

THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT STATE AND OUTLOOK 2015



European Environment Agency



SOER 2015

SYNTHESIS
REPORT

GLOBAL
MEGATRENDS

EUROPEAN
BRIEFINGS

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COMPARISONS

COUNTRIES &
REGIONS

A comprehensive assessment of past trends and future outlooks and of opportunities to recalibrate policies, knowledge, investments and innovations in line with the long-term vision of the 7th EAP.

SOER 2015 Synthesis report

SOER 2015 Assessment of global megatrends

Global megatrends

11 briefings

European briefings

25 briefings

Cross-country comparisons

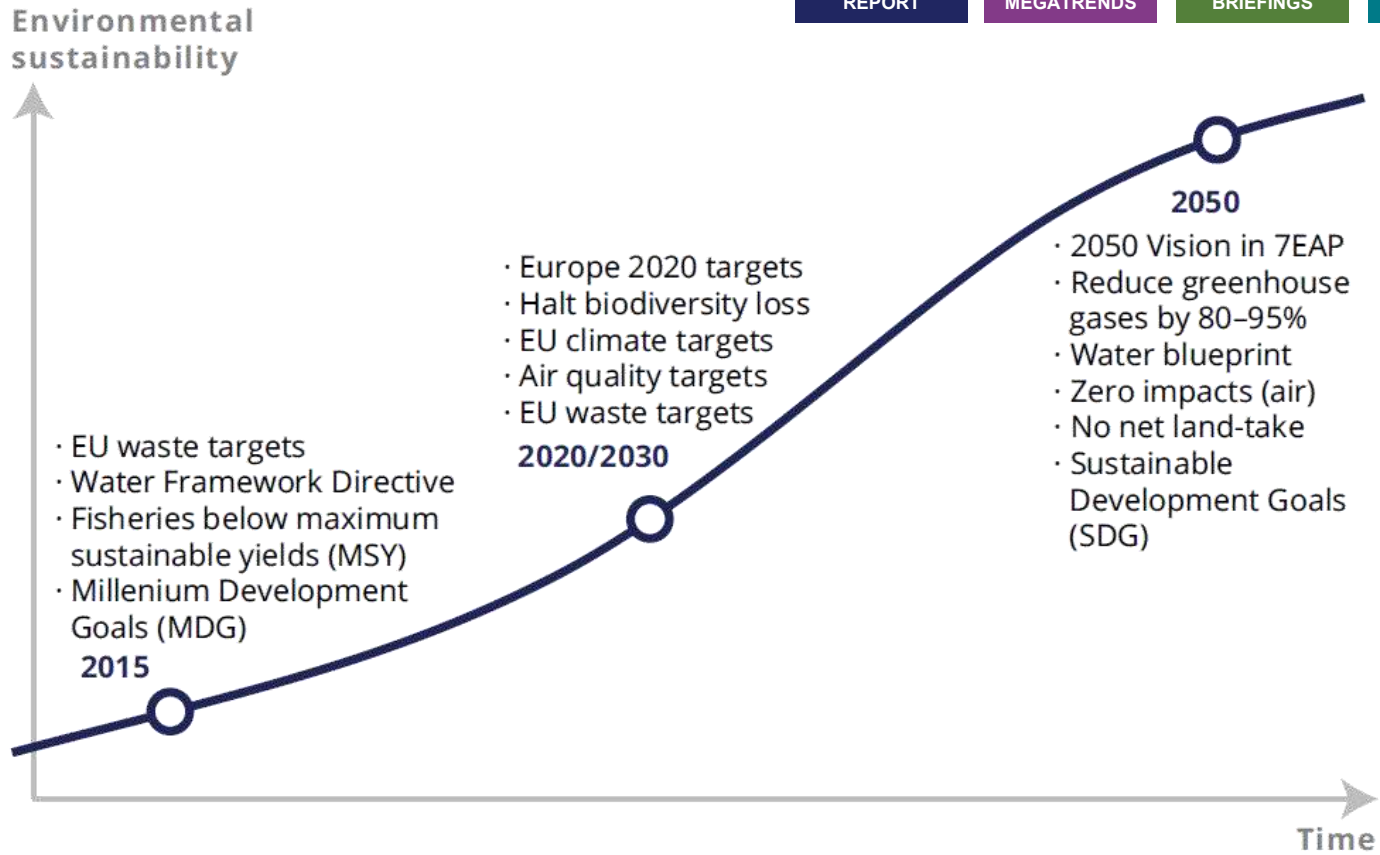
9 briefings

Countries and regions

39+3 briefings



The policy context



2015	Thematic policies, timelines and deadlines
2020/2030	Comprehensive policies (Europe 2020, 7th Environment Action Programme), or specific target
2050	Long-term visions and targets with a societal transition perspective

Source: EEA Multiannual Work Programme 2014–2018

Vision of the 7th Environment Action Programme

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‘In 2050, we live well, within the planet's ecological limits.

Our prosperity and healthy environment stem from an innovative, circular economy where nothing is wasted and where natural resources are managed sustainably, and biodiversity is protected, valued and restored in ways that enhance our society's resilience. Our low-carbon growth has long been decoupled from resource use, setting the pace for a global safe and sustainable society.’

Source: 7th EU Environment Action Programme

Synthesis report

Part 1: Setting the scene

Sets out the evolving context for European environmental policy, and the global megatrends that directly and indirectly affect Europe's environment.

Part 2: Assessing European trends

Provides summary assessments of the trends and outlook for 20 environmental issues, grouped under the three priority thematic objectives of the 7th Environment Action Programme.

Part 3: Looking ahead

Reflects on the overall picture of the European environment's state and outlook. Signals opportunities to adjust environmental policy to support the transition to a more sustainable society.



Key messages from SOER 2015

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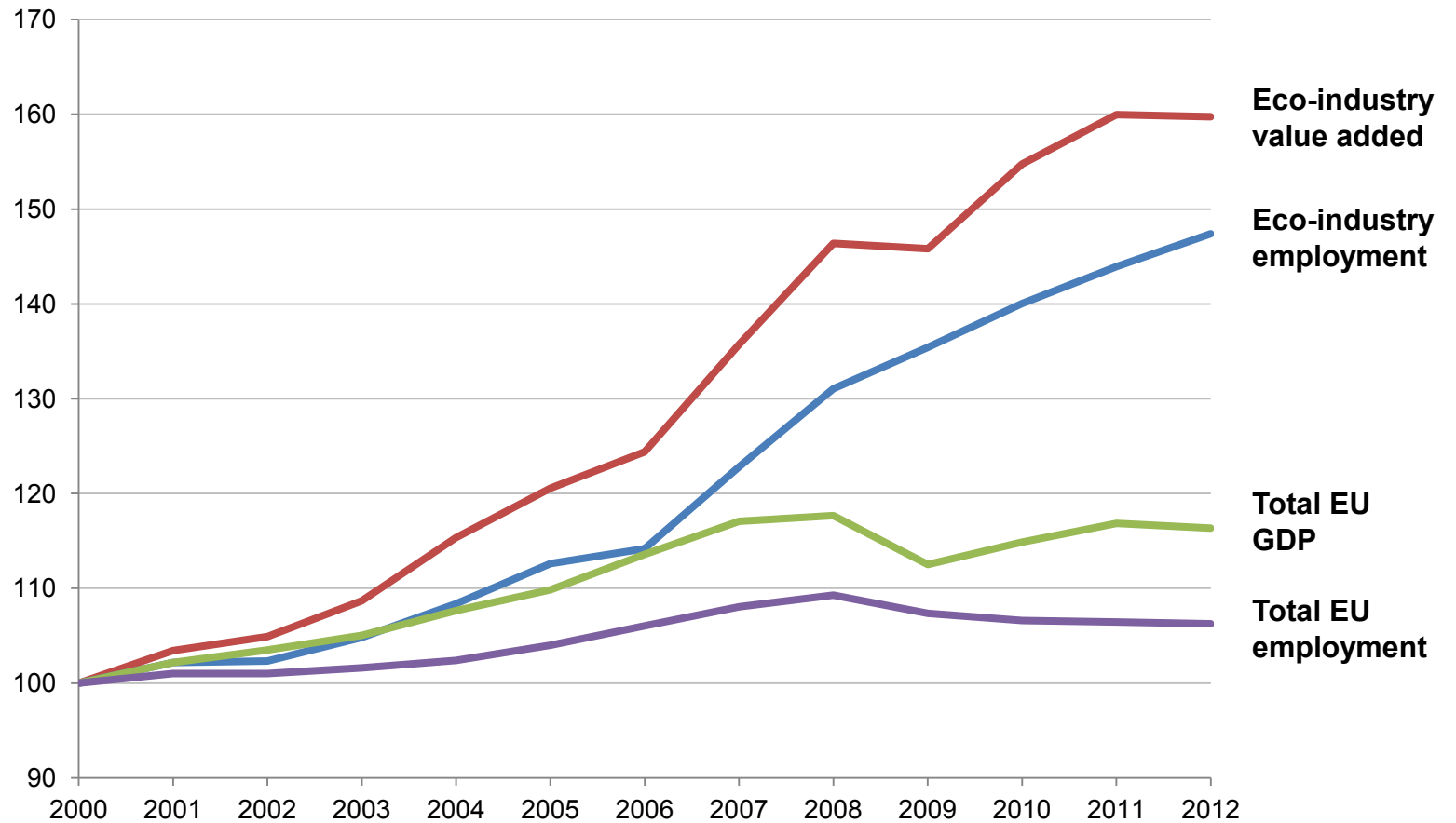
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- **Policies** have delivered substantial benefits for the environment, economy and people's well-being; major challenges remain
- Europe faces persistent and emerging challenges linked to production and consumption **systems**, and the rapidly changing **global** context
- Achieving the 2050 vision requires system **transitions**, driven by more ambitious actions on policy, knowledge, investments and innovation
- Doing so presents major **opportunities** to boost Europe's economy and employment and put Europe at the frontier of science and innovation





Eco-industries have prospered despite the recession in Europe



Source: Eurostat, 2014.

Assessing past trends and future outlooks

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The Synthesis report addresses the three thematic priority objectives of the 7th EAP:

1. Protecting, conserving and enhancing natural capital
2. Resource efficiency and the low-carbon economy
3. Safeguarding from environmental risks to health

Two overall patterns emerge:

- Resource efficiency improvements have been notable but have not translated into increased ecosystem and social resilience
- The long-term outlook is often less positive than recent trends



Thematic priority objective 1: Protecting, conserving and enhancing natural capital

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	Past (5–10 year) trends	20+ years outlook	Progress to policy targets
➤ Terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity			☐
➤ Land use and soil functions			No target
➤ Ecological status of freshwater bodies			☒
➤ Water quality and nutrient loading			☐
➤ Air pollution and its ecosystem impacts			☐
➤ Marine and coastal biodiversity			☒
➤ Climate change impacts on ecosystems			No target

Improving trends dominate		Largely on track	
Trends show mixed picture		Partially on track	
Deteriorating trends dominate		Largely not on track	

Source: EEA. SOER 2015 Synthesis report.

Thematic priority objective 2: Resource efficiency and the low-carbon economy

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	Past (5–10 year) trends	20+ years outlook	Progress to policy targets
➤ Material resource efficiency and material use	Yellow	Yellow	No target
➤ Waste management	Green	Yellow	□
➤ Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change mitigation	Green	Red	✓ / ✗
➤ Energy consumption and fossil fuel use	Green	Red	✓
➤ Transport demand and related environmental impacts	Yellow	Red	□
➤ Industrial pollution to air, soil and water	Green	Yellow	□
➤ Water use and water quantity stress	Yellow	Yellow	✗

Improving trends dominate		Largely on track	
Trends show mixed picture		Partially on track	
Deteriorating trends dominate		Largely not on track	

Source: EEA. SOER 2015 Synthesis report.

Thematic priority objective 3: Safeguarding from environmental risks to health

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	Past (5–10 year) trends	20+ years outlook	Progress to policy targets
➤ Water pollution and related environmental health risks	Improving trends dominate	Trends show mixed picture	Largely on track / Partially on track
➤ Air pollution and related environmental health risks	Trends show mixed picture	Trends show mixed picture	Partially on track
➤ Noise pollution (especially in urban areas)	Trends show mixed picture	/	Partially on track
➤ Urban systems and grey infrastructure	Trends show mixed picture	Trends show mixed picture	No target
➤ Climate change and related environmental health risks	Deteriorating trends dominate	Deteriorating trends dominate	No target
➤ Chemicals and related environmental health risks	Deteriorating trends dominate	Trends show mixed picture	Partially on track / Largely not on track

Improving trends dominate
Trends show mixed picture
Deteriorating trends dominate



Largely on track
Partially on track
Largely not on track



Source: EEA. SOER 2015 Synthesis report.



The overall picture: Efficiency improvements have not secured long-term resilience

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Source: EEA. SOER 2015 Synthesis report.

Understanding past trends and future outlooks

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Two major factors explain the uneven progress and prospects:

The changing global context

- Competition for resources
- Pressures from outside Europe
- Planetary boundaries

Systemic characteristics of environmental challenges

- Complexity
- Uncertainty
- Environmental, social and economic interdependencies

Understanding past trends and future outlooks: Natural capital

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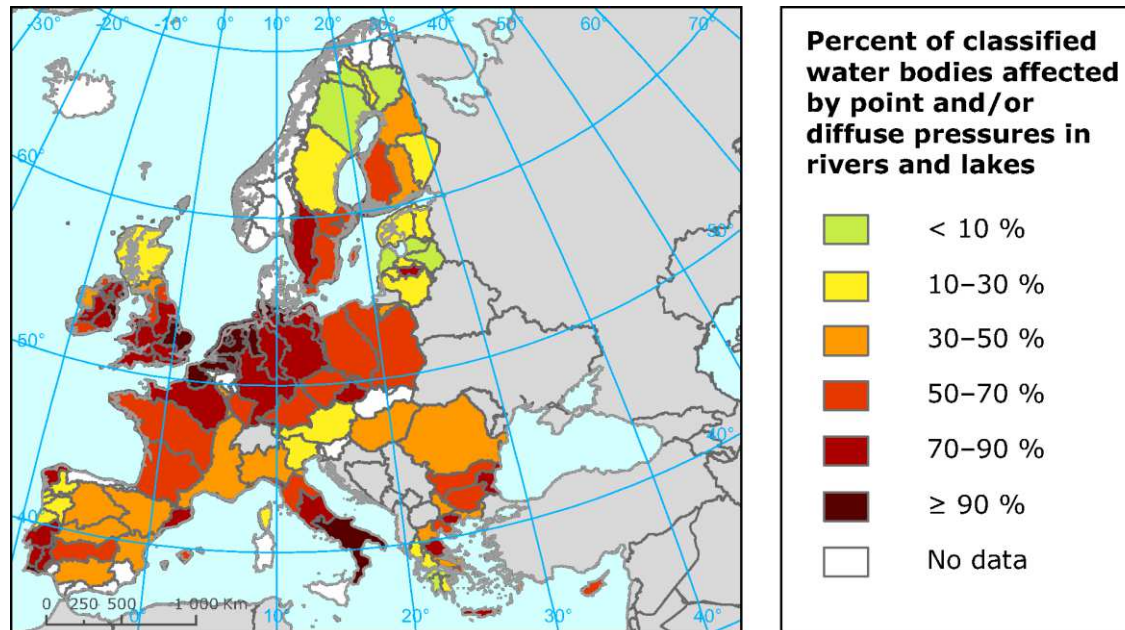
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- Long time-lags between reduced pressures and positive changes
- Pressures on ecosystems remain considerable
- External trends can counteract the positive effects of local efforts



Source: EEA, SOER 2015 Synthesis.

Understanding past trends and future outlooks: Resource efficiency and the low-carbon economy

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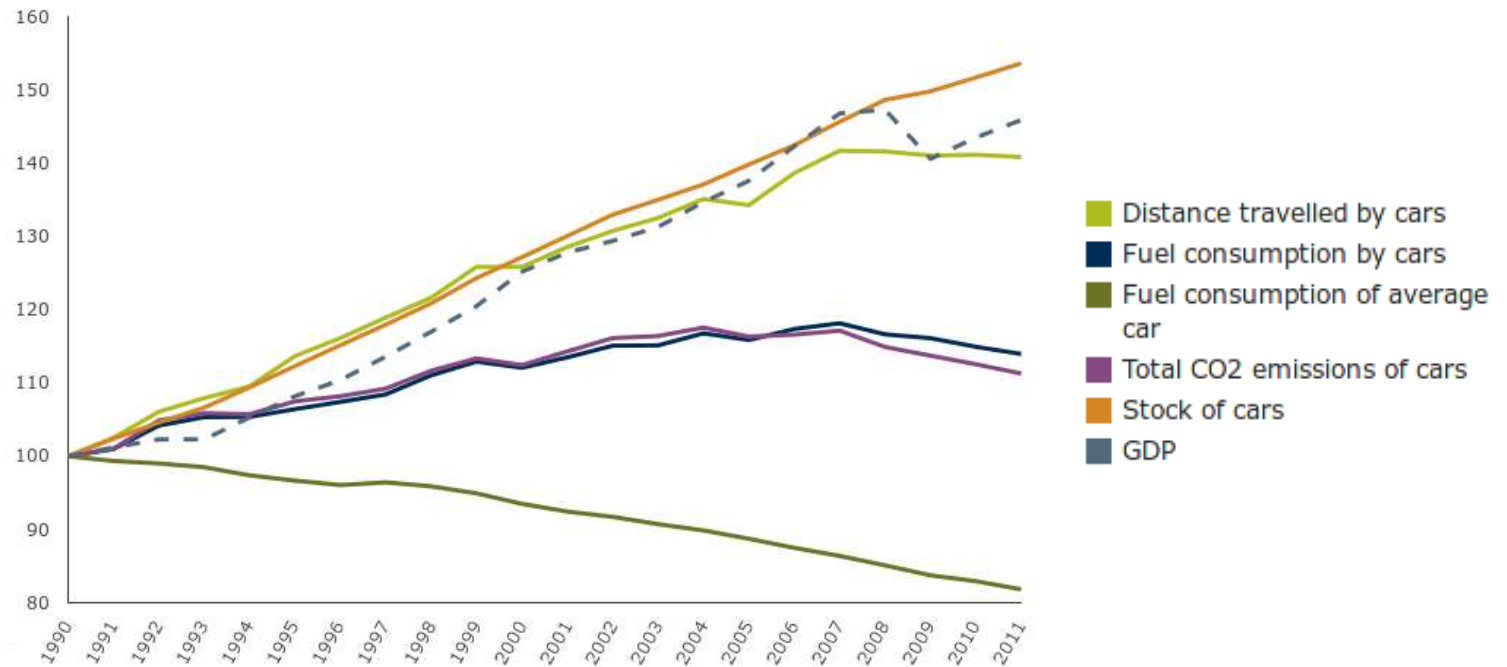
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- Production-consumption systems support livelihoods, creating lock-ins
- Globalisation of production and consumption constrains EU influence
- More efficient production lowers costs, incentivising more consumption



Source: EEA, SOER 2015 Synthesis.

Understanding past trends and future outlooks: Safeguarding from environmental risks to health

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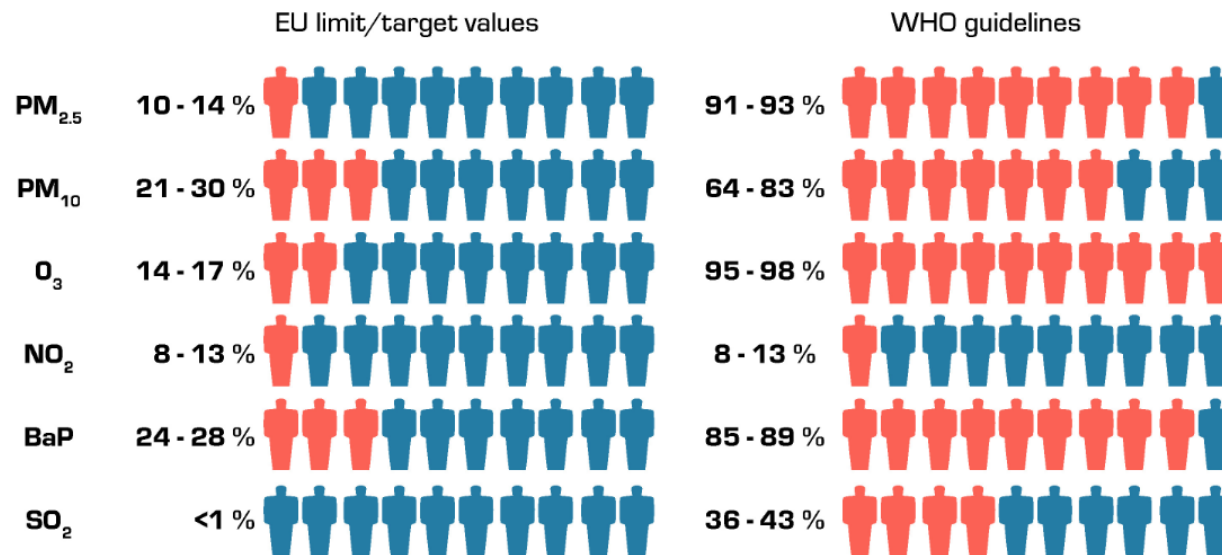
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- Impacts resulting from climate change are expected to worsen
- Changing exposures, urbanisation and ageing increase vulnerability
- Good urban design delivers benefits to health and well-being

EU urban population exposed to harmful levels of air pollution in 2010 - 2012, according to:



Sources: Eurostat, Gisco - Urban Audit 2012; EEA, AirBase and Indicator CSI004.

Looking ahead: Systemic challenges require systemic solutions

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Not just incremental efficiency gains



Source: EEA.

but fundamental transitions in food, energy, mobility, finance and fiscal systems
through profound changes in dominant practices, policies and thinking.

Looking ahead: Building on 40 years of European and national policies

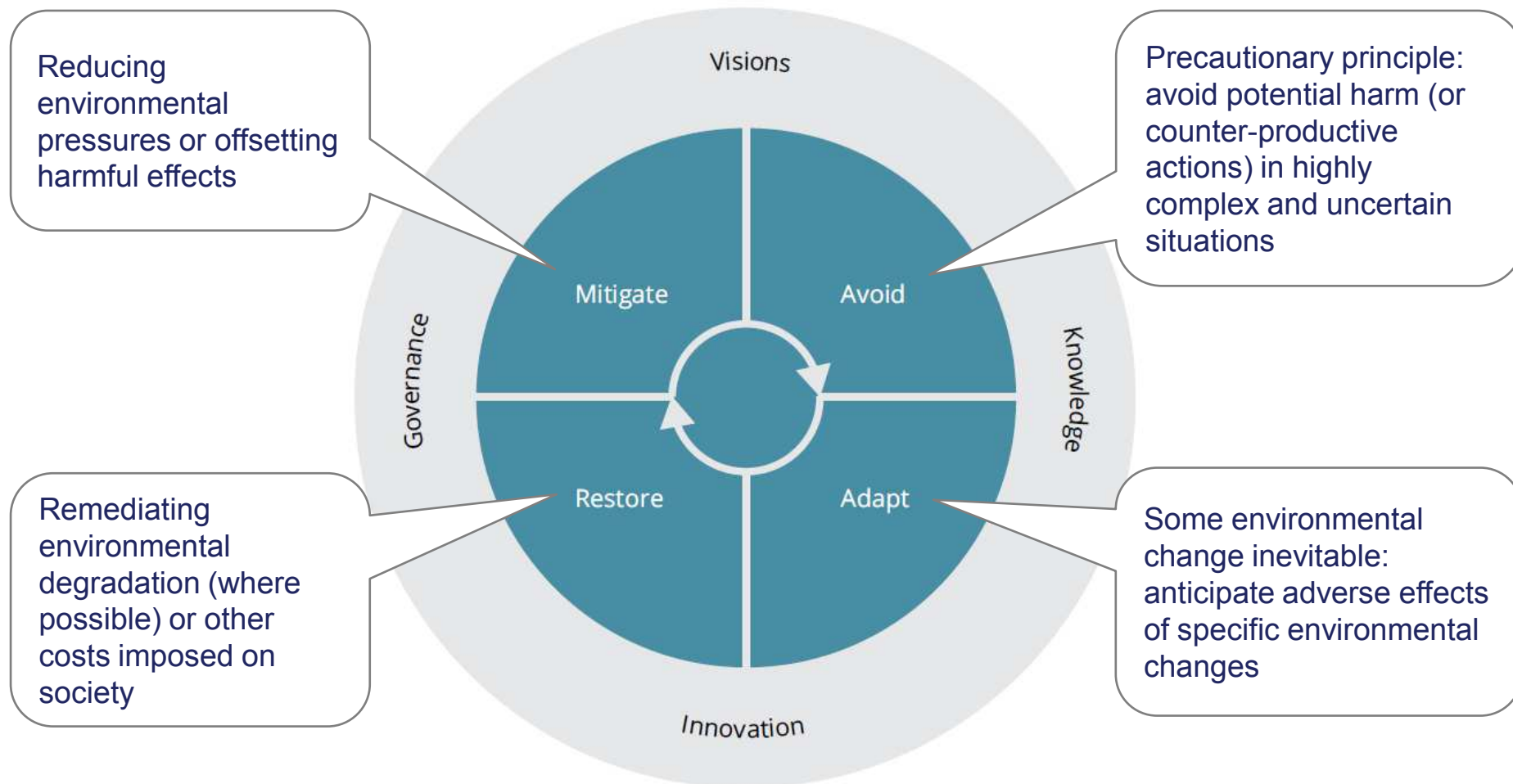
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Source: EEA.

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Looking ahead: Innovation

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- Economic, technological and social innovations can support long-term transitions to a green economy
- This requires upscaling niche innovations such as collaborative consumption and prosumerism
- Publicly funded research has fostered many of the most important and commercially successful innovations

Looking ahead: Investing today for the long term

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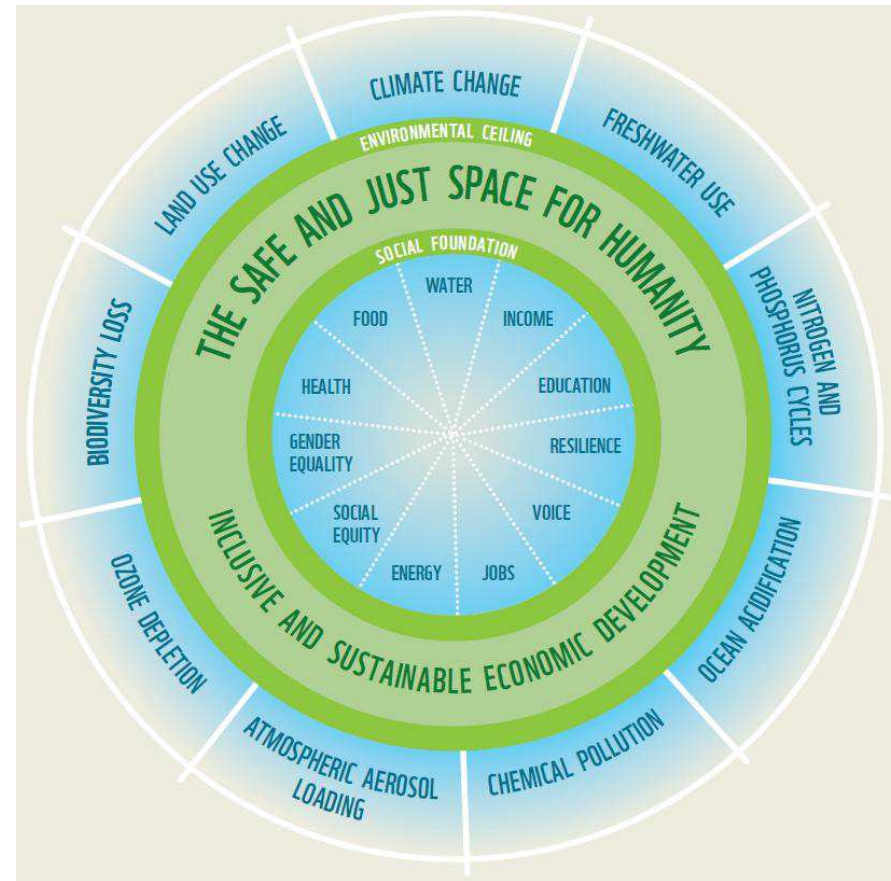
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- European investment needs are huge and today's choices will have long-term implications
- Key criteria for future investments in a green economy:
 - decarbonisation of society
 - circular economy jobs
 - ecosystem services and planetary limits
 - human health and well-being
- Market signals distort investment and innovation. We need to shift taxation and phase out environmentally harmful subsidies



Looking ahead: Living well within the limits of the planet by 2050

- Achieving the 2050 vision is possible but it depends on our actions and investments today.
- Systemic change must deliver decent employment, opportunities and fairness, as well as respecting environmental limits.
- SOER 2015 illustrates the success of European policy. We should be confident in entering a new stage of environmental governance.



Source: Raworth, 2012

Explore SOER 2015 online: eea.europa.eu/soer

SOER 2015 — The European environment — state and outlook 2015

A comprehensive assessment of the European environment's state, trends and prospects, in a global context.



Synthesis report



Global megatrends



European briefings




Cross-country
comparisons



Countries
and regions

The synthesis report informs future European environmental policy in general and its implementation between 2015 and 2020 in particular. It includes a reflection on the European environment in a global context, as well as chapters summarising the state of, trends in, and prospects for the environment in Europe.

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Synthesis report in several languages  

Explore SOER 2015



 Presentation of key facts and figures.

 Online search among all figures.



Key messages

Waste — municipal solid waste generation and management: The large differences in performance indicate room for further improvement and actions to meet the 2020 target to recycle 50% of municipal waste. [See briefing](#)

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