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# Policy Pathways towards 1.5-Degree Lifestyles

Key messages for the Policy  
Lab #1

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**Summary**

This document identifies key messages for transitioning towards sustainable and equitable lifestyles in EU policy context



## Why lifestyles?

Europe wants to become climate neutral by 2050 and has set itself ambitious goals. As the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in the [Speech of the Union 2020](#), “we need to change how we treat nature, how we produce and consume, live and work, eat and heat, travel and transport” to achieve these goals. For EU decision makers in particular, looking at the individual level and addressing the question of lifestyles is especially controversial. However, changing our ways of living is part of embarking towards zero emissions and can bring benefits for greater social cohesion, wellbeing, health, and nature. Public policies already define and shape lifestyles – think of road construction and fuel subsidies. Public policies have an untapped potential to open the room for the lifestyle changes that are part of becoming climate neutral.

**The global emissions gap between the current course of GHG emissions and the necessary levels to stay below 1.5 degrees continues to grow.** According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2020, collective emissions reductions should be at least five times more ambitious than outlined in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and if large-scale emissions reductions are not achieved by 2030, achieving the 1.5 degree target will no longer be possible.<sup>1</sup> The Green Deal already places climate action at the front of the EU agenda. However, systemic transformations in all policy areas are needed to enable European citizens to live meaningful lives within planetary boundaries.

## What are sustainable lifestyles?

“Sustainable lifestyles are clusters of habits and patterns of behaviour to minimize the use of natural resources and generation of wastes, while supporting fairness and prosperity for all. They are embedded in a society and facilitated by institutions, norms and infrastructures that frame individual choices.”<sup>2</sup>

**Transforming our lifestyles and consumption patterns provides an enormous potential for bridging the emissions gap**



# Key messages for enabling sustainable lifestyles in the EU policy context

- **Lifestyle changes have a huge potential to contribute to the European goal of climate neutrality whilst promoting wellbeing for citizens.** 1.5-degree lifestyles respect the physical and ecological limits of the environment and are compatible with higher life satisfaction, stable societies and prospering economies. By integrating demand-side policies into current policy strategies and agendas, the EU can position itself as the leading example on enabling consumption and lifestyle patterns that are oriented towards wellbeing and go along with the Paris targets of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees.
- **Two-thirds of GHG emissions worldwide are connected to household consumption and especially hotspot areas such as food, housing and mobility.**<sup>1</sup> Changes in hotspot areas (food, housing, mobility) are massive and depend on individual behaviour as well as contextual shifts.<sup>3</sup> Some of the most carbon-intensive lifestyles, such as consumption of meat and private ownership of cars, are more prevalent in Europe than on average globally.<sup>4</sup>
- **Policies can set the conditions for low-carbon lifestyles through system changes in economic, social and cultural conditions and infrastructures.**<sup>1</sup> Enabling sustainable lifestyles requires a systemic change of economic, social and cultural conditions and infrastructures.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, this means helping citizens overcome lock-in situations where the unsustainable option is the most rational one.

## What is sufficiency?

Sufficiency is a complementary strategy to efficiency which strives to make efficiency effective. It helps to ensure that energy efficiency gains are not offset by rebound effects but effectively lead to absolute reductions of resource use. This includes more efficient supply modes to shift demand (repair and share instead of buy new) as well as avoiding unnecessary demand (limit what is demanded and supplied).<sup>5,6</sup>

- **Implementing the idea of sufficiency into EU policies can enable absolute reductions in resource use.** Broadening the policy mix from current policies focusing on efficiency improvements and technological innovation towards policies enabling lifestyles fit for the 1.5-



degree target is crucial as the former are insufficient alone to reduce emissions to the necessary levels.<sup>3,7</sup> Sufficiency policies as a complementary strategy to efficiency measures helps to ensure that efficiency gains are not offset by rebound effects but effectively lead to absolute reductions in resource use.<sup>5</sup>

- **Sufficiency is much more than just consuming less.** As a demand-side approach, sufficiency also takes into account the quality of social relations, the state of the environmental surroundings, and perceived social and economic stability.<sup>5</sup>
- **Lifestyle changes are directly connected with equity considerations: Both tackling the lifestyles of the wealthy 10% of the population, as well as leaving no one behind.**<sup>1,8</sup> Increasing ecological pressure is predominantly coming from the affluent consumption of the wealthier segments of societies while lower income groups only cause a very small proportion of global GHG emissions. This ecological pressure further exacerbates poverty and imbalances. Thus, planetary and socioeconomic imbalances fuel one another and tackling unsustainable consumption patterns is at the heart of addressing this knot.<sup>9</sup>
- **Enabling equitable 1.5-degree lifestyles can strengthen social cohesion.** Some climate measures, such as carbon taxes, tend to have a regressive distributional effect, hitting poorer households harder than richer ones. This likely contributes to fuel and transport poverty. The lack of policy focus on carbon-intensive activities by high-income groups raises significant ethical and equity concerns. Social tensions and conflicts become stronger when existing distributions are perceived as unfair and differences in socio-economic conditions between groups increase.<sup>10</sup>
- **Implementing sustainable lifestyles comes along with a new narrative of (economic) progress and a focus on the wellbeing of people.**<sup>1</sup> To effectively achieve climate goals and enable low-carbon lifestyles, decoupling and systemic change are essential. This implies socio-cultural changes, such as reframing the meaning of "progress" and "prosperity", which should no longer be connoted with the accumulation of income or energy-intensive resources, but with the achievement of well-being and quality of life.<sup>1</sup>
- **Equitable policies for 1.5-degree lifestyles will need to go hand in hand with new and different processes of decision making.** Involvement of a wider range of voices in decision-making can result in more equitable and sustainable outcomes as well as improved acceptability of even stricter climate policies.
- **1.5-degree lifestyles are diverse and can differ from each other**<sup>2</sup>. What is sustainable in one place may not be sustainable in another. Therefore, successful examples of sustainable lifestyles need to be carefully adapted to the respective context before they are replicated and scaled up<sup>11</sup>.



## Background

The ZOE project “Policy Pathways towards 1.5-Degree Lifestyles” aims to integrate behavioural and systemic infrastructural changes, as indicated in the [UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2020](#), into policy design. By learning from your expertise and identifying the needs and challenges you encounter in your work on sustainable futures, we aim to equip EU policymakers with the necessary tools to design policies that promote healthy and meaningful lives and strengthen social cohesion.

We are now entering the second phase of our project with a **Policy Lab on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June** to explore further policy pathways to 1.5-Degree lifestyles. This Policy Lab is the first in a series looking at developing ambitious, feasible and acceptable policies to enable citizens to live healthy, meaningful, and just lives within planetary boundaries. After the summer, we are planning more specific **Policy Labs around food, mobility, and housing** with the aim to:

- Assess the current EU policy landscape in terms of contributions to 1.5-degree lifestyles.
- Map out pathways for strengthening EU policies in key areas such as mobility, food and housing to match the current scientific knowledge in climate science (**Autumn 2021**).
- Engage policymakers on the question of how to make the transition to 1.5-degree lifestyles equitable and discuss the role of well-being in doing so.
- Develop a compelling narrative that helps bring the topic to European institutions.

## Do you want to find out more about ZOE?

[ZOE](#) Institute for Future-fit Economies, is an independent and non-profit think and do tank, working on a just transition towards [sustainable prosperity](#) and well-being. In close exchange with pioneering policymakers, we introduced the idea of [Doughnut Economics](#) into the European Commission. This approach inspires us and many policymakers to continuously improve what we do, contributing to a world that stays within planetary boundaries.



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