

BRIEFING

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**REDUCE RESOURCE  
USE FOR A FAIRER,  
CLEANER, AND MORE  
RESILIENT EUROPE**

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Today, the EU's consumption of natural resources is far beyond what is sustainable. The overuse of natural resources is driving multiple crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, water scarcity, and social inequality<sup>1</sup>. In 2022, the average material footprint<sup>2</sup> was 14.8 tonnes per person—about six times higher than in low-income countries. The EU's dependence on high volumes of imported raw materials and commodities also leaves us vulnerable to supply risks and geopolitical instability. **As current policies are insufficient to break this trend<sup>3</sup>, we call for an EU framework on resource use reduction based on sufficiency measures. Bold political action is essential to strengthen strategic autonomy, resilience and competitiveness while delivering wellbeing for all.**

## *I – What is sustainable resources management?*

Shortly, sustainable resources management means **using natural resources (including materials, land, water) in a way that meets human needs while staying within planetary boundaries**. This involves ensuring that resource extraction, processing, and waste do not exceed what the Earth can sustain. A [group of leading environmental NGOs](#) has proposed a maximum material footprint target of 5 tonnes per capita by 2050.

To achieve a **substantial decrease in resources and energy demand**, it is essential to put **sufficiency<sup>4</sup>** at the center of political and corporate decisions. By **scaling needs to what is considered essential** to ensure wellbeing and provide a decent level of services to all, sufficiency goes **beyond efficiency**, which aims at reducing energy and resource intensity through technological improvement. This way, sufficiency “opens up opportunities for a dialogue on new understandings of quality of life, prosperity and social justice”<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, sufficiency policies must be **co-created with citizens** (e.g., through citizen assemblies and energy communities) to ensure a **fair, inclusive and democratic transition**.

There are many **concrete examples** of sufficiency measures that contribute to resource use reduction, such as:

- urban planning to bring services closer to people's homes while providing adequate and affordable public transport ([Flensburg, Germany](#));
- circular building practices ([Tampere, Finland](#));
- eliminating wasted energy ([Grenoble, France](#));
- supporting reuse and repair activities ([Resources, Belgium](#)).

## *II – How does this make Europe more resilient?*

Compared to business-as-usual scenarios, sustainable resource management and sufficiency offer the following societal benefits:

- **Aligning with 1.5°C compatible [decarbonisation pathways](#)**;
- **Reducing the need for imports**, allowing the EU to save around [€200 billion per year](#) and strengthening supply chain security;
- **Reducing energy demand** by [20-30%](#) and freeing Europe from its dependency on energy imports by 2050;
- **Reducing water and energy bills** and allocating freed up public money to social services;
- **Achieving sustainable reindustrialisation**, by focusing on strategic sectors, reducing costs and minimising risks, thus strengthening the EU's competitiveness.

## *III - What is the role of the EU?*

The EU has formulated ambitious objectives under the Environmental Action Programme, the Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan. However, the EU still lacks a **coherent policy framework and targets for resource use reduction**.

That is why we need a sufficiency strategy and new legislation to develop a clear vision and harmonise national approaches, taking into account socio-economic benefits and impacts in terms of welfare distribution. This can come in the form of a new Directive and/or through the new Circular Economy Act, while also integrating demand-side measures in sectoral legislation.

## IV - Who is supporting this?

There is a **growing consensus among scientists<sup>6</sup>, policymakers, and citizens<sup>7</sup>** that sustainable resource management and sufficiency are essential to meet sustainability goals. The [Conclusions](#) of the EU Environmental Council meeting on 17 June 2024 acknowledged that the EU's consumption level is unsustainable and urged the European Commission to assess the establishment of an EU long-term objective for sustainable resource use as well as an overarching legal framework. Such a framework can build on the experiences of **EU Member States that have already adopted resource reduction targets**, such as [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Finland](#), [Spain](#), and the [Netherlands](#).

## V - What can Members of the European Parliament do?

**MEPs have a crucial role to play in speeding up legislative action.** The European Parliament already adopted a non-legislative own-initiative report (INI) on Resource efficiency ("[Moving towards a circular economy](#)") in 2015, which stated:

*"Emphasises that addressing resource scarcity requires reducing the extraction and use of resources and an absolute decoupling of growth from the use of natural resources." [...]*

*"There is an urgent need for an overall reduction in resource extraction and use in order to overcome the rebound effect; urges the Commission to propose measures accordingly;"*

As a follow-up on this report, the new European Parliament now has the **historic opportunity to adopt a legislative initiative report (INL)** on a Resource-wise Europe to call on the European Commission to put forward a legislative proposal addressing sufficiency as a policy priority. Furthermore, **MEPs can ask critical questions during the hearings of Commissioner-designates** to make sure they support sufficiency approaches and will follow up on the Council conclusions.

**Resource use reduction and sufficiency go hand in hand to achieve climate neutrality, social justice and a resilient economy**

This briefing was prepared by the **Sufficiency Coalition** and the **Resource Use Reduction taskforce**. For more information, please contact

**Fabien Baudelet:** [fabien.baudelet@negawatt.org](mailto:fabien.baudelet@negawatt.org)

**Lindsey Wuisan:** [lindsey.wuisan@foeeurope.org](mailto:lindsey.wuisan@foeeurope.org)

**List of signatories :** Aqua Publica Europea – Association of Cities and Regions for sustainable Resource management – ClientEarth – Climate Action Network Europe – Energy Cities – Environmental Coalition on Standards – European Environmental Bureau – Friends of the Earth Europe – négaWatt Association – Rescoop.EU – Seas At Risk – Zero Waste Europe

## ENDNOTES

- 1 According to the [Global Resources Outlook](#), resource extraction and processing account for over 60% of GHG emissions and for 40% of health-related impacts of air pollution. The extraction and processing of biomass accounts for 90% of land-related biodiversity loss and water stress. Furthermore, the extraction of minerals (such as those for the [energy transition](#)) is often accompanied by human rights abuses.
- 2 The [material footprint](#), or raw material consumption, is an indicator that assesses the amount of raw materials extracted from nature, both inside and outside the EU, to manufacture or provide the goods and services consumed by EU citizens.
- 3 According to the [EEA](#), it is unlikely that the EU will significantly reduce the per capita consumption in the coming decade as there has been no progress so far, while projections show an increase in the future demand for materials.
- 4 "Set of measures and daily practices that avoid demand for energy, materials, land and water, while delivering human wellbeing for all within planetary boundaries" ([IPCC, 2022, AR6 – WGIII](#)).
- 5 German Advisory Council on the Environment - [SRU](#), 2024
- 6 In its 2024 report, the [European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate change](#) (ESABCC) recommends to "pursue more ambitious reductions in energy and material demand through new and strengthened policies".
- 7 40% of all measures recommended so far by Climate Citizens Assemblies across Europe are sufficiency-related. See [Lage et al.](#)