

Protection first: EU leadership to deliver safe chemicals with high protection of people's health and the environment

Europeans are not adequately protected from harmful chemicals

Industrial chemicals are everywhere. While enabling manufacturing processes, services, and products in modern economies, many are hazardous and pose serious risks to human health, fundamental rights and the environment. Harmful chemicals remain in widespread use, even within our homes and workplaces. Europe is facing a chemical pollution crisis, contributing to severe diseases and resulting in billions of Euros in health, environmental, and societal costs each year. Despite repeated political commitments to improve EU legislation, Europeans are not adequately protected. **The high level of protection promised under EU law has not been delivered.**

Protection must be the European Commission's primary focus

Adopted in 2006, REACH is the backbone of EU chemicals safety policy. It established value chain information requirements, improved knowledge on hazards, prioritised the regulation of the most hazardous chemicals, and strengthened authorities' capacity to control chemical risks. Together with the CLP Regulation, REACH positioned the EU as a global frontrunner in chemicals regulation. It was even copied and adapted by other countries.

However, 20 years of lax implementation has allowed known harmful chemicals to remain on the market for decades, blocking efforts to develop and market safer alternatives, while hindering the transition to a circular economy. At the same time, the EU is falling behind in chemical innovation: other regions are advancing chemicals' policies that address polymers, cocktail effects or PFAS-free alternatives. This loss of leadership does not benefit European industry, workers, or consumers. On the contrary, strong chemical regulation is a key driver of innovation and long-term EU competitiveness.

These challenges were clearly identified and addressed in the European Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability (CSS), adopted in 2020 after extensive expert and stakeholder input. The CSS sets out a coherent vision to strengthen protection, and support innovation. **It must remain the guiding framework and vision for the Commission's actions on chemicals policy.**

What is urgently needed

Therefore, **an ambitious implementation, enforcement and modernisation of the EU chemicals framework in line with 21st century science is urgently needed** to deliver the promised level of protection against hazardous chemicals and mixtures as well as accelerate the identification and phase-out of the most harmful chemicals, such as those already included in the Restrictions Roadmap.

REACH must ensure that pollution crises such as PFAS never happen again and contribute to key EU health priorities, such as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and enable a toxic free circular economy.

We count on the European Commission, the European Parliament and Member States to reject any deregulation attempt disguised as simplification and to push for legislation that ensures effective health and environment protection and re-affirms EU leadership in chemical safety standards to boost long term competitiveness.

Deregulation disguised as “simplification” puts people at risk

However, rather than taking swift action to strengthen chemical safety protections, the Commission is advancing a deregulatory agenda driven by industry demands and framed as “simplification”. In reality, this approach amounts to **deregulation**, with serious consequences for health, the environment, the enjoyment of human rights, and public trust, including the Chemicals Omnibus proposal which, if approved, will facilitate and extend the use in cosmetics of chemicals which for example are causing cancer or affect fertility, slow down the development of safer alternatives and significantly undermine consumers’ and workers’ access to information on hazardous chemicals. This particularly affects vulnerable groups such as children, women and pregnant people at risk. The stalling of the Restrictions Roadmap, the EU’s plan adopted in 2022 to restrict the most hazardous chemicals — known for decades to harm human health and the environment — is another clear evidence of lack of commitment to public health and the environment.

A strong REACH is the path to competitiveness, not the problem

The European chemical industry faces genuine challenges, including high energy costs, dependence on fossil fuels and unfair global competition. But weakening REACH and stalling its implementation will not solve these structural problems. On the contrary, regulatory uncertainty and delayed action lock Europe into toxic dependency and slow down innovation. The EU must address industry challenges (energy, feedstocks, level playing field) while strengthening REACH, not dismantling it. Ambitious chemical regulation is essential to accelerate innovation, support safer alternatives and ensure long-term competitiveness.

Beyond competitiveness, adopting, implementing and enforcing strong chemicals legislation is the only wise pathway in economic terms. The costs of chemical pollution can exceed by manyfold the benefits to the society of their production. According to a [study published by the European Commission](#), if the current levels of PFAS pollution in Europe continue until 2050 without regulatory action, the cost will reach approximately €440 billion during that period. Tackling such PFAS releases at the source by 2040 would save €110 billion, whereas treating polluted water alone would cost more than €1 trillion.

Stop corporate capture of EU chemicals policy

The direction of recent Commission initiatives reflects a troubling pattern of **corporate capture**, where certain industry interests are shaping political priorities at the expense of public health, fundamental rights and environmental protection. High-level political forums and declarations — such as those linked to the Antwerp declaration and the Critical Chemicals Alliance — have increasingly influenced Commission decisions, sidelining scientific evidence, civil-society input, and the EU’s own legal obligations. Almost 70% of the meetings held by Commission cabinet members last year were with industry representatives.

This erosion of evidence-based policymaking must be confronted. **Chemical safety is a public interest issue**, and decisions must be guided by science, precaution, and the EU’s Treaty obligation to ensure a high level of protection.

Chemical safety is an EU-responsibility

Europeans need decision makers to deliver REACH’s primary objective: a high level of protection of human health and the environment. Without further delay and without compromise at the expense of our health.



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