



Ympäristöministeriö
Miljöministeriet
Ministry of the Environment
Finland

Globally influential Ministry of the Environment of Finland

Policy on international cooperation 2021–2023



Policy vision

The policy on international cooperation implements the vision ‘*A better environment for future generations*’ outlined by the Ministry of the Environment in its Strategy 2030. Well-functioning and productive international cooperation in matters related to the environment, climate change and sustainable development make it possible to create the conditions for wellbeing within the planetary boundaries also for future generations.

Purpose of the policy

International agreements, commitments and cooperation play a key role in promoting the goals of the Ministry of the Environment. The Ministry promotes ambitious implementation of environmental and climate policies and sustainable development in multilateral and regional cooperation as well as bilaterally in work such as project cooperation. Finland's strong and diverse environmental expertise provides excellent tools for this.

The Ministry's international cooperation policy strengthens the international dimension of the Strategy 2030 priorities and the Ministry's international impact and profile, and actively contributes to increasing international environmental financing. In addition, the policy highlights Finnish environmental expertise.

The Ministry aims to be an active and strong influencer in the prioritised international issues concerning environmental and nature protection and the built environment. The policy supports the objective set in the Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government for a globally influential Finland that promotes ambitious environmental and climate change measures and sustainable development.

The policy complements the Ministry's brand new strategy in which the Ministry is identified as 'an actor that is bigger than its size would suggest and that achieves great things through cooperation'.



Scope and duration of the policy

The international cooperation policy focuses on the objectives of Finland's global (UN, environmental agreements, channels for environmental financing) and regional (Nordic, Arctic, Barents, the Baltic region, UNECE, OECD) environmental cooperation, both multilateral and bilateral.

Finland is an active member of the European Union and the EU is its key channel for influencing global developments. One of the objectives of the EU's environmental policy is to promote internationally measures aimed at solving regional or global environmental problems. In international negotiations of environmental agreements and other multilateral cooperation, Finland promotes the ambitious objectives through the EU by influencing the EU's position. This way, Finland can also have more global influence than its size would suggest.

This policy does not address the Ministry's priority areas in activities within the EU internally, as the Ministry defines them annually as part of drawing up the Government's priority areas within the EU. In addition, the Government submitted its report on EU policy to Parliament at the beginning of 2021.

The Ministry's international cooperation policy will continue to be implemented until the end of Prime Minister Marin's government term in 2023.



Objectives

The international policy objectives are built on the three impact objectives of the Ministry's strategy: good environment and diverse nature, carbon-neutral circular economy society and sustainable urban development. Themes that are critical for implementing the Ministry's vision from an international point of view have been identified within these objectives. The most important themes are climate change, biodiversity, a circular economy (including sustainable raw material use, chemicals and waste), protection of marine environments and waters, sustainable urban development and development of environmental governance.

The international objectives of the Ministry of the Environment are based on messages received from science and research regarding urgent and necessary measures. On the other hand, the demand for environmentally sustainable solutions has risen in society. In addition, emerging environmental issues are identified in the objectives. These include pandemics caused by viruses originating from animals, such as COVID-19, and the underlying causes of their more frequent occurrence, the need to invest in a green and socially fair transition of the economy, and the safeguarding of biodiversity. To respond to these issues, both immediate action and long-term measures are required from national governments and the international community.

The Ministry of the Environment's efforts to exert influence are aimed at bringing about a transformative change towards a sustainable world and society. Several environmental challenges can be solved simultaneously by implementing the individual objectives. The implementation of one objective must not hinder the implementation of another one. Implementation also requires similar, ambitious measures by several actors and sectors.

The wide scope of the required measures, their transformative nature and their interconnections are a precondition for implementing international agreements and are at the heart of the global sustainable development action plan, the 2030 Agenda. The policies thus also support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Ministry of the Environment works actively and in a solution-oriented manner in cooperation with the other ministries, different stakeholders, international organisations, partners and the governments of other countries to implement the following objectives:

- Awareness of the links between climate change and the loss of biodiversity has strengthened globally and nationally, and progress has been made in implementing joint solutions. The harmful effects that climate change and loss of biodiversity have on marine ecosystems, soil degradation, food security, poverty and equality are globally recognised.

- The new global biodiversity targets are ambitious and the state of biodiversity has improved across the world as a result of protective measures, nature-based solutions and sustainable use of natural resources.
- Circular economy solutions are widely recognised and their use to mitigate climate change, halt the loss of biodiversity and strengthen sustainable consumption and production has become mainstream across the world.
- In accordance with the Paris Climate Agreement, international climate measures and those of the European Union are ambitious. International cooperation and measures to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon have strengthened.
- The implementation of the SDGs concerning the environment has progressed, the understanding of their role in achieving all of the SDGs has strengthened, and the financing for international implementation of environmental goals has increased.
- International environmental governance and synergies between multilateral environmental agreements have strengthened and generated benefits for the implementation, also at the country level.
- Understanding of the importance of marine ecosystems has strengthened and the state of the marine environment has improved in Finland's neighbouring areas and globally.
- The state of water areas has improved and sustainable management of water resources has progressed through international cooperation on transboundary waters and the implementation of the objectives of Finland's international water strategy.
- Finland's expertise in sustainable urban development has strengthened the implementation of the UN's New Urban Agenda. The implementation of objectives concerning the accessibility of sustainable urban development has progressed.
- Support for the activities and cooperation of national and international research panels and for the science – policy dialogue has strengthened, and the results and recommendations of science – policy work have been used in the preparation of policies.

Channels for exerting influence

The Ministry of the Environment exerts influence through different routes to achieve the environmental, climate and sustainable development goals. The European Union is the most important channel for influencing the processes of the United Nations and negotiations for multilateral environmental agreements. By influencing the EU's positions, Finland's impact is multiplied because the European Union is an important donor and actor in most multilateral environmental agreements and processes.

Through implementing the European Green Deal, the Ministry supports global cooperation and the EU's ambitious approach to promoting environmental and climate policies and the commitments to sustainable development across the world. The international dimensions of many EU strategies, such as the Biodiversity Strategy, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Circular Economy Action Plan, offer a number of opportunities to influence the global transition to a fair, climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy. The Ministry of the Environment supports the solutions developed in the European Union to strengthen the knowledge base and knowledge-based decision-making to achieve the objectives of environmental policies.

A considerable proportion of the legislation applicable to the administrative branch of the Ministry of the Environment is based on international agreements whose objectives are mainly implemented through EU legislation. The Ministry participates actively and proactively in negotiating international agreements and the formulation of the EU's position before the negotiations. A multidisciplinary knowledge base is used to support the use of proactive influence tactics, whether related to the subject content or to the level and type of regulation to be selected.

Ministers and other high-level policy-makers can exert direct influence in global, regional (Barents, Arctic, Nordic and the Baltic region) and bilateral environmental cooperation, in cooperation carried out with organisations and countries, and in participation in high-level environmental and climate change initiatives or alliances. Holding the chair or acting in other positions of trust in international and regional organisations, financial institutions and multilateral environmental agreements strengthens the impact. Employment of Finnish specialists in expert and leading positions in international and regional organisations and in EU institutions increases Finland's contribution to international environmental policy.

The Ministry of the Environment promotes science-based decision-making by bringing the messages and recommendations from science into the policy processes and by communicating the information needs from policies to research. In these efforts, an important role is played by independent science-policy panels, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the International Resource Panel (IRP). In addition, scientific and expert bodies, working groups and panels of multilateral environmental agreements, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (Horizon Europe), and the working groups and cooperation documents of the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers are in key position.

Background

Ministry of the Environment's Strategy 2030

The Ministry of the Environment reviewed its strategy in 2018 to respond to the changes taking place in the operating environment. Strategy 2030 includes three broad impact objectives: good environment and diverse nature, carbon-neutral circular economy society and sustainable urban development. These objectives will be implemented through legislation, voluntary agreements and action plans, and by developing economic instruments. The work will be carried out in cooperation with rest of the central government and stakeholders.



Government Programme 2019–2023



The Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government *'Inclusive and competent Finland – a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society'* emphasises the role that an ecologically sustainable Finland will play in showing the way in mitigating climate change and protecting biodiversity. The Nordic welfare model, combined with responsible and reduced use of natural resources, is a model that will guarantee the competitiveness of our country also in the future. Extensive, broad-based cooperation and swift measures are needed to address issues with the most far-reaching impacts, such as climate change, demographic trends, reducing the loss of biological diversity, sustainable urban development, and preservation of a viable environment.

Finland is committed to observing the UN's universal values and works to strengthen international law, democracy and human rights. According to the Government Programme, the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which lays down the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provide the foundation for international cooperation and Finland's actions in the coming years. At least nine of the 17 SDGs have a strong emphasis on the environment, and the Ministry of the Environment plays a central role in implementing these goals. Finland is also well placed to contribute to the ambitious implementation of the environmental goals at the global level.

The 2030 Agenda also lays the basis for Finland's development policy, which is an essential part of Finland's foreign and security policy. Its aim is to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. Equity and equality are an integral part of all of Finland's activities.

The Government Programme also outlines that Finland will continue its Nordic cooperation on climate change and energy in order to achieve carbon neutrality and will work to strengthen the position of the Nordic countries as leaders in international climate policy. The importance of Nordic cooperation has increased in the past few years. Political and monetary support for the environmental and climate work carried out by the Nordic Council of Ministers has grown considerably.

In the Government Programme, digitalisation is considered a key method for monitoring and reducing the carbon footprint of the built environment and for the efficient use of materials and accelerating the circular economy.



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