

Complex network of European and global developments impacts sustainability



The EEA report '[Drivers of change of relevance for Europe's environment and sustainability](#)' provides an in-depth characterisation of developments that range from demographic shifts to leaps in technological innovation and from global competition for natural resources to changes in geopolitical landscape and people's lifestyles. It also shines light on their potential implications for major policy processes such as the European Green Deal (EGD) in the EU and the UN Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals.

The report argues that varying global and European trends point not only to continuing sustainability challenges and new risks, but also towards opportunities for positive change. For example, new technology might save resources and alleviate environmental pressures but it can also lead to increasing demand for energy and natural resources. As such, achieving sustainability goals requires a transformation of Europe's core systems of production and consumption through policies like the EGD as well as wider changes in norms and priorities across all levels of society.

The complexity of known trends together with the emergence of new developments in an increasingly interconnected world point to the value of recognising the presence of deep uncertainties around future developments and the need to act differently, the EEA report states. For Europe, responding to existing challenges and new risks calls for more anticipatory governance and engaging with actors across society, for example through strategic foresight processes.

The EEA report points out that emerging developments with unknown implications can range from new security threats to changing values and more digital lifestyles. Another category of drivers of change are 'wild cards' that may seem unlikely but can bring about highly disruptive changes, such as the dramatic decline in pollinators that could threaten global food supply.

Note to editors

The COVID-19 pandemic is also mentioned in the report as one example of disruptive risks. However, the contents of the report have been largely completed before the ongoing pandemic and, as such, the report does not consider or attempt to analyse the implications of COVID-19.