

Young Generation Policy Brief

Amazon Deforestation Crisis

Fighting for Climate Action and Sustainability

By María Gabriela Barraza and Nicole Quijano

A publication by the Jean Monnet Policy Network “ValEUs”

No. 06 | 01 August 2025

Amazon Deforestation Crisis: Fighting for Climate Action and Sustainability

BY MARÍA GABRIELA BARRAZA AND NICOLE QUIJANO

Executive Summary

The Amazon rainforest is a vital global ecosystem that is currently dealing with serious threats as a consequence of various activities including deforestation, illegal mining, and unsustainable agriculture. This crisis puts biodiversity, indigenous communities, and climate stability at a crossroad, running counter to certain values propagated by the European Union (EU), in particular human dignity and the rule of law. Although the EU implements regulations to curb deforestation, its consumption patterns also contribute to the crisis. A focus on international cooperation, sustainable trade policies, and local initiatives is essential to address the crisis, balance development with environmental preservation and ensure the Amazon's survival.

This policy brief is published as part of the EU-funded Jean Monnet Policy Network "ValEUs".

Find out about ValEUs on our website → <https://valeus.eu/>
Follow us on Social Media



The contribution for this issue was provided by:



This issue is published in cooperation with:



INTRODUCTION

The Amazon is one of the most valuable places on Earth and home to thousands of endemic species and indigenous communities. This forest is and has always been of enormous international importance in terms of natural resources and preservation of wildlife.

Because of its vast influence on worldwide climate, it is often referred to as the 'lungs of the planet'. It is vital for protecting native biodiversity and plays a key role in the lives of the communities that live across the countries of the Amazonian region. Intensive deforestation, aggressive raw materials extraction, illicit mining, and hostile farming are amplifying and accelerating climate dangers, putting at risk native biodiversity and halting sustainable development.

Deforestation and destructive human intervention in the region put at risk the preservation and sustainable development of this territory as well as the communities whose livelihoods depend on it. These challenges often clash with different principles of significant actors in the international system, such as the European Union (EU) values of defending human dignity but also upholding the rule of law. Therefore, action must be taken in the form of a policy- and effort-based strategy in order to ensure the Amazon's conservation and survival, understanding its relevance as a key geostrategic region for various states around the globe.

DEFORESTATION: A LONGSTANDING PRACTICE WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

Deforestation is an ancient practice that has been executed for centuries by humanity and its main purpose is to create additional open ecosystems, settlement expansion and resource extraction. Nowadays we understand deforestation as the "destruction of forests so that land is put to other uses".¹

However, what started as a method to assist human needs has resulted in a series of devastating consequences for the planet. A manifestation of this notion is the fact that "tropical deforestation contributes about 20% of annual global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions".² Moreover, several consequences of deforestation and forest degradation have repercussions not only on agendas of international organizations. They also impact human rights, economic development, stability, peace, security and the well-being of the human beings that reside all over the planet, as well as marginalized groups like indigenous communities, local farmers and individuals that fulfil rural and agriculture-based jobs.

KEY ROLE OF THE AMAZONIAN RAINFOREST

One of the most visible examples of the effects of deforestation is the Amazon rainforest, a unique biome in the world, important on a large scale and in various components, especially the diversity of species and plants it hosts.³ This important region also contains the Amazon river, considered the largest in the world with more than 7 million square kilometres and with a route through various countries such as Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.⁴

Deforestation and forest degradation in the Amazon have led to alarming consequences, including biodiversity loss, disruption of water cycles, increased carbon emissions, and the displacement of indigenous communities. These impacts threaten not only the local ecosystems but also contribute to global climate change, making the protection of the Amazon a matter of international urgency.

The biodiversity present in the region should be reason enough for its preservation and care. Considered 'the lungs of the world', greater attention should be given to protecting it,

¹ Corona, Piermaria, Valerio Di Stefano, and Angelo Mariano. 2023. "Knowledge Gaps and Research Opportunities in the Light of the European Union Regulation on Deforestation-Free Products." *Annals of Silvicultural Research* 48(2): 87–89. <https://doi.org/10.12899/asr-2445>. (p. 87)

² Asner, Gregory P. n.d. "Measuring Carbon Emissions from Tropical Deforestation: An Overview." New York: Environmental Defense Fund. https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/10333_Measuring_Carbon_Emissions_from_Tropical_Deforestation--An_Overview.pdf.

³ Ellwanger, Joel Henrique, Bruna Kulmann-Leal, Valéria L. Kaminski, Jacqueline Maria Valverde-Villegas, Ana Beatriz G. Da Veiga, Fernando R. Spilki, Philip M. Fearnside, et al. 2020. "Beyond Diversity Loss and Climate Change: Impacts of Amazon Deforestation on Infectious Diseases and Public Health." *An Acad Bras Cienc* 92(1). <https://doi.org/10.1590/0001-3765202020191375>. (p. 1)

⁴ Ellwanger et al. 2020, 1

while also safeguarding the lives of native species and communities. The Amazon plays a key role when it comes to climate change, as it is important for maintaining planetary health and the regulation of the Earth's climate.⁵ Nevertheless, deforestation remains an enormous obstacle when trying to speak about preservation of this rainforest.

DEFORESTATION VS. EU VALUES

The EU considers human dignity to be an inviolable and fundamental value, which is compromised by the fact that indigenous groups and local communities, whose livelihoods, heritage, and economic activities are deeply intertwined with the rainforest, are greatly affected by the wreckage of it. This situation directly threatens the human rights of indigenous communities, including the right to their land, the right of self-determination, their culture, and participation in environmental decision-making. These are all values that the EU has committed to uphold in its foreign policy regarding human rights. On a grand scale, deforestation threatens the well-being of all inhabitants of the planet given the fact that the Amazon produces nearly 20% of the earth's land-based oxygen through photosynthesis, which is why its irreversible destruction could cause severe consequences that profoundly threaten the value of human dignity globally.

Simultaneously, this issue tramples on the value of rule of law that the EU is based on, since the deforestation of the forest and the trade of products created from it go against the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)⁶, that entered into force on 29 June 2023. This regulation dictates that companies exchanging in cocoa, coffee, palm oil, soya, beef, and wood, as well as items derived from these commodities, must carry out the adequate diligence to guarantee that their products are not a result of deforestation, forest degradation or breaches of environmental or social laws.

It is essential to highlight that the European Union (EU) is founded on sustainable development as a fundamental pillar. Therefore, one of its key objectives is to promote balanced economic growth through price stability and the promotion of

competitive market economies that guarantee employment and social progress. In line with this pillar, the EU also seeks to protect and improve environmental quality, particularly with regard to the preservation of the Amazon as an indispensable natural resource for humanity.

THREATS OF AGGRESSIVE FARMING AND TRADE ON THE AMAZON

The practice of aggressive or intensive farming is a significant cause of deforestation in the Amazon. It is implemented to expand agricultural production, often used for the fabrication of produce designated for international trade, and the maximization of profits. However, these actions frequently lead to serious environmental consequences. The EU is a large consumer of such goods, some of which are "produced unsustainably, causing deforestation and forest degradation".⁷ A clear example of this is the fact that "soybean, forestry, and beef exports from Brazil have been linked to increasing deforestation risks, biodiversity loss, carbon emissions, and other environmental impacts in the country".⁸ It is important to acknowledge that the EU remains a vital commercial partner. As stated by some estimates that track farm supply chains, between the years 2005-2007, the EU-imported products caused 16% of forest deforestation in tropical countries, including 1 million hectares in Brazil.⁹ This demonstrates that deforestation in the Amazonian region fuelled by intensive farming is motivated by a global demand for goods and simultaneously plays a key role in devastating outcomes for nature and sustainability.

MEASURES TAKEN BY THE EU

The previously mentioned bill adopted by the European Union (EU) in 2023 and approved by the EU Parliament represents a remarkable effort in overcoming deforestation, since it blocks the entrance of any so-called 'dirty' commodities or products directly linked to deforestation. This includes products fabricated from raw materials extracted from the Amazonian rainforest. The bill bans the entrance of products such as

⁵ Ellwanger et al. 2020, 2

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 of 31 May 2023 "on the making available on the Union market and the export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation." <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023R1115>.

⁷ Corona et al. 2023, 87

⁸ Arima, Eugenio, Paulo Barreto, Farzad Taheripour, and Angel Aguiar. 2021. "Dynamic Amazonia: The EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement and Deforestation." *Land* 10(11), 1243. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land10111243>. (p. 3)

⁹ Arima et al. 2021, 3

rubber, palm oil, soya, timber, coffee, cocoa, and many more, with the purpose of taking action and responsibility in matters related to climate protection and sustainability directly through EU legislation. In this way, the bill contributes to a safer and more eco-friendly market for the EU. In addition, it encourages sustainable sourcing networks.

On the other hand, the bill is insufficient in tackling the complex reality of deforestation as it leaves out a series of structural factors that lie behind deforestation, like the high demand for cheap commodities and overconsumption of these products. In order to accomplish further progress, adopting additional measures and creating initiatives can be immensely helpful to tackle deforestation in such a vital region for the whole globe.

THE IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS GROUPS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The Amazon is home to numerous ancestral indigenous tribes, like the Yanomami and Kayapó, and harbours multiple cities and towns, such as Iquitos, Leticia, Manaus, Parintins, Santarém, and Belém. These communities rely on the Amazon as their main source of income and living. For urban communities, among other benefits, the Amazon forest acts as a source of food, chemical compounds for the development of medicines, and raw materials for a wide variety of industries.¹⁰

On that account, these groups suffer tremendously from the consequences of deforestation, often caused by large-scale farming and international heavy industry, and the loss of biodiversity. There is a pressing need to acknowledge the role that these tribes and communities play in the conservation of the Amazon and its resources, as well as the necessity to create income and added value to communities, thus improving living conditions for indigenous people, traditional populations, and the rural poor.¹¹

THE EU'S ROLE IN FIGHTING DEFORESTATION

The European Union (EU) is nowadays a global leader when it comes to addressing environmental degradation and advancing sustainable development. However, despite these commitments, the EU remains trapped in the environmental consequences of global consumption patterns, which contribute to deforestation in a significant way.¹² It has been shown that the "global demand for commodities is a major driver of deforestation in Latin America and Asia in particular, and a significant component of this global demand originates from within the EU."¹³

This situation calls for intensive efforts in the fight against deforestation, especially in the Amazonian rainforest, with repercussions and consequences not only for Latin American countries, but for the world. The EU has been a leader when it comes to sustainability and preservation. However, it must also take responsibility for deforestation, which not only threatens ecosystems and biodiversity, but also menaces the dignity and heritage of local communities that has to be preserved.

Therefore, it is necessary for the EU to recognize its impact and adopt policies that promote responsible and sustainable consumption. The EU has the opportunity to make an impact on the international community by reinforcing the adoption and fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals and show leadership in environmental governance. The cooperation with Amazonian states through initiatives whose focus is on preservation and sustainable development is crucial to fight against climate change effects and promote social justice.

This cooperation is not only a strategy to combat climate change and promote social justice, but also a concrete expression of the EU's foreign policy values, such as the defence of multilateralism, the rule of law, and the promotion of human rights, human dignity and environmental responsibility. By aligning its external action with these normative principles, the EU ensures that its leadership in

¹⁰ Ellwanger et al. 2020, 1.

¹¹ Terry, Madeleine. 2016. The Influence of Industrialized Nations on Environmental Issues: An Examination of What the European Union and United States Have Done with Respect to Brazilian Deforestation. Bachelor's thesis, University of Oregon. <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/11a2ecbb-356e-4f83-8a3a-a9b0677a6736/content>.

¹² Terry 2016, 3

¹³ Weatherley-Singh, Janice, and Aarti Gupta. 2018. "'Embodied Deforestation' as a New EU Policy Debate to Tackle Tropical Forest Loss: Assessing Implications for REDD+ Performance." *Forests* 9(12), 751. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f9120751>.

sustainability is consistent with its broader commitments as a global actor.

STRENGTHENING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR THE AMAZON'S CONSERVATION

As a key partner in sustainability efforts, the European Union (EU), through its foreign policy, has committed to protect, preserve and restore ecosystems around the world like the Amazon, in cooperation with countries such as Brazil or Colombia as home-landers of the rainforest.¹⁴ A clear example of this shared commitment and action is Colombia, one of the home-landers of the Amazon. Recognised as a strong ally of the EU on environmental issues, Colombia shares ambitious goals, mainly directed at combating climate change and deforestation, specifically towards carbon neutrality by 2050.¹⁵ In Colombia's case, there has been strategic cooperation in terms of sustainability, preservation of nature, and biodiversity at international forums such as the recent COP16 carried out in Cali in 2024. This is where Colombia seeks to improve governance in terms of natural resource management and the development of sustainable socio-environmental initiatives.

While the rainforest home-landers recognize the importance of these shared commitments being present in the diplomatic and political spheres, transformative measures are necessary to achieve a balance between economic development and ecological preservation. Strengthening international partnerships and implementing sustainable trade policies are essential steps to safeguard the Amazon's vital role in global climate stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to align with their own understanding of human dignity as well as the rule of law, political actors in the EU should take measures to reverse policies that have a negative impact on the Amazon region. The following recommendations would reflect in a greater way said values and reinforce the EU's commitment to ending deforestation.

Firstly, market-based benefits for sustainable farming should be enforced. Rather than imposing strict land-use requirements, financial bonuses should be offered to farmers

and harvesters to encourage a shift to greater sustainable solutions. Measures could include subsidies, tax deduction, or carbon credit programs for those who embrace agroforestry or agroecological farming systems. This would encourage the value of human dignity by allowing farmers and producers to have more ecofriendly livelihoods, while also aligning with EU deforestation regulations by offering benefits for adhering to them.

Secondly, it is important to pursue alliances and associations with the private sector, NGOs, and local communities for the sake of supply chain sustainability. Food corporations could commit to acquiring products that come from certified, deforestation-free farms. However, this alternative would require a strong enforcement and vigilance of the law. A policy mainly based on government intervention is not comprehensive. The implementation of this initiative translates to a greater, more tightly knit network of actors committed to enforcing values like the rule of law, as well as the conservation of vital ecosystems.

Thirdly, the focus of government-led conservation initiatives should be shifted toward community-integrated projects that seek to protect biodiversity and integrate local economic activities. This could be achieved through internationally certified programmes that train indigenous and rural populations in sustainable ecotourism, agroecology, and the use of non-timber forest products, which can generate income while maintaining ecological balance. This measure would directly support the adherence of both government and communities to deforestation control policy by promoting human dignity and the rule of law, through actions including and empowering indigenous and local communities.

In summary, it is recommended that the EU develops policies that aim to mitigate large-scale deforestation in the Amazonian rainforest. These policies should amplify cooperation between governmental authorities, international organizations, NGOs, and civil society in order to promote active participation in conservation strategies. Collaboration and interregional participation with Latin American states that are home to the Amazon should be strengthened by establishing reforestation programmes, educational programmes, and volunteer initiatives. Financial aid and technical assistance should be provided for sustainable

¹⁴ Terry 2016, 20

¹⁵ Instituto SINCHI. 2023. "Desde el Amazonas, la Unión Europea y sus Estados Miembros Conmemoran el Día de Europa." 9 May

2023. <https://www.sinchi.org.co/desde-el-amazonas-la-union-europea-y-sus-estados-miembros-conmemoran-el-dia-de-europa>.

projects that seek to achieve long-term benefits for the region, raise awareness, and promote action regarding this globally impactful issue. Inspiration could be drawn from successful programmes like Ecuador's Yasuni-ITT Initiative and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). This approach would be more effective since it is a coordinated and strategic response that unifies the efforts and includes different actors that add value to the conservation and reforestation process, not only by directly addressing environmental problems, but also by advocating for long-term sustainability.

In addition, the inclusion of indigenous groups and residents of Amazonian cities and towns in decision-making processes should be encouraged. EU missions and citizen engagement activities should be implemented as a framework for the involvement of civil society and citizens directly affected by the issue. It is vital to empower local communities and key stakeholders when it comes to implementing policies designed for protecting the rainforest. Participatory governance frameworks that recognise indigenous rights should be promoted. This helps to preserve local practices and community initiatives, ensuring culturally inclusive and effective decision-making.

Implementing such a strategy would be more beneficial since it guarantees that the policies enforced are well informed by actors with a direct relation to the Amazon, which fosters a long-term, local commitment to the conservation of the rainforest.

The Author(s)



MARÍA GABRIELA BARRAZA TORRES

Sixth-semester International Relations student at Universidad del Norte. Currently serving as Head of Logistics for the student group FEMINUN, former Head of Infographics at CERI, and current Career Representative at Universidad del Norte. Twice selected as a Leadership Ambassador at the university.



NICOLE QUIJANO QUESADA

Sixth-semester International Relations student at Universidad del Norte. Winner of the Roble Amarillo Scholarship. Current member of the executive board of the student group CERI. Active member of student groups FEMINUN and Comité Jurídico at Universidad del Norte.

About the Project

ValEUs brings together 20 universities from five continents, combining their strong expertise in EU studies across a wide range of academic disciplines. The Jean Monnet Network will foster joint research capacities, develop innovative teaching collaboration, and engage in societal policy debate to establish impactful policy recommendations. ValEUs is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission (2024-2026).

Imprint

ValEUs. Research & Education Network on Contestations to EU Foreign Policy



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Project number: [101127800](#)

Email: contact@valeus.eu

Website: <https://valeus.eu/>