

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CRIMINAL LAW

A landmark international treaty to comprehensively define and criminalise environment-related offences

WHY IT MATTERS

The Convention helps safeguard our planet and communities for current and future generations.



FIGHTING ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

In May 2025 the Council of Europe adopted the **Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law**, a **landmark international legally binding treaty** dedicated to environmental crime. It targets, among others:



- ▶ Unlawful **pollution**
- ▶ Unlawful management of **hazardous waste**
- ▶ Unlawful **mining**
- ▶ Unlawful recycling of **ships**
- ▶ Unlawful deterioration of protected **habitats**
- ▶ Particularly serious offences

It also protects **victims, witnesses, and those who expose environmental crime**, and includes a full chapter on **prevention**.

The Convention helps States **fight environmental crime, work together across borders, and set clear legal standards**. Its main aim is to strengthen and promote the protection of our planet – for nature, people, and future generations.



IT IS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Since 1967, the Council of Europe has worked to conserve Europe's natural heritage. At the **2023 Reykjavik Summit**, European leaders committed to strengthening the work on the human rights aspects of the environment based on the political recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right. This commitment launched the **Reykjavik Process**, aligning conventions, policies, and initiatives under a common strategy to protect people and the planet.



PROTECTING NATURE

- ▶ By preventing and combating environmental crime and setting minimum legal standards for States, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law **protects nature**. The Convention defines the environment in a **broad sense**, encompassing natural resources such as air, soil, and water, ecosystems and their services, wild fauna and flora, and habitats.

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HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW

- Environmental crimes affect human rights like clean air, water and safe habitats. By protecting air, water, wildlife and ecosystems, the Convention upholds human rights and strengthens democratic accountability and the rule of law.



RESILIENCE AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

- The Convention **strengthens international cooperation in criminal** matters by facilitating mutual legal assistance, extradition, information sharing and mutual recognition of judicial decisions. It also encourages States Parties to cooperate in investigations and to protect witnesses and whistleblowers, in order to overcome cross-border obstacles to the effective prosecution of environmental crimes.



POLITICAL ACTION AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

- The **Committee of Ministers** – Drives policies such as the 2022 Recommendation on **Human Rights and the Protection of the Environment** and the 2024 Recommendation on **Young People and Climate Change**.
- The **Parliamentary Assembly** – Advocates for climate action, rights of future generations, and recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
- The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** – Helps cities and regions reduce pollution, manage biodiversity, and prepare for floods, heatwaves, and wildfires.



ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY 2025–2030



- Adopted in May 2025, the **Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment** sets **five strategic objectives** to make environmental protection a **cross-cutting priority** across all activities, with a dedicated **Action Plan** for impact and accountability.
- **Strategic Objective 4 – Preventing and prosecuting environment-related crimes** anchors the Convention within this broader framework and aims to:
 - Promote signing, ratification and implementation of the Convention
 - Guide policies to prevent and prosecute environmental crimes
 - Strengthen cooperation between national authorities on environmental cases
 - Improve corporate environmental accountability

OUR VISION: PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT MEANS PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights and the environment go hand in hand. We're building a future where people and nature thrive. The Council of Europe works with governments, parliaments, courts, and communities to ensure a sustainable future for all.

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