

Securing Tomorrow: Critical Actions towards a Toxic-Free Future under the 2024 – 2029 Legislative Mandate

The European Union stands at a pivotal moment to shape a future where prosperity, public health, social justice, and a climate-friendly economy coexist.

Despite advancements in health and environmental policies, the pervasive threat of pollution from hazardous chemicals presents a stark challenge threatening our [survival](#) and the Earth's stability. Found in our water, food, air, and everyday products, these inescapable chemicals compromise our health, causing illness, infertility, cognitive impairment, and premature death, with disproportionate impacts on women, children, and future generations. Europeans are already highly [contaminated](#). Chemical pollution is a profound health crisis infringing on the fundamental human right to a safe and healthy environment.

As we look towards the 2024-2029 mandate, the EU must commit to a toxic-free and socially just green transition and support the European industry in leading the way in the innovation of safe and non-toxic chemicals, products, and practices. We owe it to future generations to champion solutions for the climate, the biodiversity, and the chemical pollution crises.

To attain these objectives, policymakers must prioritise the following critical areas:

1. Accelerate the Identification and Phase-Out of Harmful Chemicals

REACH, the existing chemicals control system, must be reformed. It takes [years](#) to phase out chemicals with well-known hazard profiles, and many other chemicals are on the market with unknown properties. The system lags behind scientific consensus, with chemicals like PFAS, bisphenols, halogenated flame retardants, and PVC remaining on the market. **A swift reform of the current system is necessary to effectively protect citizens and the environment. Chemicals must be proven safe before placement on the market and the restriction of the most harmful chemicals by groups, such as carcinogens, reprotoxins and endocrine disruptors, must be accelerated.**

2. Embrace the 'One Planet, One Health' approach

A unified strategy is needed to tackle the intertwined challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change. **The EU must implement a 'One Planet, One Health' holistic approach that prioritises access to clean sustenance, promotes agroecology, and transitions away from highly hazardous pesticides. This approach will complement efforts to reduce carbon emissions and strategies to eliminate toxic chemicals in products by 2030, which is necessary for human well-being, environmental health, and the future of agricultural productivity.**

3. Enhance Transparency and Traceability of Chemicals

Lack of knowledge and understanding of chemicals used in production processes and present in products not only hamper authorities' capacities to regulate chemicals and prevents innovation. Legacy and new substances of concern contaminate material cycles, preventing the development of a toxic-free circular economy. **The Commission, together with the Member States, must create regulatory incentives aimed at transparency and traceability. Industries must be supported in building capacities and establishing cross-sector harmonised reporting approaches.** With enhanced chemical transparency, companies can design out toxic chemicals from their products, and new business models can thrive.

4. Phase out forever chemicals (PFAS)

The [Forever Pollution project](#) recently revealed EU-wide PFAS contamination of water and soil. At the same time, the Human Biomonitoring Initiative [found](#) "widespread exposure to PFAS which exceeds health-based guidance values" among the European population. The European Environment Agency recognises that these substances – ubiquitous in consumer products – "can lead to health problems such as liver damage, thyroid disease, obesity, fertility issues and cancer". Addressing PFAS contamination is now our generation's responsibility. To protect future generations from 'forever' chemicals, we must close the tap and phase out PFAS manufacture, use, and emissions at all relevant sources, except for those rare uses deemed essential for society for which no substitutions exist. **The Commission must present an ambitious universal PFAS restriction proposal within three months of receiving the ECHA opinions.**

5. Strengthen Access to Justice and Accountability

The legal system must provide citizens and regions affected by chemical pollution with effective access to justice: authorities must **scrutinise all evidence of chemical exposure submitted by citizens** and their representatives, and **effective compensation mechanisms, such as damage funds**, are needed in the event of harm. **Companies whose products and production processes are responsible must be held accountable** to prevent the costs of disease and pollution from being passed on to society.

Harmonised, dissuasive, and effective sanctions and comprehensive enforcement measures are required to prevent the current high levels of non-compliance with chemicals legislation.

6. Hasten Innovation towards Chemicals, Materials and Products that are Inherently Safe and Sustainable

The transition to safe and sustainable chemicals, from production to end of life, is a tremendous economic opportunity for the EU chemical industry to regain competitiveness and reach climate neutrality. **Member States should, therefore, commit to stopping the production of hazardous chemicals, materials and products**, regardless of feedstock. In parallel, **the EU should focus on developing and implementing economic instruments to support safe, sustainable, climate-neutral chemicals, materials and technologies and safe and sustainable substitution by downstream users.**

7. Halt Exports of EU-Banned Chemicals

EU member states produce and export domestically banned and severely restricted hazardous chemicals to countries with less stringent regulations. In 2018 and 2019, for instance, the United Kingdom and EU countries [approved](#) the export of 140,908 tonnes of EU-banned pesticides. **The EU must lead globally by ending this practice of unethical double standards.**

The EU must lead by example, demonstrating that a toxic-free green transition is feasible and essential for our collective health, prosperity, and security. Now is the time to act to ensure a healthy, just, and sustainable legacy for all Europeans and future generations.

Guiding principles for EU chemicals policy

It is now our generation's duty to shape future strategies that are integrated and guided by human rights principles. The EU must rigorously implement Article 191(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, in particular: the *"Union policy on the environment shall aim at a high level of protection **taking into account the diversity of situations in the various regions** of the Union. It shall be based on the **precautionary principle** and on the principles that **preventive action should be taken**, that **environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source** and that **the polluter should pay.**"*

Policymakers should pay specific attention to:

- **Corporate accountability**, in line with the Polluter Pays principle, by implementing an Extended Producer Responsibility and ensuring that the financial burden related to pollution is placed on polluting companies.
- Making the regulatory framework **inclusive and transparent**, implementing the right to know, including citizens' voices and concerns during the decision-making process, and ensuring that corporate interests are not favoured at the expense of health and environmental protection.
- The **different vulnerability** of people and groups of people to hazardous substances, depending on their area of residence, occupation, social and economic status, age, and gender.
- The "One Planet, One Health" concept, ensuring that decarbonization and detoxification go hand in hand and that **a specific environmental legislation doesn't harm any of the environmental objectives** – for instance, a technology that would support the energy transition should not be detrimental to people's and nature's health.