



# EU GREEN DEAL AND THE ITALIAN ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

Proposals for a better implementation of the Italian  
ecological transition plan

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate change and global warming have gained more and more importance in the last decades, and are now at the centre of the political and social debate. Countries, as well as multilateral agencies, and finally countries are trying to respond to the crucial points that have emerged – greater number of climate migrants, surging natural disasters, and the consequential worsening of economic and social conditions – by implementing laws, and by financing projects that aim at a more sustainable way of life, and at securing future generations from suffering even more severe consequences. Nonetheless, policies need to be adjusted to respond to tangible shortcomings. This policy brief presents a brief overview of the existing legislation, and addresses some of the issues that have arisen, and that involve some of the main actors: the EU, and Italy.

## INDEX

1. Introduction	5
2. A bit of eco-history	5
3. What is the EU Green Deal?	6
4. Not all fun and games	7
5. Next Generation EU: not a recovery plan	9
6. How is Italy doing?	10
7. What more can be done?	11
7.1 Investments on renewable energy	11
7.2 Urban Gardens	12
7.3 Upcycling	13
8. Conclusions	14
References	14



# 1. Introduction

It is fairly known that **climate change** represents a **threat for the world** and for humanity as a whole, and nowadays is probably the most **pressing issue at a global level** since it affects our daily life, as well as multilateral and global relations. **Climate refugees** and migration due to environmental reasons are becoming more and more frequent, the number of **natural disasters** that used to be rare phenomena – especially in the northern part of the world – is surging, and **extreme events**, namely floods, heatwaves, wildfires and such, are now occurring on a daily basis. Earth has always experienced rises and decreases in temperatures, however **human impact** on climate is undoubtedly negatively affecting this evolutions and speeding up the process of **global warming**. Extreme events are expected to increase in the future, and as weather and geopolitical conditions worsen, **governments** need to work on ways to **mitigate, prepare, respond**, and more importantly to **prevent** these forms of disasters.

Great part of the world, including the UE, is **not on track** to meet any of the decided goals by 2030. Failing to meet them will most likely lead to **severe consequences for present and future generations**, not just in terms of social outcomes and equality but in the protection of our environment. This policy brief aims at providing an overview of the main policies put in place at a **European and national level**, while highlighting the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of the measures implemented to ease to an **ecological transition** that ultimately seeks a more **sustainable life**.

# 2. A bit of an overview

Experts have been pointing out that **climate change represents a threat the world** and humanity since the 1970s, and even though movements against climate change have existed for a long time, the world is only now focusing on implementing laws at a national and at global level that aim at preserving Earth and the Environment.

More specifically, environmental issues have entered the international and global arena at the beginning of the 1970s, and have generated quite a heated debate since then. Even though it led to the creation of the **United Nations Environment Programme**, the first summit held in Stockholm on the environment looked at the issue only from a scientific

point of view, and demanded countries to merely **commit to safeguarding natural environment**, as well as **promoting sustainability**<sup>1</sup>.

In order to balance economic, environmental, and social needs, especially for future generations, a simple footnote in the Stockholm Conference gained so much importance overtime that it became central in nowadays global table of discussion. Over the course of the years, a number of agreements and protocols were signed, aiming at development, and **resolution of social issues**, while averting the **overexploitation of natural resources**. The 1992 **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** (UNFCCC) led to the implementation of the 2005 **Kyoto Protocol**, and the 2015 **Paris Agreement**. The signing parties of these sort of agreement requires countries to reduce gas emissions, ultimately aiming at preventing global average temperature from rising 2°C, while still pursuing to keep it below 1.5°C<sup>2</sup>.

### 3. What's the EU Green Deal?

In the attempt of making Europe the **first climate neutral continent** in the world, the EU Commission has often highlighted how pressing the topic of climate change is, and has therefore advanced several proposals paving the way for the Union to **achieve its climate targets by 2050** in a fair, **cost effective, inclusive** and **competitive** way and to make all sectors of the EU's economy fit to meet this challenge.

The new strategy was announced at the end of 2019 and comprise **ten key points**. From presenting a new **circular economy** action plan, to strategies tackling the need for a **greener and healthier agriculture**, as well as encouraging an improvement in **public transportation** so to decrease the levels of CO2 produced; the European Green Deal sets out a blueprint for the necessary change of all 27 member states that ultimately enables both businesses, and individuals to enjoy benefits from a **sustainable green transition**<sup>3</sup>.

As stated in the publication, the EU Green Deal “will **improve people's health and lives, protect our nature and wildlife**, and ensure a healthy planet for generations to come. It

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*

<sup>2</sup> *Global Climate Agreements: Successes and Failures*

<sup>3</sup> *Delivering the European Green Deal*

sets out a new **growth strategy** by tackling some of the most important environmental and climate-related problems.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it falls within the European Climate Pact, that helps communities to **fight climate change**<sup>5</sup>, and the Green Consumption Pledge, whose target is the creation **climate-friendly businesses**<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the Deal does not fall short of suggesting measures to overcome part of the issues the COVID-19 pandemic has casted light on.

The Plan involves **all parts of a citizen's life** and introduces **long-term goals**. Nonetheless, it consists of a number of both short-term and mid-term steps to achieve the ultimate goal. The most notable have to do with those measures that focus on the single sectors: renewable energy, chemical, farming, and so on. The most noteworthy of the initiatives, the **European Climate Law**, requires all politics to promote to the final objective, and includes an evaluation and monitoring plan that will allow action adjustments to respond to changes and needs.

## 4. Not all fun and games

The EU Green Deal is undeniably **ambitious**, and far from being perfect. Moreover, even though it is wildly accepted, it still faces several possible obstacles. The latter are partly already visible, partly predictable, and they have different nature. On the one hand, the **economic and political spheres** have to be taken into account. As a matter of fact, while the current EU institutions, drawing from EU budget and private investments, have invested **1 billion € for the first ten years**<sup>7</sup>, the goals, bold as they are, are supposed to be accomplished in the **next few decades**. Then Deal got such a great amount of funds because it is the main political priority for now. It is thus **crucial** that it remains among the **priorities of the Institutions**, and that, in order not to hinder in any way the possibility of achievement of the project, more or less the **same amount is invested** every time it is necessary.

<sup>4</sup> *Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions*

<sup>5</sup> *European Climate Pact*

<sup>6</sup> *European Consumption Pledge Initiative*

<sup>7</sup> *European Green Deal Call: €1 billion investment to boost the green and digital transition*

On the other hand, **stake holders** and their involvement play a **key role** in achieving the objectives. It is clear that the EU Organs support and promote the Deal, on the contrary, involvement of political actors at a **national level** is still debated, and uncertain. Some countries are actually **slowing down**, and **obstructing the Plan**. The Government of Poland, for example, has openly opposed the implementation of the new measures, and legislation as **80%** of the Country's energy comes from **non-renewable resources**<sup>8</sup>, and such a sudden transition would easily be unsustainable at an economic level. The lack of clean energy sources is a cross-country issue in Eastern Europe, where many countries rely on non-renewable resources for energy, and where this kind of industry has a **social and historical role** for the livelihood of the country, and end up starting from a **position of disadvantage** compared to other member states where a transition towards green energy has started already. Keeping in mind the **different speeds** of member states is then essential. Moreover, it was the EU institutions that passed the EU Green Deal, but its **implementation is reflected on individuals** who must actively participate in the transition, and must be taken into consideration through campaigns of promotion and advocacy so that to involve them as stake holders. Thus citizens must be educated and made aware of what they can do in order to promote and speed up the process, and to lead a more sustainable life.

Finally, the Green Deal faces criticism from another kind of pretty hard to ignore actors: the green movements such as **the Friday's for Future** (FFF), that are fuelling the debate on whether the EU Green Deal is enough or it should simply be considered a filler. As a matter of fact, although part of the scientific and political community believes the goals set in the EU Green Deal to be ambitious enough, if not too much, FFF demand more measures, and think the **implemented initiatives are not enough**. The civil society, for instance, calls for an 80% reduction of carbon-dioxide emissions by 2030, and for climate neutrality by 2035<sup>9</sup>. However, these request are unlikely, and not realistic, as much as they are unsustainable, because the Green Deal itself represents **a turning**

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<sup>8</sup> Poland's power from coal seen down at 50 percent by 2040 - government official

<sup>9</sup> Actions on Climate Emergency



point in European history and economy, that will result in a **radical transformation** of the continent's economy, and lifestyle. No matter how hard, balance is key to achieving.

## 5. Next Generation EU: more than a recovery plan

The EU Green Deal is an ambitious plan on its own, however it is important to enter the global pandemic that has been affecting the world in the past two years in the equation. The **spread of Covid-19** has in fact triggered a **serious economic crisis**, that has affected consumer savings, caused employment rates to drastically drop, and increased the gap between Member states<sup>10</sup>. In order to respond to such a catastrophe, the EU has funded the so-called **Next Generation EU**, an **economic recovery package** tailored to support states affected by the pandemic, signed on 21 July 2020, and worth €750 billion<sup>11</sup>, and that represents both a recovery plan, but a great opportunity to boost European economy as well.

The Package has several objectives: first of all, it plays the role of a second Marshall Plan to help States to **recover and fix the most pressing economic and social problems** that have emerged. Moreover, it aims at **supporting the digital transformation, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs, social and territorial cohesion, as well as the green transition, health and resilience, and policies for the next generation**. It then seeks the **modernisation** of the European **economy**, and finally the modernisation of **traditional policies** in order to maximise the chance of accomplishing the current priorities of the Union<sup>12</sup>.

Being the **first European country** to be hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Italian government saw no other option, but to implement the **nationwide lockdown** to protect its citizens' health. Such strict measures have severely impacted the **already unstable nation's economy**. Since the beginning of the crisis, Italy has lost **8,9% in GDP**, and the **employment rate has plummeted**<sup>13</sup>, while the **tourism sector**, that brings a significant amount of income to the country, has registered only **half of the entries** in the territory

<sup>10</sup> *How COVID-19 has impacted the European economy*

<sup>11</sup> *Special European Council, 17-21 July 2020*

<sup>12</sup> *Recovery Plan for Europe.*

<sup>13</sup> *Covid-19, bilancio 2020: l'economia italiana ha perso 150 miliardi di Pil*

than the previous year<sup>14</sup>, and the **public dept** has skyrocketed to **159% of the GDP** in May 2021<sup>15</sup>. To support its citizens, the government has opted for the implementation of a number of measures to assist both individuals, and businesses remain afloat. For this reason, the Italian government was one of the **main supporters** of the Next Generation EU.

## 6. How is Italy doing?

With a sum that amounts to **191,5 euros**, Italy is the biggest recipient of the recovery plan, that are being put into practice by the **Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan** (RRP or PNRR in Italian)<sup>16</sup>. The RRP counts on funds deriving partly from the **Next Generation EU**, partly from the **REACT-EU fund**, other grants and loans, and finally a small part of the RRP is being financed by the **national budget**. The Plan provides to finance three key priorities: **green revolution and ecological transition**, which greatest part of the resources will be allocated to, **digitalization and innovation**, and **social inclusion**.

The promotion of a green revolution, and ecological transition are thus part of the 2030-2050 EU Green Deal for the progressive decarbonization of the Member states and the shift to circular economy. Italy is in a **position of advantage** as compared to other European countries since it is the Union's third **largest producer of green energy**, and where around **30% of energy** production comes from renewable resources<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, Italy is lucky enough to take the lead, along with Spain, in **solar radiation**, granting the Country the **opportunity of improving and developing** even more the possibility and ease to achieve the transformation. However, an effective ecological transition is still far from reach, because of the unnecessary **red tape and regulation** that slow the process down, and that rather than favouring the change, they only make it harder.

Nonetheless, the government has devoted great part of the received funds to the plan for a green revolution, consisting of **four components**: circular economy and sustainable agriculture; renewable energy, hydrogen, sustainable mobility; energy efficiency and

<sup>14</sup> *Estimated impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on tourist arrivals in Italy in 2020, by region of destination*

<sup>15</sup> *Debito Pubblico e Pil: ecco quanto costa il Covid in Italia*

<sup>16</sup> *The Recovery and Resilience Plan: Next Generation Italia*

<sup>17</sup> *Renewable energy in Italy: what kinds are out there, how much is produced, and how widespread is it*

public buildings; and finally, protection of the territory and water resources. To conclude, the current administration has introduced a new actor at play, the **Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea Protection**, responsible for all **environmental issues** of the country.

According to the *“Rapporto sull’Economia Circolare in Italia 2020”* (“Report on Circular Economy in Italy 2020”) edited by Circular Economy Network, however its score is decreasing, **Italy is the leader in productivity of resources**, and in **management of the waste**, while it is second only to France in **secondary raw materials**. Unfortunately, the nation **does pretty bad in circular consumption**. As a matter of fact, it has an incredible number of companies, but not only their **turnover is too low** as compared to other Member states, but they also register a **particular delay in the sectors of reparation and sharing**.

## 7. What more can be done?

According to data, the road to achieve the total achievement of the ecological transition is still long, and Italy is **already late on the schedule**. The main issues that have emerged have to do with the pace of the **bureaucratic apparatus**, and the slowing down of the production of renewable energy, that along with the **lack of involvement of the individuals**, and the **exploitation of waste** to create clean energy are only some of the main obstacles to the achievement of all goals set both in the EU Green Deal, and the RRP. Each issue requires a targeted solution; however, the brief only focuses on some of the possible approaches to tackle to such problems at the **national, local, and individual level**:

1. Investments on renewable energy
2. Urban Gardens
3. Upcycling

### *7.1 Investment on renewable energy*

It is undeniable that Italy places very well in the **production of green energy in Europe**. Pretty much like FFF, Greenpeace and other related organizations state that the objectives set out by the European Green Plan are actually not enough, and that Member states

should aim much higher. Nonetheless, the same organizations also realise that however insufficient, the EU Green Deal, and the national plans of the single States represent a step forward for a **Zero emission continent**<sup>18</sup>. If it is true that renewable energy can boost the energy and economic transitions, so it is that new investments are more than necessary.

**Two tools** are crucial in this process. The government must **invest in renewable energy** on one hand, while **reforms** must be implemented at the **structural level**, that can oil up the bureaucratic apparatus. As a matter of fact, the renewable energy sector seems to be stuck to years ago, even because of the pressures of the gas lobbies. A further investment on green energy can only have a **positive impact on the economy** of the country, as it will **create jobs and innovation**. Moreover, the government should pass laws and legislation that speed up the **authorization process**, since as of today it can take up to eight years for the construction of a power plant to be approved.

By raising awareness about this issue, and by providing the **right incentives**, **citizens and the civil society** can become involved in this initiative as well, and become **prime promoters of the transition**.

## *7.2 Urban Gardens*

**Cities** are becoming **bigger and bigger**, and **more and more populated**, and the 2020 lockdown has underlined more than ever the need for greener areas, that can **fight pollution** on one side, while **promoting a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle**.

**Urban gardens** are loosely defined as public green, or **small plots of land**, within the borders of the urban city, destined to cultivation, and that ultimately allow people to spend **time outside**, and in touch **with nature**, while still allowing them to **grow their own food**, and create their micro-market. Urban gardens are not a new invention, they first appeared in Germany in the XIX century, and had a double objective: **agriculture**, and **strengthening family ties**. They are now making a come-back in our modern society that is understanding more and more the need for a sustainable life. Nowadays, they are mostly promoted for their **key role in fighting climate change** and global warming, but also

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<sup>18</sup> *Ecco i cinque punti chiave della transizione ecologica*

in the fight against **social exclusion**, and **loneliness** that urban areas can bring. By allocating part of the funds to this sort of initiatives people can **support biodiversity**, and solve one of the main issues of the EU Green Deal. As mentioned earlier, one of the main obstacles to the achievement of the EU Green Deal is the involvement of the **individual stakeholders**, through the promotion of practices such as this one, along with other local initiatives, it is possible to make citizens feel included in it, in such a way that they will become the first promoters of a new sustainable way of life.

### *7.3 Upcycling*

Finally, in order for any change to be effective, the change must occur at the individual level as well. Italy is not good enough **recycling and upcycling wise**, as a matter of fact, the Country imports almost double recycled material and recycled goods, than it exports. For a country poor of resources having the possibility to use recycled material in industry is a **game changer** because it easily translates into a country less dependent from abroad for this sort of supply. As of today, most recycled materials are not re-used in production, and manufacturing processes, even though there is a significant amount.

In the context of **lack of raw materials**, the consumption of the least among of resources is key to winning an **environmental, social and economic challenge**, in order to achieve the objective of producing long-lasting goods, that not only can re-used, but can **acquire a new life** ever and ever again.

**Upcycling waste** has to do with all those processes that aim at turning “useless” or “obsolete” objects into something that is “useful” again. This kind of mechanism allows **the creation of new material**, just as much as the **creation of a product of the same or even a better quality**. According to a number of activists, recovering materials, and recovering their energetical worth must be the done before even considering the possible elimination of the object itself.

In Italy alone there are several organizations that make use of this trick, and silently help waste management facilities, but they are almost always underfunded, and definitely cannot take care of all the waste the country creates. Governments should therefore invest in activities that **promote** such practices, and promote **campaigns to raise awareness** about the issue. Not only to impact the life of individuals by teaching them re-

use rather than merely consuming goods, but also to upcycle materials so to reduce the waste people leave behind.

## 8. Conclusions

Climate change is probably the most **important issue humankind** is dealing with right now, and is a priority for most governments around the world. In order to preserve the planet and its resources for future generations, and to prevent natural disasters from happening, the **International community** has undertaken a strenuous fight against global warming and is now implementing laws, and making the best they can to win this battle.

**The European Union is therefore taking action.** To respond to the demands of the civil society that is calling for better environmental laws, the Member states have passed the EU Green Deal, a financing tool that aims at promoting laws and strategies to make Europe the first Zero emission continent by 2050. Moreover, each single State is making up its own mind about it, and taking action on their own. Italy is one of the **leading countries**, and has been calling for an **ecological transition** for years, however, the objectives are still far from being achieved.

It is undeniable that governments and individuals alike play a central role in the achievement of an ecological transition, and that **individuals are the prime actors** in the change. As a matter of fact, a total shift in behaviour is necessary to live a more **sustainable life**, that will respect the planet and preserve its resources for generations to come.

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