

# EU biofuel regulation is not sustainable long-term

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EU biofuel regulation does not guarantee reduced climate impact—nor does it address the core issue of substantially reducing transport emissions, according to a new doctoral thesis from Lund University in Sweden.

"On a smaller scale, biofuels can be a good alternative for public transport, but we cannot solve the climate issue by simply replacing fossil fuels with biofuels. Instead, we must reduce our [energy consumption](#), as the total [energy](#) consumption within road transports is not decreasing," explains David Harnesk, researcher at the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies.

In his thesis, David Harnesk studied the effects of the EU's biofuel regulation, specifically the Renewable Energy Directive from 2009, investigating how well the directive meets its goals of reducing the climate impact from the transport sector and promoting rural development. The directive introduces a regulatory framework to ensure that, by 2020, the share of energy from renewable sources will correspond to 10% of the transport sector's energy consumption.

The study argues that EU biofuel regulation is neither environmentally sustainable nor socially beneficial in the long term. Essentially, it benefits the EU market, without taking into account the directive's impacts outside the region. He suggests that, in part, the directive and its predecessors were drafted in an effort to support the energy and agriculture sector in Europe, which was experiencing an economic crisis

at the time.

"The sustainability perspective was added afterwards. Furthermore, today it looks like the Renewable Energy Directive cannot actually guarantee reduced greenhouse gas emissions," says David Harnesk.

The thesis points out that significant environmental and social aspects are not ensured by the minimum requirements of the Renewable Energy Directive. The minimum requirements concern [greenhouse gas emissions](#), as well as land criteria for carbon storage capacity and biodiversity, and must be fulfilled in order for producers to be allowed to deliver to the EU's subsidised biofuels market.

Two examples of how the minimum requirements do not live up to the directives' climate- and rural development ambitions are land use change and poverty reduction through rural development.

He argues that the production of biofuels is part of a larger change in land use, which for some time has shifted towards large-scale crop production. This has come at the expense of smaller farms as well as more biodiverse rural areas, both within and outside Europe.

For example, in Malaysia and Indonesia, two countries that produce a large proportion of the palm oil exported to the EU, there has been a significant increase in biofuels production for European consumption. This has led to clearing of large areas of land and the release of greenhouse gases that were previously stored in the forest.

David Harnesk also analysed the EU's developmental argument that was pursued in connection with the establishment of the Renewable Energy Directive. Developing countries would benefit economically, as it would enable them to deliver biomass to a new European market, which in turn would lead to more jobs and increased growth.

"This argument has not panned out. Partly due to conflicts over land emerging due to the shift towards large-scale agriculture, and partly because many countries aiming to deliver to the EU, such as Tanzania, do not have institutions that redistribute the economic gains in ways that will benefit the local population," he says.

The EU's [biofuel](#) project diverts attention from the need for transformation that is crucial in order to create a more sustainable society, he suggests. The total energy consumption of transports must be reduced. However, today, politicians and companies rely on biofuels as some kind of universal cure for the transport sector's climate problems.

"We will not be able to avoid transports, but we can change our approach. Society's basic need for transport can be organised as a social service. This is already the case to a certain extent within public transport and mobility services. In order for the system to be sustainable, we need a combination of institutional arrangements that both reduce energy consumption and safeguard society's basic transport needs," David Harnesk concludes.

**More information:** [portal.research.lu.se/portal/s ...  
7-653262f0ef22\).html](https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/s...7-653262f0ef22).html)

Provided by Lund University

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