

2023 Activity Report



**Pesticide
Action
Network**
Europe

Introduction

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe is the regional centre for Europe within a global network of over 600 non-governmental organisations, institutions and individuals in more than 60 countries worldwide. There are four other autonomous regional centres: North America, South America, Asia-Pacific and Africa. PAN Europe counts 49 members among consumer, public health, and environmental protection organisations, women's groups and educational associations, from 28 European countries of which 23 are in the EU.

PAN Europe's main objectives are to reduce dependency on pesticides, advocate for sustainable alternatives, raise awareness of the risks of exposure to pesticides for our health and the environment, and provide its expertise for adequate implementation and further development of EU legislation and policies.

President, Koen Hertoge:

"The team and members have produced an impressive amount of work this year. It has given us many new insights and brought challenges for the coming years. We disclosed that pesticides travel much farther than previously believed, we have shown that PFAS pesticides are deliberately sprayed on fields and food. We have shown the dangers to health and environment of many problematic pesticides, some of which were finally banned. However, the urgent shift towards a healthy and biodiverse pesticide free future has been delayed by shortsighted political decisions. Every reason to persevere and double our efforts."

EU Pesticide Policy 2023

The year 2023 started with promising steps in the right direction: discussion on a new law to reduce pesticides following the successful Save Bees and Farmers European Citizens Initiative (ECI) and a major win against pesticide derogations in the EU Court of Justice. But the urgent actions to address the biodiversity crisis and direct farming away from the dead-end chemical road to a sustainable future did not materialise. Farmers protesting for a fair price, a decent income and a clear long term policy were hijacked by the intensive chemical farming lobby. Necessary measures were delayed till the next mandate.

1. Successful European Citizens Initiative

In January 2023, PAN Europe's Director, Dr Martin Dermine, had the honour to represent over one million Europeans in the hearing of the European Parliament, for the 7th successful European Citizens Initiative (ECI). As an answer to the successful Save Bees and Farmers ECI, the European Commission put forward its proposal for an ambitious new Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUR), with a 50% reduction of the uses and risks of pesticides by 2030, a mandatory implementation of Integrated Pest Management by EU farmers and a full ban on the use of pesticides in towns. This ECI has allowed to maintain citizens' voices strong in the media and to pressure Member States (MS) and the European Parliament (EP) to work with high environmental standards on the SUR proposal.


Read more:

[*Million-strong pesticides petition delivered to EU Parliament
Golden chance for EU to show it works for citizens, organisers say, as
pesticide reforms hit opposition*](#)



2. Across the EU, a vast majority of citizens want to get rid of pesticides

We presented the findings of an Ipsos public opinion poll about citizens' views on pesticide use in Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, Romania and Spain. The six countries give a good indication of opinions across the EU as a whole in all its geographical, climate, political and economic diversity. The survey shows that 82% of respondents are concerned about the environmental impact of pesticide use. And 78% agree that the use of pesticides is harming the environment, with the highest agreement in France (83%) and Poland (80%).


Read more: [Pesticides: Play it safe!](#) 

3. Supporting EU-wide pesticide reduction targets

In order to implement its objective to cut pesticides by 50% until 2030, the European Commission proposed a new Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUR). PAN Europe carried out important advocacy work to obtain the endorsement of the proposal by the European Parliament and the Council. Despite calls by many citizens and organisations and our numerous visits to Members of the European Parliament or Member States' permanent representations, the text was finally voted down by the Parliament after a massive campaign from the agribusiness lobby.

PAN Europe supported the position of financing the transition from the SUR proposal to the (next) CAP, while the organisation also called for an 80% pesticide-use reduction target in agriculture by 2030, in line with the demands of the successful European Citizens Initiative *Save Bees and Farmers*.

Read more:

[Million-strong pesticides petition delivered to EU Parliament](#)
[Golden chance for EU to show it works for citizens, organisers say, as pesticide reforms hit opposition](#)
[ENVI Committee Vote on Pesticides Regulation SUR](#) 

4. Countering agrilobby on CAP derogations

In 2023, PAN Europe strongly defended the Green Deal. To preserve a sustainable future for the next generations and farmers. In a joint open letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, more than 100 civil society organisations today called for the continuation of the Green Deal, which they described as „arguably the most important European milestone project of this century“. Demands for a further suspension of environmental requirements in the Common Agricultural Policy, (CAP) should be rejected, said the signatories.

Read more:

[EU civil society to von der Leyen: No further derogations from the environmental obligations of the CAP | PAN Europe; Yes to the Green Deal. No to the suspension of the CAP's environmental requirements | PAN Europe](#)



5. Leading the Stop Glyphosate EU coalition

The end of 2023 brought more bad news for health and environment with the renewal of the authorisation for the top selling herbicide glyphosate. In 2022 and 2023, PAN Europe has led a coalition of dozens of NGOs active across Europe to phase out glyphosate. But the top selling herbicide was reapproved in Fall 2023, to the detriment of citizens' health and the environment. No qualified majority was obtained to renew glyphosate's approval and in the end only countries representing 42% of EU citizens supported the renewal. Still, the EU Commission chose to go ahead and impose a reapproval. With the organisations in our network, we decided to challenge this decision before the EU Court. We strongly believe it goes against the EU pesticide law that gives priority to health and environment over industry interests. New scientific insights should be included in the assessment, which would inevitably lead to a ban.

Pesticide topics in 2023

1. Better protection for the environment and its species


Win for bees against pesticide derogations - EU Court of Justice

In January 2023, after a 4-year legal battle, the Court of Justice of the EU agreed with us that derogations for banned pesticides were unduly given to farmers. EU Court clarified that if a pesticide is banned in the EU for health or environmental reasons, it cannot be given a derogation for its use under the 'emergency authorisation' procedure. For years, EU Member States have given dozens of such derogations to their farmers for the use of highly toxic pesticides.

PAN Europe always insisted that the use of this article of the regulation had to respect its provisions laid in Article 1, to guarantee a high level of protection to human health and the environment. That is why in 2019 we initiated a court case against a derogation for neonicotinoids before the Belgian administrative court. We suggested that the Court sent a request for preliminary references to the Court of Justice of the EU, which called to put a stop to the misuse of derogations. This ruling generated a shockwave among the numerous EU Member States that have constantly circumvented EU bans, to the detriment of citizens' health and the environment.

Very important was that the highest EU court reminded us that health and environment should prevail over crop protection. The Court of Justice also reiterated that the precautionary principle is the basis of the pesticides decision-making in Europe.


Read more:

[EU Court of Justice: no more derogations for the use of bee-toxic neonicotinoids](#) 

Terrestrial Ecotoxicology

The European Commission and Member States have set the updating of a guidance document on terrestrial ecotoxicology as priority many years ago. But nothing is progressing and no mandate has been sent to EFSA to update a new guidance document. To speed things up, PAN Europe has collected critiques on the current guidelines from scientists and sent this feedback to the EC and an official letter to the Health and Food Safety Commissioner.


Read more:

[Stop the extinction of insects - new guidance on terrestrial ecotoxicology is a must](#) 

Bees guidance doc

PAN Europe welcomed in May 2023, the new EU Guidance Document on the risk assessment of pesticides on bees. After 10 years of political blockade, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published an updated version of this guidance. It confirms that an urgent upgrade of the way pesticide toxicity is assessed in the EU is needed. PAN Europe supports a quick implementation of the guidance at EU- and national-levels.

Read more:

[A new guidance document to better protect bees against pesticides](#) 

2. The ban of some highly toxic pesticides

In 2023, the EU became a bit of a safer place. Following our advocacy work towards the Commission and Member States, Oxamyl, Dimoxystrobin, Ipconazole were banned in the EU. We closely followed the risk assessment of these highly toxic pesticide substances and advocated towards Member States and the European Commission (EC) to obtain their ban. The insecticide Oxamyl, for example, should have been banned in 2016 when the original authorisation expired. The fungicide dimoxystrobin was authorised for use in 15 EU Member States. It is one of 'The Toxic 12' PAN Europe list that now has gone down to 10. Despite the good news, this decision should have been taken 7 years ago.

Another milestone were the first bans of endocrine-disrupting pesticides. This finally came 14 years after the decision to remove these problematic substances. The many years of delay have put the health and development of young children at unnecessary risk. However, we are happy that action is finally taken for some of the problematic substances. Together with our partners, PAN Europe has been campaigning for an environment free of hormone-disrupting chemicals for more than a decade!

However, we are far from the necessary protection

Despite the ban on some very problematic pesticides, farmers, citizens and nature throughout the EU are still not properly protected from the negative impacts of pesticides. Guidelines are co-written or heavily influenced by the pesticide producers. When newspapers such as The Guardian, Le Monde and Der Spiegel reported on chemical companies withholding studies on the neurotoxicity, the Chair of the Health and Environment Committee of the European Parliament, MEP Pascal Canfin, compared it to 'Dieselgate'. The withholding of information is just the tip of the iceberg. The problem is of much larger dimensions, with a system that keeps many dangerous pesticides on the market. It is endangering our health especially that of young children and is leading to a biodiversity crisis. We dubbed it the 'Pestgate'.

Read more:

[One of Europe's most toxic pesticides finally banned](#)

[EU finally bans 2 very toxic pesticides - including one of the Toxic 12](#)

[EU bans 6 dangerous pesticides: Herbicide S-Metolachlor and 5 Endocrine Disruptors](#)

[Pestgate: why the EU pesticide control does not work the way it should | PAN Europe; No backward step in pesticide regulation](#)



3. PFAS pesticides

In November 2023, with our member Générations Futures we revealed the presence of a subgroup of 37 “forever chemicals” (PFAS) among pesticide-active substances. These hazardous substances are exempted from the forthcoming European ‘universal’ PFAS restriction, while their use in agriculture is rising. They are not regulated by the current EU pesticide law. Immediate action is needed to get them banned and avoid further pollution.

While PFAS contamination is often attributed to ‘accidental’ industrial emissions or negligent pollution, our report uncovers an intentional and widespread source of PFAS pollution: the PFAS pesticides. Specifically, currently, 12% of the synthetic active ingredients authorised for pesticide use in the European Union are PFAS. They all contain strong carbon-fluoride bonds, enhancing their persistence in the environment, or that of their degradation products like the problematic and smallest PFAS metabolite trifluoroacetic acid (TFA). These active substances are deliberately sprayed across EU agricultural fields. They contaminate our food, water, and the environment. The EU is giving its consent, the pesticide industry is cashing its profits and society takes the burden of pollution.

Read more:

[Europe's Toxic Harvest: Unmasking PFAS Pesticides Authorised in Europe](#)



4. Co-formulants in pesticides

Co-formulants are chemicals that are added to increase the ‘efficacy’ (understand ‘the toxicity’) of pesticide active substances. Many of them are carcinogens or toxic to reproduction. Science shows that they can have strong insecticidal properties and also kill frogs. Surprisingly, some co-formulants act as a herbicide on their own. Over the last years, PAN Europe has advocated for a better regulation of co-formulants. A new implementing [regulation](#) was published by the European Commission in 2023. The proposal is unfortunately not strong enough because it requires the Member States to carry out a risk assessment, without obliging the pesticide industry to provide the needed toxicology data to carry out the assessment. Therefore, in May 2023, PAN Europe submitted a Request for Internal Review to the European Commission, asking to reconsider this regulation, as a first step of a legal procedure. On the more positive side, the Commission proposed a new regulation to better regulate safeners and synergists, aligning their assessment on that from active substances. PAN Europe and its partners took part in the public consultation.

Read more:

[PAN Europe launches two new legal procedures against the Commission to protect health and the environment against pesticides](#)
[A PAN Europe briefing on the assessment of safeners and synergists in view of the European Commission's draft Regulation](#)



5. Greenhouses Report and Court Case

The EU makes exceptions for the use of very toxic pesticides in greenhouses. To do this, the regulators presume these are closed places, with no release of pesticides into the environment. We tested rain and surface water samples for greenhouse areas in Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands and Spain. The results are alarming: we found 62 different pesticide residues. One single sample contained a cocktail of 35 pesticide residues. This report shows that greenhouses are not closed systems. They do leak toxic substances into the environment.

We also initiated a legal action before the Court of Justice of the EU, against the active substance Abamectin, a substance that is highly toxic to the environment. The European Commission has re-approved it for greenhouses only. The request is based on the fact that EFSA itself acknowledges that greenhouses are not closed systems and that pesticides can leak into the environment.

Read more:

[*It rains pesticides from greenhouses*](#)

[*The end of a myth, greenhouses are releasing pesticides into the environment*](#)

[*PAN Europe launches two new legal procedures against the Commission to protect health and the environment against pesticides*](#)



6. Addressing water pollution from pesticides

PAN Europe has actively informed the European Parliament in the discussions on the revision of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). We co-organised an event in May 2023, in the European Parliament to gather key actors who shared their expertise and views on the topic of aquatic toxicity, the importance of the polluter pays principle and the value of implementing coherent rules around water monitoring.

We also organised a workshop together with other NGOs on the Commission proposal for water pollutants with Permanent Representatives to share civil society's view and reflect on the adopted opinion of the European Parliament. Outreach and meetings with the European Council Presidency were organised to discuss their development on the list of priority substances.

Read more:

[*Under the Surface: A Deep Dive Into EU Water Pollution Monitoring and Management Practices*](#)



7. Glyphosate renewal

In 2023, PAN Europe led a massive EU campaign against the reapproval of glyphosate. Different material on the toxicity of glyphosate, from factsheets to reports, were produced and shared with the public and policy makers. A political and scientific conference was organised in the European Parliament. We took the lead on a coalition of many NGOs across the EU that advocated against the renewal of this carcinogenic herbicide. Glyphosate was still reapproved for another 10 years, but thanks to our efforts, only 42% of Member States supported the reapproval. The discussion now continues in legal procedures against the renewal decision.

Read more:

[Weed management: Alternatives to the use of glyphosate](#)

[Beneath the orange fields: Impact of Glyphosate on soil organisms](#)

[Glyphosate-based herbicides and their impact on bees' health](#)

[NGOs Challenge Glyphosate Re-approval in EU Court | PAN Europe](#)



8. Ban the export of pesticides not allowed for use in the EU

In July 2023, PAN Europe continued co-organising the campaign against the export of toxic substances to third countries. A paper on why the EU should stop the export of banned and hazardous pesticides, to support the Commission in delivering the measures it has promised, was published and submitted to the European Commission's public consultation.

Read more:

[Stop the export of EU-banned and hazardous pesticides | PAN Europe](#)



9. FAO highly hazardous chemicals

In July 2023, together with ten global civil society and Indigenous Peoples organisations representing small-scale farmers, agricultural workers, trade unions, and rights holders PAN Europe urged Mr Qu Dongyu to begin his new term as Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a positive note. We asked him to end a controversial partnership with the pesticide industry organisation CropLife signed during his previous term and to take leadership on global action to phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs).

Read more:

[FAO Director-General urged to begin new term with action to end pesticide industry partnership, phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides](#)



10. GMOs deregulations

The European Commission published its new legislative proposal to deregulate new-generation GMOs, the so-called „New Genomic Techniques“ (NGTs). PAN Europe considers that the „solutions“ proposed by the industry through NGTs are merely wishful thinking. They are the same kind of deceptions as we observed earlier with conventional GMOs. Deregulation means no testing and no labelling, so no safety checks and no freedom of choice for consumers.

Read more: [By deregulating new GMOs, the European Commission goes against the will of its own citizens](#)




PAN Europe's director Martin Dermine in Politico "Most influential"

PAN Europe Executive Director, Martin Dermine was featured on Politico's "Power 40" - Brussels class of 2023. Thanks to our work on forcing a major rethink for farmers after the win of the lawsuit at the Court of Justice of the EU, overturning EU emergency authorization allowing the use of banned pesticides.

Read more:

Martin Dermine:

[Power 40 – Brussels class of 2023 – POLITICO](#) 

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Hans Muilerman
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Natalija Svrtan
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Gergely Simon
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Tjerk Dalhuisen
Senior Communications Officer

Emilie Ballivian
Communications Assistant

Lysiane Copin
Glyphosate and co-formulants campaigns Assistant

Viktorija Miojevic
Communications and Social Media Assistant

Kristine De Schampelaere
Policy Officer (Pesticide-free agriculture)

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