



## **12th EELF CONFERENCE**

# *Climate adaptation and resilience: legal avenues to prepare Europe for survival in a hothouse world*

*Ghent University, Ghent (Belgium), 10-12 September 2025*

### **CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS**

The EELF annual conference is meant to be the major annual assembly of European Environmental Law scholars and practitioners. It provides a unique opportunity to meet colleagues from across Europe and to discuss topical issues of environmental law development and implementation. The conference combines plenary keynotes, parallel sessions and an attractive social program. It is addressed to both experienced senior experts and younger colleagues. **The 12th 2025 Conference is hosted by Ghent University and will be dedicated to climate adaptation and resilience.**

#### Conference theme:

2024 is now certain to be the hottest year on record, and the first in which average global temperatures exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period. Extreme climate events such as heatwaves, drought and flooding are occurring with increasing severity and frequency, also in Europe. While greenhouse gas emissions in the EU fell by 8% in 2023, mainly thanks to the boom in renewables, other parts of the world will continue to burn carbon and fossil fuels for the years to come. This renders a scenario in which more torrential downpours, hurricanes, floods but also droughts and heatwaves will become a recurring challenge, also in many parts of Europe, for the decades to come. Economic losses from extreme climate-related events in the EU have averaged €26 billion per year over the last decade. Inaction, too, has a cost: exposing today's EU economy to global warming of 1.5 to 3°C above pre-industrial levels would result in an annual economic loss of between €42 and €175 billion. While stopping the burning of fossil fuels remains crucial, climate adaptation will be indispensable, with the potential of saving hundreds, possibly thousands of lives while also generating many jobs as well as providing other societal benefits.

The EU published its first Adaptation Strategy in 2013 and another in 2021, confirming the EU's high vulnerability to climate change. Member States decide their own implementation approaches. However, while the overall EU framework for adaptation appears to be sound in terms of focus, a 2024 report of the Court of Auditors found that national climate adaptation policies often include conflicting priorities. The report also found that Member States' reporting on climate adaptation was largely insufficient, whereas the surveyed municipalities were often unaware of the existing climate adaptation strategies. A screening of a sample of climate adaptation projects moreover revealed that

more than a third of these projects had no tangible impact on increasing adaptive capacity, whereas some might even lead to maladaptation.

It is thus self-evident that climate adaptation will have to move to the forefront of the Member States' environmental and urban planning strategies in the decades to come. In a hothouse world, we will no longer have the luxury to wait and see. Stepping up existing climate adaptation efforts, will be a fundamental policy challenge. However, it is clear that prioritizing climate adaptation also raises a multitude of legal questions linked to, amongst others, climate law, disaster law, biodiversity and nature restoration law, urban planning, agricultural and fisheries policies, human rights law, intergenerational justice, property law etc.

Accordingly, the 2025 EELF Conference in Ghent is focusing on the role that the law will have to play in stimulating the much-needed paradigm shift towards climate adaptation in the EU.

### Further details on the conference themes:

Particular attention will be given to the following themes and questions:

**1. Climate law and disaster law:** *To what extent do the international climate agreements contain enforceable climate adaptation duties in light of the existing challenges? Should more explicit attention be devoted to explicit climate adaptation duties? Should we move towards tailor-made international conventions aimed at addressing climate induced disasters? Are the existing international disaster response laws, rules and principles (IDRL) sufficiently resilient to fill up possible loopholes in the context of human-driven climate ? Can the IPCC-reports provide a suitable benchmark for a judicial review of the existing climate adaptation plans? How to align the mitigation and climate adaptation duties? Has sufficiently attention been devoted to climate adaptation in the EU's Green Deal? Should the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy be updated and translated into more binding legislation?*

**2. Biodiversity, water and nature restoration law:** *Will the EU Nature Restoration Law succeed in facilitating more landscape-wide restoration efforts? Can the increased focus on quick wins for adaptation compromise the shift towards resilient landscape wide-restoration efforts? How to reinterpret the existing forestry policies at EU level in light of global warming? Does EU water law already push EU Member States towards a climate-proof water and land-use management? How to distinguish non-deterioration duties from improvement duties? To what extent does EU water law obligate Member States to envisage a large-scale restoration of wetlands as one of the key action points in the river management plans? Should we move towards 'sponge'-landscapes?*

**3. Urban and land-use planning:** *How to find win-win scenarios, both in the context of urban environments as well as on the countryside? Are there good practices in some EU Member States that merit further consideration? Should we move towards a more flexible understanding of 'building rights', with a certain expiration date? And allow for trade amongst building developers? Should we move towards a more binding integration of climate adaptation-related concerns into planning policies and building permits? How to determine the compensation schemes that apply in cases of climate adaptation? What financial compensation is required for owners that are faced with climate adaptation measures in light of the right to property?*

**4. Agriculture and fisheries:** *Is the agricultural policy in the EU really climate-proof? Do we need a more transformative shift in the current EU agricultural policies and its funding mechanisms to safeguard food security on the European continent for the next centuries? How can climate adaptive*

*strategies be implemented in fisheries policies? Are win-wins possible with renewable energy projects at sea?*

**5. Participation, EIA and access to justice:** *How to align the existing participation demands with the limited timeframe faced when preparing the European continent for more climate-fuelled disasters, such as heatwaves and storms? How to quantify and integrate the positive climate-impacts into EIA, in light of the increased attention to climate in the 2014 revised EIA Directive? How to ensure effective access to justice without providing for unnecessary delays for much-needed climate adaptation infrastructure? Should we provide more flexibility, as also happened with the RED III for renewable energy projects?*

**6. Human rights law:** *How far do the human rights-obligations of States extend in the field of climate adaptation? Are States expected to do the impossible as well? Are they expected to protect their citizens to climate-scenarios that go beyond the existing commitments and the current predictions of the IPCC? And how to balance the climate-related human rights duties with other fundamental human rights, such as the prohibition on forced displacement?*

**7. Climate justice and tort law:** *In light of the recent strides in climate attribution science, should oil majors and other fossil-dependent companies not be forced to (partially) pay to address the damage they caused? And what if a State still falls short of timely implementing the necessary adaptation measures? Can one hold a State liable for not doing enough to protect their own citizens against climate disasters? To what extent can the inherent linkages between the right to a healthy environment and climate change, usher in new avenues in light of the important position of the former in many national constitutional orders? Should recent international developments also lead to a reassessment of the right to a healthy environment in the EU legal order? What would be the impact of a more intergenerational understanding of climate adaptation duties?*

**8. Opportunities and hurdles for adaptation in law and governance:** *Is the existing distribution of competences in the context of environmental and planning law clear-cut enough to allow for effective protection of humans and the environment against global warming, in particular in the context of urgent climate-related disasters? Do we already have good practices in some EU Member States on more comprehensive and effective climate adaptation approaches? What types of innovative funding mechanisms might bolster and facilitate comprehensive climate adaptation approaches? Are the EU rules on State Aid too strict to allow a shift towards more impactful climate adaptation plans? Could property rights be used as a lever for more ambitious climate adaptation plans? Should we move towards a new conceptual understanding of property rights, possibly also including more intergenerational approaches? Are current existing legal frameworks not too rigid to accommodate technological innovation needed to effectively mitigate the impact related to climate change?*

**9. Multidisciplinary themes:** *How to prepare potentially vulnerable populations for potentially intrusive climate adaptation measures, such as expropriation? What role should law play here and what role is left to play for other disciplines, such as social psychology, sociology and mediation? How to back up climate adaptation plans with robust scientific studies?*

## Call for abstracts: practical information

We hereby invite scholars and practitioners to submit abstracts for papers to be presented at the Conference. Abstracts shall not exceed 500 words, indicate the related subtheme(s), and consist in (a) a short description of the content of the contribution and (b) up to three questions or thesis to be discussed with your international audience. Please send your abstract and a short biography of max. 150 words to [Abstracts\\_EELF@semico.be](mailto:Abstracts_EELF@semico.be) by **15th of April 2025**.

Abstracts will be reviewed on a rolling basis, as received, with a final decision to be provided by 15 May 2025 at the latest.

More information on the conference (e.g. registration form, conference venue, conference dinner, excursion, hotel accommodation,...) will be soon available on the EELF website ([www.eelf.info](http://www.eelf.info)) and the Conference webpage of [www.EELF2025.be](http://www.EELF2025.be)

Any question concerning the conference can be addressed to [EELF@semico.be](mailto:EELF@semico.be)

## Organising committee

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## About EELF

The **European Environmental Law Forum** is a **non-commercial network** aimed at enhancing professional exchange on the development and implementation of environmental law in Europe. The Forum was initiated in 2011 by a convention of 50 distinguished colleagues from 17 European countries in Leipzig, Germany. The core features of EELF are

- the **EELF online members register** as a "who's who" and "who's doing what" in European environmental law. The website gives registered members the opportunity to upload their professional profile, view and search profiles of other members, announce events and publications and use the EELF forum for debating seminal issues of European environmental law.
- the **annual EELF conference**: The EELF conference is organized by alternating hosts from across Europe, every year. It is open to academics and practitioners, and we are eager to involve both highly experienced experts and younger professionals and PhD students. The 2013 1st EELF annual conference in Groningen featured around 60 presentations from nearly 30 nations.

**EELF Membership is free of charge.** The Forum is publicly funded and is currently hosted by the German Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research. It is managed on a voluntary basis by a group of European colleagues and supported by an array of institutional partners and by an advisory group of distinguished scholars from across Europe.

**Join the Forum! For more information and free registration please visit [www.eelf.info](http://www.eelf.info)**