Financing

The EU budget supports climate investment in Belgium with significant amounts in the 2021–2027 period, with revenues from the EU ETS also feeding into the national budget. During 2020–2022, Belgium's revenues from auctioning reached EUR 1.5 billion in total, with 25 % of it spent on climate and energy, corresponding to EUR 342 million.

In addition, the annual investment needed to meet its environmental objectives in the areas of pollution prevention and control, the circular economy and waste, water protection and management, and biodiversity and ecosystems is estimated to be EUR 14.4 billion per year in Belgium.

These four environmental areas currently receive total funding of around EUR 10.7 billion per year; thus, there is a gap of EUR 3.7 billion per year.

The environmental investment gap is concentrated in pollution prevention and control (EUR 1.5 billion per year) and in the water field (EUR 1.4 billion per year), while also being present in the circular economy (EUR 0.9 billion per year).

Climate finance landmarks

EU funding for climate action

The EU budget supports climate action in the EU-27 with EUR 657.8 billion in the 2021–2027 budgetary period across the various programmes and funds, representing an overall 34.3 % contribution level. Of this, the cohesion policy provides EUR 120 billion (over half of it through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) 275.7 billion, and the CAP 145.9 billion ⁽¹³²⁾.

In Belgium, the EU cohesion policy (considering the EU contribution amount) provides EUR 703 million for climate action in 2021–2027 (with around 44 % of this via the ERDF), with a further 23.6 million from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) ⁽¹³³⁾.

The RRF contributes to climate finance in Belgium with EUR 2.61 billion up to 2026, representing 49.2 % of its national RRP ⁽¹³⁴⁾.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) provided EUR 109.9 billion in financing across the EU-27 between 2021 and mid 2024 to support energy, transport and industry projects that are aligned with the EU's climate objectives. Of this amount, EUR 4.3 billion was assigned to Belgium in the reference period ⁽¹³⁵⁾.

National financing, including emissions trading system revenues

Revenues from the auctioning of emission allowances under the EU ETS, which feed directly into national budgets, amounted to EUR 356.1 million in 2020, EUR 533.2 million in 2021 and EUR 657.7 million in 2022 in Belgium, totalling EUR 1.5 billion in the three-year period. Of this, the share spent on climate action reached 25 % (EUR 341.7 million). From 2021 onwards the direct spending of auction revenues has been on hold pending a legal decision on the regions' and federal shares, and revenues are being carried over to future years. The amount reported as spent in 2022 covers only direct revenue spent. From the remaining part of the EU ETS revenues that feed into the Innovation Fund and the Modernisation Fund, further support is available for climate action at the EU level ⁽¹³⁶⁾.

It should be noted that investment in climate action also supports the environment and, therefore, the environmental investments described in the following

⁽¹³²⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Budget, *Statement of Estimates of the European Commission – For the financial year 2025*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, pp. 94–96, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/7a0420e1-599e-4246-9131-ccb7d505d6d9_en?filename=DB2025-Statement-of-Estimates_1.pdf.

⁽¹³³⁾ See the Cohesion Open Data Platform (<https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu>).

⁽¹³⁴⁾ EU Commission datasets and the recovery and resilience scoreboard (https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/index.html).

⁽¹³⁵⁾ A list of financed projects is provided by the EIB (<https://www.eib.org/en/projects/loans/index.htm>).

⁽¹³⁶⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Climate Action, *Progress Report 2023 – Climate action*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, https://climate.ec.europa.eu/news-your-voice/news/climate-action-progress-report-2023-2023-10-24_en.

sections cannot be regarded as entirely additional to climate investment ⁽¹³⁷⁾.

Environmental financing and investments

This section describes Belgium's investment needs, current financing and gaps as they relate to the *four environmental objectives* beyond climate objectives, namely tackling pollution, the circular economy and waste, water protection and management, and biodiversity and ecosystems ⁽¹³⁸⁾.

The environment overall

Investment needs

The overall environmental investment needs to be sufficient to enable Belgium to meet its objectives in the areas of pollution prevention and control, the circular economy and waste, water protection and management, and biodiversity and ecosystems. The required investment is estimated to be EUR 14.4 billion per year (in 2022 prices).

A significant part of the estimated requirement (up to EUR 9 billion a year) can be attributed to the need to support the circular economy. The investment need for pollution prevention and control is around EUR 2.6 billion per year and for the water objective EUR 2.3 billion per year. For biodiversity and ecosystems, the estimated investment need is around EUR 0.5 billion per year (in 2022 prices).

Current investments

To implement the environmental investments needed, the available financing is estimated to currently reach an annual EUR 10.7 billion in Belgium from EU and national sources combined (in 2022 prices).

Total environmental funding from the multiannual financial framework (MFF) is estimated to reach around EUR 1.6 billion for Belgium in total for 2021–2027 (or 230 million per year).

Table 1: Key environmental allocations from EU funds to Belgium (million EUR), 2021–2027

Instrument	Allocations
Cohesion policy	318.3 ^(a)
ERDF	263.3
Just Transition Fund	55.0
CAP	867.5 ^(b)
European Agricultural Guarantee Fund	611.4
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	256.1
EMFAF	14.3
Other MFF sources	411.8 ^(c)
RRF ^(d) (2021–2026)	1 754

^(a) European Commission, 2021–2027 cohesion policy (planned) allocations in *EU amount* excluding national co-financing, based on the tracking in the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR, 2021) Annex I. Please note potential data changes that may have arisen between the EIR preparation cut-off date (31 October 2024) and its publication date. Note that Belgium is not eligible for the Cohesion Fund. Source and further information: https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2021-2027-Categorisation/2021-2027-Planned-finances-detailed-categorisation/hgyj-gyin/about_data.

^(b) Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP strategic plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013 (OJ L 435 6.12.2021, p. 1), Annex XI, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/2115>.

Note that 2021–2027 combines factual data for 2021 and 2022 and expenditure under the relevant specific objectives (SOs) of the CAP strategic plans from 2023, using the EU biodiversity tracking methodology (<https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/Biodiversity%20tracking%20methodology%20for%20each%20programme%202023.pdf>). Source: European Commission.

^(c) Space Fund, Horizon Europe, financial instrument for the environment and Connecting Europe Fund.

^(d) Outside the MFF. Note that the RRF applies a similar environmental tracking scheme (set in the RRF Regulation, Annex VI) as the EU's cohesion policy. RRF dataset version used: July 2024, prior to 2025 revisions. Data source: European Commission

Belgium, in addition to receiving EU funds earmarked specifically for it in 2021–2027, can also benefit from funding programmes that can be accessed at the EU level and which are open to all Member States. These include the financial instrument for the environment (LIFE) programme ⁽¹³⁹⁾ (EUR 5.4 billion), Horizon Europe ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

⁽¹³⁷⁾ Indirect investments (from climate and other policies) in support of the environment are accounted for via the tracking.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ Research, development and innovation is accounted for under each environmental objective. The financing needs, baselines, gaps estimates are based on the Directorate-General for Environment's internal analysis (of 2024). Throughout this chapter, specific references are provided to the most important data sources used.

⁽¹³⁹⁾ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en.

⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ European Commission, Horizon Europe, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en.

(EUR 95.5 billion), the Connecting Europe Fund⁽¹⁴¹⁾ (EUR 33.7 billion) and funds that can be mobilised through the InvestEU programme⁽¹⁴²⁾.

Belgium's RRP supports climate objectives through funding of EUR 2.61 billion (49.2 % of the total) with an additional EUR 0.2 billion (3.8 % of the total) directly for the environment.

Certain parts of Belgium's RRP have a strong focus on the environment. Component 1.3 'Climate and environment' focuses on restoring biodiversity, strengthening adaptability and resilience to climate change, and water management. Investments will aim at a coherent set of natural areas, forests and riverbeds to act as carbon sinks and mitigate the consequences of floods and droughts. This component has a budget of EUR 400 million. Component 5.3 'Circular economy' contributes to the development of a circular and low-carbon economy. This component supports innovation in waste and raw material processing, and develops circular economy training. Investments include, for example, the federal initiative Belgium Builds Back Circular, the recycling hub in the Flemish Region and the deployment of the Circular Wallonia strategy.

The EIB provided around EUR 3 billion in environment-related financing to Belgium from 2021 to mid 2024, half of which went to water measures and the other half to sustainable energy, transport and industrial projects, with significant co-benefits to clean air, environmental noise and other pollution.

The EU's total national expenditure on environmental protection (operating plus capital expenditure) was EUR 298 billion in 2020 and EUR 321 billion in 2021, representing around 2.2 % of EU-27 GDP. In Belgium, the total national environmental protection expenditure was EUR 15.3 billion in 2020 and EUR 16.7 billion in 2021, representing 3.3 % of GDP in both years.

Of the total environmental expenditure, the national capital expenditure (investment) on environmental protection amounted to EUR 54.5 billion in 2020 and 59.9 billion in 2021 in the EU-27, representing around 0.4 % of the EU's GDP. In Belgium, the national environmental protection investment reached EUR 2.4 billion in both 2020 and 2021, representing around 0.5 % of GDP.

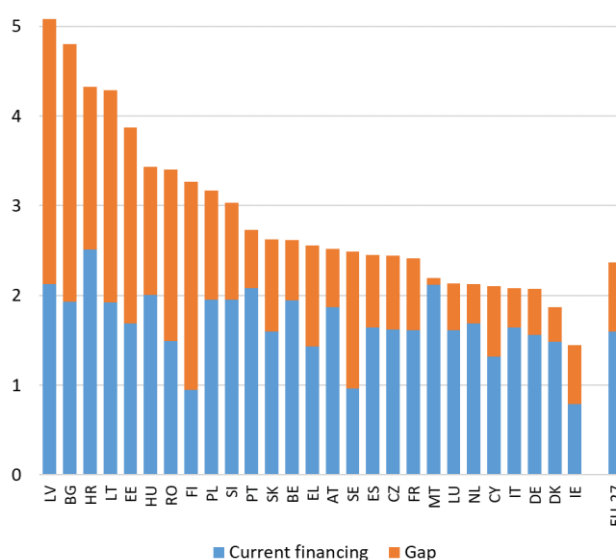
Split by institutional sector, 25.2 % of Belgium's national environmental protection investment (capital expenditure) comes from the general government budget, with 46.4 % coming from specialist private-sector producers (of environmental protection services, such as waste and water companies) and 28.3 % from the general business sector, whose environmental activities are usually ancillary to their main activities. At the EU level, around 38 % of environmental protection investment comes from governments, 40 % from specialist private-sector producers and 22 % from the business sector⁽¹⁴³⁾.

Belgium's total financing for environmental investment reaches an estimated EUR 10.7 billion per year (in 2022 prices), including EU funding and national public and national private expenditure. Of the total, EU funding (including EIB funds) represents 8%, and national financing 92 %. The total public financing (EU plus national public) represents 31.2 % of the total.

The gap

To meet its four environmental objectives beyond climate change, the additional investment need over the current levels (i.e. the gap) reaches an estimated EUR 3.7 billion per year in Belgium, representing around 0.67 % of the national GDP, being lower than the EU average (0.77 %).

Figure 35: Environmental financing, needs and gaps per Member State (% of GDP)



Source: Analysis of Directorate-General for Environment.

⁽¹⁴¹⁾ The Connecting Europe Facility Transport part also includes EUR 11.3 billion transferred from the Cohesion Fund, of which 30 % will be made available, on a competitive basis, to all Member States eligible for the Cohesion Fund. The remaining 70 % will respect the national envelopes until 31 December 2023.

⁽¹⁴²⁾ The InvestEU Fund is set to mobilise over EUR 372 billion of investment through an EU budget guarantee of EUR 26.2 billion to back the investment of financial partners such as the EIB group and others.

⁽¹⁴³⁾ Eurostat, 'Environmental protection expenditure accounts', env_ac_epea.

The following table provides the distributions of Belgium's environmental investment gap (expressed in various forms) by environmental objective.

Table 2: Summary of environmental investment gaps in Belgium per year, 2021–2027

Environmental objective	Investment gap per year		
	Million EUR (2022 prices)	% of total	% of GDP
Pollution prevention and control	1 512	41.0	0.28
Circular economy and waste	886	24.0	0.16
Water management and water industries	1 392	37.7	0.25
Biodiversity and ecosystems	–	–	–
Total	3 694	100.0	0.67

NB: For biodiversity and ecosystems, there is no significant gap envisaged based on currently available data.

Source: Directorate-General for Environment analysis.

Pollution prevention and control

Investment needs

In pollution prevention and control, Belgium's investment needs are estimated to reach EUR 2.6 billion per year (including baseline investments) in 2021–2027. Most of this, EUR 1.9 billion, relates to air pollution control, to comply with the clean air requirements for the five main air pollutants under the NECD by 2030. The estimated needs to reduce environmental noise reach

EUR 834 million per year, most of which is delivered by the (same) sustainable energy and transport investments that also benefit clean air⁽¹⁴⁴⁾. Industrial site remediation requires an estimated EUR 101 million per year. Microplastics pollution and the chemicals strategy require around EUR 60–80 million per year (each)⁽¹⁴⁵⁾.

Current investments

The current investment levels supporting pollution prevention and control reach an estimated EUR 1.1 billion per year in Belgium in 2021–2027. Most of the financing concerns clean air (EUR 681 million per year). Protection from environmental noise receives around EUR 228 million (each) per year, with a further EUR 118 million for protection from radiation and EUR 66 million for site remediation.¹⁴⁶

In Belgium, the EU MFF provides an estimated 5.8 % of the clean air financing (mostly via the cohesion policy), with a further 15.4 % from the RRF, adding up to 21.2 % of the total. EIB financing contributes 17.7 % and national sources reach 61.1 %⁽¹⁴⁷⁾.

The gap

To meet its environmental objectives concerning pollution prevention and control (towards zero pollution), Belgium needs to provide an additional EUR 1.5 billion per year (0.28 % of GDP), mostly related to clean air and noise. The adequate implementation of the NECPC with the investments included for sustainable energy and transport would largely deliver this, while in many Member States additional measures and investments may be required to comply with the ammonia reduction requirements.

According to the latest (2023) NAPCP review report⁽¹⁴⁸⁾, Belgium complied with ammonia reduction requirements in 2020 and 2021, and is at low risk of non-compliance with ammonia concerning the NECD's 2030 emission reduction commitments, based on the policies and measures in its NAPCP that take into account climate, energy and CAP plans and financing baselines.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ 2021 Phenomena project assessment
(<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f4cd7465-a95d-11eb-9585-01aa75ed71a1>) and the Commission's 2023 Environmental Noise Directive implementation report
(https://environment.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-03/COM_2023_139_1_EN_ACT_part1_v3.pdf).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ European Commission, *Third Clean Air Outlook*, Brussels, 2022, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/clean-air-outlook_en. See also the impact assessment for the revision of the AAQD, available from the Commission web page on the proposed revision
(https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/revision-eu-ambient-air-quality-legislation_en).

¹⁴⁶ Through the tracking of EU funds, EIB projects and national expenditure (EPEA accounts, Eurostat). Note that the bulk of clean air financing is provided as a contribution from climate (energy and transport) measures, as per the tracking schemes in the Common Provisions Regulation Annex I and the RRF Regulation

Annex VI. Further information on clean air tracking:
https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/0a80484e-2409-4749-94c6-3b23bc6bae8f_en?filename=Clean%20air%20methodology_0.pdf

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Through the tracking of EU funds, EIB projects and national expenditure (environmental protection investment accounts, Eurostat). Note that the bulk of clean air financing is provided as a contribution from climate (energy and transport) measures, as per the tracking schemes in the Common Provisions Regulation Annex I and the RRF Regulation Annex VI. Further information on clean air tracking:
https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/0a80484e-2409-4749-94c6-3b23bc6bae8f_en?filename=Clean%20air%20methodology_0.pdf

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ European Commission, 'National air pollution control programmes and projections', European Commission website, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/reducing-emissions-air-pollutants/national-air-pollution-control-programmes-and-projections_en.

Circular economy and waste

Investment needs

Belgium's investment needs in the circular economy and waste reach EUR 9.1 billion per year (including baseline investments). Most of this, around EUR 7.9 billion per year, relates to circular economy measures in the mobility, food and built environment systems, with a further EUR 1.2 billion necessary for waste management (municipal and packaging waste), covering waste collection, biowaste treatment, recycling reprocessors, waste-sorting facilities and digitalisation of the waste registry. The amount for waste excludes the investments needed for the uptake of circularity and waste prevention across the economy ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾.

Current investments

Circular economy investments across the economy reach around EUR 7 billion per year in Belgium in 2021-2027, with a further EUR 1.1 billion provided for waste management that is not considered part of the circular economy.

Around 0.2 % of the combined financing for circularity and waste management comes from the EU MFF, with a further 0.5 % from the RRF, adding to 0.7 % of the total. EIB loans identified in support of circularity and waste management represent 0.1 % of the total. Accordingly, the share of national sources is overwhelming, reaching 99 % of the total financing ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾.

The gap

To meet its environmental objectives concerning the circular economy and waste, Belgium needs to increase circular economy investments by an estimated EUR 819 million per year, with an additional EUR 68 million for waste management action not belonging to the circular economy. Combined, this amounts to EUR 887 million per year, representing 0.16 % of Belgium's GDP.

Of the circular economy gap, EUR 214 million relates to recent initiatives, such as eco-design for sustainable products, packaging and packaging waste, labelling and

digital tools, CRM recycling and measures proposed under the amendment of the Waste Framework Directive, and EUR 604 million constitutes the further investment needed to unlock Belgium's circular economy potential.

Water protection and management

Investment needs

The annual water investment needs reach an estimated EUR 2.3 billion (in 2022 prices) in Belgium. This comprises investment needs for both the water industry and the protection and management of water. The largest part of the total annual need, EUR 1.8 billion, relates to the management of waste water (including additional costs associated with the revised UWWTD). A further EUR 59 million is necessary for drinking-water-related investments and around EUR 363 million for the protection and management of water ⁽¹⁵¹⁾.

Current investments

Water investments in Belgium are estimated to be around EUR 868 million per year (in 2022 prices) in 2021–2027. Of this, EUR 649 million supports wastewater management, EUR 68 million drinking water and around EUR 146 million the other aspects of the Water Framework Directive (water management and protection).

Of the total water financing, 1.4 % is provided by the EU MFF and 1.2% from the RRF for Belgium. EIB financing is significant, around 24 %, while the bulk of water financing comes from national sources (73.7 %) ⁽¹⁵²⁾.

The gap

To meet the various environmental targets under the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive, Belgium's water investment gap reaches EUR 1.4 billion per year (0.25 % of GDP), with most of it related to waste water (EUR 1.2 billion per year). Additional elements of the Water Framework Directive require around EUR 217 million per year over existing levels of financing.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ See Systemiq and Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *Achieving 'Growth Within'*, 2017, <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/achieving-growth-within>; and European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Study on investment needs in the waste sector and on the financing of municipal waste management in Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4d5f8355-bcad-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1>.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Waste management and circular economy expenditure tracking in the EU funds, EIB projects and in the national expenditure (Eurostat). Datasets: environmental protection investment accounts (env_epi) and circular economy private investments (cei_cie012).

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ See European Commission, 'Estimating investment needs and financing capacities for water-related investment in EU member states', 28 May 2020, https://commission.europa.eu/news/estimating-investment-needs-and-financing-capacities-water-related-investment-eu-member-states-2020-05-28_en; and OECD, *Financing Water Supply, Sanitation and flood Protection: Challenges in EU Member States and policy options*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/financing-water-supply-sanitation-and-flood-protection_6893cdac-en.

⁽¹⁵²⁾ Water investment levels are estimated through tracking EU funds, EIB projects and national expenditure (environmental protection expenditure accounts, Eurostat).

Biodiversity and ecosystems

Investment needs

The investment needs for biodiversity and ecosystems are estimated to be EUR 0.5 billion per year (in 2022 prices) in Belgium in 2021–2027. This includes the following financing needs:

- Belgium's prioritised action frameworks ⁽¹⁵³⁾, concerning the Natura 2000 areas: EUR 343 million per year, mostly running costs;
- additional BDS costs ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾: EUR 22 million per year on top of the frameworks;
- sustainable soil management costs ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾: EUR 126 million.

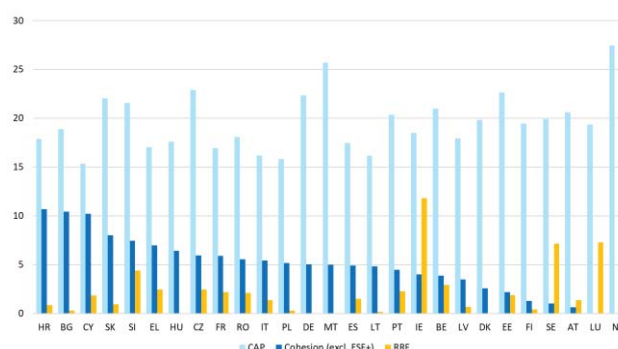
Current investments

The current level of biodiversity financing is estimated to be EUR 588 million per year (in 2022 prices) in 2021–2027. Of this, 93 % is considered direct financing to biodiversity and ecosystems, with a 100 % coefficient in the tracking schemes.

Of the total financing, 0.3 % is estimated to come from the EU cohesion policy, 20 % from the CAP, 3.3 % from Horizon Europe and around 1 % from both the EMFAF and the LIFE programme. The EU MFF altogether accounts for 21.2 % of the financing and the RRF for 3.5 %, adding up to a total of 25 % from the EU budget. The rest, 75 % comes from national sources ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾.

At 2.9 %, Belgium has a relatively high share of RRF funding dedicated to supporting measures for biodiversity compared with other Member States. Belgium has also programmed 21 % of its CAP budget for 2021–2027 for biodiversity, which is above the EU average. Lastly, 3.9 % of Belgium's cohesion policy EU contribution is estimated to contribute to biodiversity, disregarding ESF+ (see Figure 36).

Figure 36: 2021–2027 contributions to biodiversity from the main EU instruments per Member State (% of policy total)



NB: ESF+, European Social Fund Plus.

The gap

To meet the environmental objectives concerning the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems and other relevant cross-cutting measures, Belgium's financing resources are estimated to be proportionate to its needs, without a major financing gap, based on the currently available data.

Public financial management

Green budgeting practices

Green budgeting refers to the use of budgetary tools to achieve climate and environmental goals. Some Member States already use green budgeting tools for identifying and tracking green expenditures and/or revenues ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾. Green budgeting practices provide increased transparency on the environmental implications of budgetary policies.

The Commission has developed a non-mandatory green budgeting reference framework that brings together methodologies for assessing the impacts of budgets on climate and environmental goals ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ European Commission, 'Financing Natura 2000 – Prioritised action frameworks', European Commission website, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/natura-2000/financing-natura-2000_en.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ See European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Biodiversity Financing and Tracking – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/793eb6ec-dbd6-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ See Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on soil monitoring and resilience (Soil Monitoring Law) COM(2023) 416 final of 5 July 2023, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-directive-soil-monitoring-and-resilience_en.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Based on biodiversity tracking in the EU budget (<https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/3f466d71-92a7-49eb-9c63-6cb0fadf29dc/library/8e44293a-d97f-496d-8769-50365780acde>),

and national expenditure into biodiversity from the Classification of the Functions of Government accounts.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ European Commission, *Green Budgeting in the EU. Key Insights from the 2023 European Commission Survey of Green Budgeting Practices*, 2023, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/national-fiscal-frameworks-eu-member-states/green-budgeting-eu_en#:~:text=European%20Commission%20Green%20Budgeting%20Survey%C2%A0.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ European Commission, 'European Union green budgeting reference framework', 2022, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/green-budgeting-eu_en.

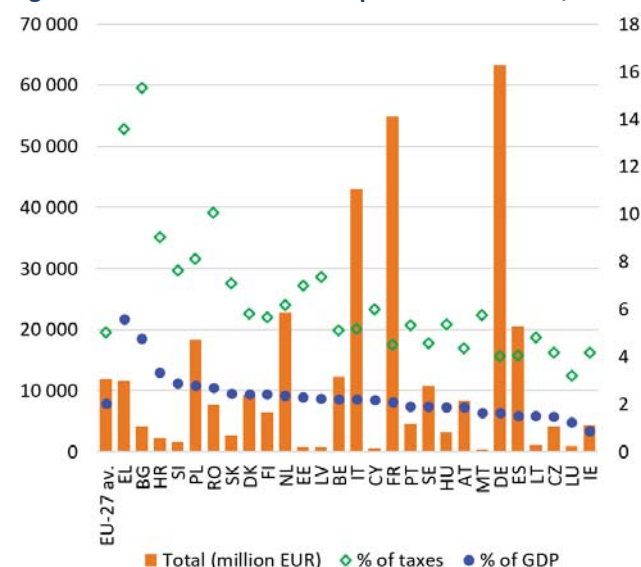
To help Member States develop national green budgeting and thereby improve policy coherence and support the green transition, the Commission facilitated a technical support instrument (TSI) project on green budgeting from 2021 to 2024⁽¹⁵⁹⁾. Belgium participated.

Beyond green budgeting, to improve policy outcomes, the Commission has also drawn up climate-proofing and sustainability-proofing guidance⁽¹⁶⁰⁾, as tools to assess project eligibility and compliance with environmental legislation and criteria.

Green taxation and tax reform

Total environmental taxes amounted to EUR 12.3 billion in Belgium in 2022, representing 2.2 % of its GDP (EU average: 2.0 %). Energy taxes formed the largest component of environmental taxes, accounting for 1.6 % of GDP, similarly to the EU average of 1.6 %. Transport taxes, at 0.6 % of GDP, were above the EU average (0.4 %), as were taxes on pollution and resources, at 0.11 % (EU average 0.08 %). In 2022, environmental taxes in Belgium accounted for 5.1 % of total revenues from taxes and social security contributions (around the EU average of 5.0 %) ⁽¹⁶¹⁾.

Figure 37: Environmental taxes per Member State, 2022



The EU Green Deal emphasises the role of well-designed tax reforms (e.g. shifts from taxing labour to taxing pollution) to boost economic growth and resilience and to foster a fairer society and a just transition through the right price signals. The Green Deal promotes the ‘polluter-pays principle’, which makes polluters bear the costs to prevent, control and remedy pollution.

According to a 2024 study ⁽¹⁶²⁾, Belgium applies emission charges to water (biochemical oxygen demand, pesticides and other), a solid waste landfill fee, a manure tax, product charges (vehicle tax, batteries, levies on plastics, aluminium sheets and strips, cameras disposal, paints, inks and solvents), and user charges (water abstraction and disposal volumes, road pricing). Specific examples of good practices are the tax on environmental impacts from farming in the Walloon Region ⁽¹⁶³⁾ and incineration taxes complemented by bans on the landfill of specific substances in the Flemish and Walloon Regions. Taxes on mineral extraction charged per volume (m³) or weight (kg or t) of materials extracted cover the extraction of various natural resources, for example coal, lignite or peat extraction. The same study recommends a tax on pesticides ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾.

With regard to the use of the fees collected from landfill and incineration taxes in the Walloon Region, the tax

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/revenue-administration-and-public-financial-management/supporting-implementation-green-budgeting-practices-eu_en.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Commission notice – Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021–2027 (OJ C 373, 16.09.2021, p. 1), <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/23a24b21-16d0-11ec-b4fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Eurostat, ‘Environmental taxes accounts’, env_eta.

⁽¹⁶²⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Candidates for Taxing Environmental Bads at National Level*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, Annex 1, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/35c1bbdf-2931-11ef-9290-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ <https://agriculture.wallonie.be/home/environnement/taxee-nvironnementale/la-taxe-sur-les-charges-environnementales-generes-par-les-exploitations-agricoles.html>.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Candidates for Taxing Environmental Bads at National Level*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, point 5.2.5, p. 23, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/35c1bbdf-2931-11ef-9290-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

decree ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ stipulates that the revenue from these taxes is allocated exclusively to the Waste Management Fund, created within the revenue budget and the general expenditure budget of the Walloon Region.

According to the same 2024 study ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾, the Walloon Region applies a tax on environmental costs generated by agricultural activities to take into account environmental costs linked in particular to livestock effluents or the use of fertilisers and phytosanitary products in crops ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾.

Green bonds and sustainable bonds

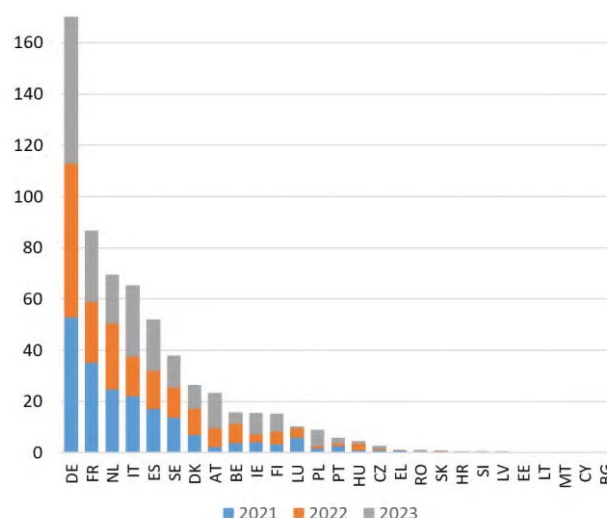
In 2023, the total value of green bonds issued by Member States was USD 245 billion (EUR 227 billion), up from USD 234 billion (EUR 198 billion) in 2021 ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾.

During 2021–2023, Belgium issued green bonds worth USD 17.2 billion (EUR 14.6 billion). Of this, the issuance in 2023 amounted to USD 5 billion (EUR 4.6 billion).

During 2014–2023, 83 % of the green bonds issued by European countries (excluding supranational entities) served objectives in energy, buildings or transport, while 5 % supported objectives in water, 5.1 % related to land use (with links to nature and ecosystems) and 3.8 % applied to waste management. By 2023, the combined share of energy, buildings and transport has decreased to 73 %, the shares of waste management and land use have increased (to 5.9 % and 8.4 %, respectively) and the share of water has remained around 5 %.

In 2021–2023, 31.7 % of European green bonds (excluding supranational issuances) was issued by financial corporates, 29.1 % by sovereign governments and 23.1 % by non-financial corporates. Of the issuances, 8.3 % was linked to government-backed entities, 6.4 % to developments banks and 1.4 % to local governments.

Figure 38: Value of green bonds issued per Member State (billion EUR), 2021, 2022 and 2023



Data source: Climatebonds.net, with some additional data from national sources (e.g. Croatia, Slovenia).

Environmentally harmful subsidies

Addressing and phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies, in particular fossil fuel subsidies (FFS), is a further step towards achieving the eighth environment action programme objectives and the enabling conditions ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. FFS are costly for public budgets and make it difficult to achieve European Green Deal objectives.

The overall downward trend of FFS mentioned in past EIRs was disrupted from 2022, due to the European response to the 2021 energy crisis and subsequent increase in energy prices.

As a direct consequence, annual FFS in the EU have increased to EUR 109 billion in 2023 from EUR 57 billion in 2020. From 2021 to 2023, there has been a marked increase in annual FFS of 72 % in the EU ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾.

For the majority of the Member States (16), the year 2022 saw a peak in the amount of overall FFS. A decline was then observed in 2023 ⁽¹⁷¹⁾. In particular, FFS for coal and

</publication/35c1bbdf-2931-11ef-9290-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ See Article 44, <https://wallex.wallonie.be/eli/loi-decret/2007/03/22/2007201247/2024/01/01>.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Candidates for Taxing Environmental Bads at National Level*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, Annex 2, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/35c1bbdf-2931-11ef-9290-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ For an overview of environmental taxes in agriculture, see OECD, *Taxation in Agriculture*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020, p. 105, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/taxation-in-agriculture_073bdf99-en.html.

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Climate bonds initiative (<https://www.climatebonds.net>). NB. Additionally (and not included in this), national sources indicated EUR 544.8 million issuance for Croatia, in 2022-2023, and a slightly higher amount for Slovenia (+0.27 billion) during 2021-2023 in total.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ Articles 3(h) and 3(v) of the eighth environment action programme.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ European Commission, 2024 Report on Energy Subsidies in the European Union, COM(2025), [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM\(2025\)17&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM(2025)17&lang=en)

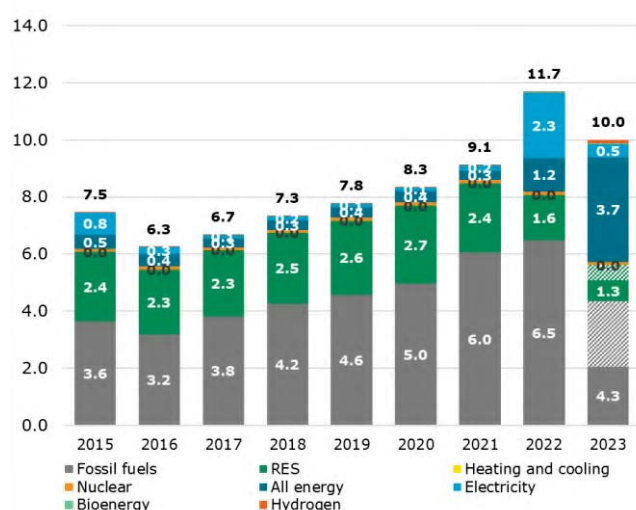
⁽¹⁷¹⁾ 16 Member States: BE, EE, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, CY, LT, HU, NL, AT, PT, RO and SE.

lignite, natural gas and oil increased in 2022 and a strong increase was observed for natural gas subsidies.

In Belgium, the energy subsidies showed increases from 2016 to 2022. As a significant part of this, the FFS grew from EUR 3.2 billion (in 2016) to 6.5 billion (in 2022), followed by a decrease in 2023.

As a share of GDP, FFS in 2022 ranged from 1.8 % in Croatia to less than 0.1 % in Denmark and Sweden. Belgium's value reached 1.2 %, above the EU average (0.8 %) ⁽¹⁷²⁾.

Figure 39: Energy subsidies by energy carrier in Belgium (billion EUR), 2015–2023



NB: RES, renewable energy source.

Source : analysis of Directorate-General Energy

The 2022 EIR report included the following recommendation for Belgium.

- Tackle the main environmental challenges affecting the country, through appropriate funding, including through the mobilisation of investments and the use of EU funds.

Important to note is that Belgium organised a conference on 24 March 2023 ⁽¹⁷³⁾ on the European Commission's vade mecum for environmental financing ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾.

Since the 2022 EIR, Belgium continued to provide funding for environmental objectives, in the magnitude of EUR 10 billion per year. However, environmental financing gaps of 0.2–0.3 % of GDP exist for several environmental objectives (in particular for pollution prevention and control and for water), adding up to around EUR 3.7 billion per year (0.67 % of GDP, slightly under the EU average).

2025 priority action

In light of the financing gaps observed for most environmental objectives, a general priority action is provided for Belgium.

- Use more national funding (for instance by increasing taxes in favour of the environment and reducing environmentally harmful subsidies), EU funding and private funding to help close the investment gap.

⁽¹⁷²⁾ European Commission, 2024 Report on Energy Subsidies in the European Union, COM(2025), [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM\(2025\)17&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM(2025)17&lang=en)

⁽¹⁷³⁾ European Commission, 'The first vade mecum online event on environmental funding – Belgium, 24 March 2023', European Commission website, <https://environment.ec.europa.eu/events/first-vademecum->

[online-event-environmental-funding-belgium-24th-march-2023-2023-03-24_en.](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33b54f0d-0251-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1)

⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Find Your EU Funding Programme for the Environment – Supporting the environment under the 2021–2027 multiannual financial framework and NextGenerationEU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, [https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33b54f0d-0251-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1.](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33b54f0d-0251-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1)

6. Environmental governance

Information, public participation and access to justice

Citizens can more effectively protect the environment if they rely on the three 'pillars' of the Aarhus Convention: (i) access to information, (ii) public participation in decision-making and (iii) access to justice in environmental matters. It is of crucial importance to public authorities, the public and businesses that environmental information is shared efficiently and effectively⁽¹⁷⁵⁾. Public participation allows authorities to make decisions that take public concerns into account. Access to justice is a set of guarantees that allows citizens and NGOs to use national courts to protect the environment, safeguard the rights of citizens and ensure accountability of authorities⁽¹⁷⁶⁾. It includes the right to bring legal challenges ('legal standing')⁽¹⁷⁷⁾.

Environmental information

This section focuses on the implementation of the infrastructure for spatial information in the European Community (Inspire) Directive. The Inspire Directive aims to set up a European spatial-data infrastructure for sharing environmental spatial information between public authorities across Europe. It is expected that this will help policymaking across boundaries and facilitate public access to this information. Geographic information is needed for good governance at all levels and should be readily and transparently available.

Belgium's performance in implementing the Inspire Directive is substantial and has been reviewed based on its 2023 country fiche⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ (see Table 3).

In 2022, Belgium received a priority action on the need to improve access to spatial data and services. This action has been adequately addressed and therefore no priority action is proposed for 2025.

Table 3: Belgium dashboard on implementation of the Inspire Directive, 2016–2023

	2016	2023	Legend
Effective coordination and data sharing			 Implementation of this provision is well advanced or (nearly) completed. Outstanding issues are minor and can be addressed easily. Percentage: > 89 %
Ensure effective coordination			
Data sharing without obstacle			
Inspire performance indicators			 Implementation of this provision has started and made some or substantial progress but is still not close to being complete. Percentage: 31–89 %
(i) Conformity of metadata			
(ii) Conformity of spatial datasets			
(iii) Accessibility of spatial datasets through view and download services			 Implementation of this provision is falling significantly behind. Serious efforts are necessary to close the implementation gap. Percentage: < 31 %
(iv) Conformity of network services			

Source: European Commission, 'Belgium', Inspire Knowledge Base, https://knowledge-base.inspire.ec.europa.eu/belgium_en.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ The Aarhus Convention (<https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/text>), the Access to Environmental Information Directive (Directive 2003/4/EC) (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32003L0004>) and the Inspire Directive (Directive 2007/2/EC) (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32007L0002>) together create a legal foundation for the sharing of environmental information between public authorities and with the public.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ These guarantees are explained in the European Commission's 2017 notice on access to justice in environmental matters ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52017XC0818\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52017XC0818(02))) and a related 2018 citizen's guide (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2b362f0a-bfe4-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF>).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ This EIR focuses on the means used by Member States to guarantee rights of access to justice and legal standing and to overcome other major barriers to bringing cases on environmental protection.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ European Commission, 'Belgium', Inspire Knowledge Base, https://knowledge-base.inspire.ec.europa.eu/belgium_en.

Public participation

Public involvement at both the planning and the project phase maximises transparency and social acceptance of programmes and projects. Consultation with the public (including NGOs) and environmental, local and regional authorities is a key feature of an effective impact assessment procedure. Such consultation also provides an opportunity for public authorities and project promoters to engage with the public actively and meaningfully by making information on the likely significant effects widely available. If carried out with due diligence and taking into consideration useful public input, this process leads to better-informed decision-making and can promote public acceptance. Making information available increases stakeholder involvement, thus lessening resistance and preventing (or minimising) litigation. On the other hand, it is paramount that the procedure is effective.

This section examines how public involvement and transparency are ensured under two instruments, namely the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive⁽¹⁸⁰⁾.

EU law provides for a flexible framework concerning EIAs. The aim of this framework is to ensure the application of the necessary environmental safeguards, while enabling speedy approval of projects. The Commission has contributed to simplifying and accelerating permitting for renewable energy projects and continues to support the Member States in this regard⁽¹⁸¹⁾. Belgium has already taken steps towards accelerating permit procedures, taking advantage of the broad flexibilities offered by the EU legal framework, such as the establishment of one-stop-shop and accelerated short deadlines for permit processes for renewable energy projects. Furthermore, Belgium has transposed the EU rules on energy communities and prosumers, based on a number of enabling conditions, including eased permit requirements

for smaller-scale solar photovoltaics; dedicated supply licensing regimes and a regulatory framework; ICT infrastructure and financial incentives (e.g. value-added tax exemptions in the Flemish Region and reduced network tariffs in the Brussels Region) for energy traded between peers and shared within multi-apartment buildings and energy communities.

The average speed in the EU for permit processes involving an EIA procedure is 20.6 months, with a minimum duration of 11.4 months and a maximum duration of 75.7 months⁽¹⁸²⁾. The duration of each step in an EIA process (screening, scoping, EIA report, public consultation, reasoned conclusion, development consent) varies considerably between Member States and projects. The available data for Belgium does not allow drawing conclusions, with data missing for the Walloon Region. A priority action is included for 2025 to provide more detailed information on the different stages of the EIA process. Effective use of EU procedures can positively influence the timely approval of activities underpinning the decarbonisation of the economy on the way to net zero by 2050.

A new report is not yet available on the application and effectiveness of the SEA Directive in the EU. Nevertheless, a support study has been published with information by Member State⁽¹⁸³⁾.

Belgium has a national website about the implementation of the Aarhus Convention⁽¹⁸⁴⁾. This website provides a one-stop shop describing how public engagement is organised across the country. The website includes information on past or current public consultations on draft legislation, plans or programmes that are organised at the federal and/or regional levels.

At the regional level, only the Flemish Region currently has platforms in place to enable public participation in

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (OJ L 26, 28.1.2012, p. 1), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011L0092>.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (OJ L 197, 21.7.2001, p. 30), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042>.

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ Commission Staff Working Document (SWD/2022/0149 final), 18 May 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022SC0149&qid=1653034229953>.

⁽¹⁸²⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Collection of information and data on the implementation of the revised Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (2011/92/EU) as amended by 2014/52/EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, Tables 5 and 6, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8349a857-2936-11ef-9290-01aa75ed71a1>.

⁽¹⁸³⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, Lundberg, P., McNeill, A., McGuinn, J., Cantarelli, A. et al., *Study supporting the preparation of the report on the application and effectiveness of the SEA Directive (Directive 2001/42/EC) – Final study*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/1615072>

⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ <https://www.health.belgium.be/fr/environnement/bienvenue-sur-le-portail-national-sur-la-convention-daarhus>.

licensing procedures⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ and planning procedures for regional plans and programmes⁽¹⁸⁶⁾. In the Brussels Region, Bruxelles Environnement/Leefmilieu Brussel set up a single consultation web page, easily accessible from the main page of its website.

However, statistics on the level of public participation in EIA and SEA procedures are not available at either the federal or regional level in Belgium.

Access to justice

Access to justice, guaranteed by Article 19(1) of the Treaty on European Union and Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, is a fundamental right and part of the democratic process. It is vital to ensure the full application of EU law in all Member States and the legal protection of the rights of individuals, including in environmental matters. Access to justice is essential to enable judicial review of the decisions of public authorities and to allow the correction of any wrongdoing committed by these authorities.

This section provides a snapshot of the state of play of access to courts by the public, particularly when it comes to challenging plans, or the non-adoption of plans, under EU law, in the areas of water, waste, air quality and noise, irrespective of the form of the legal act (i.e. regulatory act or administrative decision).

As mentioned in the 2022 EIR, Belgium has made progress by providing wider access to justice to environmental NGOs.

The procedure for judicial review of administrative decisions by Belgium's Council of State is laid down in its basic act (Lois Coordonnées sur le Conseil d'État) and complementary regulations. This procedure can be used to challenge any unilateral, final, legally binding act of a Belgian administrative authority, whether of an individual or regulatory nature (i.e. administrative decisions in individual cases as well as executive orders and administrative regulations laying down generally applicable rules).

An action to annul an administrative act can be brought by any party (any natural or legal person) that has been 'harmed' or has an 'interest' at stake. Meeting this

requirement does not pose particular problems for individual claimants (legal or natural persons) in environmental cases, and the standing requirements do not vary according to the type of environmental legislation concerned. Proof of actual harm is not required. A legitimate interest in the contested act is sufficient. This need to have a legitimate interest is not necessarily based on a legally recognised subjective right. Whether a natural person has the interest required to seek judicial review of an administrative decision affecting their environment is essentially a factual matter, which will be judged by the Council of State based on the specific circumstances of the case. The council will examine whether the claimant will be – or may be – affected by the environmental effects of the implementation of the decision.

Costs might be an obstacle to access to environmental justice by ordinary people and NGOs in Belgium. These costs include court fees and the risk of having to pay a judicial allowance as intervention in the lawyers' fees and the costs of the winning party if the case is lost. If these costs are not covered by insurance (which can often be the case when a private party is suffering damages that can be considered environmental), a party might often hesitate before launching procedures.

In 2022, Belgium received two priority actions on this topic: (i) set up websites providing information on and facilitating participation in EIA and SEA processes in the Walloon and Brussels Regions (also raised in the 2019 EIR); and (ii) record and regularly publish information on levels of public participation in EIA and SEA processes, as well as on their outcomes and on the extent to which public comments were taken into account in the final decision, at both the federal and regional levels.

The first priority action has been resolved, as regards providing information in the Walloon⁽¹⁸⁷⁾, Brussels⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ and Flemish Regions⁽¹⁸⁹⁾. But the second priority action has not been addressed.

2025 priority actions

- Ensure that relevant information on EIA and SEA procedures (including on public participation opportunities and on publication of final decisions) is electronically accessible in a timely manner, through

⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ <https://www.omgevingsloket.be/omvPubliek/?openbaarond%20zoek>.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ <https://inspraak.omgeving.vlaanderen.be/>.

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ <https://etat.environnement.wallonie.be/contents/indicators%20heets/TRANSV%202.html>.

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ <https://environnement.brussels/pro/services-et-demandes/permis-denvironnement/comment-preparer-votre-demande-de-permis-denvironnement>.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/milieuffectrapport-mer>.

a central portal or easily accessible points of access, at the appropriate administrative level.

- Provide information on the average duration of all steps in the EIA process.
- Ratify the amendment to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- Improve access to courts in national environmental cases by the public concerned and eliminate practical barriers, such as length of proceedings and excessive costs in some Member States.

Compliance assurance

Environmental compliance assurance covers all work undertaken by public authorities to ensure that industries, farmers and others fulfil their obligations to protect water, air and nature, to manage waste ⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ and to remedy any environmental damage. It includes measures such as (i) compliance promotion, (ii) compliance monitoring (i.e. inspections and other checks), (iii) enforcement, that is steps taken to stop breaches and impose sanctions, and (iv) ensuring damage prevention and remediation in line with the polluter-pays principle.

Compliance promotion, monitoring and enforcement

Non-compliance with environmental obligations may occur for different reasons, including poor understanding or lack of acceptance of the rules, opportunism or even criminality. Compliance promotion activities help duty-holders to comply by providing information, guidance and other support. This is particularly important in areas where new and complex legislation is put in place.

When inspections and other control activities identify problems, a range of responses may be appropriate, including the use of administrative and criminal enforcement tools.

For the Brussels Region, websites provide guidance on compliance with environmental obligations to prevent environmental law infringements ⁽¹⁹¹⁾. This makes part of a larger inspections plan with eight axes. One of the axes is dedicated to compliance promotion. The emphasis is put on three main areas: communication (e.g. thematic campaigns or articles on the actions of the inspection ⁽¹⁹²⁾), supporting companies and developing awareness-raising projects (e.g. the deployment of monitors in shops to explain waste management legislation ⁽¹⁹³⁾).

The Brussels Region also publishes inspection plans and programmes, and reports on industrial installations.

The 2022 EIR recommended that Belgium (i) provide further information and support to farmers in the Walloon Region via governmental tools and websites on compliance with obligations under the Nature Directives and the Nitrates Directive; (ii) publish inspection plans and inspection reports on industrial installations in both the Walloon and Flemish Regions; and (iii) develop online systems and information to enable submission of complaints from the public on environmental damages or on issues of compliance with environmental legislation in the Walloon and Flemish Regions. On the website of the Flemish government, information on complaints and compliance issues is available ⁽¹⁹⁴⁾. Moreover, as regards point (ii), the environmental inspections carried out by the Enforcement Division since 1 July 2023 are available online ⁽¹⁹⁵⁾. Detailed information is provided on the company, location and content of inspections using specific codes ⁽¹⁹⁶⁾, as well as on the conclusions of the inspections ⁽¹⁹⁷⁾.

The Commission is not aware of whether information is easily available online at the national level for farmers regarding compliance with the Nitrates and Nature Directives, and hence the 2022 priority action is not assessed.

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ The concept is explained in detail in the European Commission's 2018 communication on EU actions to improve environmental compliance and governance (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0010>) and the related Commission staff working document (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018SC0010>).

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ <https://environnement.brussels/citoyen/nos-actions/prevention-et-inspection/linspection-environnementale>.

⁽¹⁹²⁾ <https://environnement.brussels/blog-pro/dossiers/les-coulisses-de-linspection-environnementale-des-entreprises-bruxelles,%20https://environnement.brussels/blog-pro/temoignages/les-protecteurs-de-la-foret-de-soignes?highlight=bentonite>.

⁽¹⁹³⁾ <https://environnement.brussels/blog-pro/temoignages/comment-mieux-trier-dans-les-commerces-bruxellois>.

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ <https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/nl/wegwijzer/ik-wil-milieuhinder-melden>; <https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/nl/ik-wil-een-verzoek-indienen-tot-het-opleggen-van-een-bestuurlijke-maatregel>.

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ <https://informatie.omgeving.vlaanderen.be/kaart>.

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/2023-09/Lijst_actieve_codes_Website.xlsx.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ Compliant, not compliant, not applicable or yet to be assessed.

The new EU Environmental Crime Directive

The EU has recently strengthened its legal framework on tackling the most serious breaches of environmental obligations, notably by the adoption of the new Environmental Crime Directive (ECD) (2024/1203/EU)⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ and new sectoral legislation with stronger provisions on compliance monitoring, enforcement and penalties. Issues important for the transposition and the implementation of the relevant new instruments are highlighted below; a detailed assessment of these topics will be included in the next EIR once more implementation measures are put in place and more systematic information is available.

The new ECD replaced the 2008 ECD and introduced several new offence categories, such as unlawful ship recycling, unlawful water abstraction, and serious breaches of EU legislation on chemicals, mercury, fluorinated GHG and IAS of EU concern. It also covered the establishment of qualified offences, subject to more severe penalties where one of the offences defined in the directive leads to serious widespread and substantial damage or destruction of the environment. Concrete provisions on the types and levels of penalties that can be imposed for natural and legal persons who commit an offence were also introduced. Other provisions will help considerably to improve the effectiveness in combating environmental crime of all actors along the enforcement chain. These include obligations to ensure adequate resources and investigative tools, specialised regular training and the establishment of cooperation mechanisms within and between Member States as well as national strategies on combating environmental crime.

Member States are required to transpose the new ECD into national law by 21 May 2026 and to take additional measures to more effectively combat environmental crime, in particular through training, coordination, cooperation and strategic approaches. The Commission will provide support, including by facilitating the identification and sharing good practices. Member States are expected to ensure the necessary resources and

specialised skills required and they are invited to encourage their authorities to support and cooperate with the recognised EU-level networks of environmental enforcement practitioners, such the EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law⁽¹⁹⁹⁾, EnviCrimeNet⁽²⁰⁰⁾, the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment⁽²⁰¹⁾ and the EU Forum of Judges for the Environment⁽²⁰²⁾. The Europol and Eurojust mechanisms for cooperation on cross-border cases should be used more systematically for environmental offences.

Environmental Liability Directive

The Environmental Liability Directive (ELD)⁽²⁰³⁾ aims to ensure that environmental damage is remediated in kind at the expense of those who have caused it, in line with the polluter-pays principle. It helps to halt the net loss in biodiversity, as well as reducing the number of contaminated sites and protecting the environmental quality of groundwater and surface waters. The ELD is a cross-cutting tool and a key enabler for better implementation of EU environmental law.

The ELD addresses cases of significant environmental damage to protected species and natural habitats, and, when caused by operators carrying out certain potentially hazardous activities, also damages to water and to soil. The Commission has the legal obligation to periodically evaluate the ELD. The ELD has undergone the second evaluation⁽²⁰⁴⁾, which will be finalised in 2025, and which was supported by an external study⁽²⁰⁵⁾, containing, among other things, evidence, views, reports and other relevant information gathered from different stakeholder groups, including Member States.

One of the most relevant indicators in assessing implementation and enforcement of the ELD is the number of environmental damage cases handled under the ELD, especially when this number is compared with the previous reporting period. Fewer ELD cases have been reported in the second reporting period (2013–2022) than in the first one (2007–2013). However, the downward

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ Directive 2024/1203/EU on the protection of the environment through criminal law (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1203/oj/eng>),

⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ <https://www.impel.eu/en>.

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ LIFE+SATEC project (<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/project/LIFE2-0-PRE-ES-000001/fight-against-environmental-crime-at-a-strategic-level-through-the-strengthening-of-envicrimenet-network-of-experts-in-environmental-criminal-investigations>).

⁽²⁰¹⁾ <https://www.environmentalprosecutors.eu>.

⁽²⁰²⁾ <https://www.eufje.org/index.php?lang=en>.

⁽²⁰³⁾ Directive 2004/35/EC on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02004L0035-20190626>).

⁽²⁰⁴⁾ Commission staff working document - Evaluation of the Environmental Liability Directive, forthcoming 2025.

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment and Fogleman, V., *Study in support of the evaluation of the Environmental Liability Directive and its implementation – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/006d90e5-980a-11ef-a130-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

tendency in the number of ELD occurrences and their overall low number do not necessarily mean that the ELD has achieved its objectives, as it needs to be compared with the overall number of environmental damage cases, some of which may have been handled under the other liability instruments.

The ELD has not always been effective in ensuring that the polluter pays, because the liable operators often lack financial capacity to carry out remediation measures. While the ELD does not provide for a mandatory financial security system, it explicitly calls for Member States to encourage the development of financial security instruments and markets, with the aim of enabling operators to use financial guarantees to cover their responsibilities under this directive.

From 1 May 2013 to 29 August 2022, Belgium reported three occurrences of environmental damage: the Flemish Region did not identify any occurrences, the Brussels Region identified only one biodiversity damage occurrence and the Walloon Region identified two environmental damage occurrences, one of them affecting land, water and biodiversity and the other affecting water. In the previous reporting period, there was only one occurrence of environmental damage reported under the ELD by Belgium.

Although neither the federal government nor any of the three regions has imposed mandatory financial security for ELD liabilities, there is demand for such instruments in Belgium. Environmental insurance policies that cover all ELD liabilities are widely available. Environmental extensions to general liability policies are available but typically provide cover for ELD liabilities only if these liabilities overlap with those under other national environmental legislation. Such extensions tend to cover only the remediation of the off-site land or soil pollution from a sudden and accidental incident and only rarely cover the remediation of biodiversity damage under the ELD.

The 2022 EIR recommended that Belgium develop online systems and information to enable submission of

complaints from the public on environmental damages or on issues of compliance with environmental legislation in the Walloon and Flemish Regions. Information is available on complaints and compliance in the Flemish Region ⁽²⁰⁶⁾. For the Walloon Region, there are online procedures and forms enabling citizens to file a complaint in the event of damage caused to the environment.

On the Public Service of Wallonia environment website, procedures for the following can be found (with online forms and all the necessary information):

- (i) requesting action by public authorities in the event of environmental damage ⁽²⁰⁷⁾;
- (ii) applying for exemption in the context of the ELD ⁽²⁰⁸⁾;
- (iii) claiming reimbursement under the ELD ⁽²⁰⁹⁾.

2025 priority action

- Encourage the use of training programmes provided by the Commission (or developed at the national level) covering the ELD and its interaction with the other national liability-related instruments, to ensure more efficient ELD implementation, improve the expertise of the competent authorities and raise awareness among all stakeholder groups.

EU-supported environmental capacity building

The Commission's 2023 Compact ⁽²¹⁰⁾ initiative to enhance the administrative space identifies the capacity to lead the green transition as one of three key pillars, along with the public administration skills agenda and the capacity for Europe's Digital Decade. Compact also recognises the role of the EIR reporting tool in improving environmental governance. The two main capacity-building opportunities for the environment provided by the European Commission are the TSI ⁽²¹¹⁾ and the TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER tool ⁽²¹²⁾. The technical assistance available through the cohesion policy is subject to shared management and is not dealt with in this subsection.

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ <https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/nl/klimaat-en-milieu/milieuschade/ik-vermoed-dat-ik-het-slachtoffer-ben-van-een-milieuschadegeval-wat-nu>.

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ https://environnement.wallonie.be/demandes/1886_demander-l-action-des-autorites-publiques-en-cas-de-dommage-environnemental.html.

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ https://environnement.wallonie.be/demandes/1887_demander-une-exoneration-dans-le-cadre-de-la-responsabilite-environnementale.html.

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ https://environnement.wallonie.be/demandes/1888_demander-un-remboursement-dans-le-cadre-de-la-responsabilite-environnementale.html.

⁽²¹⁰⁾ See the European Commission web page on Compact (https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/public-administration-and-governance-coordination/enhancing-european-administrative-space-compact_en).

⁽²¹¹⁾ See the European Commission web page on the TSI (https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en).

⁽²¹²⁾ See the European Commission web page on the TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER tool (https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-implementation-review/peer-2-peer_en). TAIEX: Technical Assistance and Information Exchange.

The Commission's technical support instrument

The TSI provides Member States with tailor-made technical expertise on the design and implementation of reforms. The support is demand driven and does not require national co-financing.

The TSI had annual calls in 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. The following environment-related projects have been selected in Belgium:

- Integrated environmental monitoring informs adaptive management of coastal wetlands; Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO) (2025);
- Support for the assessment of environmentally harmful subsidies and for the preparation of national biodiversity plans in Belgium, the Netherlands and Finland; Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (two calls 2024);
- Support for the preparation of Social Climate Plans, a TSI 2024 multi-country project benefiting nine Member States (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Finland); Walloon Air and Climate Agency, Bruxelles Environnement, Vlaamse Overheid, Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Climate Change Service (2024);
- Multi-country support for the revised EU ETS, a TSI 2024 project benefiting Belgium, Croatia, Romania and Finland (2024);
- GreenReform model / strengthening Belgium's capacity to model the macroeconomic effects of 'green' policies and investments; Federal Planning Bureau (2024);
- Integration of environmental dimensions in public finances – implementing the 'do no significant harm' principle in the public funding programme; Federal government: Cabinet of Secretary of State Dermine (2023);

- Building policy coherence for sustainable development in Belgium; Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (2023);
- Implementation of sustainability frameworks for Belgian national promotional banks and institutions; Participatiemaatschappij Vlaanderen, Regional Investment Company of Wallonia (2022);
- Support for the Renovation Wave and one-stop shops in the Walloon Region; Public Service of Wallonia TLPE, Direction des Bâtiments Durables (2022);
- Recharge and refuel – clean, smart and fair urban mobility; Brussels Mobility (2022);
- Recharge and refuel – clean, smart and fair urban mobility; Flemish Department of Mobility and Public Works (2022).

The Commission's TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER tool

The Commission launched the TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER tool in 2017. It aims to facilitate peer-to-peer learning among Member States' environmental authorities through workshops (single or multi-country), expert missions (where a delegation of experts travels to the requesting institution) and study visits (where a delegation from the requesting institution travels to a host country). Flagship multi-country workshops are those requested by the European Commission to present new and upcoming environmental legislation and policy in all Member States⁽²¹³⁾.

Workshops involving Belgium are as follows:

- Climate adaptation and blue infrastructures: Examples across European regions (31 May–1 June 2022);
- Circular procurement (7 June 2022), hosted by the Public Service of Wallonia;
- Future challenges in air protection in Europe (24 November 2022) with the EU Czech Presidency;

⁽²¹³⁾ flagship multi-country workshops in the reporting period are: Recast Drinking Water Directive (3 April 2025); Environmental compliance and governance (18 March 2025); Planning of Renewable Energy Projects (20 February 2025); Air Quality: Implementation of the revised Air Quality Directive (16 January 2025); Industrial safety: awareness raising of emerging risks linked with climate change and decarbonation (12 December 2024); Air quality: implementation of the NEC Directive to further mainstream air and broader pollution reduction in agricultural policy (25 September 2024); Industrial emissions transposition and implementation of the revised Directive (12 September 2024); Noise: progress towards meeting Member States' noise limit values and EU reduction targets (5 June 2024); Best practice use of environmental footprint methods on the EU

market (30 May 2024); Sustainable finance (9 November 2023); Textile waste separate collection, treatment and markets (3 October 2023); EU environmental funding and support (13 June 2023); Advisory service for businesses to go circular (24 April 2023); Digital product passport implementation (6 December 2022); Public involvement in planning and approval of renewable energy projects (17 November 2022); Environmental compliance and governance (14 November 2022); Biowaste management (19–20 September 2022); Renewable energy projects: permitting granting processes (13 June 2022). N.B. the first flagship workshop on Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil, took place 9 February 2022.

- Making space for biodiversity: Regional action to mainstream biodiversity and empower stakeholders (21–23 March 2023);
- Biodiversity, nature conservation and large predators: Examples across European regions (4–6 June 2024);
- Online platforms: EU batteries, packaging and packaging waste regulation (28–29 October 2024);

- New aspects in the cross-border cooperation against environmental crime (19–20 November 2024) ⁽²¹⁴⁾.

2025 priority action

- Improve overall national environmental governance, in particular administrative capacity to support the green transition and coordination at the regional and local levels.

⁽²¹⁴⁾

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/TMSWebRestrict/resources/js/app/#/library/detail/90076?hasBackBtn=false>.

Annex

2025 priority actions
Circular economy and waste management
<i>Transitioning to a circular economy</i>
Speed up the transition to a circular economy by implementing an updated national strategy and the EU framework and recommendations, in particular to complement it with upstream circularity measures.
<i>Waste management</i>
- Further shift reusable and recyclable waste away from incineration, including through economic instruments. - Improve separate collection at the source e.g. through economic instruments, investing in infrastructure for separate collection, sorting and recycling, and increasing public awareness. - Increase the collection and recycling rate of waste electronic and electric equipment (WEEE). - Invest in waste prevention measures to reduce the total amount of waste generated.
Biodiversity and natural capital
<i>Global and EU biodiversity frameworks</i>
Submit to the Convention on Biological Diversity an updated NBSAP or national targets following the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
<i>Nature protection and restoration – Natura 2000</i>
Finalise the establishment of site-specific conservation objectives and measures for all Natura 2000 sites (including by adopting their management plans) and ensure their effective implementation.
<i>Recovery of species</i>
Reinforce action for habitats and species with unfavourable conservation status through, for example, restoration measures, increased connectivity, better policy coordination and integration, and increased funding
<i>Recovery of ecosystems</i>
- Step-up efforts to further reduce nitrogen deposition, in particular in Natura 2000 sites with nitrogen-sensitive species and habitats.. - Implement eco-schemes and agri-environmental measures and practices to address the environmental needs of Belgium. - Implement and scale up the uptake of organic farming practices.
<i>Forest ecosystems</i>
- Improve conservation status of forests by promoting sustainable forest management and ensuring compliance with the Habitats Directive before granting/renewing permits for forest logging. - Bring levels of nitrogen deposition under the critical threshold to allow forest habitat types protected under the Habitats Directive to recover
<i>Prevention and management of invasive alien species</i>
Step up implementation of the IAS Regulation, including with regard to enforcement and capacity of inspection authorities.
Zero pollution

<i>Clean air</i>
- As part of the NAPCP, take action to reduce emissions of air pollutants. - Ensure full compliance with the current AAQD standards, also in light of future stricter requirements under the revised AAQD.
<i>Industrial emissions</i>
- Reduce industrial air pollution damage and intensity. - Reduce industrial releases to water and their intensity. - Engage with industry and environmental NGOs to ensure proper contribution to and implementation of BAT conclusions and ensure timely updates to permits following the publication of BAT conclusions. - Ensure effective public participation and access to justice in relation to the IED.
<i>Noise</i>
Complete and implement action plans on noise management.
<i>Water quality and management</i>
Water Framework Directive - Improve river continuity and ecological flows, boosting efforts on nature-based solutions to reduce hydromorphologic pressures. - Ensure periodic reviews of permits for discharges, abstractions and other water uses, including hydropower pressure. - Reduce pollution from nutrients, chemicals, metals and saline discharges. - Better justify exemptions to the achievement of good status. - Improve the classification of water bodies and strengthen monitoring systems. - Develop more robust programmes of measures, tackle obstacles identified in the implementation of measures and ensure adequate financing for implementation, including through better use of the cost recovery and polluter pay principle. Floods Directive - FRMPs should provide details on how the FHRMs were used in the choice of measures and how to consider pluvial flooding. - Consider future climate scenarios in the FRMPs. - Better explain the choice and implementation of flood prevention and protection measures (prioritisation, monitoring costs of measures). Nitrates Directive - Tackle nutrients pollution, especially nitrates from agriculture, through the implementation of the Nitrates Directive. Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive - Take the necessary measures to ensure full implementation of the current urban wastewater treatment directive, taking into account the new requirements of the recast directive.
<i>Chemicals</i>
- Upgrade administrative capacities in implementation and enforcement to move towards a policy of zero tolerance for non-compliance. - Increase involvement in the activities of the Forum for Exchange of Information on Enforcement of the European Chemicals Agency, including in the coordinated enforcement projects, called REF projects. - Increase customs checks and checks of products sold online with regard to compliance with chemicals legislation.
Climate action
Submit the final energy and climate plan (NECP).

- Implement all policies and measures that are needed to achieve targets laid down in the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) and the Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation.

Financing

- Use more national funding (for instance by increasing taxes in favour of the environment and reducing environmental harmful subsidies), EU funding and private funding to help close the investment gap.

Environmental governance

Information, public participation and access to justice

- Ensure that relevant information on EIA and SEA procedures (including on public participation opportunities and on the publication of final decisions) is electronically accessible on a timely basis, through at least a central portal or easily accessible points of access, at the appropriate administrative level.
- Provide information on the average duration of all steps in the EIA process.
- Ratify the amendment to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- Improve access to courts in national environmental cases by the public concerned and eliminate practical barriers such as length of proceedings and excessive costs in some Member States.

Compliance assurance

- Encourage the use of training programmes provided by the Commission (or developed at the national level) and covering the ELD and its interactions with the other national liability-related instruments, to ensure more efficient ELD implementation, improve the expertise of the competent authorities and raise awareness among all stakeholder groups.

EU-supported environmental capacity building

- Improve overall national environmental governance, in particular administrative capacity to support the green transition and coordination at the regional and local levels.