Environmental News, Research & Analysis (ENRA)

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Agriculture/ Food

[Long-term sustainability of food systems at stake](#)

On the 23 March, the European Commission decided to allow biodiversity rich areas on farmland to be cultivated despite the negative implications this will have on nature. The announcement also comes with an official delay to the EU Nature Restoration Law and revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive. These delays to environmental action will hinder the vital recovery path of the EU through the Green Deal and subsequently jeopardize long-term food security and food systems resilience.

[The EU's emerging response to the food crisis needs urgent reset](#)

To reduce the impact of the war in Ukraine on global food security, many European actors propose to increase production in the EU, regardless of the associated environmental costs. This blog post intends to refocus the debate on more fundamental concerns highlighted by the food crisis.

Air Quality

[Air pollution exposure may increase severity and fatality of COVID-19 infections](#)

Researchers evaluate the increased risk of severe and fatal COVID-19 in those patients exposed to air pollutants. This study uses data from hospitals in Catalonia, Spain, to assess whether patients from more polluted areas were more likely to have a severe or fatal COVID-19 response. It finds that exposure to high levels of particulates (microscopic airborne particles) increases the risk of severe disease and death

Biodiversity

[Swiss-based companies pledge to deliver 100 Nature-based Solutions by 2030](#)

To help address the interlinked climate and biodiversity crises, SwissBiz4Nature, a multi-stakeholder initiative composed of Swiss-based businesses and organisations, plans to implement 100 Nature-based Solutions (NbS) before the end of the decade.

[Evaluating 'green jobs': a framework for understanding relationships between employment and biodiversity](#)

Policy efforts to halt and reverse biodiversity loss often view expanding green jobs as a win-win scenario with economic and environmental benefits. However, there is no universally-accepted definition of the term 'green job', and relationships between employment and biodiversity can be complex and multifaceted. This study presents a new analytical tool to help visualise these dynamics and better understand the role of different jobs in transitioning to a sustainable economy

[Transition to forest may threaten 20% of European peatlands](#)

Many northern European landscapes, including western Russia, are covered either by carbon-rich wetlands on thick peat soils, or by forests typically on thin organic soils – depending on the climatic and hydrological conditions. This study suggests that climate change and drainage can cause persistent shifts from one ecosystem to the other. Due to climate change, forests could overgrow peatlands on approximately 20% of European raised bogs, leading to the release of around 4% of European soil organic carbon. In addition, water conservation measures to restore degraded raised bogs will only be possible in 10% of Europe – where the climate still allows them to initiate and to outcompete forests.

[IUCN's four new Centres set to deliver innovative action for nature](#)
In response to the escalating nature and climate crises, including the urgent need for greater conservation finance and inclusive governance, IUCN has announced the creation of four new Centres that will help deliver on the global goals for sustainable development and its own ambitious programme, Nature 2030.

[Supporting biodiversity: study highlights cost of more diverse grassland seed mixtures](#)
Intensive production has been linked to dramatic biodiversity loss in agricultural lands. In productive grassland - for grazing or hay - plant species diversity can support diversity at higher levels (for example insects and birds) and contribute to more sustainable milk and meat production. Land managers can sow seed to increase diversity. New research, however, shows that diverse seed mixtures1 are often more expensive. Reducing the cost could be an effective option for policymakers to support an increase in plant diversity in grasslands and the restoration of semi-natural grasslands.

Climate Action
[Commission invites regions and communities to join the Mission Adaptation to Climate Change](#)
The Commission has launched an invitation to EU regions and communities to join the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change. A survey is now available for regions and communities to express their interest in joining the Mission. Once the replies to the survey have been analysed, regions and communities that demonstrate commitment to adaptation will be invited to sign a Mission Charter.

[LEAK: 70% of EU's drained peatlands must be restored by 2050, says Commission](#)
Member states will have to restore at least 70% of drained peatlands under agricultural use by 2050, of which at least half is rewetted, according to a leak of the nature restoration regulation proposal seen by EURACTIV. The proposal, which is due to be presented on 23 March, aims at halting biodiversity loss in Europe by enshrining ecosystem restoration targets into regulation while also strengthening the contribution of the land sector to the overall climate ambition for 2030.

[Urgent need to adapt to massive impacts of climate change highlighted in latest IPCC report](#)
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has published its latest report on the impacts, adaptation and vulnerabilities related to climate change. Authored by hundreds of the world's top climate scientists, the report confirms that climate change is here to stay and some of its effects are now unavoidable. Across the globe, the climate crisis is putting lives and livelihoods at risk – especially for the most vulnerable.

Energy
[Russia's war in Ukraine: Why doubling down on the Green Deal is the best strategy](#)
As EU leaders meet in Versaille, energy is set to be a key topic. But leaders must ensure that the decisions they make to break away from Russian energy push the EU in the direction of sustainability, argue European sustainability think tanks.

[Facilitating development of renewable energy communities: recommendations for developing legal frameworks](#)
The 2018 recast of the [Renewable Energy Directive (RED II)](#) includes obligations to facilitate renewable energy communities (RECs). These commitments are currently being transposed into legislation in several Member States. This study discusses key factors in the implementation of RECs to consider when developing these legislative instruments. Researchers provide recommendations on socio-technical issues relating to complementarity, proximity, incumbents (businesses with central responsibilities in existing energy systems) and inclusivity.

Finance/ Funding
[European Investment Bank Environmental and Social Standards](#)
The EIB Group Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework is an overarching policy framework that allows the Group to focus on sustainable and inclusive development, committing to a just and fair transition and supporting the transition to economies and communities that are climate and disaster

resilient, low carbon, environmentally sound and more resource-efficient. It consists of a Group-wide Environmental and Social Policy and a revised set of EIB Environmental and Social Standards, including a new Standard 11 on Intermediated finance, which describe the requirements that all EIB-financed projects must meet.

Freshwater/ Water

[UN World Water Development Report 2022 "Groundwater: Making the invisible visible" launched](#)

The 2022 annual UN World Water Development Report is given over to groundwater, which represents 99% of all liquid freshwater on the Planet. On a global scale, groundwater accounts for half the total volume of water destined for domestic use, and for one-fourth of all water withdrawn for irrigation. Because it is invisible, groundwater tends to be poorly understood and mismanaged. The report notes the vast potential of groundwater as relief for the looming scarcity of good-quality water and as a buffer from the effects of climate variability. Against this backdrop, a compelling case is made for the need to manage the resource sustainably, also with the help of an enabling and effective legal and institutional environment.

[Urban flood mitigation: blue-green roofs using forecast-based technology could reduce flooding from extreme rainfall](#)

Green roofs are a promising urban environmental technology; however, they can be vulnerable to dry conditions and have limited ability to store rainwater during extreme weather events. Enhanced 'blue-green' roof systems can address these shortcomings. This study assesses the potential of forecast-based valves, which drain the water when high rainfall is expected, to improve blue-green roof performance in flood mitigation, drought tolerance and temperature reduction during heatwaves.

Green Recovery

[A New Era for Europe - How the European Union Can Make the Most of its Pandemic Recovery, Pursue Sustainable Growth, and Promote Global Stability](#)

The European Commission has responded decisively to the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, putting in place major new policy instruments, most notably NextGenerationEU. Nevertheless, the medium- to longer-term impact of the pandemic on both the economy and society remains to be seen. In this context, at the beginning of 2021 Commissioner Gentiloni convened a High-Level Group to reflect on the main economic and social challenges the European economy will face in the post-COVID environment.

[Towards a green, digital and resilient economy: our European Growth Model](#)

There is a broad consensus on the priorities for the European economic growth model, including the green and digital transitions, and the need to enhance the EU's economic and social resilience as well as and our preparedness to future shocks. These priorities jointly contribute to the objective of fair and inclusive growth and competitive sustainability

Health

[50 million Euros to seed new Nature for Health Trust Fund for Pandemic Prevention](#)

IUCN, together with partners, look forward to implementing this new Fund to help countries achieve more holistic policymaking by creating further evidence of the links between biodiversity, climate and health, and support decision makers and relevant actors to take measures to prevent future pandemics.

[Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy - Climate Change and Health – The Link](#)

The impacts of climate change on health and health care are being recognized of late. The rising temperatures and the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are of grave concern to all life forms on earth and patients are no exception.

Marine

[Coastal ecosystems: carbon stores lost when marshland replaces forest may never be recaptured](#)

As sea levels rise due to global climate change, coastal ecosystems are being transformed. Migrating marshlands were assumed to capture carbon as marshes quickly accumulate carbon in their soils, suggesting a possible increase of carbon storage across the landscape. However, this study finds that where forests turn into marsh, the long-term loss of above-ground carbon (trees and shrubs) can outweigh this effect and may never be recaptured. As marsh soils must survive centuries before they can offset forest carbon loss, marsh migration results in a net loss of carbon that is overlooked in coastal budgets

Plastics

[EU helps launch negotiations on landmark global agreement on plastic pollution](#)

The United Nations Environment Assembly, meeting in Nairobi, has just agreed to launch negotiations on a legally binding global agreement to combat plastic pollution. EU diplomacy has played a key role in securing the support of the global community coming together in Nairobi for this agreement, which aims at reducing and eventually eliminating plastic pollution in all environments.

[Plastic hospital waste can be recycled into new medical devices](#)

Each year, hospitals in the Netherlands generate about 1.3 million kilograms of plastic waste from polypropylene wrapping paper on surgical instruments. Researchers have suggested that this waste could be turned into new medical devices. They recovered surgical wrapping paper from the operating theatre at a hospital in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The waste was melted into solid blocks, granulated and injection moulded into new medical products.

Transport

[Assessing electric vehicle impacts: the need for up-to-date electricity data](#)

Ratios of fossil, renewable and nuclear energy are rapidly changing in European countries, and the grid mix fluctuates daily. Electricity data is of key importance to life cycle assessments of electric cars - for example, their greenhouse gas emissions will be higher when charged from a high-fossil mix. New analysis suggests that accurate assessments require new, up-to-date electricity emissions data.

[Decarbonisation today dramatically reduces future challenges](#)

Heavy duty vehicles (HDVs) is one of three 'difficult to decarbonise' transport sectors and must be addressed with urgency alongside aviation and marine. Electric and hydrogen vehicles are possible solutions in the mid to long term for HDVs and should play their important part in the sustainable energy mix. However, biodiesel, and waste-based biodiesel in particular, offers by far the most cost-effective solution to the displacement of fossil diesel in any diesel engine vehicles left on the road. It is also unique in that it is available immediately.