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AD HOC MULTIDISCIPLINARY GROUP ON THE ENVIRONMENT (GME)

**PRELIMINARY DRAFT COUNCIL OF EUROPE STRATEGY ON THE ENVIRONMENT  
AND ACTION PLAN  
2025-2030**

**Foreword**

The following document has been prepared on the basis of the elements discussed by the GME at its 1<sup>st</sup> meeting (GME(2024)3) and revised on the basis of the comments received from delegations (GME(2024)3rev).

The Strategy is based on the general aspects of the elements (GME(2024)3rev, page 3) while the Action Plan is prepared on the basis of the appendix to the elements document (GME(2024)3rev, page 4ss).

**Action required**

Members of the GME are requested to consider and review this document with a view to submitting to the Committee of Ministers in pursuance of the GME's terms of reference.

Document prepared by the Secretariat

## THE REYKJAVÍK DECLARATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

1. The 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Reykjavík on 16 – 17 May 2023, recognised the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It committed the Council of Europe to strengthening its work in this field, with the aim of making the environment a visible priority for the Organisation, as laid out in Appendix V of the [Reykjavík Declaration](#) on “The Council of Europe and the environment”. This paved the way to the so-called “Reykjavik process”.

2. The Heads of State and Government gave a strong political message to the Council of Europe and its member States by asking to urgently take co-ordinated action to protect the environment, strengthening the human-rights based approach, addressing the challenges raised by the triple planetary crisis and identifying common responses, promoting co-operation among member States and with partner organisations, and making the environment a visible priority for the Organisation.

3. In this context, the Council of Europe has a crucial role to play in providing a common legal framework, co-ordinating actions, promoting democratic participation and environmental governance, to face these urgent and interconnected environmental challenges for the sake of societies’ quality of life and sustainable future. The present Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment aims at addressing these challenges, applying a multidisciplinary and integrated approach, and involving multiple stakeholders from the outset to its implementation and monitoring.

4. The Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment is based on the fundamental principles of the Organisation - human rights, rule of law and democracy – and is the result of an inclusive participation process of the Organisation’s bodies, institutions, and sectors, by the Ad Hoc Multidisciplinary Group on the Environment (GME). It pursues a comprehensive approach including the three dimensions of the Council of Europe work: standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation activities thereby ensuring a greater impact and sustainability. The Strategy focuses on areas where the Council of Europe has a comparative advantage and proven record, leveraging synergies with partners and stakeholders, providing added value, and avoiding duplication with existing frameworks or mechanisms within and outside the Council of Europe.

5. In drafting the Strategy, the Council of Europe gathered key stakeholders, both internal and external to the Council of Europe, to identify challenges, to agree on a shared vision and to develop a common reference framework, with specific and time-bound objectives. In this way, the Strategy can effectively address issues that have multiple and interlinked dimensions, assigning clear roles to all actors. The main challenges highlighted by Council of Europe member States and civil society, focus on **pollution** with critical threats from industrial emissions and chemical pollutants affecting both health and ecosystems; **climate change**, which leads to severe weather events and natural disasters impacting human rights, rule of law and democracy, food security, and infrastructure; and **biodiversity loss**, largely due to unsustainable practices in agriculture and industry, threatening the ecological balance and human well-being.

6. These challenges critically affect human health, ecosystems, economic stability, impacting on human well-being and causing many casualties every year. Co-ordinated and urgent actions are necessary to mitigate these worsening effects. Stakeholders emphasise, as common responses, the need for stronger legal frameworks, public engagement, and financing for sustainable practices. They also recommend that the Council of Europe adopt a human rights-based approach, foster regional co-operation and support capacity-building

initiatives in this field. These requests highlight the urgency for immediate and ambitious actions, positioning the Council of Europe as a central actor in co-ordinating environmental governance and upholding democratic and social rights amid the triple planetary crisis.

7. The Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment takes into account the Organisation's Programme and Budget 2024-2027 to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in its follow up and facilitate the implementation of its Action Plan, in particular, in relation to the six overarching themes: securing human rights and fundamental freedoms; advancing social justice, good health and a sustainable environment; acting for equality, diversity and respect; building trust in public institutions; upholding safety, security and integrity of society and persons; anchoring democratic values in European societies.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

8. The Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment outlines eleven interlinked and complementary strategic objectives to counter the interconnected impact of the triple planetary crisis on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. A multidisciplinary, transversal, and integrated approach is necessary to identify innovative actions to deal with these multifaceted challenges, involving stakeholders at all levels, States, IGOs, NGOs and civil society. The Strategy provides guidance to the Council of Europe and its member States on complementary actions to the existing activities or other multilateral fora, to ensure a future in which human beings fully enjoy their rights in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

9. The Strategy includes the following strategic objectives which focus precisely on integrating human rights, democracy, the rule of law and environmental sustainability principles at all levels of governance and society, with particular emphasis on protecting vulnerable and marginalised groups.

1. Human Rights-Based Approach: address the triple planetary crisis through a human rights lens, with particular attention to vulnerable and marginalised groups.
2. Nature-Based Solutions: promote an ecosystem-based approach to manage natural resources, using green and innovative available technologies.
3. Environmental Sustainability: integrate sustainable practices into all activities and the use and development of infrastructure, ensuring that projects and policies respect the principles of prevention, non-regression and precaution.
4. Equality, Equity, Fairness and Non-Discrimination: promote equality, equity, fairness and non-discrimination in both decision-making processes and outcomes.
5. Intergenerational Equity and Solidarity: promote actions that consider the needs of present and future generations.
6. Democratic Governance: ensure that authorities at national, regional, and local levels apply a multistakeholder and multisectoral approach at all stages of decision-making processes, in order for them to be inclusive and participatory.
7. Access to Justice: guarantee that all people affected by environmental issues, and other interested stakeholders, have access to justice and effective legal remedies.
8. Accountability: hold all actors, public and private, accountable for their environmental impact.
9. Democratic Participation, Public Engagement and Awareness: inform and involve the public concerned, in particular, representatives of civil society, youth and vulnerable groups, increasing their environmental education to ensure inclusive sustainable policies and strategies.
10. Transparency: ensure open and transparent access to information on environmental issues, and combat climate disinformation.
11. Protection of Environmental Human Rights Defenders: empower activists and environmental human rights defenders, especially young environmental human rights

defenders, and protect them from any form of reprisal, unlawful punishment, or detention, ensuring their access to justice and effective remedies.

## **1. Human Rights-Based Approach: Addressing the Triple Planetary Crisis**

10. The ongoing triple planetary crises of pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, pose severe challenges, to ecosystems and to human well-being, including human life and health. They particularly impact women, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and marginalised groups such as children, young people, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and low-income populations. Addressing these crises through a human-rights lens, clearly identifying rights-holders and duty-bearers, ensures that policies and actions are grounded in the protection and promotion of human rights, creating a framework that prioritises the security, safety, health, well-being, non-discrimination, dignity, and livelihoods of those most at risk.

11. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks is also essential to addressing the significant challenges which arise where environmental regulations across member States are inconsistent or inadequate. Such weakness undermines the effectiveness of environmental protection, creating obstacles to coherent and unified action to combat environmental crises.

12. To embed this approach effectively, it is crucial to foster integration of environmental human rights into national and regional climate adaptation and mitigation plans. This integration, building on the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter, fosters holistic and inclusive strategies that align environmental goals with social equity. [Promoting the legal recognition at national and European levels of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as an enforceable human right further strengthen accountability and empowers communities to demand protective measures and effective policy implementation.]

13. Supporting member States in signing, ratifying, and implementing treaties that safeguard human rights of populations, especially vulnerable groups, in the face of environmental degradation is essential to building robust, rights-based environmental governance. Periodic human rights impact assessments on environmental policies and practices should be conducted by stakeholders, to ensure that measures taken do not inadvertently infringe upon or harm these rights. Additionally, these assessments help monitor progress and reveal areas where improvements are needed.

14. Advocacy for environmental justice and the prioritisation of protecting the most vulnerable should be woven into national climate and environmental strategies. This focus ensures that social equity remains at the core of climate action, promoting a future where sustainable development goes hand-in-hand with human rights protection. Through these collective actions, an inclusive, and rights-based approach to environmental sustainability and just transition can be achieved.

15. To tackle these issues, efforts will focus on supporting the development of comprehensive, consistent, effective and enforceable environmental laws and policies at the national, regional, and local levels, and their implementation. These legal instruments will provide a strong foundation for effective environmental governance. Additionally, existing Council of Europe standards will be complemented by new tools to address identified shortcomings, ensuring a robust and cohesive legal basis for environmental protection. To support member States in meeting their obligations, enhanced follow-up mechanisms will be implemented, providing tailored guidance and monitoring to ensure successful alignment with shared environmental objectives.

16. The successful implementation of this strategic objective could yield significant positive outcomes, namely: a) the increased recognition by member States at national level of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 76/300 “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment”, and by pursuing the implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)20 on human rights and the protection of the environment: A broader acknowledgment and legal reinforcement of this right can empower individuals and communities to advocate for certain environmental practices and hold those responsible accountable, b) strengthened capacity of member States to protect their populations, especially vulnerable groups, from the impacts of environmental harm: Enhanced policies and frameworks will enable governments to develop and enforce protective measures that prioritise the needs and safety of affected populations, in particular, vulnerable groups and c) enhanced integration of human rights into environmental governance: National and regional strategies will incorporate human rights considerations more deeply, ensuring that environmental policies contribute to social equity, sustainable development, and long-term resilience.

17. These outcomes will collectively promote a sustainable and equitable approach to addressing environmental challenges, underscoring the interconnectedness of human rights and environmental health.

## **2. Nature-Based Solutions: Promoting Ecosystem-Based Approaches**

18. Adopting Nature-based Solutions (NbS) as a means to manage natural resources and respond to environmental challenges aims to promote ecosystem-based approaches. Encouraging such an approach leverages natural processes and systems to offer sustainable solutions for addressing environmental issues, while integrating the conservation of ecosystems and the development of green technologies. By focusing on NbS, and building on Council of Europe relevant instruments including the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, European Landscape Convention, as well as EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, the aim is to promote long-term environmental sustainability through strategies that work in harmony with nature, such as reforestation, wetland restoration, and sustainable agricultural practices.

19. To achieve this, developing and implementing policies that support ecosystem restoration, conservation, and sustainable resource management are key. Efforts will also focus on promoting the use of NbS for both climate adaptation and mitigation, encouraging the adoption of solutions that enhance ecosystem services, support carbon sequestration, and contribute to biodiversity conservation. The development of green technologies that align with NbS will be supported, alongside providing technical assistance and capacity-building for member States to integrate these solutions into their national environmental strategies.

20. The expected outcomes of the implementation of this objective include enhanced ecosystem services that contribute to both climate resilience and biodiversity conservation. An increased use of innovative, sustainable technologies that align with NbS principles will further foster a green and resilient economy. Additionally, the integration of NbS into national and regional environmental policy frameworks will be strengthened, ensuring that these natural solutions are embedded in the broader governance structures, paving the way for more sustainable, nature-positive policies and practices.

### **3. Environmental Sustainability: Integrating Sustainable Practices**

21. Integrating environmental sustainability across all activities of the Organisation and its member States is considered of major concern that should be ensured. Upholding the principles of non-regression (ensuring that environmental standards are not weakened) and precaution (which calls for proactive measures in the face of uncertainty) are of particular importance. This approach aims to embed sustainability in every sector, ensuring that development occurs without compromising the environment for future generations. By embracing these principles, the objective is to drive long-term, responsible practices that align with both environmental protection and sustainable growth.

22. The lack of financial and technological resources, and capacity building to ensure the right use of technology, is another significant barrier to adopting sustainable practices and driving innovation needed to address environmental challenges within member States. Without adequate funding and technological support, the transition to more sustainable systems and the development of green technologies are severely limited, making it difficult for many member States to meet environmental goals.

23. Several key actions will be implemented to realise this vision. These include the creation and promotion of policies that encourage sustainable practices across member States; environmental sustainability will be prioritised in all Council of Europe projects and initiatives, ensuring that development efforts are aligned with the overarching goal of safeguarding the environment for future generations.

24. To address the lack of financial and technological resources, efforts will focus on promoting green financing and subsidies that support the transition to sustainable practices. These financial tools, including from the Council of Europe Development Bank, will enable Governments and private entities to invest in green technologies and practices, reducing the economic burden of adopting environmentally friendly solutions. In parallel, technological innovation will be encouraged, with a focus on creating solutions that mitigate environmental crises and support long-term sustainability. Furthermore, member States will be supported in accessing international funding for environmental projects, ensuring that they have the necessary financial resources to implement effective environmental strategies.

25. As these actions unfold, including at Council of Europe internal level, several important outcomes are anticipated. Notably, there will be a broad adoption of sustainable practices across diverse sectors, resulting in a significant reduction in the environmental footprint of both member States' and private-sector activities. Policy coherence will be strengthened, ensuring that environmental sustainability and climate change objectives are aligned, paving the way for more effective and unified governance. These expected outcomes will help ensure that environmental protection becomes deeply embedded in national and regional development strategies, fostering a more sustainable and resilient future.

### **4. Equality, Equity, Fairness and Non-Discrimination**

26. Equality, equity, fairness, and non-discrimination within both decision-making processes and their outcomes are to be promoted to ensure that all individuals, particularly women and those from vulnerable or marginalised communities, are treated justly in the context of environmental policies. This approach building on a series of important Council of Europe conventions and standards, seeks to create an inclusive framework where the voices and needs of all affected groups are central to the development and implementation of policies, allowing for a more equitable response to environmental challenges.

27. In pursuit of this goal, several actions will be undertaken by the Organisation and its member States and frameworks developed that move beyond climate-change mitigation to create permanent resilience across all social groups. Environmental policies and decisions will be designed to be inclusive and non-discriminatory, actively reflecting the needs and perspectives of marginalised groups. Measures will be introduced to address environmental inequalities, ensuring equitable access to essential resources including clean water, air, and safe living conditions. Additionally, gender-responsive environmental policies will be promoted, focusing on the specific needs of women and other marginalised groups in relation to environmental protection. Efforts will also be made to promote equitable access to green jobs, technologies, and environmental education, using formal and non-formal methodologies, providing opportunities for all to participate in the green transition.

28. The expected outcomes are significant and multifaceted. The reduction of environmental inequalities will contribute to enhanced social justice within environmental governance. The increase in the participation of marginalised and vulnerable groups in environmental decision-making will ensure that their voices are heard and considered in shaping policies. Moreover, the integration of gender-responsive and inclusive policies will foster a more equitable and just approach to environmental governance, ensuring that all groups, regardless of their background or status, stand to benefit from the transition to a sustainable future.

## **5. Intergenerational Equity and Solidarity**

29. The goal is to promote actions that balance the needs of both present and future generations, ensuring that sustainable practices protect the environment and contribute to the long-term well-being of all. This vision emphasises the importance of addressing current environmental challenges while preserving natural resources and ecosystems for those who will inherit them. By embedding intergenerational equity into environmental policies, the aim is to leave a legacy of sustainability, resilience, and shared responsibility.

30. To bring this objective to fruition, it is essential to advance policies that emphasise long-term sustainability and prevent environmental harm with consequences for future generations. Simultaneously, member States will be encouraged to integrate the principle of intergenerational equity into their governance frameworks, ensuring that environmental decision-making accounts for the needs of future generations. Furthermore, initiatives that actively reduce the environmental debt left to future generations - such as expanding renewable energy use and implementing sustainable resource management - will be promoted, fostering a forward-looking approach to environmental stewardship.

31. The Council of Europe youth and children dimensions are deeply embedded in the Organisation modus operandi and that experience and the avenues for dialogue and co-operation created over the years will be instrumental in supporting the implementation of this strategic objective.

32. As a result of these efforts, several key outcomes are anticipated. First, environmental decision-making will increasingly reflect consideration for future generations, ensuring that policies and actions are designed with long-term impacts in mind. Sustainability will also become a core element of environmental practices and policies, leading to a significant enhancement in their effectiveness and resilience. In addition, intergenerational solidarity in climate and environmental action will be strengthened, fostering collaboration and shared purpose between current and future stakeholders. Ultimately, these outcomes will contribute to a more sustainable approach to environmental governance, where the needs of the present generations are met without compromising the ability of future generations to thrive. By achieving these goals, a legacy of equitable and sustainable environmental stewardship will be established.

## **6. Democratic Governance: Inclusive and Participatory Decision-Making**

33. Encouraging inclusive, transparent, and participatory decision-making processes at all stages of environmental policy development and implementation is essential in the context of democratic governance. This approach emphasises the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including government bodies, local and regional authorities, civil society, the private sector, and vulnerable communities, in shaping policies that directly impact their lives. By fostering meaningful, broad-based participation, the aim is to ensure that environmental policies are not only more representative but also more effective in addressing the needs, concerns, vulnerabilities, and rights of all sectors of society. Environmental issues also transcend national borders, making it clear that addressing them requires co-ordinated international efforts. The global nature of these challenges demands a unified approach, where collective action is essential to effectively manage and resolve environmental crises. Various Council of Europe instruments provide a framework and guidance to move forward in this area addressing in parallel access to information and participation; they are complemented with the significant work in the area of civil society and youth involvement.

34. The first key action to be undertaken to achieve this is to strengthen mechanisms for public consultation and participation in the development of environmental policies, ensuring that the voices of various stakeholders are heard throughout the policy-making process. Inclusive platforms for dialogue will also be created, bringing together governments, local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, the private sector, and affected communities, as well as women and vulnerable and marginalised groups, to collaborate on policy development and implementation. Member States will be encouraged to adopt participatory governance models, particularly in environmental decision-making at local and national levels, fostering greater transparency and accountability. Additionally, efforts will be made to ensure that policies and governance structures are flexible and adaptive, capable of responding to the diverse needs and priorities of all stakeholders involved.

35. To meet the challenge of co-ordinated international efforts, key actions will focus on enhancing participation in international environmental agreements, ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged in multilateral co-operation. Efforts will also include fostering synergies with international organisations and civil society, leveraging their expertise to tackle global environmental challenges. Additionally, actions will be aligned with the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that global strategies are cohesive and integrated. By strengthening international collaboration, these actions aim to ensure that environmental issues are tackled with a unified, global response.

36. The expected outcomes of this strategic objective include more inclusive and representative environmental decision-making processes, where all stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalised communities, have a voice in shaping policies. This will lead to enhanced public trust in environmental governance, as people see that their concerns are taken into account. Furthermore, the greater engagement of civil society, especially of youth organisations and networks, and local communities will ensure that environmental policies are more grounded in the needs of those who are most affected, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility in policymaking and implementation, as well as strengthening overall policy effectiveness.

## **7. Access to Justice: Ensuring Legal Remedies**

37. To guarantee that all people affected by environmental issues have access to justice and effective legal remedies, thereby enabling them to challenge insufficient or ineffectual policies and seek redress in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and the specific conventions addressing liability for damages to the environment and other related crimes. This approach prioritises empowering individuals and communities by ensuring that



they have the legal tools and support necessary to hold polluters accountable and safeguard their rights. Strengthening environmental justice will create a legal framework in which those impacted or harmed by environmental degradation can actively seek protection and remedy.

38. Several key actions are to be taken to achieve this goal. First, access to environmental justice will be enhanced through the adoption of national laws that allow individuals and communities to challenge harmful environmental practices. Additionally, access to justice will be ensured by the effective execution of judgments regarding environment related cases. There will also be advocacy for the establishment of specialised environmental jurisdictions capable of handling disputes effectively and efficiently. Promoting the use of legal tools, such as public interest litigation, class action suits, anti-SLAPP laws, will empower citizens to take legal action against environmental damage. Moreover, efforts will be made to ensure that environmental laws are not only accessible and transparent but also enforceable, enabling communities to understand their rights and seek justice when necessary.

39. Several key expected outcomes are anticipated as a result of these actions. An improved access to justice for those affected by environmental harm will enable them to hold those responsible to account. Furthermore, the capacity of legal systems to effectively address environmental harm will be significantly enhanced, making them more capable of providing timely and just outcomes. Ultimately, these efforts will result in a legal environment where citizens are empowered to challenge environmental injustices and protect their human rights and their communities.

## **8. Accountability: Holding All Actors Accountable**

40. Holding all actors - both public and private - accountable for their environmental impact ensures that environmental regulations are respected and that actors are responsible for the consequences of their actions. Building on the existing legal framework and ensuring effective implementation of Court decisions including at European level, this aims to establish a framework where transparency, responsibility, and adherence to environmental standards are non-negotiable. By focusing on accountability, the goal is to drive a shift toward more sustainable and ethical practices across all sectors, where environmental impacts are closely monitored and rectified when necessary. The need for efficient co-ordination and implementation of the Council of Europe's environmental activities is also crucial for ensuring that environmental goals are met across all member States. The diverse range of activities requires a well-structured approach to maintain coherence and effectiveness in addressing environmental challenges.

41. To achieve these objectives, a range of actions will be carried out. Initially, mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement will be established to track the environmental impact of both public and private sector activities, ensuring compliance with environmental regulations. In addition, accountability frameworks will be promoted and further developed to hold Governments, stakeholders, and international bodies responsible for fulfilling their environmental commitments and achieving the designated goals. Efforts will also focus on promoting transparent reporting on environmental performance, encouraging both governments and the private sector to openly disclose their sustainability measures and outcomes. Moreover, the application of environmental accountability standards in corporate governance will be prioritised, fostering a culture of responsibility within businesses, and encouraging them to integrate environmental considerations into their decision-making processes.

42. To address the challenge of an efficient co-ordination and implementation of the Council of Europe's environmental activities, key actions will focus on establishing the "Reykjavík Committee" an intergovernmental committee, building on the GME, which will streamline activities and promote greater co-operation among member States. In addition,

mechanisms for monitoring and supporting compliance with environmental obligations will be strengthened, including by ensuring the participation of civil society organisations, ensuring that all States are aligned with the Council's environmental goals. Furthermore, the "Reykjavík Committee" could act as a platform for the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. This approach will improve the efficiency of the Council of Europe's environmental initiatives and strengthen its capacity to support member States in achieving their environmental commitments.

43. As a result, it is expected to see a noticeable increase in accountability for environmental actions across all sectors, ensuring that both public and private actors are held responsible for their environmental footprints. The enforcement of environmental laws and regulations will improve, making it more difficult for violators to evade responsibility. Furthermore, stronger public trust in environmental governance is expected, as transparency and accountability mechanisms lead to a greater sense of confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of environmental governance systems. These outcomes will help ensure that environmental sustainability becomes a core value across all sectors, with tangible actions driving long-term positive impacts.

## **9. Democratic Participation, Public Engagement and Awareness**

44. This strategic objective emphasises the promotion of democratic participation, public engagement, and awareness to ensure that environmental policies and strategies are inclusive and sustainable. This approach prioritises informing and involving representatives of civil society, youth, marginalised and vulnerable groups, while increasing their environmental education, using both formal and non-formal methodologies, to foster meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

45. Key actions include facilitating the active participation of children, youth, marginalised, and vulnerable groups in consultations and governance. By reaching out and engaging in dialogue with these groups, robust, accessible consultation mechanisms and platforms for public engagement and collective decision-making on environmental issues will be established and promoted to ensure diverse voices are heard. Local participatory governance models will be supported, empowering communities to take an active role in managing their natural resources.

46. Democratic processes will remain central to environmental policy design and implementation. Comprehensive environmental education programmes targeting children, youth, community leaders, and vulnerable groups will enhance their understanding of key environmental issues. Additionally, collaboration with schools, universities, non-governmental organisations will bolster education and training efforts and inspire action.

47. Public awareness campaigns will aim to cultivate an increased understanding of environmental rights and sustainable practices, as well as a commitment to the environment, encouraging informed participation at all levels. Efforts will also focus on enabling civil society, youth, and other groups to shape policies at international, national, regional, and local levels.

48. The expected outcomes include greater inclusion and representation of diverse stakeholders in environmental governance, empowering local communities and marginalised groups to actively participate in decision-making. This will lead to more effective, pertinent, and socially acceptable environmental policies, increased environmental literacy, enhanced public participation, and a well-informed public committed to sustainable and inclusive approaches to addressing environmental challenges.

## **10. Transparency: Open Access to Information**

49. Ensuring open and transparent access to quality information on environmental issues while actively combating environmental disinformation and misinformation that threaten public trust and the effectiveness of policies are key elements of the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment. Fostering reliable information-sharing and combating false narratives seek to empower stakeholders with accurate knowledge to make informed decisions and engage meaningfully in environmental governance.

50. Several targeted actions are needed to achieve this. Access to environmental data, reports, and reliable research will be promoted, ensuring that all stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations, young environmental human rights defenders, and the general public, can benefit from accurate and comprehensive information. Access to reliable information can be further ensured by the ratification to the Tromsø Convention on access to information. Platforms facilitating free exchange of environmental information between governments, the private sector, and the public will also be supported, fostering collaboration and shared understanding of environmental challenges. In parallel, communication strategies will be developed to counter climate disinformation, emphasising the dissemination of scientifically accurate and credible environmental information. Additionally, the capacity of environmental watchdogs will be strengthened to monitor and report on environmental issues, providing a robust mechanism for accountability and transparency.

51. Through these efforts, the aim is to build a culture of openness and trust in environmental communication while equipping the public with the tools to discern and challenge disinformation effectively, and ensure that young people have access to evidence-based climate-related information and data, through effective and diverse communication channels, including in accessible and youth-friendly formats, as well as in minority languages.

## **11. Protection for Defenders: Empowering Environmental Human Rights Defenders**

52. The human rights of environmental activists and human rights defenders (EHRDs) should be respected, protected, and fulfilled at all times. EHRDs should be empowered including by being shielded from violence, reprisals, unlawful punishment or detention, and stigmatisation, thus ensuring that their work in defending human rights related to the environment, is safe and effective.

53. Efforts will therefore focus on advocating for legal protections that ensure environmental defenders' right to speak out, demonstrate peacefully and act in the public interest without fear of retaliation. Support will be provided to activists facing threats and unfair treatment, including legal and financial assistance, to ensure their safety and the continuation of their work. Raising awareness about the crucial role of environmental human rights defenders and the risks they face will also be central, fostering public understanding and support for their efforts. Additionally, engagement with Governments will be essential in ensuring that actions and policies against environmental human rights defenders are equitably and robustly addressed and that law-enforcement agencies are held accountable.

54. As a result, it is expected that legal protection for environmental human rights defenders, especially young people whose mobilisation is critical to the sustainability of the Strategy, will be enhanced, providing them with greater security to carry out their work. Recognition of the role of defenders in advancing environmental protection and human rights will also increase, contributing to wider societal support for their efforts. Furthermore, there will be improved safety and security for activists, allowing them to continue working on critical environmental issues without fear of reprisals, thereby strengthening the overall effectiveness of environmental advocacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

55. By implementing these strategic objectives, the Council of Europe can play a key role in helping member States and communities to build a future that balances human rights and environmental sustainability. The Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment, backed by an Action Plan with concrete actions, initiatives, and evidenced through successful examples within the Compendium on the Council of Europe's environmental activities, underlines the Organisation's unwavering commitment to addressing pressing environmental challenges. Working collaboratively across sectors, the Council of Europe endeavours to lead by example, fostering a greener, more just, and sustainable future for all. This comprehensive approach leverages the strengths, ongoing activities, and successful initiatives, illustrating the Organisation's proactive stance towards effectively mitigating environmental challenges and ensuring respect for human rights, rule of law and democracy.

## **COUNCIL OF EUROPE STRATEGY ON THE ENVIRONMENT ACTION PLAN**

In order to ensure transposability and efficiency in its follow up, the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment Action Plan is aligned with the Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2024-2027. In particular, six overarching themes which correspond to programme sectors are highlighted: securing human rights and fundamental freedoms; advancing social justice, good health and a sustainable environment; acting for equality, diversity and respect; building trust in public institutions; upholding safety, security and integrity of society and persons; anchoring democratic values in European societies.

### **1. Securing Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**



- a) [considering the need and feasibility of a further instrument or instruments on human rights and the environment cf. CDDH report, CM/Rec(2022)20, draft CM/Rec];
- b) promoting dissemination, capacity-building, awareness-raising and knowledge-sharing with reference to the European Court of Human Rights environmental case-law - including possible Third-Party Interventions (TPIs) of the Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as with reference to the practice of the European Committee of Social Rights;
- c) ensuring effective execution of judgments of the Court regarding environment related cases;
- d) taking into account the importance of intergenerational equity;
- e) including the environmental dimension into “human rights and private sectors” initiatives at the Council of Europe;
- f) supporting national human rights institutions and Ombuds institutions to monitor, report and provide policy recommendations on the environment, human rights and business;
- g) supporting education and capacity-building on the environment, the triple planetary crisis, and the interlinkage between sustainable development and respect for human rights (children, young people, legal professionals, businesses, civil society, administrations at all levels of governance, etc);
- h) building resilience against climate disinformation and access to information on environmental matters;
- i) including targeted questions on the consequences of the triple planetary crisis within the next monitoring cycles of existing monitoring mechanisms in several areas, such as the European Social Charter;
- j) promoting co-operation activities, such as capacity-building activities or confidence-building measures, as well as technical co-operation projects related to the environment and social rights.

## 2. Advancing social justice, good health and a sustainable environment



- a) preventing and combating environmental crime through the promotion of the new Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law;
- b) collecting knowledge and evidence on the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity for human rights on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as on future generations, in order to be able to effectively address the challenges raised;
- c) adopting and promoting the implementation of the Recommendation on landscape and health;
- d) promoting the implementation of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action;
- e) drafting a dedicated Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government;
- f) revising the analytical procedures of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and HealthCare (EDQM);
- g) implementing the standard-setting activities in the context of the Bern Convention;
- h) assessing the relevance of the animal welfare conventions;
- i) mainstreaming the environmental dimension in monitoring activities, for example, in the European Social Charter System and promoting and reinforcing environmental-specific monitoring mechanisms such as the Bern Convention case-file system, and the Landscape Convention;
- j) fostering the implementation of the Roadmap for Sustainable Development within the Council of Europe, with a particular focus on environmental crime;
- k) promoting activities towards a common European approach for reduction of light pollution;
- l) highlighting the intersectionality of climate change and social justice such as for instance the right to healthy food;
- m) utilising the tools and available financing options from the Council of Europe Development Bank.

## 3. Acting for equality, diversity and respect



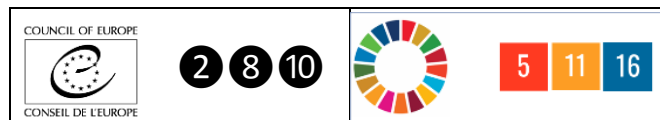
- a) taking into consideration environmental perspectives in Council of Europe action regarding gender equality, anti-discrimination/diversity/inclusion, and the rights of the child, making societies more resilient by combating inequality and discrimination;
- b) promoting further ratifications of Protocol No 12 to the ECHR as a general safeguard against discrimination in all environmental/climate policies and actions;
- c) protecting indigenous people;
- d) encouraging states to ensure that children and youth are safeguarded when participating as defenders of the environment as indicated in the Council of Europe Study on Children as defenders of human rights and Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action;
- e) adopting a recommendation on gender mainstreaming in the planning, development, implementation, and monitoring of environmental legislation, strategies, policies, and actions.

#### 4. Building trust in public institutions



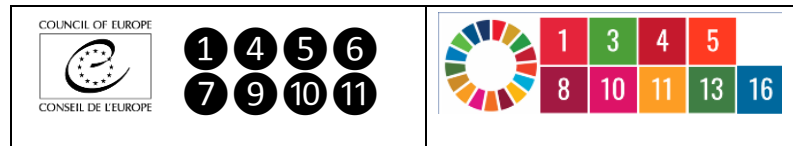
- a) implementing standards in environmental policies on co-decision making and participation in public administration, and on “green” public administration (including at the local and regional level) in the context of environmental policy;
- b) designing democratic, transparent and evidence-based procedures of decision-making at the local and regional levels and foreseeing safeguards against any attempts to undermine them such as for example through corruption, in the context of environmental policy;
- c) ensuring civil and criminal liability for damage to the environment;
- d) initiating a study into the situation concerning civil liability for damages resulting from activities dangerous to the environment;
- e) ensuring intergenerational and future generations protections;
- f) promoting awareness-raising and capacity-building activities for members of public administrations to integrate sustainability practices in their functioning, taking also into consideration digitalised practices and their impact on the environment according to Recommendation CM/Rec (2023)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the principles of good democratic governance;
- g) involving children in decision-making processes on the environment at the Council of Europe level;
- h) involving youth in decision-making processes on the environment at the Council of Europe level in light of Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action;
- i) setting up and promoting the operationalisation of the Reykjavik Committee.

#### 5. Upholding safety, security and integrity of society and persons



- a) strengthening work on the areas of economic crime and forms of corruption connected to environmental crime;
- b) building the framework for compensation;
- c) utilising the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine to work to ensure accountability for environmental damage;
- d) facilitating children and youth’s access to justice including for cases on climate change and environmental harm;
- e) implementing the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Countering Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and ensuring that when Council of Europe member states transpose the EU directive on SLAPPs they focus on achieving the level set by the CoE recommendation rather than the language in the EU directive only;
- f) consider including environmental issues in future monitoring rounds of relevant instruments, including those by GRECO and MONEYVAL;
- g) [considering the need and feasibility of a further instrument or instruments on human rights and the environment cf. CDDH report, CM/Rec(2022)20, draft CM/Rec];
- h) devising explicit protection for human rights defenders;
- i) reviewing the Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-friendly justice through the prism of children’s access to environmental and climate justice;
- j) promoting and reviewing the implementation of CM/Rec(2024)6 on young people and climate action.

## 6. Anchoring democratic values in European societies



- a) incorporating the voice and views of children, youth, minorities and groups in vulnerable situations, civil society, local and regional authorities and other stakeholders, including those who are in vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised situations, in all stages of decision-making processes;
- b) Consulting and co-operating with sub-national entities, civil society, national human rights institutions, regional institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights, environmental human rights defenders, economic stakeholders, indigenous peoples and local communities, cities and regions;
- c) protecting and empowering environmental human rights defenders (e.g. whistle-blowers and environmental journalists), including children, young people and civil society organisations;
- d) protecting the right to peaceful environmental protest as contained in the ECHR;
- e) tackling climate disinformation;
- f) promoting and strengthening of educational (using both formal and non-formal methodologies) and awareness-raising activities aimed at, and with, children and youth concerning environmental issues, embedding environmental rights and climate justice within programmes on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, such as the Human Rights Education Youth Programme;
- g) ensuring the integration of youth perspectives in the development of new recommendations, implementation of elements, and strategies on the environment;
- h) engaging children actively in the development and implementation of the Strategy, and by providing a child-friendly version of the Strategy;
- i) promoting capacity-building sessions on engagement with stakeholders in policy and decision-making regarding the environment;
- j) promoting the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS No. 205), also known as the Tromsø Convention;
- k) [considering the need and feasibility of a further instrument or instruments on human rights and the environment cf. CDDH report, CM/Rec(2022)20, draft CM/Rec];
- l) creating a platform for human rights defenders similar to the Council of Europe Platform for the safety of journalists;
- m) promoting the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) that establishes an intrinsic link between education for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as education for sustainable development;
- n) supporting the implementation of the Resolution on the Renewal of the Civic Mission of Education adopted by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe on 29 September 2023, including the European Space for Citizenship Education.



## APPENDIX

### Council of Europe Programme and Budget and Structures concerned by the Action Plan of the Council of Europe Strategy on Environment

#### 1. Securing human rights and fundamental freedoms



##### Sub-programmes:

- Execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights
- Effective implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights at national and European level

##### Structures:

- Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH)
  - Committee of Experts on the System of the European Convention on Human Rights (DH-SYSC)
  - [Ad Hoc Group on the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights (46+1 – if needed)]
  - Drafting Committee on Human Rights and the Environment (DH-ENV)

#### 2. Advancing social justice, good health and a sustainable environment

##### Sub-programmes:



- Effective implementation of the European Social Charter
- Health and human rights
- Quality of medicines and healthcare
- Protection of the environment and human rights
- Secretariat of the Council of Europe Development Bank

##### Structures:

- European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR)
- Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and of the European Code of Social Security (GC)
- Steering Committee for Human Rights in Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO)
  - Committee of Permanent Correspondents (Pompidou Group)
  - Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on the counterfeiting of medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health (Medicrime Committee)
  - Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs (T-THO)
- European Pharmacopoeia Commission
- European Committee of Pharmaceuticals and Pharmaceutical Care (CD-P-PH)
- European Committee on Blood Transfusion (CD-P-TS)
- European Committee on Organ Transplantation (CD-P-TO)
- European Committee for Cosmetics and Consumer Health (CD-P-COS)
- European Committee for Food Contact Materials and Articles (CD-P-MCA)
- [Reykjavik Committee]
- Ad Hoc Multidisciplinary Committee on Environment (GME)
- European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC)
  - Committee of Experts on the protection of the environment through criminal law (2024) (PC-ENV)
- Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH)
  - Drafting Committee on Human Rights and the Environment (DH-ENV)

- Steering Committee on Culture, Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP)
- Standing Committee on the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (T-PVS)
- Committee of Permanent Correspondents of EUR-OPA
- Council of Europe Development Bank

### 3. Acting for equality, diversity and respect

#### Sub-programmes:

- Gender equality - Violence against women and domestic violence - Human Trafficking
- Anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion - Roma and Travellers - National minorities, regional or minority languages -LGBTI - Migrants
- Children's rights



#### Structures:

- Gender Equality Commission (GEC)
- Committee of Experts on Artificial Intelligence, Equality and Discrimination (2024-2025) (GEC/ADI-AI)
- Committee of Experts on combatting Technology-facilitated Violence against Women and Girls (2024-2025) (GEC/PC-eVIO)
- Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GREVIO)
- Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (IC-CP)
- Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)
- Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (THB-CP)
- Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI)
  - Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM)
  - Committee of Experts on Intercultural Inclusion (ADI-INT)
  - Committee of Experts on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (ADI-SOGIESC)
- European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)
- Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC-FCNM)
- Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional Minorities Languages (COMEX)
- Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)
  - Committee of Experts on the prevention of violence (ENF-VAE)
  - Committee of Experts on the rights and best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings (2024) (CJ/ENF-ISE)
  - Committee of Experts on access to child-friendly justice through multidisciplinary and interagency services (2025-2026) (ENF-JUS)
- Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (T-ES or Lanzarote Committee)

#### 4. Building trust in public institutions

##### Sub-programmes:

- Democracy through law (Venice Commission)
- Independence and efficiency of justice
- Prisons - Police - Deprivation of liberty



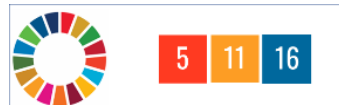
##### Structures:

- European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)
- Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE)
- Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE).
- European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ)
  - Committee of Experts on the Protection of lawyers (2024) (CJ-AV)
  - Committee of Experts on the Rights and the Best Interests of the Child in Parental Separation and in Care proceedings (2024) (CJ/ENF-ISE)
  - Committee of Experts on rights of donor-conceived persons to know their origins (2025-2026) (CJ-OR)
- European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ)
- European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC)
  - Council for Penological Co-operation (PC-CP)
- European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)

#### 5. Upholding safety, security and integrity of society and persons

##### Sub-programmes:

- Corruption – Money laundering - Economic crime
- Digital challenges: Artificial intelligence - Cybercrime - Data protection
- Criminal law - Terrorism
- Integrity and governance of sport



##### Structures:

- Statutory Committee of GRECO
- Plenary of GRECO
- MONEYVAL
- Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (COP of CETS No. 198)
- Committee on Artificial Intelligence (2024-2025) (CAI)
- Committee of the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (T-PD)
- Evaluation and review mechanism of the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with Regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (name to be defined, subject to entry into force of the relevant Protocol)
- Cybercrime Convention Committee (TC-Y)
- European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC)
  - Committee of Experts on the Operation of European Conventions on Co-operation in Criminal Matters (PC-OC)
  - Committee of Experts on combatting Technology-facilitated Violence against Women and Girls (2024-2025) (GEC/PC-eVIO)
  - Committee of Experts on Criminal Asset Recovery (2024-2025) (PC-RAC)
- Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT)

- Committee of Parties to the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (COP196)
- Ad hoc European Committee for the World Anti-doping Agency (CAHAMA)
- Standing Committee of the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events, in particular at Football Matches (T-RV)
- Monitoring Group of the Anti-Doping Convention (T-DO)
- Follow-up Committee of the Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions (T-MC)
- Committee on the Safety and Security at Sport Events (T-S4)
- EPAS Governing Board, Consultative Committee and Statutory Committee

## 6. Anchoring democratic values in European societies

### Sub-programmes:

- Freedom of expression and information - Safety of journalists
- Democratic governance and dialogue - Civil society
- Education
- Youth
- Culture and cultural heritage



### Structures:

- Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI)
- Committee of Experts on online safety and empowerment of content creators and users (2024-2025) (MSI-eSEC)
- Committee of Experts on the implications of generative artificial intelligence for freedom of expression (2024-2025) (MSI-AI)
- Group of Specialists on Access to Official Documents (Access Info Group)
- Consultation of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on access to Official Documents (Tromsø Convention)
- Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM)
- Executive Committee of North-South Centre
- Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations
- Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU)
- Committee of the Council of Europe / UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (LRCC)
- European Network of National Information Centres on academic mobility and recognition (ENIC Network)
- Governing Board of the European Centre for Modern Languages
- Governing Board of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe
- Scientific Advisory Council of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe
- European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ)
- Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ)
- Joint Council on Youth (CMJ)
  - Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ)
- Youth Mobility Board of co-ordination
- Steering Committee for Culture, Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP)
- Executive Committee of Eurimages
- Board of Management of Eurimages
- Governing Board of the Cultural routes
- Statutory Committee of the Cultural routes