

Mission letter

This is a fictional mission letter issued by the President of the European Commission to a fictional 'Commissioner for a Transformative Budget' intended to illustrate how the climate and environmental crises should be prioritised as part of the European Union's long-term budget for 2028–2034. The demands of this mission letter reflect those of CEE Bankwatch Network.

Dear Commissioner for a Transformative Budget,

Your leadership comes at a crucial moment. As we face intensifying climate and biodiversity crises and escalating pollution levels, the very ecosystems that sustain our existence are under unprecedented threat. Approximately half of the world's population faces severe water scarcity for at least part of the year, and regions and populations with significant development constraints are especially vulnerable to climatic hazards.¹ As floods, storms, and droughts intensify, the urgent need to stop using fossil fuels, switch to an energy-efficient, renewable energy system based on and electrification, and ramp up adaptation measures is clearer than ever. This requires significant and sustained investments, along with a bold vision to ensure the long-term well-being of our citizens and the environment, which is also a precondition for a sustainable and secured economy.

EU citizens are concerned about the future and demand accountability. According to a Eurobarometer survey on fairness perceptions of the green transition, 88 per cent of EU residents support the green transition, yet more than half doubt that it will be fair and affordable for everyone by 2050.² This scepticism is grounded in a harsh reality – our fossil fuel-based energy system left 9.3 per cent of people in the EU unable to adequately heat their homes in 2022,³ with southern, central, and eastern Europe hit particularly hard. Rapid decarbonisation is not just a preference; it's an absolute necessity. However, for the transition to be accepted, it must be guided by the principles of social equality, inclusion, nature protection, and active citizen participation.

Such a transformation demands huge investment. Yet the gap between the current funding available and what's actually needed to meet the EU's climate goals remains vast. Fortunately, this gap can be drastically reduced by ensuring the EU budget only supports transformative projects that set social, environmental and just transition objectives, such as the electrification of heat and transport using renewable energy, building insulation, nature restoration, and the circular economy. It's essential that public finance reaches

¹Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Climate Change 2022 – Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 28 February 2022.

² European Commission, [Fairness perceptions of the green transition](#), European Commission, October 2022.

³ Agnieszka Widuto, [Energy poverty in the EU](#), European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2023.

those who need it most and that it mobilises private financing in an accountable and sustainable way, enabling social and economic innovation for a just and inclusive transition for all. The EU must lead by example, steering the transformation of our economies and societies towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Your mission

I entrust you with the responsibility of crafting a budget that brings about a socially and environmentally oriented transformation of the EU. Your task is to set in motion an ambitious, long-term financial plan for the 2028–2034 period that benefits both our citizens and the environment, ensuring fairness for all.

A forward-looking, long-term budget focused on bridging the financing gap and reversing negative trends

I want you to develop a budget that meets of our times head-on, while adequately responding to people’s needs. An estimated EUR 2 trillion is needed to bridge the current financing gap and secure our future within the limits of planetary boundaries.⁴ Partnering with the European Investment Bank, national promotional banks and institutions, and both private and public financial organisations, while ensuring policy coherence and consistency across all EU financial instruments, including Emissions Trading System (ETS) revenue channels, would be a promising step forward.

I also want you to adopt a science-based approach when it comes to spending and identifying new income streams, such as taxes and joint borrowing, to secure the financial resources necessary for this vital transformation. In addition, I call on you to strengthen the role of the EU budget as a tool for creating opportunities and promoting well-being, rather than focusing on endless GDP growth that demotes the best interests of both people and the planet.

A transformative budget to deliver on our climate and nature commitments

Your priority is to ensure that the EU budget becomes a powerful tool for achieving our climate and environmental goals. This commitment must be rooted in strengthened safeguards and an immediate halt to all support for fossil fuels. To this end, you are tasked with overseeing the rigorous enforcement of EU environmental law, improving application of the ‘do no significant harm’ principle, and ensuring that no EU-funded projects cause significant harm to environmental and climate objectives.

In light of the urgent action required, at least 50 per cent of the budget must be earmarked for climate and nature-related investments. But to avoid greenwashing, a more robust and transparent methodology is required to track and optimise green spending. This will ensure that every last cent effectively contributes to sustainable decarbonisation and reversing biodiversity loss. Your task is to ensure that transformative environmental investments are prioritised and receive the necessary support across the EU, while applying stringent investment safeguards to prevent environmental harm. Special attention should be paid to

⁴ Birdlife Europe and Central Asia, Climate Action Network Europe, European Environmental Bureau, Transport and Environment, [A Social and Green Investment Plan for a prosperous and just transition](#), Birdlife Europe and Central Asia, Climate Action Network Europe, European Environmental Bureau, Transport and Environment, 15 May 2024.

investments that adhere to the principle of ‘energy efficiency first’, deliver holistic solutions, and drive social innovation, thus adding significant value to all environmental objectives.

In parallel, it’s crucial to increase the quality and quantity of spending specifically earmarked for nature conservation and restoration in line with the EU Nature Restoration Law. The cost of failing to protect nature vastly outweighs the investments needed to ensure its good health. Support should be directed towards establishing a new fund dedicated to nature aimed at preserving and restoring biodiversity across Europe as well as improving environmental mainstreaming across EU funds and programmes. This approach will not only strengthen environmental resilience, but also ensure that the long-term budget reflects our unwavering commitment to protecting the living world for future generations.⁵

Citizens’ acceptance, empowerment and ownership of the green transition

Your mandate as Commissioner includes ensuring that the EU budget supports citizens’ acceptance, empowerment and ownership of climate action. This can be achieved by increasing funding for community-led initiatives and services such as energy communities. Such initiatives enable citizens to take an active role in the energy transition, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring that the benefits of the transformation are shared broadly.

No region should be left behind in the transition. Special attention must be paid to individuals and groups most affected by phasing out fossil fuels, particularly coal, oil shale and peat. The Just Transition Fund has been a crucial instrument for supporting carbon-intensive mining regions across the EU. Therefore, it’s imperative to build on this support in the EU’s next long-term budget, honouring our political commitment to significantly increase financing for the just transition⁶ and ensure continuity. By reinforcing the next phase of the Just Transition Fund, we can ensure that these regions receive the financial and technical assistance needed to transition to sustainable economic models, thereby safeguarding jobs and livelihoods.

A transformative budget must be inclusive and ensure that all groups, especially in cities and municipalities, can access the resources needed to drive the transition at the local level. Consideration should be given to strengthening direct funding mechanisms for cities, enabling them to implement participatory, innovative and tailored solutions that meet their specific needs and contribute to broader climate goals. Distribution of the current EU budget shows that even if groups like smaller municipalities and civil society organisations are formally eligible for funding, they still face criteria that are impossible to meet, such as requirements for large financial contributions and unrealistic deadlines. These realities pose a major threat to cohesion.

Additionally, it’s essential to provide targeted support for vulnerable groups, including low-income and energy-poor families. The EU’s long-term budget must contribute to the implementation of plans for affordable housing, ensuring that the green transition is not only sustainable but also equitable. Additionally, the Social Climate Fund must fully serve the most vulnerable groups struggling with energy

⁵ BirdLife International: Europe and Central Asia, CEE Bankwatch Network, ClientEarth, EuroNatur, EUROPARC Federation, European Environmental Bureau, Eurosite, Wetlands International, World Wildlife Fund, Youth and Environment Europe, [Unlocking funds for nature: How the next EU budget must deliver for biodiversity](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, 9 July 2024.

⁶ Ursula von der Leyen, [Europe’s Choice: Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029](#), European Commission, 18 July 2024.

and transport poverty, and receive support through additional resources such as ETS revenue channels, which must be mobilised to tackle inequalities.

To ensure sufficient and well-targeted financing, it's crucial that we conduct quality assessments of energy and transport poverty among all families, particularly marginalised groups such as Roma, minorities and migrants. Maintaining consistency with other EU funds is also vital for identifying the most pressing financing priorities. By putting the needs of those bearing the brunt of the current crises front and centre, we can ensure that the benefits of the transition are shared and redistributed, fostering social cohesion and long-term resilience.

A sound, transparent, participatory and accountable governance system

Finally, you are tasked with overseeing a sound, transparent, participatory and accountable governance system. I want you to strengthen public participation in the EU's next long-term budget by renewing the partnership principle and extending it to all EU funds. Public oversight should be dynamic and diverse, with monitoring committees driven by engagement rather than formal decision-making processes.

I would like you to make multi-level dialogue, supported by systematic capacity building and technical assistance, the cornerstone of the budget to ensure a successful transformation in line with the European Green Deal. Within the EU, a separate, user-friendly mechanism should be established to allow members of the public to initiate independent civic monitoring actions, thus preventing the misuse of EU funds, particularly in relation to financing environmentally damaging activities. You must put in place an accountable governance system that upholds planetary stewardship, treating the planet as the main stakeholder and addressing its boundaries and restoration needs.

The way forward

The tasks that you have been entrusted with are crucial for unlocking the transformative potential of the EU's long-term budget, matching our unwavering commitment to reshape the EU and achieve a complete phase-out of fossil fuels. However, you should also bear in mind that we will need to respond to external pressures that threaten our cohesion, ambition, and democratic values. I look forward to working closely with you as you take the necessary steps to align these environmental and social needs with the priorities of the EU's long-term budget.

Yours faithfully,

President of the European Commission