



ACCLIMATE policy brief

TOWARDS A JUST, ORDERLY, AND EQUITABLE TRANSITION AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS: OPTIONS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE EU AFTER SANTA MARTA

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The imperative of transitioning away from fossil fuels

There is growing scientific and legal consensus on the imperative of a just, orderly, and equitable transition away from fossil fuels. Combustion and production of fossil fuels accounted for the vast majority of global greenhouse gas emissions and a third of methane emissions in 2024. Projected emissions of existing fossil fuel-consuming infra-structure alone are already projected to exceed the remaining carbon budget for the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit with 50% probability and high confidence. Transitioning away from fossil fuels (TAFF) is therefore the central pathway towards achieving the Agreement's mitigation objectives. This imperative received further legal backing in the July 2025 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, which warned that a state's failure to take appropriate action to protect the climate system – including through fossil fuel production, consumption, licensing, or subsidies – may constitute an internationally wrongful act.

While this imperative was acknowledged in the outcome of the first Global Stocktake at the 2023 UN Climate Conference in Dubai (COP28), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process has struggled to implement this call. At the most recent UN Climate Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, parties to the Paris Agreement could not agree on moving forward with a global fossil fuel roadmap. In response, the Brazilian COP30 Presidency undertook to develop such a roadmap on its own initiative.

The First Intergovernmental Conference on Transitioning away from Fossil Fuels, held in Santa Marta, Colombia, in April 2026, offered an opportunity for a coalition of willing countries to move forward on this topic. The conference was co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands, and provided a unique setting in that not all countries were invited to come to the conference, and there was no negotiated outcome. At the end of the conference, a second TAFF conference was announced, to be co-hosted by Tuvalu and Ireland in July 2027. Moreover, the co-hosts created a coordination group of TAFF-related international coalitions and established three workstreams (on national and regional TAFF roadmaps, fossil fuel-related macroeconomic dependencies and addressing barriers in the global and domestic financial architecture, and producer-consumer alignment), with a separate Science Panel for the Global Energy Transition also being launched at the conference.

The Santa Marta conference took place amid a global fossil energy crisis following the war in Iran and the subsequent closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz. These geopolitical developments have led to broader questions concerning the reliability of fossil fuel supplies. These questions are particularly pressing for the European Union (EU). **Tackling these geopolitical uncertainties, however, can go hand-in-hand with pursuing the EU's long-standing climate leadership aspirations.** Following the withdrawal by the United States from

the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC, the EU has a clear opportunity to realise its climate leadership aspirations whilst also reducing its reliance on uncertain fossil fuel imports. Against this backdrop, this policy brief identifies **several areas where the EU and its Member States could make meaningful contributions** to making progress on TAFF.

Four ways the EU can advance the transition away from fossil fuels

First, the European Commission and EU Member States could **strengthen existing international coalitions**, notably by supporting the Government of Ireland in the **organisation of the second TAFF conference**, as well as by promoting the **broadening of the participant base** ahead of the conference. The latter would include not only encouraging other EU Member States to join, but also using the diplomatic capital of the EU and its Member States to reach out to countries critical to TAFF, such as China, India, Indonesia, and South Africa. EU institutions such as the Council and the Commission can also **strengthen intra-EU coherence on TAFF** by backing international initiatives led by its Member States, notably including the **Coalition on Phasing Out Fossil Fuel Incentives Including Subsidies (COFFIS)**, led by the Netherlands), and the **Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA)**, led by Denmark), as well as initiatives in which Member States play a prominent role, such as the **Clean Energy Transition Partnership (CETP)** on international public finance. The European Commission and Member States could also seek to strengthen existing initiatives that promote producer-consumer alignment, such as the **Equitable Framework and Finance for Extractive-based Countries in Transition (EFFECT)** launched by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In doing so, the EU could leverage its legacy oil and gas imports in a dialogue with its suppliers to incentivise them to decarbonise and diversify their economies away from fossil fuels.

Second, the EU and its Member States could **develop new international coalitions**. Notably, the EU could **pioneer TAFF roadmaps that are integrated with Nationally Determined Contributions and Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategies** under the Paris Agreement. Doing so could form the starting point for the development of a broader coalition of countries developing such roadmaps. Furthermore, the EU could enter into **structured bilateral agreements with key oil and gas suppliers** in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, coupling predictable fossil fuel reductions with targeted support for clean energy and economic diversification. To prevent investment treaties from undermining domestic climate action, the EU could also **build a coalition focused on reforming the investment treaty regime**, specifically by removing access to investor-state dispute settlement for fossil fuel investors.

Third, **within the UNFCCC process**, the EU could **advocate the uptake of the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake in the second one** (which will run from 2026 to 2028), thereby ensuring that TAFF remains on the formal negotiation agenda. The EU can also leverage

other formal negotiation tracks, including shaping the operationalisation of the Just Transition Mechanism under the Just Transition Work Programme and engaging in discussions within the Mitigation Work Programme. In addition, the EU can support informal ways of integrating TAFF in recently launched initiatives, including the COP30 Presidency's **fossil fuel roadmap, the Belém Mission to 1.5, and the Global Climate Action Agenda.**

Lastly, international efforts by the EU should be flanked by **domestic action**. In this regard, there is significant potential in the upcoming **revision of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action** to not only strengthen the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies through Member States' National Energy and Climate Plans and Long-Term Strategies, but also addressing TAFF more broadly in such plans and strategies. Completing the **revision of the Energy Taxation Directive** would further complement these efforts by removing perverse tax incentives favouring fossil fuels. In addition, the EU institutions should also **ensure that existing measures that impose restrictions on fossil fuel production, including notably the Methane Regulation and the moratorium on Arctic fossil fuel extraction under the EU Arctic Policy, remain intact**, even if their implementation is delayed.

A longer, more detailed version of this policy brief is available [here](#).

About ACCLIMATE

ACCLIMATE is a Horizon Europe-funded research project that aims to support the global transition to low-emission, climate-resilient development through the co-creation of science-based and inclusive strategies. Aligned with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, the project brings together researchers, policy experts, and national stakeholders to design integrated pathways that are technically robust, socially just, and politically feasible.

Find out more: <https://acclimate-project.eu>

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