

# Science for Environment Policy

## New tool to aid decision-making in sustainable consumption

**Researchers have developed a new tool** to help policymakers access and use data regarding the environmental impacts of consumption and production. Using the EUREAPA tool, decision makers can analyse data from a range of perspectives and create scenarios to understand the implications of changes in consumption and production.

**Our current level of [production and consumption](#)** is unsustainable. However, the issue requires a complex response which tackles several interconnected factors, making it difficult for policymakers to identify priorities and interventions.

The EU-funded One Planet Economy Network (OPEN)<sup>1</sup> aimed to improve use of evidence regarding sustainable consumption and production by developing a 'footprint family' of indicators including the ecological footprint, the carbon footprint and the water footprint. These were then brought together using a 'multi-regional input-output framework' consisting of international data regarding the interconnection of different sectors of production and tracing production and consumption within an economy.

This framework is potentially very useful to policymakers; however, the results need to be accessible so that key messages can be easily identified and communicated. The EU-funded EUREAPA tool<sup>2</sup> was thus created by OPEN to address this issue.

The tool's developers incorporated user feedback at every stage of its design. Initially, they sent questionnaires to policymakers, consultants and civil service organisations to understand what kind of functions the tool needed. From this engagement process, two main functions were identified which were incorporated into the design.

Firstly, users indicated that they need to be able to analyse the data and present results from a range of perspectives, including comparing environmental impacts of countries, indicators or product groups. This would help users understand the causes of environmental impacts so they can identify possible areas for policy intervention.

Secondly, users said they needed to be able to [evaluate the impacts of various policy decisions](#). Therefore, the tool allows policymakers to examine the effects of, for example, increasing production efficiency by recalculating the environmental impacts (in terms of ecological, carbon and water footprints) based on changing conditions. Users can also set targets for each footprint and then predict the changes required to achieve the targets.

User feedback was also obtained at later stages of development by demonstrating the tool to users and providing them with prototypes to test. This participatory approach had many benefits, but some limitations, the researchers suggest. For example, constant user consultation can lead to the risk of blindly implementing all feedback without careful consideration.

The tool is freely available online, but in order to make it accessible to as many users as possible, there are limits to the level of detail that is shown. However, the researchers conclude that these limitations are minimal compared to the advantages of providing a user-friendly and fit-for-purpose tool to aid policymakers in improving sustainability. Ongoing research will allow more indicators of environmental impact to be included, as well as more local information, which will ensure the footprint measures are representative of a specific area.



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2. The research behind the EUREAPA tool was funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme. See <https://www.eureapa.net>