Towards Better Land-Use Decisions in Europe

August 2026

From isolated measures to an integrated European land-use framework – This policy brief calls for harmonised evidence, durable incentives, context-sensitive governance, and stronger collaboration between science, policy, and practice, enabled by co-created knowledge and digital decision-support tools.

THE CHALLENGE

Across Europe, land must meet competing demands: producing food, timber, and renewable resources while supporting biodiversity, storing carbon, protecting water, and providing space for housing and infrastructure.

Land-use patterns are shaped by past political, economic, and management decisions and are difficult to change. At the same time, climate change and biodiversity loss require faster adaptation while maintaining productive and resilient agricultural and forest systems.

The bottlenecks

DATA

High spatial agricultural data remain unevenly accessible and structured across countries.

MONITORING

Inconsistent and incomplete land-use data limit reliable reporting and cross-country comparison.

GOVERNANCE

Voluntary policy instruments alone do not guarantee uptake; legitimacy, social context and local adaptability matter.

BIODIVERSITY

Crop diversity remains limited in many farming systems, indicating limits of short-term greening measures.

GHG EVIDENCE

Peatland emissions can be underestimated when outdated or non-comparable emission factors are used.

FORESTS

Forest trajectories differ regionally, with governance quality and implementation capacity shaping outcomes.

www.europe-land.eu

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Evidence for Action

What Europe-LAND evidenced

MAKE LAND-USE DATA MORE USABLE
Europe-LAND harmonised IACS (Integrated Administration and Control System) data across 20 countries, but differences in national reporting and access remain.
Jänicke et al. (2025)

DESIGN BIODIVERSITY SUPPORT DURABLE
Across over 3.6 million farms in 18 Member States, Europe-LAND identified 16 farm types with strong regional differences in specialisation and intensity.
Europe-LAND D2.2 – Publication of Farming Typologies Across the EU (2026)

HARMONISE LAND-USE MONITORING
Europe-LAND is developing standardised indicators for land-use and land-cover transitions, including farmland abandonment.
Jänicke et al. (2025)

NATIONAL GHG INVENTORIES UNDERESTIMATE EMISSIONS
In the Neman River basin, Europe-LAND research estimated ~22 Mt CO_2e/year from peatlands, revealing substantial underestimation in national inventories and highlighting the need for standardised, long-term GHG monitoring.
Kamocki et al. (2025)

MOVE BEYOND REGULATION ALONE
Europe-LAND found that effective land-use governance depends on policy mixes adapted to local conditions, institutions and stakeholder needs.
Europe-LAND D3.1 – Report on Regulatory Instruments (2026)

STRONG REGIONAL CONTRASTS IN FOREST CHANGE
A Europe-LAND survey of forest experts across all 27 EU Member States found strong regional contrasts in forest change: Recovery was more prominent in the north, while degradation and disturbance pressures were stronger in the south and east.
Krumins et al. (2026)

Europe-LAND brings together Europe-wide analysis, eight regional case studies, and jointly developed decision-support tools in order to test how land-use decisions perform in different regional contexts.

All project results at a fingertip
https://zenodo.org/communities/europeland/

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Our Policy Recommendations

ENABLE SECURE ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL DATA
Align IACS/GSA data structures, metadata and secure-access rules across Member States.

MAKE BIODIVERSITY PRACTICES DURABLE
Keep mandatory and permanent biodiversity-friendly practices at the centre of agricultural support; Target biodiversity support to farm type and region.

HARMONISE LAND-USE MONITORING
Adopt common definitions, methods and interoperable data infrastructures for land-use changes, management changes and intensity indicators.

BUILD A CREDIBLE GHG EVIDENCE CHAIN
EU and national funders should support standardised long-term peatland GHG monitoring, including water-table depth, vegetation and nutrient status.

USE A BALANCED POLICY MIX
Combine regulation and economic incentives with partnership-based, participatory tools, and adapt the mix to regional conditions.

STRENGTHEN REGIONAL FOREST GOVERNANCE
Strengthen enforcement and institutional coherence while adapting EU forest policy to regional trajectories, fragmentation pressures and local governance capacity.

About the Project

Europe-LAND combines Europe-wide data analysis with eight regional case studies to understand land-use decisions, their drivers, and how they may evolve under climate and biodiversity pressures. Building on these insights, the project develops practical decision-support tools to help policymakers, planners, farmers, land users, and other stakeholders explore the impacts of different choices on future landscapes. Through stakeholder engagement, knowledge exchange, and capacity building, Europe-LAND bridges research and practice, supporting more informed, collaborative, and sustainable land-use decisions across Europe.

Further readings

Connect with us

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Our Community

Project Partners

- HAW Hamburg, GER
- University of Thessaloniki, GRE
- University Bologna, ITA
- Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development, GER
- Academia Romana, ROU
- Bialystok University of Technology, POL
- University of Latvia, LVA
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