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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

2025 Environmental Implementation Review

Country Report - AUSTRIA

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

{COM(2025) 420 final} - {SWD(2025) 301 final} - {SWD(2025) 302 final} - {SWD(2025) 303 final} - {SWD(2025) 304 final} - {SWD(2025) 305 final} - {SWD(2025) 306 final} - {SWD(2025) 307 final} - {SWD(2025) 308 final} - {SWD(2025) 309 final} - {SWD(2025) 310 final} - {SWD(2025) 311 final} - {SWD(2025) 312 final} - {SWD(2025) 313 final} - {SWD(2025) 314 final} - {SWD(2025) 315 final} - {SWD(2025) 316 final} - {SWD(2025) 317 final} - {SWD(2025) 318 final} - {SWD(2025) 319 final} - {SWD(2025) 320 final} - {SWD(2025) 321 final} - {SWD(2025) 322 final} - {SWD(2025) 323 final} - {SWD(2025) 324 final} - {SWD(2025) 325 final} - {SWD(2025) 326 final}

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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 Austria. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the implementation performance and highlight 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.

Austria is progressing in the level of **protection and restoration efforts for its Natura 2000 sites**. Nevertheless, the status of many habitats and species continues to deteriorate. There has been a negative trend for most species protected under the Habitats Directive. Austria also needs to find a consistent policy in terms of dealing with its populations of large carnivores. Illegal poaching, shooting and poisoning seems to be the main reason for the lack of success of introducing the lynx in the Austrian Alps and to establish the wolf more widely as a reproductive species.

Land-take and soil sealing remain very high in Austria. It needs to be observed if the newly adopted "Soil strategy for Austria" will lead to a significant reduction by 2030.

Austria performs very well regarding **waste management**. The recycling rate of packaging waste stands at 63% in 2022 and the landfill rate is below 2%. However, Austria generates far more waste than the EU average. Overall, waste generation appears not to have been decoupled from economic growth.

The overall **environmental investment needs** to enable Austria to meet its objectives in the main environmental areas stand at EUR 11.3 billion per year, broken down as follows: circular economy (EUR 6.5 billion); pollution prevention and control (EUR 1.9 billion); water (EUR 1.5 billion); and biodiversity and ecosystems (EUR 1.3 billion). To meet these four environmental objectives beyond climate change, the additional investment need over the current levels – **the investment gap** – reaches an estimated EUR 2.9 billion per year in Austria, representing around 0.65% of the national GDP, being lower than the EU-average (0.77%).

In terms of **governance**, an infringement procedure relating to the insufficient implementation of the Aarhus Convention – in particular the right of recognised NGOs to have access to effective judicial review of self-executing ordinances – is ongoing and could be referred to the CJEU if Austria does not remedy the breaches identified by the Commission.

On the positive side, Austria adopted its Circular Economy Strategy and has launched a number of initiatives to reduce waste generation. A repair bonus scheme provides funding for households in the form of vouchers that cover 50% of the costs for repairing or renewing electrical and electronic equipment.

Austria also has by far the highest share of organic farming, covering almost 26% of the agricultural land.

([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, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A316%3AFIN.

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) ([2]) measures either in place or legislatively advanced, Member States will now have to focus on a swift and effective implementation.

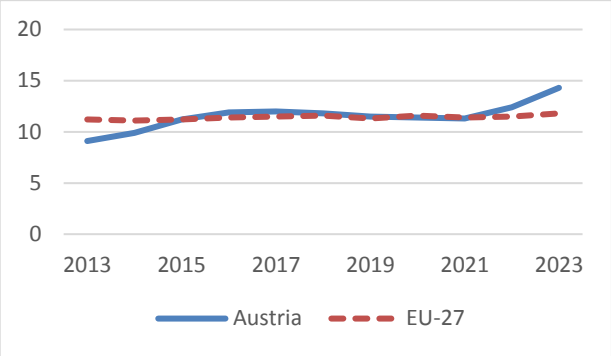
The 2020 CEAP launched the legislative process for a set of initiatives that will now have to be implemented by national governments across the EU. These initiatives were all introduced following a holistic life-cycle approach, with measures addressing the different stages of a product's life cycle,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

The circular use of material in Austria has risen since 2020 and reached 14.3 % in 2023, against the EU average of 11.8 %, continuing the country's upward trend since 2021. This rise puts Austria among the top 10 countries in the EU in terms of CMUR.

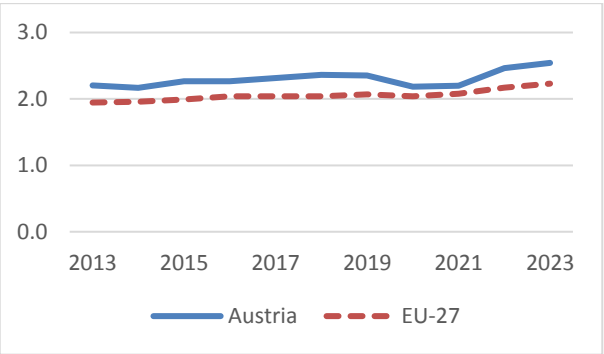
Figure 1: CMUR (%), 2013–2023



Source: Eurostat, 'Circular material use rate', env_ac_cur, last updated 13 November 2024, accessed 10 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/env_ac_cur.

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, with EUR 2.54 generated per kg of material consumed in 2023, Austria's resource productivity is above the EU average of EUR 2.23 per kg.

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



NB: The unit of measurement 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 10 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/env_ac_rp.

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

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 ([3]) 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 ([4]) 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.

On 7 December 2022, Austria adopted its circular economy strategy ([5]), following public consultations that concluded in January of the same year. After reviewing the public feedback, the country set several key targets: reducing domestic material consumption to 14 t per person per year by 2030 and lowering the material footprint to 7 t per person per year by 2050. Austria also aims to increase resource efficiency by 50 % by 2030 (using 2015 as the reference year) and raise the material use rate from the current 12 % to 18 %, which nevertheless falls short of the EU CEAP goals. Additionally, private household material consumption is to be reduced by 10 % by 2030.

The Reset2020 initiative, which focuses on integrating resource efficiency into environmental technologies, sustainable production and consumption, continues to play a key role in promoting the circular economy in Austria.

In 2020, the green chemistry initiative 'Plattform Grüne Chemie' was launched. With its principles of design, efficient synthesis, the use of renewable raw materials, safe production, low-toxicity chemicals and waste, and recycling, it has a strong connection to the circular economy.

In May 2022, the Austrian government adopted its microplastics action plan ([6]), outlining key measures in several areas: improving data collection, advancing research and innovation, enhancing regulation and enforcement, raising public and school awareness, encouraging voluntary initiatives and promoting action at the global level. The plan also includes a ban on adding microplastic particles to cosmetics and cleaning agents, pending the adoption of a preferred Europe-wide ban.

In April 2022, Austria launched the repair bonus scheme ([7]), supported by the recovery and resilience plan (RRP). This investment aims to give broken electronic devices a second chance, thus increasing the number of refurbished and repaired items of electrical and electronic equipment, in line with circular economy objectives. The support programme provides funding for households in the form of vouchers that cover 50 % of the costs for repairing or renewing electrical and electronic equipment and, since 2024, bikes as well.

On 23 September 2024, Austria published its action plan on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). This plan calls for measures to reduce the pollution caused by these dangerous chemicals, promotes communication on dangers and risks, and supports coordinated action. It will be reviewed within four years.

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.

A national strategy for sustainable public procurement[8] has been in place in Austria since 2010 and was adopted by the Council of Ministers. It covers 16 product groups, which are partly based on the core criteria in the EU green public procurement toolkit and which are binding for the federal authorities, including all federal ministries, the central purchasing body and the Federal Procurement Agency. All other public entities, like federal states, cities, municipalities and other public institutions, are subject to federal procurement law and are advised to use the criteria. The action plan for sustainable public procurement was updated in 2020 to reflect, among other things, the EU plastics and farm-to-fork strategies. In 2023, the revision process began for the existing construction criteria. Monitoring through

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

([4]) Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/en/strategies).

([5]) Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, *Austria on the path to a sustainable and circular society – The Austrian circular economy strategy*, Vienna, 2022, https://www.bmk.gv.at/en/topics/climate-environment/waste-resource-management/ces.html.

([6]) Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, *Aktionsplan Mikroplastik 2022–2025*, Vienna, 2022, https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/kunststoffe/mikroplastik.html.

([7]) Reparaturbonus. See https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/umwelt_und_klima/energie_und_ressourcen_sparen/reparaturbonus.html.

([8]) https://www.nabe.gv.at.

surveys has been carried out regularly at various levels. Automatic monitoring based on purchases, and in relation to the criteria for all product groups determined in the action plan, is planned at the federal level.

The EU Ecolabel and the eco-management and audit scheme

The number of EU Ecolabel product groups and the number of eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS)-licensed 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, Austria had 1 100 products out of 98 977, and 311 licences out of 2 983 registered in the EU Ecolabel scheme. As of October 2024, 282 organisations from Austria were registered in EMAS ([9]). Since 2021, there have been 14 new EMAS registrations.

As Austria adopted its circular economy strategy at the end of 2022, the 2022 report's priority action was fulfilled. Implementation is now needed.

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.

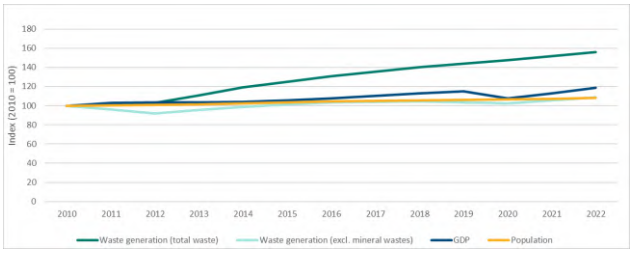
One of the main objectives of the EU Waste Law is to decouple economic growth from its environmental impacts.

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.

Austria's total waste generation shows a significant increase from 2012 onwards (Figure 3). This trend is primarily driven by the largest waste categories – namely, soils and mineral waste from construction and demolition. Excluding the major mineral waste categories results in the stabilisation of the overall level of waste generation. Recyclable waste increased while the generation of mixed waste decreased, indicating improvements in waste management. Austria's GDP shows steady growth over the time period covered, but dropped in 2020, which is most likely to be due to the COVID-19 outbreak. While a longer time series is needed to confirm decoupling from GDP, waste generation appears not to have been decoupled from economic growth.

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



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__custom_9301905/default/table; Eurostat, 'Generation of waste by waste category, hazardousness and NACE Rev. 2 activity', env_wasgen, last

([9]) European Commission, 'Eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS)', European Commission website, November 2021, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/emas_registrations/statistics_graphs_en.htm.

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_gind/default/table?lang=en&category=demo.demo_ind.

Critical raw materials

In the 2023 national waste management plan ([10]), Austria highlights waste streams related to CRMs and the status of these streams. In a few areas, an accumulation of CRM waste streams is recognised, such as CRMs in photovoltaic panels. CRM recycling is often carried out in cooperation with other Member States, as is the case for lithium batteries. Austria has recycling capacity for certain metals, such as wolfram or vanadium.

In the national master plan for raw materials for 2030 ([11]), Austria gives further information on ways to increase recycling rates for waste containing CRMs. Austria wants to cooperate with international companies working in the field of circular economy, increase the traceability of CRMs by setting up an information system and increase collaboration between stakeholders through dialogue and a dedicated platform. Moreover, Austria takes the circularity of CRMs into consideration in its research efforts.

Construction and demolition waste

Construction and demolition waste accounts for almost 40 % of all waste generated in the EU. In Austria, the generation of construction and demolition waste has steadily increased since 2010. A recent study ([12]) by the Joint Research Centre shows that preparing for re-use and recycling operations are preferred over incineration and landfilling from an environmental perspective for most of the individual fractions of construction and demolition waste. However, the economics are often not right to favour preparing for re-use and recycling over incineration and landfilling. If available technology were to be applied, it is estimated that the increase in preparing for re-use and recycling would save an additional 33 Mt of GHG emissions annually (more than, for example, the combined annual GHG emissions from Estonia, Latvia and Luxembourg).

The rate of recycling and preparation for reuse of mineral construction and demolition waste in Austria in 2022 was 69.2 %, compared with the EU average of 79.8 %. There has been a drop since 2020, which has not been explained. Measures to further increase the rate of recycling and preparation for reuse of construction and demolition waste include separating collection at the source – for instance, through digitalised pre-demolition audits ([13]) ('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 ([14]) of construction works.

Boosting implementation – the 2023 *Waste Early Warning Report*

This section focuses on the management of municipal waste ([15]) and packaging waste, for which EU law sets mandatory recycling targets. In June 2023, the Commission published the *Waste Early Warning Report* ([16]) identifying the general trends in waste management and the Member States at risk of missing 2025 waste targets (see Figure 4). Austria is not at risk of missing the municipal waste target or the packaging waste target.

([10]) Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, *Bundes-Abfallwirtschaftsplan 2023*, Vienna, 2023, https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/abfall/aws/bundes_awp/bawp2023.html.

([11]) Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, *Masterplan Rohstoffe 2030*, Vienna, 2021, https://www.bmf.gv.at/themen/bergbau/mineralrohstoffpolitik/oesterreich/masterplan-rohstoffe-2030.html.

([12]) European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Cristóbal García, 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, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC135470.

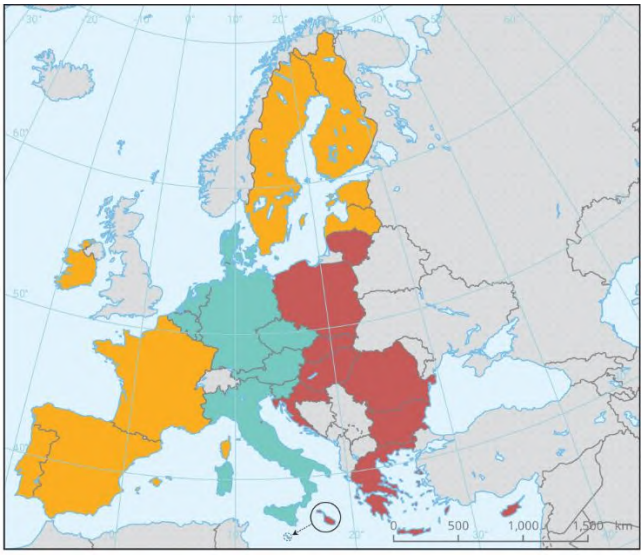
([13]) European Commission: Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, *EU Construction & Demolition Waste Management Protocol including guidelines for pre-demolition and pre-renovation audits of construction works – Updated edition 2024*, Publications Office of the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

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

([15]) Municipal waste consists of (i) mixed waste and separately collected waste from households, including paper and cardboard, glass, metals, plastics, biowaste, wood, textiles, packaging, waste electrical and electronic equipment, 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).

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

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 the 55 % preparing for reuse and recycling target for municipal waste and the 65 % recycling target for packaging waste
- Member States at risk of missing the preparing for reuse 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

Source: European Environment Agency (EEA), 'Many EU Member States not on track to meet recycling targets for municipal waste and packaging waste', briefing No 28/2022, Copenhagen, 2023. 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 use this possibility have to notify the Commission 24 months in advance of the deadline and submit an implementation plan laying down the steps they envisage to reach the postponed targets within a new time frame. Regarding the 2025 targets, 11 Member States, not including Austria, have used this prerogative.

In the *Waste Early Warning Report*, the Commission recommended that Member States accelerate their efforts to improve their recycling performance. The Commission is, on one hand, working together with the national authorities and stakeholders to speed up the implementation of measures necessary to meet the targets, including through dedicated financing. 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 ([17]), the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive ([18]) and the Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment ([19]).

Austria is on track to meet the 2025 targets for the recycling of municipal waste and packaging waste, except for plastic packaging. Austria reports a recycling rate of 63 % for municipal waste for 2022 and a rate of 66 % for total packaging waste for 2021, above the target rates of 55 % and 65 %, respectively. Austria also reported material-specific recycling rates that were above the 2025 targets for all packaging materials except plastics and aluminium. The new reporting rules have been applied since reference year 2020 for municipal waste and for packaging. The reported landfill rate for municipal waste of only 2 % is already well below the 2035 target set out in the Landfill Directive of reducing landfill to a maximum of 10 %.

Municipal waste

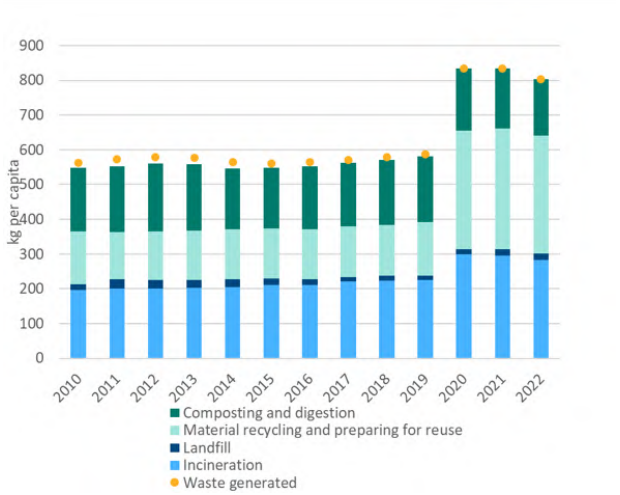
Municipal waste generation in Austria remained relatively stable until 2019 (around 580 kg per capita), but increased significantly from 2020 onwards (Figure 5) due to changes in the reporting methodology – the coverage of the reported municipal waste was extended to include waste that is similar to household waste but comes from other sources, such as services or commercial and industrial operations. In 2022, the country generated 803 kg of municipal waste per capita, which is significantly above the estimated EU-27 average of 515 kg per capita.

([17]) 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.

([18]) 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.

([19]) 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.

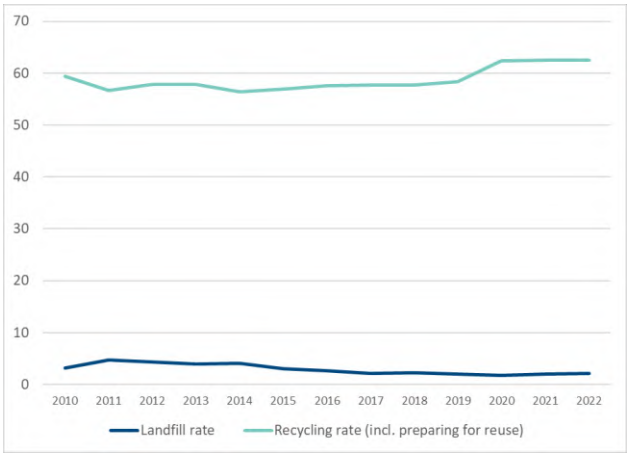
Figure 5: Municipal waste management and recycling (including preparation for reuse), 2010–2022



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.

The recycling and landfill rates for municipal waste have stagnated in Austria over the past few years (Figure 6). Notably, the recycling rate stood at 63 % in 2022, which is significantly above the estimated EU-27 average of 49 % in the same year. The landfill rate remained very low throughout the period covered and reached 2 % in 2022. The share of waste incinerated has remained quite stable since 2010 as well and was 35 % in 2022.

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

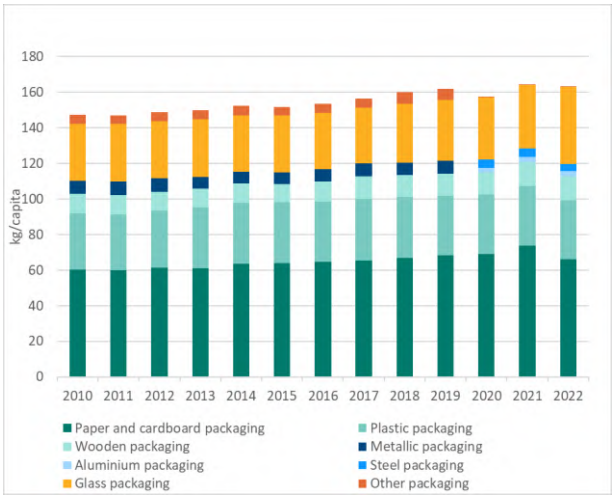


Source: Eurostat, 'Municipal waste by waste management operations', env_wasmun, accessed 22 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASMUN/default/table.

Packaging waste

Packaging waste generation in Austria has moderately increased since 2010 (Figure 7). The country generated 163 kg per capita in 2022, which is significantly below the estimated European average of 186 kg per capita in the same year ([20]).

Figure 7: Packaging waste generation, 2010–2022

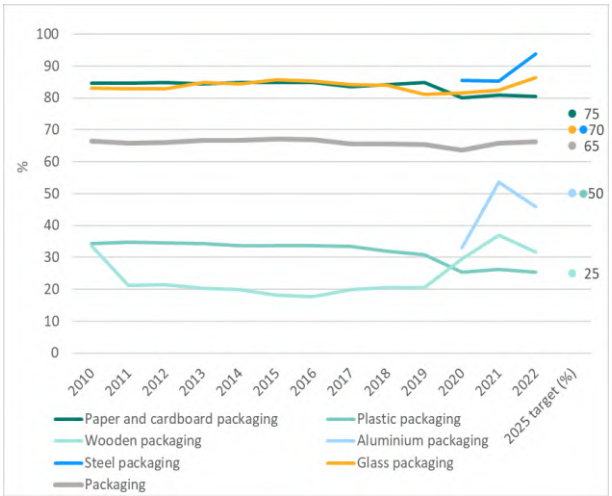


Source: Eurostat, 'Packaging waste by waste management operations', env_waspac, last updated 23 October 2024, accessed 28 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASPAC__custom_842634/default/table?lang=en.

Austria's overall packaging waste recycling rate has stagnated at a high level since 2010, reaching 66 % in 2022. The same applies for most material-specific recycling rates, except that of plastic packaging (Figure 8).

([20]) The EU average might have been influenced by not all Member States fully applying the reporting rules for packaging waste set out in Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/665.

Figure 8: Packaging waste recycling rates (%), 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.

The overall packaging waste recycling rate is strongly influenced by paper and cardboard packaging, as this constitutes the largest share of recyclable waste and has a high recycling rate (Figure 7). The recycling rate for wooden packaging increased in 2020 when the repair of wooden pallets was included in the category. The recycling rate for plastic packaging is quite low and has been moderately decreasing since 2010, reaching just 25 % in 2022 (Figure 8). In 2022, the recycling rate of steel packaging waste exceeded the 2025 target.

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).

The most important legal basis for waste management in Austria is the Waste Management Act ([21]), as amended in 2021, and associated ordinances. The national waste management plan for 2023, which includes the new waste prevention programme, was published in 2023 and reflects the requirements of the EU Waste Directives, as amended in 2018. Publishing the plan was one of the priority actions set out by the European Commission's Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) in 2022.

Austria's national waste prevention programme for 2023–2028 ([22]) includes specific targets alongside waste prevention measures related to prevention. The plan envisages reducing the (currently slightly increasing) level of waste generation in Austria.

In 2022, Austria developed a circular economy strategy in which the reduction of resource use, consumption, waste and emissions is of particular importance within the context of sustainable development (e.g. in terms of forming a legal framework for a sharing economy).

Policies to encourage separate collection and recycling

Austria has extended producer responsibility systems in place for packaging waste but does not yet apply advanced fee modulation. The introduction of fee modulation is currently assessed by a ministry working group (focusing on multilayer packaging and plastic packaging).

From 1 January 2025, Austria has applied a deposit return system for single-use beverage containers (cans and plastic containers). Through this system, Austria aims to reach a collection rate of 80 % in 2025 and 90 % in 2027.

Since 1 January 2023, rules on the uniform collection of lightweight packaging have applied due to the amendment of the Packaging Ordinance. This means that all plastic packaging – such as yoghurt pots, plastic bags or tubes – and lightweight packaging made of composites, wood or textiles is collected together with plastic bottles and beverage cartons in the yellow bins or yellow bags throughout Austria. In 2025, the joint collection of plastic and metal packaging will be mandatory throughout Austria. The federal states of Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg and Vienna and some districts in Upper Austria implemented this step in 2023.

Policies to discourage landfilling or incineration

Austria has had a landfill tax since 1989. The tax depends on the composition of the waste and the standards of the landfill, varying between EUR 9 and EUR 30, and has not been adapted since 2012. For outputs of mechanical biological treatment or of sorting plants that are landfilled, a tax has to be paid as well. Residues from

([21]) Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, 'Abfallwirtschaftsgesetz', Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology website, https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/abfall/recht/awg.html.

([22]) Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, *Abfallvermeidungsprogramm 2023*, Vienna, 2023, https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/abfall/abfallvermeidung/publikationen/avprog.html.

incineration and co-incineration are exempted from the landfill tax.

Waste with total organic carbon (TOC) content above 5 % is banned from being landfilled, except for mechanical biological treatment output, waste with a calorific value of a maximum of 6 600 kJ/kg dry substance, and residues from mechanical waste treatment with a calorific value of a maximum of 6 600 kJ/kg dry substance and TOC content of a maximum of 8 %.

In addition, Austria applies a tax on the incineration of waste, including on the production of refused derived fuel, which has been kept stable at EUR 8/t since 2012. No further increases are expected at the moment. If the waste is exported for incineration, the same rules and procedures apply as for domestic incineration, including regarding the production of refused derived fuel.

In the 2022 EIR, Austria had three priority actions in the field of waste management. Some progress was made regarding the extended producer responsibility systems, and the shifting of reusable and recyclable waste away from incineration. Austria's national waste management plan and waste prevention programme are in line with the revised Waste Framework Directive.

2025 priority actions

- Increase the collection and recycling rate of waste electronic and electric equipment (WEEE).
- Adopt measures to increase the recycling rate of CRMs.
- Invest in waste prevention measures to reduce the total amount of waste generated.

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, 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 ([23]) and a dashboard of indicators ([24]) provide information on implementation progress. The recently adopted EU Nature Restoration Regulation ([25]) 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.

Austria published its biodiversity strategy for 2030 onwards ([26]) in December 2022, following a broad participatory process of thematic and scientific workshops, public consultations and discussions across government bodies. Drawing on the EU and global biodiversity targets, the strategy sets out a 10-point programme with 100 specific targets, more than 400 measures and a set of headline indicators to track progress. It also provides an overview of the key sectors and actors for its implementation. In August 2024, Austria uploaded its national targets to the Convention on Biological Diversity's online reporting tool ([27]).

A new biodiversity fund has been set up to finance nature protection and restoration measures, monitor biodiversity and raise awareness. It will receive a top-up of EUR 50 million from the RRP.

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 Austria, see 'Biodiversity and ecosystems' in Chapter 5.

Nature protection and restoration – Natura 2000

Natura 2000 ([28]), 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. These objectives are to ensure the long-term protection, conservation and survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats and the

([23]) EU Biodiversity Strategy Actions Tracker (https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/actions-tracker/).

([24]) EU Biodiversity Strategy Dashboard (https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/EUBDS2030-dashboard/?version=1).

([25]) 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).

([26]) https://www.bmk.gv.at/themen/klima_umwelt/naturschutz/biol_vielfalt/biodiversitaetsstrategie/biodiversitaetsstrategie_2030.html.

([27]) https://ort.cbd.int/national-targets?countries=at.

([28]) 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. An SAC is an SCI designated by a Member State.

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) ([29]); 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. Natura 2000 shall enable 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.

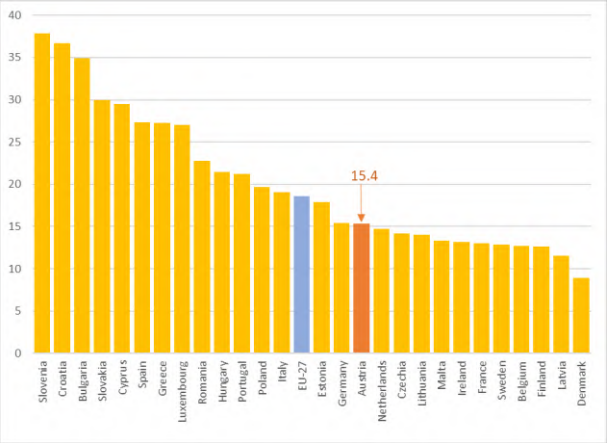
Austria hosts 71 habitat types ([30]) and 207 species ([31]) covered by the Habitats Directive. The country also hosts populations of 90 bird taxa listed in the Birds Directive Annex I ([32]).

As shown in Figure 9, in 2023, 15.4 % of Austrian territory was covered by Natura 2000 sites (EU coverage: 18.6 %), with special protection areas (SPAs) classified under the Birds Directive covering 12.3 % (EU coverage: 12.8 %). SCIs under the Habitats Directive covered 11.2 % of the country (EU coverage: 14.3 %).

Despite significant progress being made in the number of sites proposed over the last 10 years, the ecological coherence of the Austrian Natura 2000 network remains questionable. Several key areas in the Alpine region do not have any site protection, despite carrying labels recognising their outstanding value as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The proportional coverage of many species and habitats (including priority habitats with bad conservation status) remains unsatisfactory. Many of the recently proposed Natura 2000 sites are too small and disconnected to be able to deliver sustainable conservation outcomes, whereas others that have long been recognised as sites of national and international importance for priority habitats or species are still waiting to be proposed as SCIs.

Considering both areas covered by Natura 2000 and other nationally designated protected areas, Austria legally protects 29.3 % of its terrestrial areas (EU-27 coverage: 26.1 %) ([33]).

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



Source: European Environment Agency (EEA), 'Natura 2000 Barometer', data of 2023, accessed March 2025, https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/dashboards/natura-2000-barometer.

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

([29]) 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.

([30]) European Environment Agency (EEA), 'Number of habitats and species per Member State', Article 17 dashboard, Annex I total, 19 December 2019, https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/state-of-nature-in-the-eu/article-17-national-summary-dashboards/general-information-on-habitats-and-species.

([31]) EEA, 'Number of habitats and species per Member State', Article 17 dashboard, 19 December 2019, https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/state-of-nature-in-the-eu/article-17-national-summary-dashboards/general-information-on-habitats-and-species.

([32]) 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/themes/biodiversity/state-of-nature-in-the-eu/article-12-national-summary-dashboards/general-information-on-bird-species-populations. This counting only takes into account bird taxa for which information was requested.

([33]) Eurostat dataset env_bio4, protected area percentage for 2022, accessed 12 March 2025

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describe the habitats' or species' condition as favourable or unfavourable. Under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive Member States must establish and implement measures to achieve these objectives.

As nature conservation is an exclusive competence of the *Länder*, Austria does not have a unified approach to setting site-level conservation objectives and measures. Given the lack of coherence in the way the *Länder* publicise their information about SAC designations, conservation objectives and conservation measures, it is currently not possible to provide reliable statistics on the quality and completeness of conservation objectives and measures. Generally speaking, however, given the general absence of clear site-specific objectives for restoring species and habitats with unfavourable conservation status, the current site-specific objectives (and therefore also, presumably, the conservation measures) cannot be considered to be in compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. The Commission has therefore initiated infringement procedures to improve the transposition and application of the EU Law on Nature Conservation.

Compliance would require the full consideration of the Article 17 conservation status assessments in setting site-specific conservation objectives and a coherent approach to all sites in a given biogeographical region, so as to ensure that the Natura 2000 network can facilitate the recovery of favourable conservation status for all species and habitats currently reported by Austria as having bad conservation status.

Recovery of species

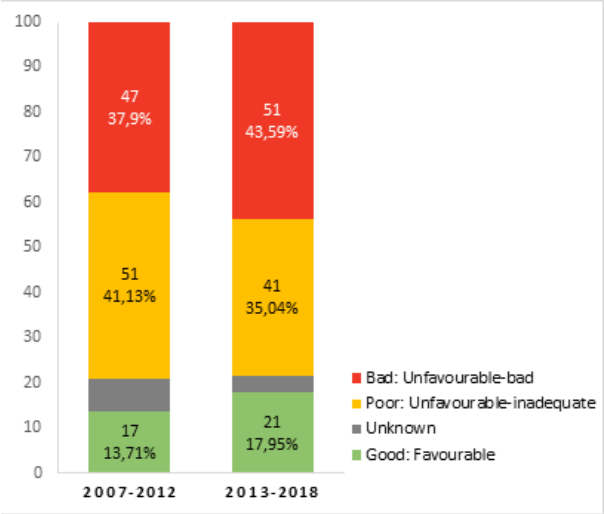
One objective set by the BDS is that, by 2030, there should be no further deterioration in conservation trends or the status of any protected species. The BDS also states that Member States should ensure that at least 30 % of species not currently in favourable conservation status achieve that status 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 European Environment Agency (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 ([34]).

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.

Despite evident improvements in the level of site protection and increased restoration efforts over recent decades, the status of many habitats and species in Austria have continued to deteriorate over the most recent six-year reporting period, in particular in the continental biogeographical region.

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. Figures 10 and 11 show the latest available conservation status data.

Figure 10: Assessments of conservation status of habitats 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, accessed December 2021, https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/conservation-status-and-trends-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived.

According to the most recent report on Article 17 of the Habitats Directive, covering 2013–2018, 18 % of habitats in Austria are classed as having a favourable status, 35 % a poor status and 44 % a bad status.

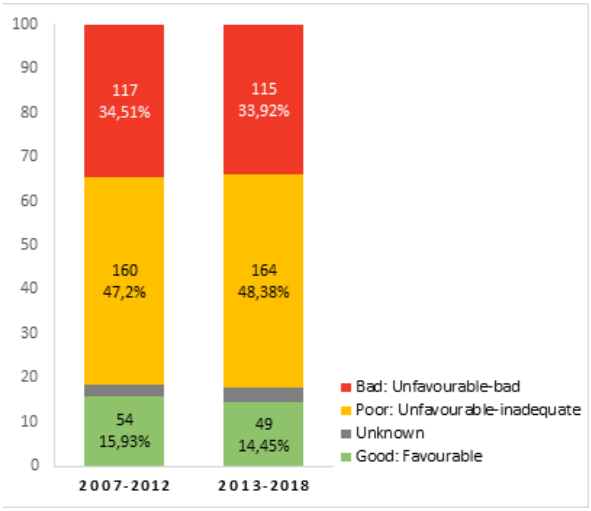
([34]) EEA, *State of Nature in the EU: Results from reporting under the Nature Directives 2013–2018*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020.

The groups of habitat types of highest concern are (i) species-rich grasslands, (ii) bogs and fens, (iii) floodplain forests; (iv) rivers and other freshwater habitats and (v) the priority habitats Pannonic inland dunes, Pannonic salt steppes and salt marshes. None of these habitat types have favourable status in either the continental or Alpine biogeographical regions.

The only habitat types found to be consistently in favourable condition are rocky habitats, and heath and scrubs.

The picture for species is similar to that for habitats. It shows little change from the last reporting period, and a high proportion of the species in unfavourable status have seen their numbers decline continuously over the past 12 years.

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, accessed December 2021, https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/conservation-status-and-trends-article-17-national-summary-dashboards-archived.

Populations of bird species listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive mostly appear to be faring better than those listed in the Habitats Directive, but some species have decreased in numbers or have become extinct recently (e.g. ortolan bunting and roller). Many populations of formerly common farmland bird species have declined and are continuing to decline further (e.g. whinchat and meadow pipit).

Austria currently lacks any consistent policy dealing with its populations of large carnivores. It is the only Member State where a large carnivore species has gone extinct since EU accession (brown bears in the Central Alps). Furthermore, high levels of illegal poaching appear to be the main reason for the lack of success in introducing the lynx into the Austrian Alps, despite the presence of suitable habitats and a very good, appropriate food base (in the form of the abundant roe deer population). Illegal shooting and poisoning seem to be more widespread in Austria than other Member States (as was recently shown through satellite-tracking research as part of EU-wide research on the red kite), and this also seems to be one of the main reasons why the wolf is still not established more widely as a reproductive species in Austria.

Most of the Austrian regions have adopted regulations permitting the hunting of strictly protected species (beavers, otters and wolves) that cause economic damage; this is a derogation from the provisions of the Habitats Directive. A recent judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union[35] has provided clarification on the granting of derogations, stating that Member States must assess the impact of such derogations on the conservation status at both local and national levels. Derogations may only be granted if it can be guaranteed that they will not have a negative effect on the favourable conservation status. In Austria, the granting of derogations will have to be carefully regulated, particularly since the favourable conservation status has yet to be achieved.

In 2022, Austria received a priority action to improve the quality, completeness and ambition level of site-specific conservation objectives and measures, including management plans, for species and habitats in Natura 2000 sites.

Some formal deficiencies in the site-level designation acts have been improved by early 2025, but for most Natura 2000 sites the description of site-specific conservation objectives still remains rather superficial. The formal improvements made in the legal acts are therefore unlikely to lead to any genuine improvement in the condition of the species and habitats in the sites, let alone to any improvement of their conservation status at national level.

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.

([35]) Judgment of 11 July 2024, *WWF Österreich and Others*, C-601/22, EU:C:2024:595.

- 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" ([36]), 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.

The CAP and national CAP strategic plans (SPs) that establish the framework for the transition to sustainable agriculture 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 SPs in 2022. CAP is the largest source of funding for the implementation of EU environment policy and SPs should lead to better 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, as uptake of the eco-schemes is voluntary for farmers.

The utilised agricultural area in Austria decreased from 2 863 580 ha in 2012 to 2 655 560 ha in 2017, decreasing further to 2 599 510 ha in 2022 ([37]).

Landscape features are small fragments of non-productive and typically – but not exclusively – 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 landscape features and the area covered by agricultural land. Based on the Land Use/Cover Area Frame Survey landscape features estimates, the share of agricultural land covered by non-productive landscape features in Austria is 4.4 %, below the EU average. At the EU level, landscape features cover 5.6 % of agricultural land.

In 2024, the CAP basic regulations were amended ([38]) regarding, inter alia, the standards for good agricultural and environmental condition 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 area or landscape features in their farms. The amended regulations set out, however, 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.

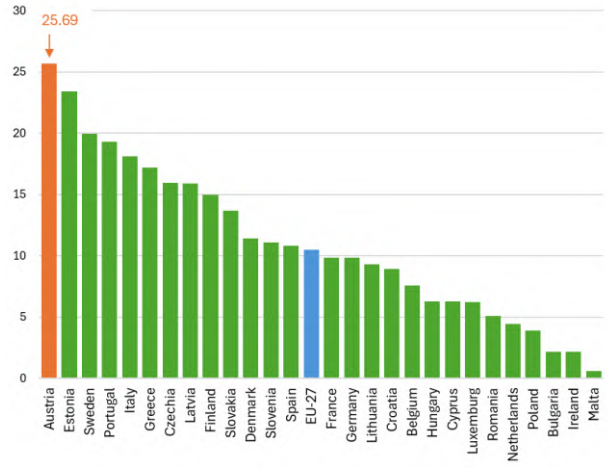
The recently adopted Nature Restoration Regulation ([39]) focuses on the restoration of agricultural ecosystems and requires Member States to put in place measures that aim to achieve an increasing trend at the national level in at least two out of three indicators for agricultural

([36]) https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/vision-agriculture-and-food_en
([37]) Eurostat, 'Utilised agricultural area by categories', tag00025, accessed 5 December 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tag00025/default/table?lang=en.
([38]) 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.
([39]) 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.

ecosystems ([40]). 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 25.69 % ([41]) of Austria's land area is used for organic farming. This is the best result in the EU, far above the EU average of 10.50 % ([42]). Austria is currently contributing significantly to achieving the target of 25 % of the EU's agricultural land being used for organic farming 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.

2025 priority action

- Implement eco-schemes and agri-environmental measures and practices to address the environmental needs of Austria.

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 ([43]) 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 Austria ([44]).

10 % of Austria's soils are affected by unsustainable soil erosion (by water, wind, tillage and harvest), representing 68 % of croplands. 9 % of the national

([40]) The three indicators are 'grassland butterfly index', 'stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils' and 'share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features'.
([41]) Data for Austria are only available for 2020.
([42]) This is based on the latest available information from Eurostat, which is currently under review; European Commission, *Agriculture biologique au sein de l'union européenne*, factsheet, Brussels, 2024, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c67458ed-ec50-4762-ae68-341763ab93c2_fr?filename=factsheet-organic-farming_fr.pdf&prefLang=en.
([43]) 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.
([44]) Commission staff working document – Impact assessment report: Annexes – Accompanying the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on soil monitoring and resilience (Soil Monitoring Law), SWD(2023) 417 final of 5 July 2023, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT ANNEXES SWD 2023 417 part4.pdf.

territory experiences loss of soil organic carbon in mineral soils ([45]), with a high concentration in the north-east of the country, and 8 % of the total surface contains mercury concentrations of above 200 µg/kg.

Land take and soil sealing remain high in Austria. The total land use in Austria in 2022 was 5 648 km². This corresponds to 6.7 % of the country's area and 17.3 % of the permanent settlement area ([46]). Austria adopted a new national soil strategy for Austria – strategy to reduce further land use and soil sealing by 2030 ([47]) – with the target of substantially reducing land use by 2030.

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. Extensively managed grasslands include meadows, mountain pastures, dry calcareous grasslands and steppic grasslands.

In the most recent report produced in accordance with Article 17 of the Habitats Directive (published in 2019), severe area losses and serious declines in habitat quality are reported for most Annex I grassland habitat types in Austria.

Only 2 out of 12 grassland habitats in the Austrian Alpine region are reported to be in a favourable status; none of the 14 habitat types in the continental regions are reported to be in favourable status. 48 % of assessments of grasslands reported bad status.

Not a single grassland habitat, in the continental or in the Alpine region of the country, is reported to have a positive conservation status trend.

The main reasons for the reported deterioration are land-use intensification (excessive use of fertilisers and high mowing frequencies) and land-use conversion (transformation of grasslands into cornfields). Agricultural land abandonment seems to explain some of the losses of species-rich grasslands in the higher parts of the Alps, whereas atmospheric nitrogen has negative impacts on the species composition and the structure of grasslands in Alpine valleys and lowland areas.

Genuine improvements in the overall conservation status for grasslands seems unlikely to be achieved, unless land abandonment, intensification and atmospheric nitrogen deposition are reduced.

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 wetlands 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 greenhouse gas (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 most recent report produced in accordance with Article 17 of the Habitats Directive (published in 2019), all Annex I wetland habitat types in Austria are reported to be in unfavourable conservation status.

Of particular concern is the status of active raised bogs, given that their status is reported as not only 'unfavourable – bad' but also still 'declining further' in both biogeographical regions of Austria.

The main pressures on wetlands in Austria are related to (former or ongoing) agricultural drainage, land-use conversion and an excessive abstraction of groundwater for intensive agricultural needs, especially in Burgenland and Lower Austria.

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

([45]) De Rosa, D., Ballabio, C., Lugato, E. et al., 'Soil organic carbon stocks in European croplands and grasslands: How much have we lost in the past decade?', *Global Change Biology*, Vol. 30, No 1, 2023, e16992, https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.16992.

([46]) Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz (ÖROK), 'Ergebnisse Österreich', ÖROK website, 2022, https://www.oerok.gv.at/raum/daten-und-grundlagen/ergebnisse-oesterreich-2022.

([47]) ÖROK, 'Bodenstrategie für Österreich', ÖROK website, accessed 7 January 2025, https://www.oerok.gv.at/bodenstrategie.

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.

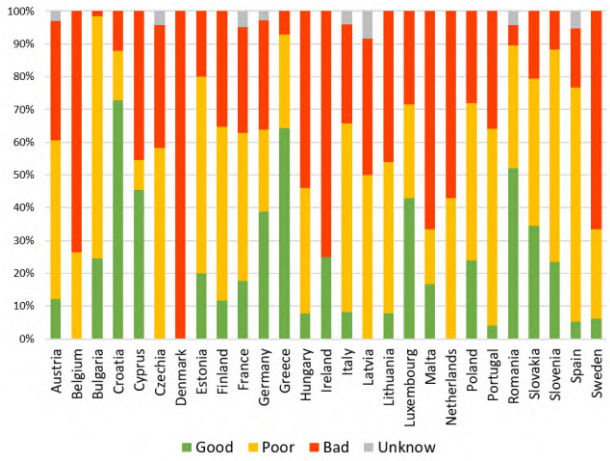
Several guidelines on forestry management were published in 2023. They covered biodiversity-friendly afforestation, reforestation and tree planting; closer-to-nature forest management; and defining, mapping, monitoring and strictly protecting primary and old-growth forests. Further guidance on payment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

In 2023, the Commission proposed a new forest monitoring law ([48]) 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 ([49]). The share of forested areas in the EU with a bad conservation status increased from 27 % in 2015 to 31 % in 2018.

In Austria, forests covered 47.3 % of the territory in 2020 ([50]). More than 75 % of the assessments in Austria show these areas have a bad or poor status ([51]). In total, 63 000 ha in Austria is covered by primary forests ([52]).

Figure 13: Conservation status of forests protected under the Habitats Directive per Member State (% of 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) ([44]) prohibits the placing on the EU market of illegally harvested timber.

On 29 June 2023, the Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) ([45]) entered into force ([53]). The regulation seeks to guarantee that products in the EU that are produced using any of a list of seven commodities have no links to deforestation. The EUDR repeals the EUTR.

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

([48]) 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.

([49]) 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.

([50]) EEA forest information system for Europe, 'Countries – FISE country factsheets', forest information system for Europe website, https://forest.eea.europa.eu/countries.

([51]) Commission staff working document – Stakeholder consultation and evidence base: 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 – New EU forest strategy for 2030, SWD(2021) 652 final of 16 July 2021, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0652.

([52]) European Commission: Joint Research Centre, *Mapping and assessment of primary and old-growth forests in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, p. 13, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC124671.

([53]) 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.

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 ([54]).

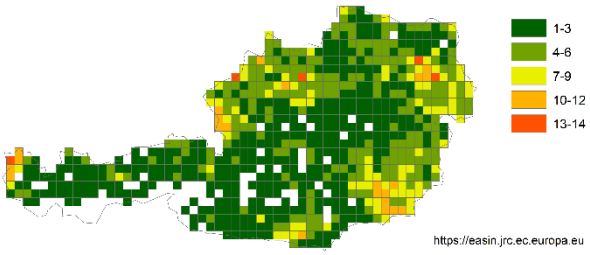
The third update of the Union list ([55]) entered into force on 2 August 2022. The fourth update is in preparation.

The IAS Regulation ([56]) 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 ([57]). More recent studies have put this cost at USD 28 billion per year in the EU, increasing to USD 148.2 billion by 2040 ([58]), and at USD 423 billion annually at the global level ([59]).

Figure 14: Number of IAS of EU concern, based on available georeferenced information for Austria, 2024



The total number of IAS of Union concern in the country is 39. This includes 28 species recorded in the previous EIR (2021) and 11 additions. Of these 11 additions, 3 were already on the Union concern list in 2021, and 8 were added later under Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1203.

2025 priority actions

- Step up implementation of the IAS Regulation, including with regard to enforcement and the capacity of inspection authorities.
- Ratify the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments of 2004 (BWM Convention).

([54]) 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.

([55]) Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1203 of 12 July 2022 amending Implementing Regulation (EU) 2016/1141 to update the list of invasive alien species of Union concern (OJ L 186, 13.7.2022, p. 10), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R1203.

([56]) 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).

([57]) 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.

([58]) 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.

([59]) 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-policymakers-invasive-alien-species-assessment.

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 ([60]) 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 ([61]).

The amended Regulation (EU) No 691/2011 on European environmental economic accounts ([62]) 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.

An increasing number of platforms, networks and communities of practice involve businesses in protecting biodiversity, including the EU Business & Biodiversity Platform ([63]). 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.

In 2022, Austria received a priority action to continue supporting the mapping and assessment of ecosystems and their services, and ecosystem accounting development, as well as to continue supporting the development of national business and biodiversity platforms.

There is still no Austrian business and biodiversity network member of the EU Business & Biodiversity Platform.

2025 priority action

- Support the development of the national business and biodiversity network.

([60]) 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).

([61]) 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.

([62]) 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.

([63]) 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 ([64]). These set health-based EU air quality standards ([65]) and stipulate Member States' national emission reduction commitments ([66]) for several air pollutants.

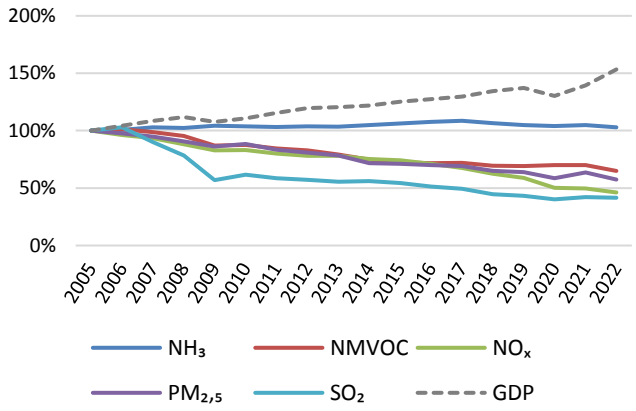
The air quality in Austria is generally good, with some exceptions.

The latest available annual estimates (for 2022) by the EEA ([67]) for Austria attribute 3 300 deaths each year (or 31 300 years of life lost (YLL)) to fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) ([68]), 780 deaths each year (or 7 300 YLL) to nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) ([69]) and 1 400 deaths each year (or 13 600 YLL) to ozone ([70]).

The emissions of several air pollutants have decreased significantly in Austria since 2005, while GDP growth has continued (see Figure 15). According to the inventories submitted under Article 10(2) of the National Emission Reduction Commitments Directive (NECD) ([71]) in 2024, Austria has met its emission reduction commitments for 2020–2029 for air pollutants nitrogen oxides (NO_x), non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC), sulphur dioxide (SO_2) and $PM_{2.5}$, and has not met them for ammonia (NH_3). According to the latest projections submitted under Article 10(2) of the NECD in 2023, Austria is projected to meet its emission reduction commitments for 2030 onwards for NO_x, NMVOC, SO_2 and $PM_{2.5}$, but not for NH_3.

Austria submitted its updated national air pollution control programme (NAPCP) to the Commission on 8 April 2024, according to the scenario 'with additional measures', Austria projects to meet its emission reduction commitments for 2030 onwards for NH_3, too.

Figure 15: Emission trends of main pollutants / GDP in Austria (%), 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.

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

([65]) European Commission, 'EU air quality standards', European Commission website, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/air/air-quality/eu-air-quality-standards_en.

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

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

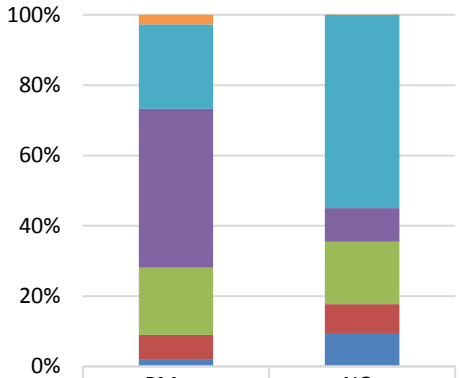
([68]) Particulate matter (PM) is a mixture of aerosol particles (solid and liquid) covering a wide range of sizes and chemical compositions. PM_{10} refers to particles with a diameter of 10 µm or less. $PM_{2.5}$ refers to particles with a diameter of 2.5 µm or less. PM is emitted from many human sources,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

([69]) Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) 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.

([70]) 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.

([71]) 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 16: $PM_{2.5}$ and NO_x emissions by sector in Austria (%), 2022



	$PM_{2.5}$	NO_x
Waste	2.7%	0.024%
Transport	24.0%	54.904%
Residential, commercial & institutional	45.1%	9.596%
Manufacturing and extractive industry	19.2%	17.780%
Energy supply	7.1%	8.441%
Agriculture	1.8%	9.255%

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, no exceedances above the limit values set by the Ambient Air Quality Directive (AAQD) ([72]) were registered in Austria. However, for several air quality zones, the target values for ozone concentrations have not been met ([73]).

Infringement procedures have been opened for Member States not meeting the emission reduction commitments for 2020–2029; this includes a procedure for Austria for NH_3.

In the 2022 EIR, Austria received three priority actions. The first priority action was to further reduce emissions in the context of the NAPCP. Austria has not made progress on this, as the latest reported data show continued non-compliance with the 2020–2029 emission reduction commitment for NH_3. The second priority action was to ensure full compliance with EU air quality standards and maintain downward emission trends. Based on the latest data, Austria has made substantial progress in this regard. Full compliance has been ensured for all limit values and target values, with the exception of those for ozone. Since 2019, downward emission trends have been reported for all main air pollutants. However, for NH_3, the levels are above 2005 levels and require further action. The third priority action received by Austria was to ratify the amended Gothenburg Protocol, which has been done.

2025 priority actions

- As part of the NAPCP, take actions towards reducing 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:

(i) protect air, water and soil and to prevent harmful effects on human health and the environment;
(ii) prevent and manage waste;
(iii) improve energy and resource efficiency, including water;
(iv) contribute to decarbonisation.

The cornerstone of the policy is the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED), which was revised in 2024 ([74]). 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 ([75]).

In Austria, there were about 784 installations covered by the IED in 2022, almost half of them (41 %) being installations from the waste management sector (including landfills). The other main sectors are the metals sector (16 %) and the chemical sector (12 %).

([72]) 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.

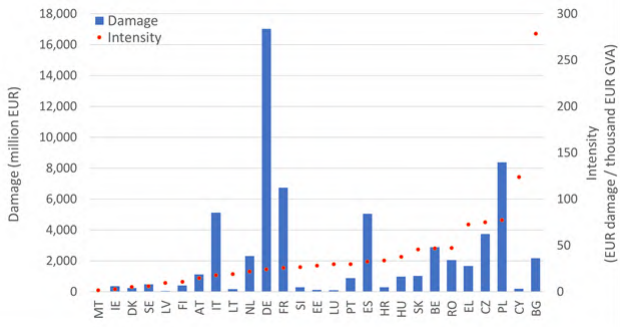
([73]) EEA, 'Eionet Central Data Repository', https://cdr.eionet.europa.eu.

([74]) 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.

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

Figure 17 shows the damage to health and the environment due to the main industrial air pollutants. As this depends on, among other factors, 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'. Although Austria is in 12th place in terms of damage in the EU, it comes 21st for emissions intensity, below the EU average of EUR 27.5/EUR 1 000 GVA. The main industrial contributors to emissions to air ([76]) are the metals sector, the energy sector for SO_2 and mercury emissions, and the energy sector for cadmium, dust and NO_x emissions.

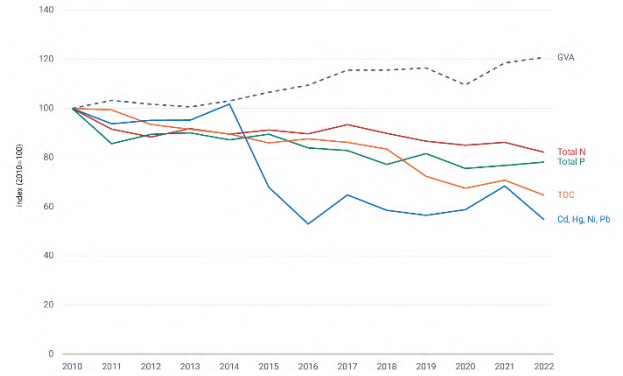
Figure 17: Industrial air pollution damage and intensity per Member State, 2021



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 the industrial activity, which has increased over the same period (expressed in GVA), as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Industrial releases of pollutants to water and industrial activity in the EU-27

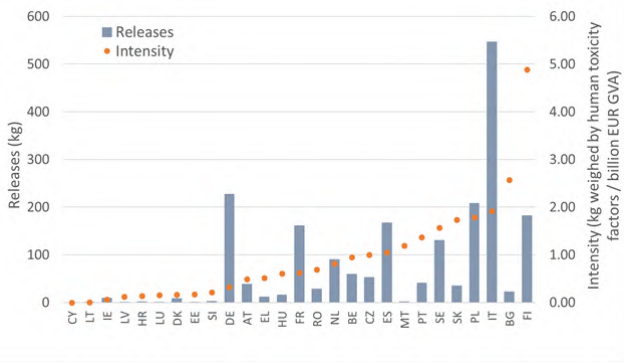


NB: Cd, cadmium; Hg, mercury; Ni, nickel; Pb, lead; total N, total nitrogen; total P, total phosphorous.

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.

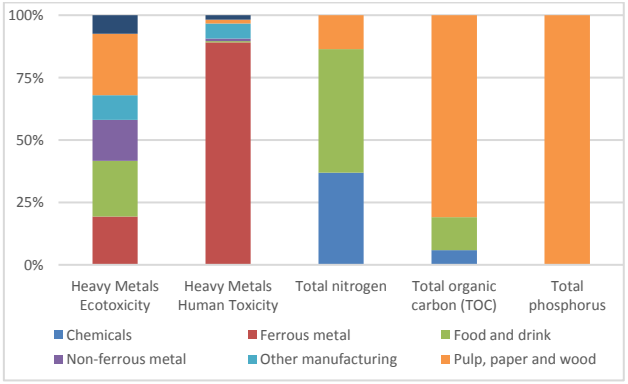
Concerning Austria in particular, Figure 20 shows the industrial emissions of heavy metals to water, taking into account the human toxicity of each metal, as well as the emissions intensity, based on its ratio with industrial activity (expressed in GVA). Austria has the 12th highest emissions of heavy metals to water and is in 17th position for emissions intensity (below the EU average of 0.864 kg/EUR 1 billion GVA). As shown in Figure 20, the main industrial contributors to emissions to water in Austria are the ferrous metal sector for heavy metals, the pulp, paper and wood sector for total phosphorus and TOC, and the chemical sector and the food and drink sector for total nitrogen.

Figure 19: 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.

Figure 20: Relative releases to water from industry in Austria (%), 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://doi.org/10.2909/cf5e54c1-be99-4426-bcad-baa26c4f27a0.

([76]) 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.

Austria has been subject to an infringement procedure for not conforming with the transposition of the IED since 2020; this procedure is still ongoing.

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 non-governmental organisations (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 1–3 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 on (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

- Complete the correct transposition of the IED 1.0.
- 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:

(i) control major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances, especially chemicals;
(ii) limit the consequences of such accidents for human health and the environment;
(iii) 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) ([77]).

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 ([78]) and the report by Austria on the implementation of the Seveso III Directive for 2019–2022 ([79]).

Austria transposed the Seveso III Directive differently in each industrial sector and in each of the nine *Länder*. Due to the large number of legal acts, not always adopted in a co-ordinated way, some obligations have not been fully implemented. An infringement procedure on this subject is pending ([80]).

In Austria, among the 172 Seveso establishments, 78 are categorised as lower-tier establishments and 94 as upper-tier establishments (UTEs), based on the quantity of hazardous substances likely to be present. UTEs are subject to more stringent requirements.

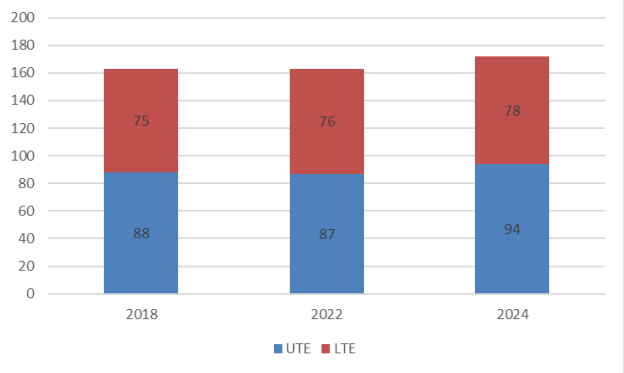
([77]) Directive 2012/18/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances, amending and subsequently repealing Council Directive 96/82/EC (OJ L 197, 24.7.2012, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2012/18/oj.

([78]) https://espirs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/espirs/content; data extracted in September 2024.

([79]) As provided for by Article 21(2) of the Seveso III Directive.

([80]) European Commission infringement decision INFR(2020)2104; see European Commission, 'May infringements package: Key decisions', European Commission website, 14 May 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/EN/INF_20_859.

Figure 21: Number of Seveso establishments in Austria, 2018, 2022 and 2024

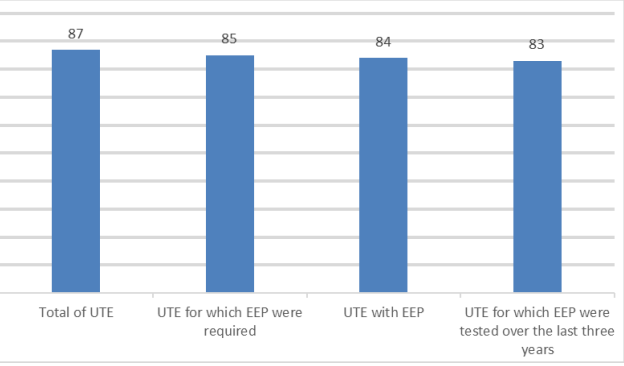


NB: LTE, lower-tier establishment.

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.

In Austria, in 2022, an EEP was required for 85 UTEs, out of 87 in total. In 2018, 84 such establishments had an EEP and all of these plans except for one had been tested within the previous three years. The summary is shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Situation regarding EEPs in Austria, 2022

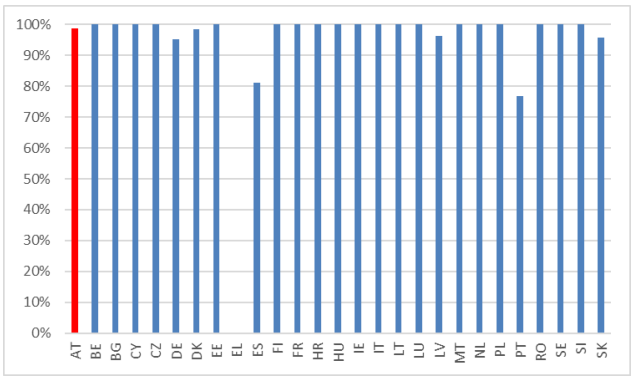


Sources: European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, *Assessment and summary of Member States' implementation reports for Implementing Decision 2014/896/EU (implementing Directive 2012/18/EU on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances)*, Publications Office of 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.

The following types of information are permanently available for all Seveso UTEs in Austria: (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) the date of the last site visit.

The shares of UTEs for which information on safety measures and requisite behaviours was actively made available to the public in 2022 in the EU-27 are presented in Figure 23. 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 23: 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.

In 2022, Austria received a priority action to strengthen control and enforcement to ensure compliance with the Seveso III Directive rules, especially those on EEPs. Data reported on the implementation of the directive for 2019–2022 show some improvements in the number of EEPs established for UTEs in Austria (but not a 100 % rate).

2025 priority action

- Strengthen compliance with requirements on safety measures to prevent major accidents and ensure

appropriate preparedness and response in relation to UTEs, in particular as regards reviewing, testing and updating EEPs, at intervals of no more than three years.

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).

In 2019, 43 % of dental treatments were still using dental amalgam, which represented a challenge for Austria to phase out its use by 1 January 2025. However, measures should have been put in place to ensure a socially and economically sound phase-out, including an adequate reimbursement of the alternatives to dental amalgam through the health insurance scheme and the training of dental practitioners. The Commission is monitoring whether the phase-out has taken place under the terms and conditions of the regulation. Austria will also need to ensure that the manufacture and export of mercury-containing lamps are prohibited by the deadlines set out in the Mercury Regulation.

Noise

The Environmental Noise Directive ([81]) 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 ([82]).

In Austria, environmental noise is estimated to cause at least around 670 cases of ischaemic heart disease annually ([83]) and some 130 000 people suffering from disturbed sleep[84].

Based on the latest set of information analysed, Austria 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 yet.

Austria received no priority action in this area 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 water (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 benefit from good-quality and safe drinking and bathing water. It

([81]) 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.

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

([83]) 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

[84] More information on the adverse health effects of noise pollution is available at: https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/human/noise/noise-2

will further ensure that the nutrient cycle (nitrogen and phosphorus) is managed in a more sustainable and resource-efficient way.

Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive ([85]) is the cornerstone of EU water policy in the 21st century ([86]). The Water Framework Directive and other water-related directives ([87]) 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.

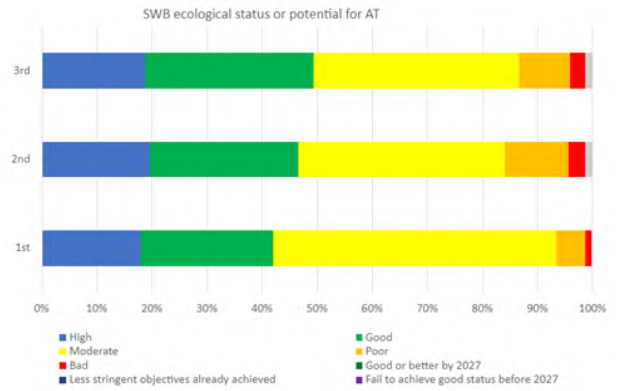
The Water Framework Directive establishes a procedural framework for reaching good surface water ecological and chemical status and good groundwater quantitative and chemical status. This implies monitoring and classification of all waterbodies, assessment of pressures and impacts and identification 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 ([88]).

Austria's three river basin districts (Rhine, Danube and Elbe, all three being international) count 8 188 surface waterbodies and 142 groundwater bodies. Approximately 10 % of surface waters are designated as 'heavily modified' and 1.1 % of river bodies and 30.6 % of lake bodies are designated as 'artificial'. 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 Water Framework Directive requires Member States to establish a programme of measures for each river basin district to achieve the objectives of the directive. These programmes must include measures to control different types of water use liable to have a significant adverse impact on the status of water. Control measures must be periodically reviewed. As they are doubts of whether the Austrian rules are in line with the directive, the Commission introduced an infringement procedure in 2024.

Figures 24–27 show the change in ecological status/potential and chemical status of surface waters, and the quantitative and chemical status of groundwater in 2010, 2015 and 2021. It follows from the assessment of the third RBMPs that the ecological status/potential of surface waterbodies has slightly improved, with almost half of these having good or better ecological status/potential. On the other hand, the chemical status has remained the same, with 100 % failing to achieve good chemical status.

Figure 24: Ecological status/potential of surface waterbodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



The main pressures are impoundments for hydropower and flood protection. In 2020, hydropower made up 36.5 % of Austria's share in gross final energy consumption and about 56 % of electricity is produced with hydropower. On the other hand, Austria has only

([85]) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32000L0060.

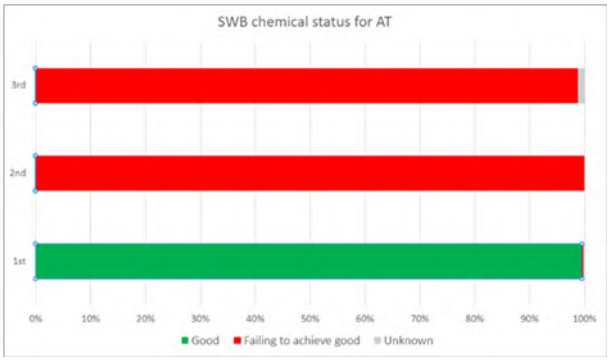
([86]) https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water_en.

([87]) 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 Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (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 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (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).

([88]) ENV - Bibliothèque

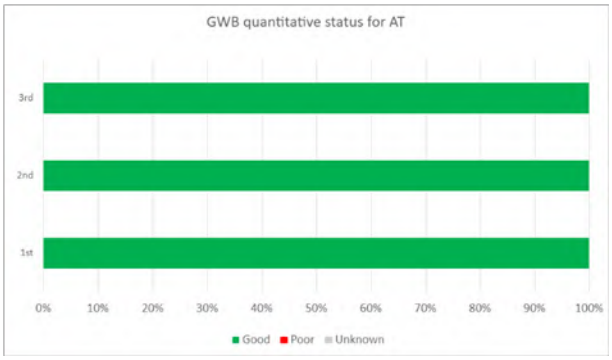
identified three river-basin-specific pollutants as potentially harmful for ecological status/potential: ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid, zinc and ammonia.

Figure 25: Chemical status of surface waterbodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



Austria has gradually reduced chemical pressures on surface waterbodies, with the exceptions of two ubiquitous and persistent bio-accumulative and toxic substances (brominated ethers and mercury), which cause all surface waterbodies in Austria to fail to achieve good chemical status. 99 % of Austria's surface waterbodies would achieve good chemical status in the absence of these substances, which reportedly result from atmospheric pollution and deposition in water.

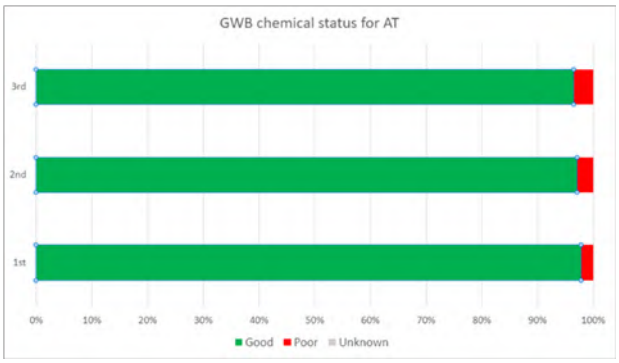
Figure 26: Quantitative status of groundwater bodies in each RBMP cycle (%)



All groundwater bodies monitored showed good quantitative status in 2021. Four groundwater bodies are, however, at risk of losing good quantitative status by 2027.

Climatologic and demographic projections suggest that Austria's ground water resources could drop by up to 23 % by 2050 in a worst-case scenario. Austria's response to this involves plans for more abstractions from the Danube. However, this could have long-term consequences for ecosystems dependent on the Danube.

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



There has been a small deterioration in the chemical status of groundwater, but with most waterbodies being in good chemical status. The main pollutants are nitrates, pesticides, ammonium and sulphate. Unlike surface waterbodies, where nutrient pollution has decreased since the second RBMP, the deterioration in the chemical status of groundwater bodies seems to be mainly due to nitrates (from fertilisers) and dimethachlor (a herbicide). Moreover, 15 % of groundwater bodies are at risk of failing to achieve good status by 2027. The use of pesticides in Austria's agricultural sector – still comparatively low compared with the EU average due to a high percentage of organic farming (26 %) – is on the rise and the number of groundwater bodies not achieving good chemical status due to pesticides has increased since the second RBMP.

The deterioration of the chemical status of groundwater bodies suggests that Austria's programme of measures for agricultural pollution after the second RBMP still needs time to take effect for groundwater.

Until the end of 2027, Member States can still apply 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 exemptions will be much more limited.

The 2022 EIR identified the following priority actions.

- Continue current efforts to mitigate hydromorphological pressures and counteract diffuse sources of nutrient pollution in agricultural areas.
- Ensure sufficient funding to implement measures from the RBMPs, in particular in addressing hydromorphological pressures.

Austria has made good progress in terms of these priority actions, insofar as it has set a standard for ecological flows that is legally binding (to address pressures from hydropower activities), which is a positive change, although the situation could be further improved in practice, in particular by including minimum flows in older water permits. Guidelines have been developed for achieving good ecological potential in river stretches

affected by hydropower dams; however, the thresholds set out for determining good ecological potential are not yet binding.

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 on 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 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 also assessed the FRMPs, and in 2024 reported on both the third RBMPs and second FRMPs (first FRMP reporting was in March 2016) to the European Parliament and to the Council.

The second Austrian FRMP is now better connected to the previous steps (i.e. the preliminary flood risk assessment and the FHRMs). The objectives have been clarified and linked to measure types, distinguishing between the national level and the regional/area-specific level. The second FRMP also provides more information on the effects of climate change on flooding, including on pluvial floods linked to intense rainfall events. Although the report does not describe the specific changes made to the final FRMP, in response to the comments from the public consultation, 157 measures have been listed as 'reviewed' based on the consultation.

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 ([89]), (ii) a methodology for measuring microplastics in drinking water ([90]) and (iii) an EU system for testing and approving materials that will be allowed to be in contact with drinking water ([91]). 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 Austria does not give rise to concern ([92]). From January 2026, the European quality standards for PFAS in drinking water will apply, ensuring harmonised

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

([90]) 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.

([91]) 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).

([92]) In summary, the compliance for all parameter groups in Austria was at least 99.58 % in 2017, 99.62 % in 2018 and 99.73 % in 2019.

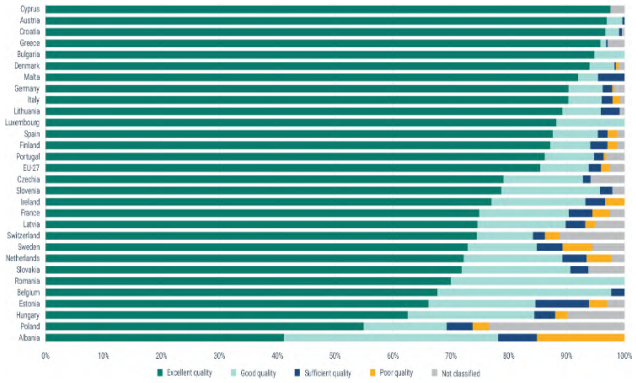
Member States' reporting of PFAS monitoring data in the future.

Bathing Water Directive

The Bathing Water Directive requires Member States to monitor and assess bathing water. It requires that, during 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 28 shows that in 2023, out of the 260 Austrian bathing waters, 252 (96.9 %) were of excellent quality, 7 (2.7 %) bathing waters were of good quality and 1 (0.4 %) bathing water was of sufficient quality. No bathing waters were found to be of poor quality. Detailed information on Austrian bathing waters is available from a national portal ([93]) and through an interactive map viewer of the EEA ([94]).

Figure 28: Bathing water quality per Member State, Albania and Switzerland (%), 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 Nitrates Directive ([95]) aims to protect water quality across Europe by preventing nitrates from agricultural sources that can pollute groundwater and surface waters and by promoting the use of good farming practices.

The latest Commission report on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive ([96]), dating back 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 Austria's RBMPs has identified nutrients from agriculture as an important pressure on groundwater / surface waters that is affecting these waters' good status and as one of the main factors in not meeting the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.

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).

In 2020, Austria reached the target for collecting and treating urban waste water required to fully comply with the directive (100 % of agglomerations and generated load).

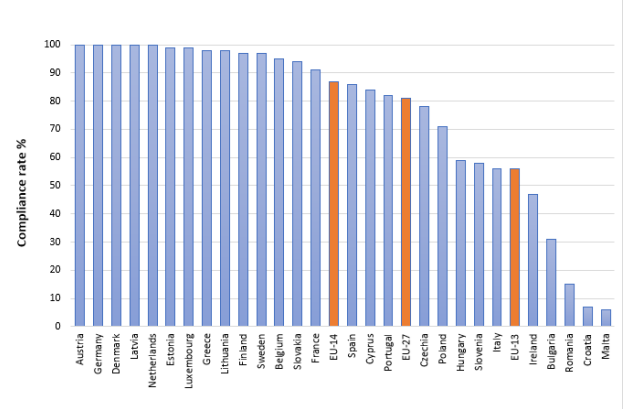
([93]) Österreichische Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit (AGES), 'Badegewässer Monitoring', AGES website, last updated 14 June 2024, https://www.ages.at/umwelt/wasser/badegewaesser-monitoring.

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

([95]) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1561542776070&uri=CELEX:01991L0676-20081211.

([96]) https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water/nitrates_en.

Figure 29: Proportion of urban waste water that fully complies with the UWWTD (%), 2020



Source: European Commission, *12th UWWTD Implementation Report*, 2024, 12th technical assessment of UWWTD implementation - Publications Office of the EU.

The directive has been revised in order to, among other things, strengthen existing treatment standards and establish an additional treatment of micropollutants in urban waste water. Other new requirements relate to moving towards the energy neutrality of 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. Austria has until 31 July 2027 to transpose the new directive into its national legal system.

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 ([97]), 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 ([98]) 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 ([99]) on the implementation and enforcement of these regulations ([100]). 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 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 ([101]) 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

([97]) 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.

([98]) 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.

([99]) 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.

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

([101]) 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/.

new entries have been added to Annex XVII to the REACH Regulation ([102]).

In 2023, new hazard classes were added to the CLP Regulation, and the revision of the regulation was tabled (published on 20 November 2024) ([103]). 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 ([104]). 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.

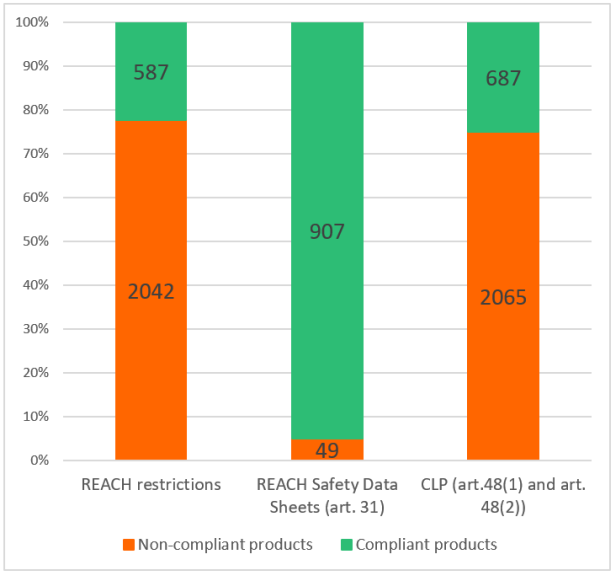
Responsibility for checking compliance with the REACH Regulation in Austria rests with the state authorities of the *Länder* ([105]). Austria has devised and fully implemented enforcement strategies for both the REACH and CLP Regulations ([106]). These focus on programmes on the special duties under the REACH and CLP Regulations, mixing proactive and reactive enforcement.

The Member States' reporting exercise set out in Article 117 of the REACH Regulation and Article 46 of the CLP Regulation is conducted every five years. The results of the coming one are expected in 2025, hence the absence of new country-specific data on enforcement since 2022.

In Austria, 18 staff (two in each *Land*) are allocated to the enforcement of the REACH and CLP Regulations ([107]).

In 2020, Austria participated in an EU coordinated enforcement project on products sold online, called the REACH-EN-FORCE (REF)-8 project ([108]). The report was adopted in November 2021, so it could not be taken into account in the previous EIR.

Figure 30: Compliance of imported products – results of the REF-8 project (%)



A risk approach was used for the targeting of control measures in order to maximise the chances of identifying non-compliances. 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.

([102]) 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.

([103]) 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).

([104]) 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.

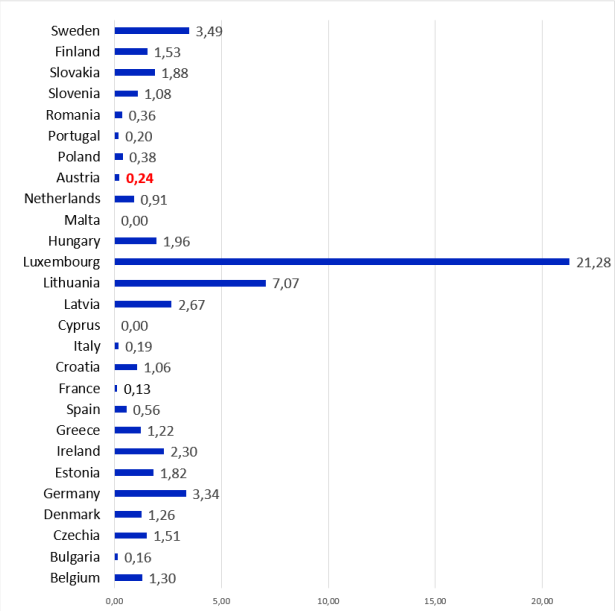
([105]) European Commission, *Technical assistance to review the existing Member States reporting questionnaire under Articles 117(1) of REACH and 46(2) of CLP – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p. 68, https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/8ee3c69a-bccb-4f22-89ca-277e35de7c63/library/a4abce8c-8425-455f-b7e6-0ead917bde6b/details.

([106]) 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.

([107]) 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.

([108]) 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.

Figure 31: Number of REF-8 checks performed per 100 000 inhabitants (EU average = 1.24)



Austria participated to a small extent in the REF-8 coordinated enforcement project. Online sales have been proved to correspond consistently to higher non-compliance rates in checks performed across the EU, in particular when related to imported products.

In 2022, Austria received a priority action related to upgrading administrative capacities in implementation and enforcement to move towards a policy of zero tolerance of non-compliance. In the absence of reporting since 2022, no progress has been shown and this priority action remains valid in 2025, partly because of the experience with the REF-8 project.

2025 priority actions

- Upgrade the 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 REF projects.
- 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 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 % ([109]). 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 Austria increased by 1 % making it one of the countries with a net increase.

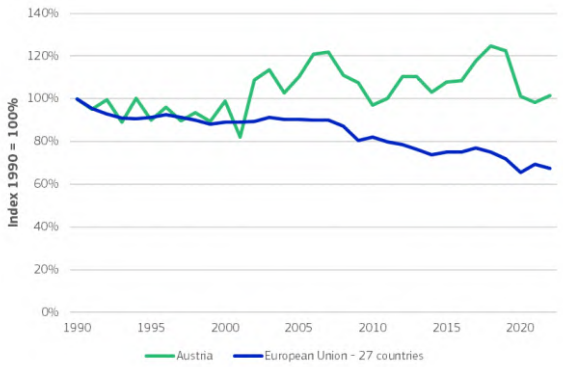
The 'Fit for 55' legislative package reflects the need to speed up the green transition. It includes (i) strengthening and expanding the EU emissions trading system (ETS), with the creation of a new, second, ETS for transport and buildings together with a dedicated Social Climate Fund to help citizens during the transition; (ii) increasing targets under the Effort Sharing Regulation; and (iii) a revised Regulation for Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry ([110]). The package has been fully adopted, and the Member States have been implementing the legislation.

The key strategic document at country level is the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) ([111]). Austria submitted its updated plan in December 2024 after the deadline set by the regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action([112]). The European Commission assessed the final plan and the extent to which Austria has followed the recommendations for the draft version. The findings from the assessment are:

- Emissions under the Effort Sharing Regulation will decrease by 46% in 2030 compared to 2005, and Austria will have to use flexibilities to meet its target of 48%.
- Despite a declining trend in its carbon sink, projections for 2030 show that Austria will overachieve its Land use, Land-use change and Forestry (LULUCF) target.
- Austria is in line with its target for the share of renewable energy.
- There are still gaps in energy efficiency targets that must be closed.

To minimise the impacts of climate policies on vulnerable people and sectors, Austria is using the Just Transition Fund and will use Social Climate Fund from 2026. (for more information, see Chapter 5 – Financing).

Figure 32: Total GHG emissions (excluding international aviation) (%), 1990–2022



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

([110]) 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.

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

([112]) Article 14 of regulation 2018/1999 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action

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 ([113]) 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 t of CO_2 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.

The emissions under the ETS decreased by 23 % from 2005 to 2023.

In 2023, only 13 % of GHG emitted by Austria's ETS installations came from power generation, significantly below the EU average (57 %). Of the total emissions from all industry sectors, the metals industry emitted over half (56 %), cement and lime production 16 %, other industries 11 %, refineries 12 % and chemicals 4 %. Between 2019 and 2023, the power sector registered a higher emissions reduction (44 %) than the industry sectors (11 %), leading to an overall reduction of 17 %. Since 2013, GHG emissions have declined by 49 % in power generation, but they have decreased by only 10 % in the other ETS sectors, due to adverse trends in chemicals and cement production and stubbornly high emissions in the metals sector.

From 2027, a new emissions trading system, called ETS2, for buildings, road transport and additional sectors (mainly industry not covered by the current ETS) will become fully operational ([114]). 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. Austria has done so. The monitoring and reporting requirements and the obligation to hold a permit to carry out activities under ETS2 will commence on 1 January 2025. Austria is the only Member State that transposed it in time.

Under its eco-social tax reform, Austria has introduced its own carbon pricing system for the transport, heating and other sectors (non-ETS industry, machinery in agriculture and forestry), which is to be merged into the ETS2 once it becomes operational.

The Commission opened infringement procedures against Austria on 25 January 2024, for failing to fully transpose previous revisions of ETS Directives ([115]) into national law. Austria has since notified full transpositions of the abovementioned directives to the Commission.

Effort sharing

The Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) ([116]) covers GHG emissions from domestic transport (excluding CO_2 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. Austria's target is – 48 %.

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 Austria will need to implement new measures and/or use available flexibilities to achieve its 2030 ESR target. The projected gap is 1.9 percentage points to the 2030 target.

The largest contributor is the domestic transport sector, which accounted for 45 % of all effort sharing emissions in 2022. The emissions have decreased by 17 % since 2005. Austria's transport mix is relatively evenly balanced between road and rail, and its shift to sustainable road transport is gaining momentum. In 2022, battery electric vehicles accounted for 2.1 % of Austria's passenger car fleet, significantly higher than the EU average of 1.2 %. In 2023, around 19 600 publicly accessible charging points provided a charging point for every eight e-vehicles, above the EU average of 1:10. Car trips account for 75 % of the distances travelled (EU average: 85 %), while rail accounts for 9 % (EU average: 6 %). For freight, road transport accounts for a smaller proportion of t transported than the EU average (62 % vs 75 %), with a remarkable 27 % of freight being transported by rail, and 10 % through pipelines. 71 % of Austria's railway network is electrified (significantly above than the EU average of 56 %).

Buildings accounted for 18 % of all effort sharing emissions in 2022. Emissions of the sector have decreased by 40 % since 2005. But Austria needs to step up its efforts in the residential sector if it is to achieve a meaningful contribution to the 2030 building decarbonisation

([113]) Flights between the EU Member States including departing flights to Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

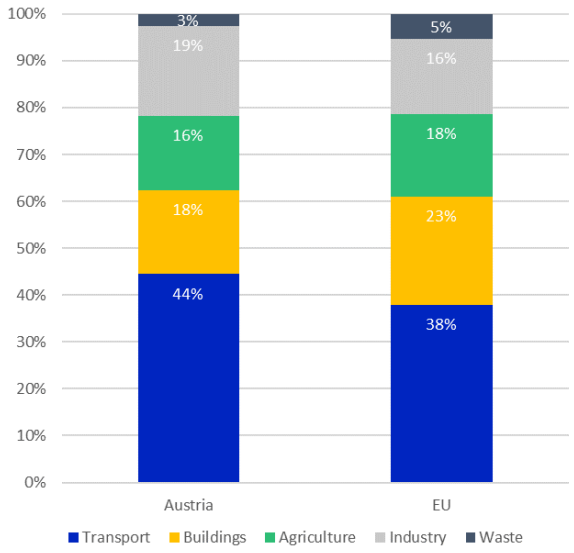
([114]) Directive (EU) 2023/959 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2023.130.01.0134.01.ENG)

([115]) Directive - 2023/959 - EN - EUR-Lex and Directive - 2023/958 - EN - EUR-Lex.

([116]) Regulation (EU) 2018/842 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/842).

milestone set in its latest long term renovation strategy. Indeed, residential final energy consumption was lower in 2022 than 2020 but seen in a longer perspective it has increased by 2.6 %.

Figure 33: Effort-sharing emissions by sector (%), 2022



Land use, land-use change and forestry

The land-use, land-use change and forestry (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.

Austria's forests play a major role in carbon removals. In 2018, Austria's LULUCF sector transitioned from removing carbon to emitting it, due to major calamity events in the forest, but the country has been achieving net removals again since 2020.

Austria's target in 2030 is to enhance land removals by an additional −0.9 Mt of CO_2 equivalent compared to the yearly average of the period 2016–2018. The latest projections show a surplus compared to the 2030 target of −3.4 Mt of CO_2 equivalent, despite the long-term trend of a declining net-sink until 2050. Therefore, Austria is on track to meet this target, but the results in this sector are highly dependent on natural conditions (such as the influence of climate change) and can therefore change significantly from year to year.

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.

Austria has no regions identified as a hotspots of climate risks most affected by climate change ([117]).

Austria's wide climate protection gaps for floods and wildfires call for monitoring. Damages and losses from these risks are projected to rise to at least EUR 3–6 billion in 2030 and EUR 6–12 billion by 2050. A relatively large share of assets remains uninsured against climate hazards. Austria is also vulnerable to climate change-related impacts due to more frequent and extreme weather events like heatwaves and droughts. Adapting to these impacts will require substantial additional precautionary measures, notably on the resilience of forests, biodiversity, infrastructure, construction (including through nature-based solutions), transport, agriculture, (hydro)energy, tourism and human health protection.

Austria adopted its national adaptation strategy and plan in 2012 and updated it in 2017 and 2024. There are several regional adaptation plans.

European Commission identified five priority actions in the 2022 edition ([118]) of the review with regard to climate action.

There is some progress in energy infrastructure investments, but continued efforts for capacity expansion in Austria's cross-border as well as its domestic electricity network remain necessary to 2030 and beyond.

There is a progress in carbon pricing. Austria has introduced CO_2 pricing in the transport and heating sectors.

Austria has obligatory targets in the transport sector, such as a 14 % share of fuels from renewables (including biofuels) by 2030. This measure was originally implemented in 2004. In this specific case, it can be assumed that biomass sustainability criteria are accounted for.

2025 priority action

- Implement all polices 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. More detailed

([117]) European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA). 2024. Available at European Climate Risk Assessment (europa.eu).
([118]) EUR-Lex - 52022SC0274 - EN - EUR-Lex.

priority actions are set out in the assessment of the final National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).([119])

([119]) National energy and climate plans

Part II: Enabling framework – implementation tools

5. Financing

The EU budget supports climate investment in Austria with significant amounts in 2021–2027, with revenues from the ETS also feeding into the national budget. During 2020–2022, Austria's revenues from auctioning reached EUR 877 million in total, with almost double that spent on climate and energy, corresponding to EUR 1 679 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 11.3 billion per year in Austria.

These four environmental areas currently receive total funding of around EUR 8.4 billion per year; thus, there is a gap of EUR 2.9 billion per year.

Of the environmental investment gap, EUR 855 million concerns pollution prevention and control, EUR 942 million biodiversity and ecosystems, EUR 715 million circular economy and EUR 389 million the water objective.

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, cohesion policy provides EUR 120 billion (over half of it through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)), the recovery and resilience facility (RRF) EUR 275.7 billion and CAP EUR 145.9 billion ([120]).

In Austria, the EU cohesion policy (considering the EU contribution amount) provides EUR 303 million for climate action in 2021–2027 (with around half of this via the ERDF), with a further EUR 4.3 million from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund ([121]).

The RRF contributes to climate finance in Austria with EUR 2.21 billion up to 2026, representing 55.7 % of the RRP ([122]).

The European Investment Bank (EIB) provided EUR 109.9 billion 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 2.15 billion was assigned to Austria in the reference period ([123]).

National financing, including EU emissions trading system revenues

Revenues from the auctioning of emission allowances under the EU ETS, which feed directly into national budgets, amounted to EUR 184.2 million in 2020, EUR 311 million in 2021 and EUR 381.7 million in 2022 in Austria, totalling EUR 877 million in the three-year period. In Austria, these revenues are not earmarked. National spending on climate and energy purposes totals more than 100 % of auctioning revenues. Climate and energy projects financed from the national budget were reported in several years, although their funding cannot be directly linked to the auctioning revenues.

From the remaining part of the EU ETS revenues that feed into the Innovation Fund and the Modernisation Fund, further support is available to climate action at the EU level ([124]).

It should be noted that investment in climate action also supports the environment and, therefore, the environmental investments described in the following sections cannot be regarded as entirely additional to climate investment ([125]).

([120]) European Commission, *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.

([121]) See the Cohesion Open Data Platform (https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/).

([122]) EU Commission datasets and the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard (https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/index.html).

([123]) A list of financed projects is provided by the EIB (https://www.eib.org/en/projects/loans/index.htm).

([124]) 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.

([125]) NB: Indirect investments (from climate and other policies) in support of the environment are accounted for via the tracking.

Environmental financing and investments

This section describes Austria'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 ([126]).

The environment overall

Investment needs

The overall environmental investment needs to be sufficient to enable Austria 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 11.3 billion per year (in 2022 prices).

A significant part of the estimated requirement, around EUR 6.5 billion per year, can be attributed to the need to support the circular economy. For pollution prevention and control, the annual investment needs are estimated to be EUR 1.9 billion; for water, they are EUR 1.5 billion and for biodiversity and ecosystems EUR 1.3 billion (in 2022 prices).

Current investments

To implement the environmental investments needed, the available financing is estimated to currently reach an annual EUR 8.4 billion in Austria from EU and national sources combined (in 2022 prices).

Total environmental funding from the multiannual financial framework (MFF) is estimated to reach around EUR 2.1 billion for Austria in total, during 2021–2027 (or EUR 304 million per year).

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

Instrument	Allocations
Cohesion policy	**110.2** ([a])
ERDF	94.5
Cohesion Fund	0.0
Just Transition Fund	15.7
CAP	**1 665.5** ([b])
European Agricultural Guarantee Fund	383.9
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	1 281.6
European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund	**3.8**
Other MFF sources	348.4 ([c])
RRF ([d]) (2021–2026)	**1 151.4**

([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 Austria 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 the Connecting Europe Facility.

([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.

Austria, 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 (EUR 5.4 billion) ([127]), Horizon Europe

([126]) Research, development and innovation is accounted for under each environmental objective. The financing needs, baselines and gap 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.

([127]) https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en.

(EUR 95.5 billion) ([128]), the Connecting Europe Facility (EUR 33.7 billion) ([129]) and funds that can be mobilised through the InvestEU programme ([130]).

Austria's RRP supports climate objectives through funding of EUR 2.2 billion (55.7 % of total), with an additional EUR 0.22 billion (5.5 % of total) for the environment.

The EIB provided around EUR 659 million in environment-related financial contributions to Austria from 2021 to mid 2024, most of which, EUR 577 million (88 %), was in the area of sustainable energy, transport and industrial projects, which provides significant co-benefits to reducing air pollution, 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 Austria, the total national environmental protection expenditure was EUR 12.2 billion in 2020 and EUR 14.6 billion in 2021, representing 3.2 % and 3.6 % of GDP, respectively.

Of the total environmental expenditure, the national capital expenditure (investment) on environmental protection amounted to EUR 54.5 billion in 2020 and EUR 59.9 billion in 2021 in the EU-27, representing around 0.4 % of the EU's GDP. In Austria, the national environmental protection investment reached EUR 1.5 billion in 2020, rising to EUR 2.1 billion in 2021, representing around 0.4–0.5 % of GDP.

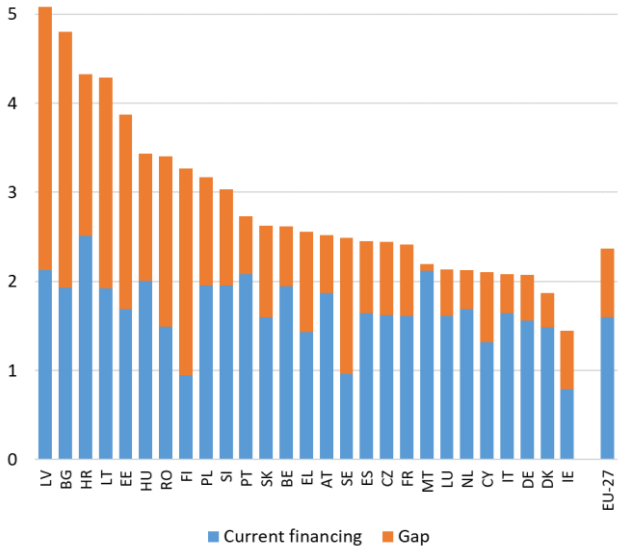
Splitting by institutional sector, 3 % of Austria's national environmental protection investment (capital expenditure) comes from the general government budget, with 65 % coming from specialist private-sector producers (of environmental protection services, such as waste and water companies) and 32 % from the general business sector, whose environmental activities are usually ancillary to its main activities. At the EU level, 38 % of environmental protection investment comes from governments, 40 % from specialist private-sector producers and 22 % from the general business sector ([131]).

Austria's total financing for environmental investment reaches an estimated EUR 8.4 billion per year (in 2022 prices), including EU funding and national public and national private expenditure. Of the total, the share of EU funds (including EIB funds) reaches 6.3 %, with around 93.7 % national financing. The total public financing (EU plus national public) represents 9.3 % 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 2.9 billion per year in Austria, representing around 0.65 % of the national GDP, being lower than the EU average (0.77 %).

Figure 34: Environmental financing, needs and gaps per Member State (% of GDP)



Source: Analysis of Directorate-General for Environment.

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

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

Environmental objective	Investment gap per year		
	Million EUR (2022 prices)	% of total	% of GDP
Pollution prevention and control	855	29.5	0.19
Circular economy and waste	715	24.7	0.16

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

([129]) 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.

([130]) 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.

([131]) Eurostat, 'Environmental protection expenditure accounts', env_ac_epea.

Water management and water industries	389	13.4	0.09
Biodiversity and ecosystems	942	32.5	0.21
Total	**2 901**	**100.0**	**0.65**

Source: Analysis of Directorate-General for Environment.

Pollution prevention and control

Investment needs

In pollution prevention and control, Austria's investment needs are estimated to reach EUR 1.9 billion per year (including baseline investments) in 2021–2027. Most of this, EUR 1.7 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 680 million per year, most of which is delivered by the (same) sustainable energy and transport investments that also benefit clean air ([132]). Industrial site remediation requires an estimated EUR 82 million per year. Microplastics pollution and the chemicals strategy require around EUR 50–60 million per year (each) ([133]).

Current investments

The current investment levels supporting pollution prevention and control reach an estimated EUR 1.1 billion per year in Austria in 2021–2027. Most of the financing concerns clean air (EUR 585 million per year). Protection from environmental noise and radiation receive around EUR 100 million (each) per year, with a further EUR 84 million for site remediation .

In Austria, the EU MFF provides an estimated 3.1 % of the clean air financing (mostly via cohesion policy), with a further 10.2 % from the RRF, adding up to 13.4 % of the total. EIB financing contributes 7.4 % and national sources reach 79.3 %.([134])

The gap

To meet its environmental objectives concerning pollution prevention and control (towards zero pollution), Austria needs to provide an additional EUR 855 million per year (0.19 % of GDP), mostly related to clean air and noise. The adequate implementation of the NECP 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 ([135]), Austria did not comply with ammonia reduction requirements in 2020 and 2021, while it is not at 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.

Circular economy and waste

Investment needs

Austria's investment needs in circular economy and waste reach EUR 6.5 billion per year (including baseline investments). Most of this, around EUR 6 billion per year, relates to circular economy measures in the mobility, food and built environment systems, with a further EUR 564 million 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 ([136]).

Current investments

Circular economy investments across the economy reach around EUR 5.3 billion per year in Austria in 2021-2027,

([132]) 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).

([133]) 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).

([134]) 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

([135]) 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.

([136]) See Systemiq and Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *Achieving 'Growth Within'*, 2017; 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.

with a further EUR 515 million provided for waste management that does not constitute circular economy.

Around 0.2 % of this combined financing for circularity and waste comes from the EU MFF, with a further 0.7 % from the RRF, adding up to 0.9 % of the total. EIB loans identified in support of circularity and waste represent 0.1 % of the total. The share of national sources is absolutely overwhelming, reaching 99 % of the total financing ([137]).

The gap

To meet its environmental objectives concerning the circular economy and waste, Austria needs to increase circular economy investments by an estimated EUR 667 million per year, with an additional EUR 48 million concerning waste management action, not belonging to circular economy. Combined, this amounts to EUR 715 million per year, representing 0.16 % of Austria's GDP.

Of the circular economy gap, EUR 175 million relates to recent initiatives, such as the 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 492 million constitutes further investment need to unlock Austria's circular economy potential.

Water protection and management

Investment needs

The annual water investment needs reach an estimated EUR 1.5 billion (in 2022 prices) in Austria. This comprises investment needs both for the water industry and for the protection and the management of water. The largest part of the total annual need, EUR 813 million, relates to the management of waste water (also including additional costs associated with the revised UWWTD). A further EUR 441 million is necessary for drinking-water-related investments and around EUR 224 million for the protection and management of water ([138]).

Current investments

Water investments in Austria are estimated to be around EUR 1.1 billion per year (in 2022 prices) in 2021–2027. Of this, EUR 612 million supports wastewater management, EUR 373 million drinking water and around EUR 100 million the other aspects of the Water Framework Directive (water management and protection).

Of the total financing, 0.3 % is provided by the EU MFF (mostly through cohesion policy). EIB financing is around 0.6 % of the total, while the bulk of water financing comes from national sources (99 %) ([139]).

The gap

To meet the various environmental targets under the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive, Austria's water investment gap reaches EUR 389 million per year (0.09 % of GDP), with over half related to waste water (EUR 200 million per year). Drinking water measures require an additional EUR 68 million per year and the other aspects of the Water Framework Directive around EUR 118 million per year over the existing levels of financing.

Biodiversity and ecosystems

Investment needs

The investment needs for biodiversity and ecosystems are estimated to be EUR 1.3 billion per year (in 2022 prices) in Austria in 2021–2027. This includes the following financing needs:

(i) Austria's prioritised action framework ([140]) concerning the Natura 2000 areas: EUR 117 million per year, mostly running costs;
(ii) additional BDS costs ([141]): EUR 876 million per year on top of the framework;
(iii) sustainable soil management costs ([142]): EUR 346 million per year.

([137]) Waste management and circular economy expenditure tracking in the EU funds, EIB projects and in the national expenditure (Eurostat). Datasets: EPEA accounts (env_epi) and circular economy private investments (cei_cie012).

([138]) 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.

([139]) Water investment levels are estimated through tracking EU funds, EIB projects and national expenditure (EPEA accounts, Eurostat).

([140]) 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.

([141]) 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.

([142]) 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.

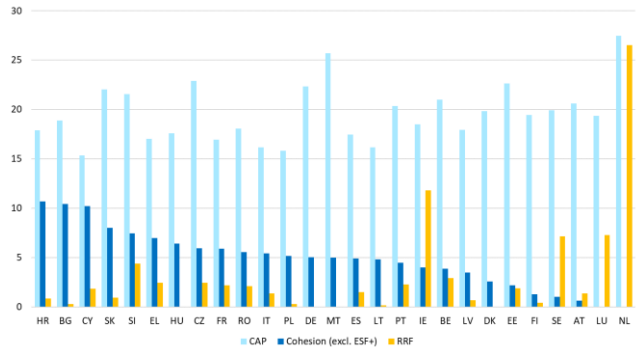
Current investments

The current level of biodiversity financing is estimated to be EUR 397 million per year (in 2022 prices) in 2021–2027. 79.1 % of this is considered direct financing to biodiversity and ecosystems, with a 100 % coefficient in the tracking schemes.

0.1 % of the total financing is estimated to come from EU cohesion policy, 56 % from CAP, 2.5 % from Horizon Europe and around 1 % from LIFE. The EU MFF altogether accounts for 60 % of the financing and the RRF for 1.7 %, adding up to a total of 62 % from the EU budget. The rest, 38 %, comes from national sources ([143]).

Austria has programmed 20.6 % of its CAP budget in measures dedicated to support biodiversity, above the EU average. However, Austria is the Member State with the third-lowest share of biodiversity financing programmed under cohesion policy: 0.6 % of the cohesion policy budget is estimated to contribute to biodiversity (disregarding ESF+). Lastly, 1.4 % of RRF funds have been programmed for investments in biodiversity in Austria.

Figure 35: 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, Austria's investment gap is estimated to be around EUR 855 million per year, corresponding to 0.19 % of its GDP.

Public financial management

Green budgeting practices

Green budgeting refers to the use of budgetary tools to achieve climate and environmental goals. Some Member States, including Austria, already use green budgeting tools for identifying and tracking green expenditures and/or revenues ([144]). Green budgeting practices provide increased transparency on the environmental implications of budgetary policies.

Austria is a frontrunner on green budgeting, developing tools such as climate tagging, impact assessments and climate-related spending([145]). The establishment of a focal point for green budgeting steers the path towards an increased impact orientation across the national administration.

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 ([146]).

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 ([147]). Austria participated, taking inspiration on possible improvements to its national framework.

Beyond green budgeting, to improve policy outcomes, the Commission has also drawn up climate-proofing and sustainability-proofing guidance ([148]) as tools to assess project eligibility and compliance with environmental legislation and criteria.

Green taxation and tax reform

Total environmental taxes amounted to EUR 8.4 billion in Austria in 2022, representing 1.9 % of its GDP (EU average: 2.0 %). Energy taxes formed the largest component of environmental taxes, accounting for 1.1 % of GDP, which

([143]) 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.

([144]) 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.

([145]) https://www.bmf.gv.at/en/topics/climate-policy/green_budgeting_en.html

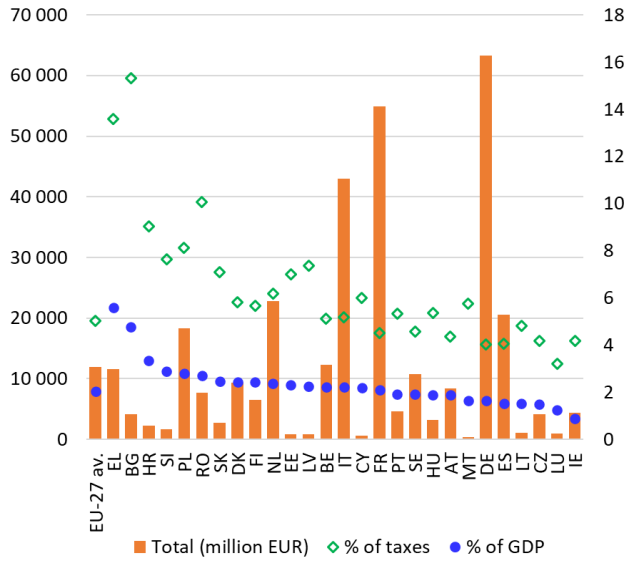
([146]) European Commission, 'European Union green budgeting reference framework', 2022, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/green-budgeting-eu_en.

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

([148]) 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.

is lower than the EU average of 1.6 %. Transport taxes, at 0.8 % of GDP, were well above the EU average (0.4 %), as were taxes on pollution and resources, at 0.02 % (EU average: 0.08 %). In 2022, environmental taxes in Austria accounted for 4.4 % of total revenues from taxes and social security contributions (under the EU average of 5.0 %) ([149]).

Figure 36: 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 ([150]), Austria applies landfill taxes used to discourage environmentally harmful activities and behaviours in the field of waste management (concerning various types of waste).

Green bonds and sustainable bonds

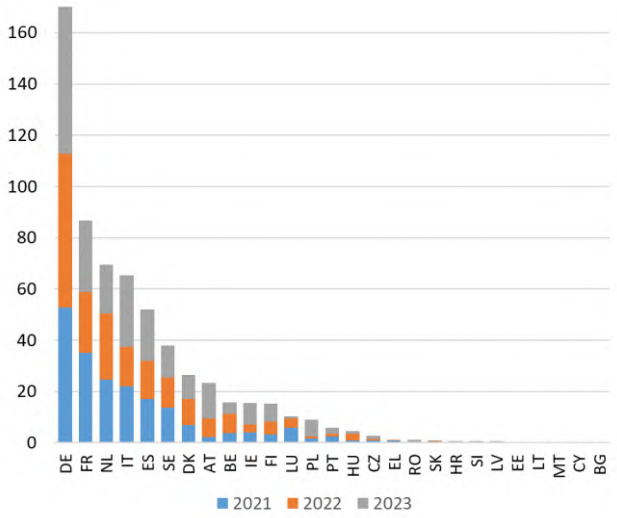
In 2023, the total value of green bonds issued by Member States was USD 245 billion (EUR 227 billion), up from USD 234 billion (EUR 198 billion) in 2021 ([151]).

During 2021–2023 combined, Austria issued green bonds worth USD 25.4 billion (EUR 21.4 billion). Of this, the issuance in 2023 amounted to USD 15 billion (EUR 13.9 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 had decreased to 73 %, the shares of waste management and land use had increased (to 5.9 % and 8.4 %, respectively) and the share of water had remained around 5 %.

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

Figure 37: 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

([149]) Eurostat, 'Environmental taxes accounts', env_eta.

([150]) 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.

([151]) 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.

conditions ([152]). 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.

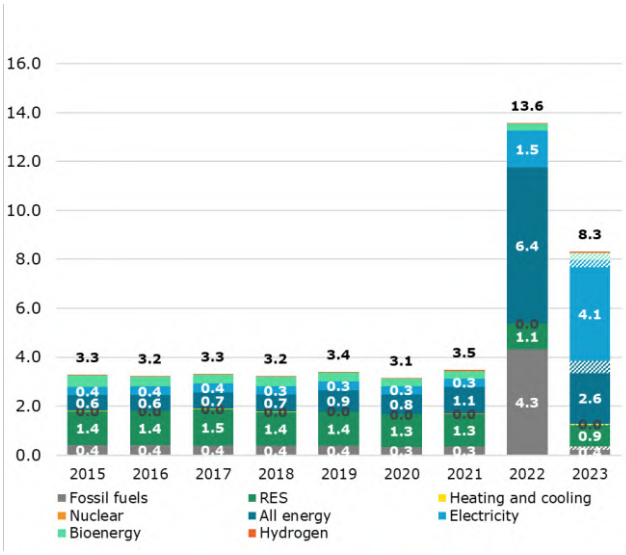
As a direct consequence, annual FFS in the EU have increased to EUR 109 billion in 2023 from EUR 57 billion in 2020. From 2021 to 2023, there was a marked increase in annual FFS of 72 % in the EU ([153]).

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 ([154]). In particular, FFS for coal and lignite, natural gas and oil increased in 2022 and a strong increase was observed for natural gas subsidies.

In Austria, the energy subsidies were stable in 2015–2021, including FFS (at around EUR 0.3–0.4 billion per year). In 2022, FFS jumped to EUR 4.3 billion, returning to previous levels 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. Austria's value reached 1 %, slightly above the EU average (0.8 %) ([155]).

Figure 38: Energy subsidies by energy carrier (billion EUR), 2015–2023



NB: RES, renewable energy source.

Source: analysis of Directorate-General Energy

The 2022 priority action included a general recommendation to ensure an increased level of financing for the environment to cover the investment needs across the environmental objectives and priorities and to avoid investment gaps. The environmental investment gap overall remained at a similar level (0.65 % of GDP), requiring further action across the objectives to close the gaps, which reach around 25 % of the total needs.

2025 priority action

- 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.

([152]) Article 3(h) and 3(v) of the eighth environment action programme.

([153]) European Commission, 2025, 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

([154]) 16 Member States: BE, EE, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, CY, LT, HU, NL, AT, PT, RO and SE.

([155]) 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

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 ([156]). 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 ([157]). It includes the right to bring legal challenges ('legal standing') ([158]).

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.

Table 3: Austria 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 completed. 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, 'Austria', Inspire Knowledge Base, https://knowledge-base.inspire.ec.europa.eu/austria_en.

Austria's performance in implementing the Inspire Directive is substantial and has been reviewed based on its 2023 country fiche ([159]) (see Table 3).

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

([156]) 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.

([157]) 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)) and a related 2018 citizen's guide (https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2b362f0a-bfe4-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF).

([158]) 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.

([159]) European Commission, 'Austria', Inspire Knowledge Base, https://knowledge-base.inspire.ec.europa.eu/austria_en.

(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 ([160]) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive ([161]).

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([162]). Austria has already taken steps aiming to accelerate permit-issuing procedures taking advantage of the broad flexibilities offered by the EU legal framework, such as the establishment of one-stop shops and accelerated short deadlines for issuing permits for renewable energy projects.

The average speed in the EU for issuing permits involving an EIA procedure is 20.6 months, with a minimum duration of 11.4 months and a maximum duration of 75.7 months ([163]). 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. Austria reported very low numbers of EIA procedures throughout the period and merged the information on the duration of the different stages of the EIA process. The nature of the data available therefore limits the ability to draw general conclusions. 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 ([164]).

With regard to public participation, Austria received one priority action related to EIA and SEA in 2022: monitor public participation in EIA and SEA processes, in particular with the view to exploring trends in public engagement. This has not yet been addressed.

In Austria, there are fewer EIA procedures than in other comparable Member States. This is due to an insufficient consideration of the selection criteria determining whether projects should be subject to an EIA. The Commission therefore started an infringement procedure in 2024.

Beyond the implementation of the relevant legislation, there remains scope for encouraging participation in the EIA and SEA processes ([165]). While a specific government website to encourage public participation has been created ([166]), this does not focus on environmental issues, and does not signpost sources of information on EIA for the public. The situation with SEA processes is more encouraging: a specific website includes a section on the involvement of the public and the environmental agencies *(Beteiligung der Öffentlichkeit und der Umweltstellen)* ([167]).

([160]) 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.

([161]) 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.

([162]) 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.

([163]) 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/.

([164]) 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

([165]) Information on publicity for SEA processes is available on the Federal Environment Agency's website (https://www.strategischeumweltpruefung.at/sup-grundlagen/sup-oeffentlichkeit).

([166]) https://partizipation.at.

([167]) Information on publicity for SEA processes is available on the Federal Environment Agency's website (https://www.strategischeumweltpruefung.at/sup-grundlagen/sup-oeffentlichkeit).

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 last EIR, Austria provides for some access to justice in environmental matters, in particular to recognised environmental NGOs. The requirements for recognising an environmental organisation are laid down in Section 19(6) of the EIA Act (UVP-G 2000) and are quite restrictive. This provision requires the organisation to (i) have been a non-profit organisation for at least three years; (ii) have at least 100 members; and (iii) have environmental protection as its main objective. Federations must comprise at least five member associations. Every three years, organisations must prove that they still meet the recognition requirements. A list of all recognised environmental organisations is available on the website of the Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology.

Generally, decisions of an administrative authority can only be challenged by individuals if and as far as their (substantive) rights are affected. Recognised NGOs obtain limited access to justice against individual decisions. The nine Austrian *Länder* with exclusive competence for nature conservation introduced legislation that provides for access to justice against some individual decisions relating to the implementation of parts of EU environmental law (the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and the IAS Regulation). The rules are different in each Land.

Plans and progress are mostly adopted in the form or as a part of an ordinance. According to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court, recognised environmental organisations do not have the standing to challenge such acts. This is particularly problematic if state authorities take measures through self-executing ordinances, which cannot be legally challenged by NGOs. This practice has become more widespread since NGOs obtained limited access to justice against individual decisions. In 2023, the Austrian Verwaltungsgerichtshof (Supreme Court of Administration) decided that recognised environmental organisations had in some cases a right to challenge regulatory acts based on Article 6 of the Aarhus Convention in combination with Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Therefore, the competent authorities had the obligation to examine the request of an environmental organisation to modify a regulatory act and an administrative jurisdiction could not simply reject the application as inadmissible. At present, the exact scope and effect of this decision is not clear, in particular because administrative jurisdictions do not have the power to annul regulatory acts or to grant interim relief against such acts.

In light of the above, an infringement procedure relating to the insufficient implementation of the Aarhus Convention, in particular the right of recognised NGOs to have access to an effective judicial review of self-executing ordinances, is ongoing and could be referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union if Austria does not remedy the breaches identified by the Commission.

In 2022, Austria received priority actions to (i) improve access to courts by the public concerned when it comes to challenging administrative or regulatory decisions covering planning, in particular in relation to water, nature and air quality; and (ii) ensure that the public has access to justice to review self-executing regulatory acts, such as ordinances derogating from the basic principles of EU environmental law. While there has been some progress, the systemic issues remain the same.

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 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.
- Ensure correct transposition of the revised EIA Directive.
- Improve access to courts in national environmental cases by the public concerned and eliminate practical barriers, such as length of proceedings or 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 ([168]) 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.

Statistics on environmental crimes are provided by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The latest report available is from 2022 ([169]). For each year, a narrative report is provided, with a related annex and a separate document on statistics and analysis. This report (*Crime Report – Statistics and Analysis*) includes statistics on a wide range of criminal offences. There is a separate section on environmental crimes in the annual reports.

The 2022 EIR recommended that Austria (i) ensure that information on the implementation of legislation on nature and nitrates is provided, specifically targeting farmers and duty-holders; (ii)·improve public information on measures to tackle environmental crime, including follow-up actions to inspections or complaints; (iii) encourage public bodies at the federal and regional levels to publicise options for public reporting of environmental concerns or infringements. Concerning compliance promotion, monitoring, and criminal and administrative enforcement, the 2022 priority actions are not assessed here due to a lack of systematic information. Similarly, 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 related 2022 priority action is not 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) (Directive (EU) 2024/1203)[170] 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 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 of 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 as the EU Network for the

([168]) 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 ().

([169]) The security report (*Sicherheitsbericht*) is available on the ministry website (https://www.bmi.gv.at/508/start.aspx).

([170]) Directive 2024/1203/EU on the protection of the environment through criminal law https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1203/oj/eng

Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law ([171]), EnviCrimeNet ([172]), the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment ([173]) and the EU Forum of Judges for the Environment ([174]). The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation and European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation mechanisms for cooperation on cross-border cases should be used more systematically for environmental offences.

Environmental Liability Directive

The Environmental Liability Directive (ELD)([175]) 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 ([176]), which will be finalised in 2025, and which was supported by an external study ([177]), 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 were reported in the second reporting period (2013–2022) than in the first one (2007–2013). However, the downward 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 31 December 2021, Austria reported only one occurrence of environmental damage under the ELD (the case involved damage to three deciduous trees that were the natural habitat for hermit beetles). No environmental damage under the ELD was reported in the previous reporting period.

Although Austria has not implemented mandatory financial security, environmental insurance policies that provide cover for ELD liabilities are available. They are rarely purchased due to the model extension for ELD liabilities in general liability policies, developed by the Austrian Insurance Association. The model environmental extension specifically provides cover for ELD liabilities, with the caveat that it does not provide cover for environmental damage that occurs on an insured site. As a result, most operators in Austria now have coverage for ELD liabilities, but, as was explained, this coverage is limited to third-party claims for remediating environmental damage and does not include remediation of on-site damage.

2025 priority action

- Encourage the use of training programmes provided by the Commission (or developed at the national level) 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.

([171]) https://www.impel.eu/en.
([172]) LIFE+SATEC project (https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/project/LIFE20-PRE-ES-000001/fight-against-environmental-crime-at-a-strategic-level-through-the-strengthening-of-envicrimenet-network-of-experts-in-environmental-criminal-investigations).
([173]) https://www.environmentalprosecutors.eu.
([174]) https://www.eufje.org/index.php?lang=en.
([175]) 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.
([176]) Commission staff working document - Evaluation of the Environmental Liability Directive, forthcoming 2025.
([177]) 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.

EU-supported environmental capacity building

The Commission's 2023 Compact ([178]) 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 ([179]) and the TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER tool ([180]). The technical assistance available through the cohesion policy is subject to shared management and is not dealt with in this subsection.

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 Commission's TSI had annual calls in 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. The following environment-related projects have been selected for Austria:

- Roadmap for a future comprehensive raw material balance, Ministry of Finance (2022);
- Integration of environmental dimensions in public finances – implementing the 'do no significant harm' (DNSH) principle in public funding programme, Ministry of Finance (2023);
- Building policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) in Austria, Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (2024);
- Promoting cooperation and cross-border exchange on legal challenges and issues related to energy transition, Federal Ministry for Climate Action (2024).
- Strengthening Austria's capacity to model the macroeconomic effects of 'green' policies and investments through the GreenREFORM model, Federal Ministry of Finance (2024);
- Critical Raw Materials Balance, Austrian Federal Ministry of Finance (2025).

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 Commission to present new and upcoming environmental legislation and policy in all Member States ([181]).

Workshops involving Austria:

- Best practices in applying Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (5 May 2022);
- Eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) (28–29 September 2022);
- Future challenges for air protection (24 November 2022) with the Czech EU presidency;
- Decentralised bio-waste recycling in Austria (9–10 October 2023);
- Best practice in applying Article 6(3) of Habitats Directive: Practical solutions to carry out Natura

([178]) 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).

([179]) 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).

([180]) 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.

([181]) 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); and Renewable energy projects: permitting granting processes (13 June 2022). NB: The first flagship workshop on zero pollution for air, water and soil took place on 9 February 2022.

impact assessments effectively (25–27 October 2023);
- Reducing air pollution from transport and residential energy (11–13 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).
- Freight transport by rail (in relation to waste transport) (17 - 18 March 2025), hosted in Vienna.

The workshop on decentralised biowaste recycling in Austria aimed to achieve a deeper understanding among Member State officials of biogenic waste treatment through lectures and excursions to various operators and recycling plants. From 2024, Member States have to collect biowaste separately or ensure recycling at the source.

The workshop related to best practice in applying Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (and practical solutions to carry out Natura 2000 impact assessments effectively) brought together experts from Greece, Austria, Poland and Sweden, who shared best practices with Estonian officials regarding the appropriate assessment of Natura 2000. The workshop was the last exchange in a series of events, preceded by an expert mission on 26-27 April 2023 in Estonia.

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.

Annex
2025 priority actions

Circular economy and waste management
Transitioning to a circular economy
• 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
• Increase the collection and recycling rate of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). • Adopt measures to increase recycling of critical raw materials. • Invest in waste prevention measures to reduce the total amount of waste generated.
Biodiversity and natural capital
Nature protection and restoration – Natura 2000
• 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.
Recovery of species
• Reinforce action for habitats and species in unfavourable conservation status, for example through restoration measures, increased connectivity, better policy coordination and integration, and increased funding.
Recovery of ecosystems
• Implement eco-schemes and agri-environmental measures and practices to address the environmental needs of Austria.
Prevention and management of invasive alien species
• Step up implementation of the IAS Regulation, including with regard to enforcement and capacity of inspection authorities. • Ratify the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments of 2004 (BWM Convention).
Ecosystem assessment and accounting
• Support development of national business and biodiversity network.
Zero pollution
Clean air
• 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
• Complete the correct transposition of the IED 1.0. • 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

- Strengthen compliance with requirements on safety measures to prevent major accidents and ensure appropriate preparedness and response in relation to UTEs, in particular as regards reviewing, testing and updating EEPs, at intervals of no more than three years.

Noise

- Complete and implement action plans on noise management.

Water quality and management

Water Framework Directive

- Improve river continuity and ecological flows, boosting efforts on 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.rein

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

Chemicals

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

Climate action

- Implement all polices 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. More detailed priority actions are set out in the assessment of the final National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).

Financing

- Use more national funding (including by increasing taxes in favour of the environment and reducing environmentally 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 publication of final decisions) is electronically accessible in a timely manner, 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.
- Ensure correct transposition of the revised EIA Directive.
- 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) 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.