

Amazon wildfire crisis

Need for an international response

SUMMARY

The Amazon rainforest, which is the largest ecosystem of its kind on Earth and is shared by eight South American countries as well as an EU outermost region, was ravaged by fires coinciding with last summer's dry season. However, most of these fires are set intentionally and are linked to increased human activities in the area, such as the expansion of agriculture and cattle farming, illegal logging, mining and fuel extraction.

Although a recurrent phenomenon that has been going on for decades, some governments' recent policies appear to have contributed to the increase in the surface area burnt in 2019, in particular in Brazil and Bolivia. Worldwide media coverage of the fires, and international and domestic protests against these policies have nevertheless finally led to some initiatives to seriously tackle the fires, both at national and international level – such as the Leticia Pact for Amazonia.

Finding a viable long-term solution to end deforestation and achieve sustainable development in the region, requires that the underlying causes are addressed and further action is taken at both national and international levels. The EU is making, and can increase, its contribution by cooperating with the affected countries and by leveraging the future EU-Mercosur Association Agreement to help systematic law enforcement action against deforestation. In addition, as the environmental commitments made at the 2015 Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris will have to be renewed in 2020, [COP25](#) in December 2019 could help reach new commitments on forests.



In this Briefing

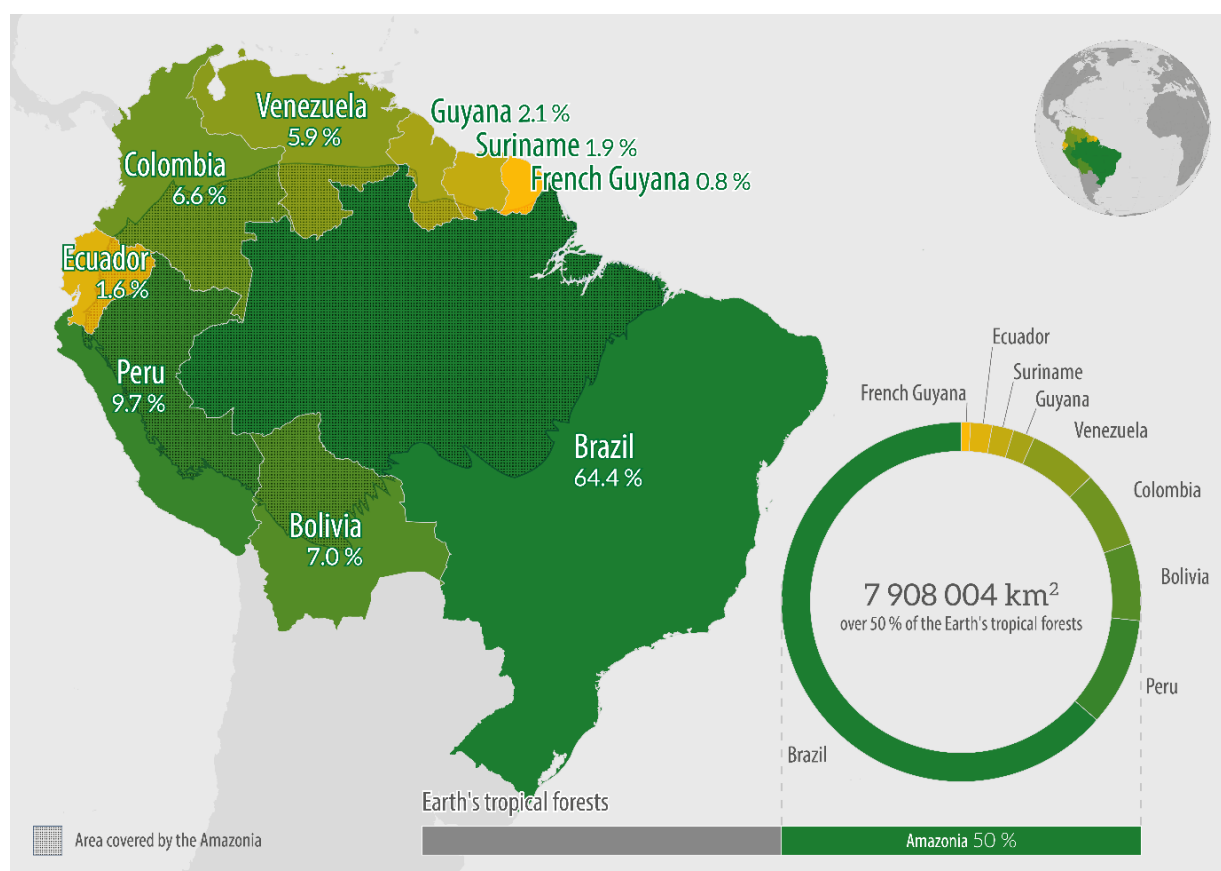
- 'Lungs of the world'
- Forest fires in 2019
- International protection efforts
- Outlook

'Lungs of the world'

Sometimes referred to as the 'lungs of the world', Amazonia is the largest tropical rainforest ecosystem on Earth (over [7.5 million km²](#)). It covers the huge hydrographic basin of the Amazon River – the largest by volume of water in the world, fed by over 1 000 tributaries and extending 7 000 km from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean. It makes up over half the wet tropical rainforest in the world, around 6 % of the Earth's total surface and 20 % of the total area of the Americas. It spreads over eight South American countries (Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Guyana and Suriname, and over 60 % of its surface is in Brazil) as well as [French Guyana](#), which is an Overseas Department-Region of France, and an European Union (EU) outermost region. The Amazon Basin represents 20 % of the total volume of fresh water flowing into the world's oceans (220 000 m³ per second), and its hydrological cycle feeds a complex system of aquifers and groundwater of nearly 4 million km².

Amazonia is also the biggest carbon sink in the world with the exception of the oceans, and is key to stabilising and regulating regional and global weather patterns, as the water vapour freed by the rainforest into the atmosphere generates '[flying rivers](#)' that bring [rain](#) to other areas in the region (as distant as Sao Paulo or Buenos Aires), which otherwise would be much drier. The region is also intrinsically related to the survival of other [adjacent eco-regions](#), such as the [Pantanal](#) (the world's biggest freshwater wetland, shared by [Brazil](#) – Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul – Bolivia and Paraguay) and the [Chaco](#) – which contains South America's second-largest forest and is shared by Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia. Amazonia is also home to [one in ten](#) known species, including over 40 000 different plant species and over 2 500 species of fish. Over 390 protected areas represent 25 % of the Amazonian biomass. As a pole of human cultural diversity, it is home to over 420 indigenous peoples, 86 languages and 650 dialects.

Figure 1 – Amazonian region



Source: EPRS, with data from [Instituto SINCHI](#) and other sources.

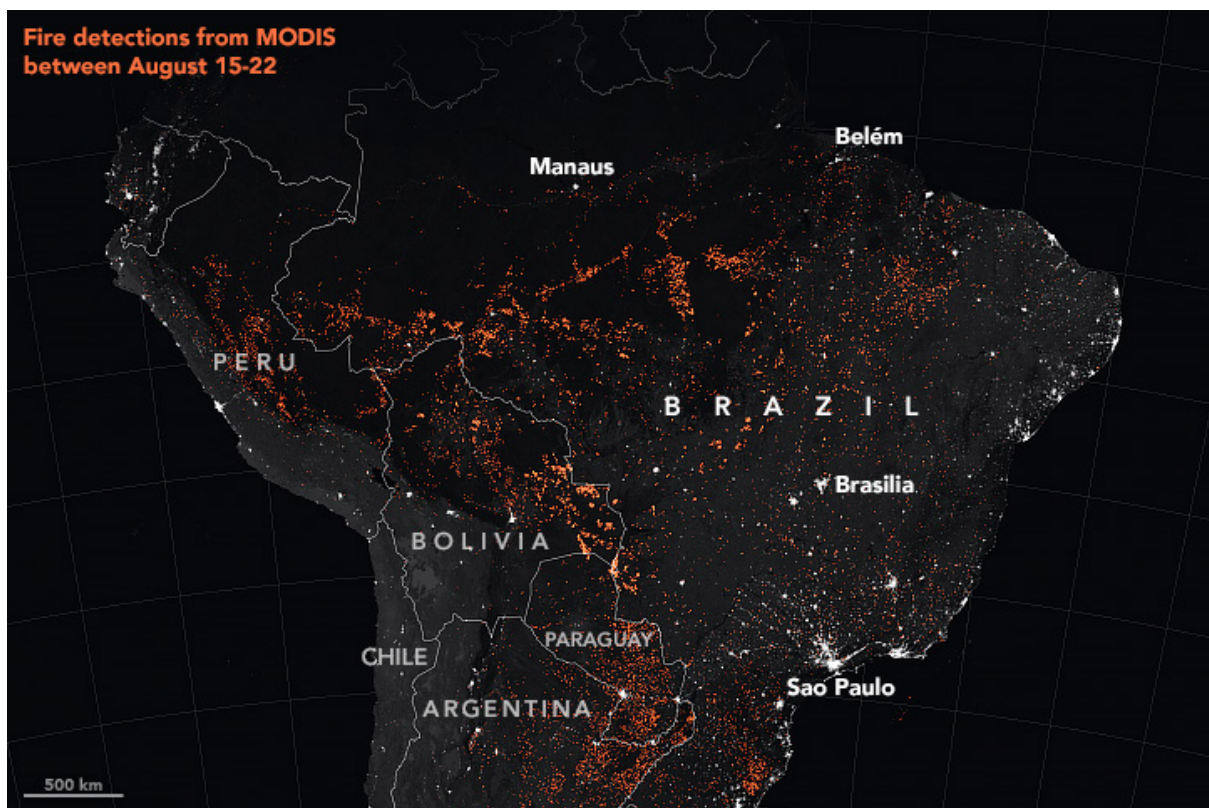
Paradise in danger

Nevertheless, the Amazon rainforest is also threatened by uncontrolled human activity in the area, such as illegal mining, expansion of the agricultural border, overfishing, poaching or deforestation. The Amazonian population has experienced rapid growth in the last few decades – from over 5 million inhabitants in the 1970s to 33.5 million in 2007, and from 3.4 % habitants per km² in the 1990s to 4.2 habitants per km² in 2007, and already represents over 11 % of the total population of the Amazonian countries. Furthermore, 63 % of this population, over 21 million people, live in cities such as Manaus or Iquitos, which has led to rapid and unplanned urban growth in the region. Moreover, international market demand leads to intensive use of Amazonian natural resources, such as wood and nuts, fossil fuels, mining products and the expansion of agriculture (mainly soya beans) and cattle farming that promotes an unsustainable production model.

Population growth, accompanied by increases in economic activities and infrastructure development in the region, have led to an important modification of land use in Amazonia, generating deforestation, fragmentation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity. For example, the [road network](#) in Brazilian Amazonia grew tenfold between 1975 and 2005, over 17 000 km per year in 2004-2007, and attracted more population to the region. It is estimated that around 20 % of the Amazon forest has already been lost, and, given the fragility of these ecosystems – most of the Amazonian forest grows on poor soil, extremely vulnerable to rain and sunlight – some studies have predicted that [by 2050](#), or even as soon as [2030](#), the loss of this tropical forest could reach a tipping point. This risk is compounded by the increased frequency of drought and the increase in forest fires. A [recent study](#) has shown that Amazonia loses around [350 km²](#) of surface freshwater every year.

Forest fires in 2019

Figure 2 – Image of fires detected by NASA MODIS, 15-22 August 2019



Source: [NASA Earth Observatory](#), Terra and Aqua MODIS, 15-22 August 2019.

Although the problem is not new, alarm was raised globally in the summer of 2019, due to a significant increase (the highest since 2010), in forest fires in the Amazon region, with the exception

that the 2010 fires were associated with a considerable period of drought, and the 2019 dry season was not particularly extreme.

Experts point to [the fact](#) that most of these fires are [not natural](#), but related to economic activity in the region, and usually happen along transport axes and areas of recent agricultural expansion. The countries most affected by the 2019 fires are Brazil and Bolivia, but other countries in the region, such as Colombia or Peru have also seen their rainforest areas affected by man-made forest fires, and deforestation is a problem for all Amazonian countries. It also affects the traditional way of life of indigenous peoples in the region, who depend on sustainable exploitation of the rainforest for their survival and can play a [decisive role](#) in the conservation of its biodiversity.

Figure 3 – Number of fires detected by the satellite of reference between 1 January and 20 October 2015-2019, by country, and % difference compared with preceding year

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Argentina	24 193 (+47 %)	27 946 (+15 %)	28 479 (+1 %)	30 946 (+8 %)	26 017 (-15 %)
Bolivia	15 053 (+7 %)	32 003 (+112 %)	24 711 (-22 %)	22 965 (-7 %)	39 054 (+70 %)
Brazil	161 949 (+15 %)	151 171 (-6 %)	165 953 (+9 %)	107 726 (-35 %)	159 149 (+47 %)
Chile	4 505 (+46 %)	2 769 (-38 %)	6 508 (+135 %)	3 338 (-48 %)	3 197 (-4 %)
Colombia	14 193 (-10 %)	17 006 (+19 %)	11 867 (-30 %)	17 342 (+46 %)	15 119 (-12 %)
Ecuador	692 (+42 %)	794 (+14 %)	576 (-27 %)	1 191 (+106 %)	721 (-39 %)
Guyana	1 124 (+25 %)	1 046 (-6 %)	583 (-44 %)	690 (+18 %)	1 110 (+60 %)
French Guyana	181 (+57 %)	210 (+16 %)	78 (-62 %)	106 (+35 %)	60 (-43 %)
Paraguay	11 193 (-6 %)	19 997 (+78 %)	22 563 (+12 %)	15 870 (-29 %)	18 951 (+19 %)
Peru	11 045 (+36 %)	12 584 (+13 %)	8 504 (-32 %)	10 464 (+23 %)	13 416 (+28 %)
Suriname	363 (+19 %)	302 (-16 %)	157 (-48 %)	273 (+73 %)	311 (+13 %)
Uruguay	1 325 (+264 %)	373 (-71 %)	321 (-13 %)	388 (+20 %)	613 (+19 %)
Venezuela	16 527 (-18 %)	18 988 (+15 %)	13 212 (-30 %)	23 011 (+74 %)	27 140 (+58 %)
Total	262 333 (+13 %)	285 189 (+8 %)	283 512 (0 %)	234 310 (-17 %)	304 858 (+17 %)

Source: [INPE, Brazil](#), Programa Queimadas, situação atual (Programme 'Fires', current situation).

Brazil

Brazil is the country worst affected by the 2019 Amazon forest fires. According to the National Institute for Space Research ([INPE](#)), satellite data showed an 84 % increase in the period between January and August 2019, over the same period in 2018.

A [report](#) published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in September 2019 showed that Amazon deforestation in Brazil 'is driven largely by criminal networks', whose ultimate goal is to 'clear the forest entirely to make room for cattle or crops'. Violence linked to illegal deforestation in the region is not new, and, according to [CPT](#), a non-profit organisation affiliated with the Catholic Church, over 300 people have been killed in the last ten years in conflicts over the use of land and resources in the Amazonia region.

Although Brazil had succeeded in reducing Amazon deforestation by 80 % between 2004 and 2012, it has begun to climb again since then (over [70 %](#) between 2004 and 2016), and had almost doubled between 2012 and 2018.

[Brazil ranks 22nd](#) in the 2019 Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), with a 'medium' overall rating, but has obtained a low rating in national climate policy, as experts consider emission targets insufficient and 'are alarmed about rapid deforestation rates'. The country had committed itself to eliminating [all illegal deforestation](#) by 2030, when it subscribed the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, but in order to do so, it will need to rein in the criminal groups operating in Amazonia and protect those who defend the forest.

The HRW report also stresses that President Jair Bolsonaro has so far shown little interest in doing either of these two things, and other analysts also place the [blame](#) on [Bolsonaro](#).

President Bolsonaro, among other things, appointed [ministers](#) that [oppose international efforts](#) to address climate change or dismiss the importance of global warming, and has cut the budget for implementing Brazil's Climate Change National Policy by 95 %.

Bolsonaro has also transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture the delimitation of lands attributed to native peoples – a former competence of [the Funai](#) (National Foundation of the Indian), a public body headed by the Justice Ministry. He has also relaxed the rules for attributing construction and mining licences in the region.

In February 2019, 21 of the 27 [regional directors](#) of the Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama) in charge of anti-logging operations were fired. During Bolsonaro's first eight months in office, the number of deforestation fines issued by Ibama fell by 38 % and deforestation almost doubled.

Bolsonaro's government has also eliminated or blocked [funds](#) destined for environmental enforcement efforts and preventing and fighting Amazon fires. According to some sources, it blocked 30 % of the national environment agency's budget for fire prevention, and reduced funds available for Ibama's environmental inspections programme by 15 %.

The Brazilian President has repeatedly said that the official data regarding forest fires were biased, which also led to the firing of the head of Brazil's space agency (INPE), [Ricardo Galvão](#) in July 2019. He has even suggested [non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#) working in the region could have set the fires to take revenge for the loss of public funds.

Bolsonaro has supported opening the forest to [commercial interests](#) and dismissed international concern about the Amazonia's future as hidden attempts by rich and developed countries to undermine Brazil's development. This attitude and the [laxity of repressive actions](#) since he assumed the Presidency in January 2019, are considered to have encouraged small farmers, farm operators, industry businessmen and criminal gangs, to burn the forest without fear of prosecution.

Greenpeace has denounced the attempt made by the Brazilian Government to [meddle](#) in the governance of the [Amazon Fund](#) – the largest international cooperation project to preserve the Amazon – as Brazil dissolved the fund's Guidance and Technical Committees by [decree](#), resulting in the blocking of [288 million Brazilian reals](#) (R\$, approximately €64.5 million) in donations from Germany and Norway. Greenpeace accuses the current government of '[systematically dismantling](#) Brazil's environmental policy'.

Brazil's recent enforcement action

Nevertheless, faced with increasing international criticism and the worsening situation, the Brazilian Government finally recognised the emergency and, on 23 August 2019, authorised the '[Garantia da Lei e da Ordem ambiental](#)' ([GLOA](#), or Guarantee of Environmental Law and Order, Decree), to help fight the fires in the Amazon forest. The decree sets out measures for the use of [armed forces](#) personnel and equipment, auxiliary forces and other agencies (at the demand of the State

governors), with the aim of fighting illegal activities and containing fire in the region. This is the first time such a measure has been adopted to combat forest fires, as it is normally used to guarantee internal security in exceptional situations (e.g. international conferences). It has been extended until [24 October 2019](#).

As a result, the [Green Brazil Operation](#) (*Operação Verde Brasil*) was launched, with the help of the armed forces, the Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama), and the Chico Mendes Institute for the Conservation of Biodiversity (ICMBio). In its [first month of operations](#), the Green Brazil Operation reported 112 violations, and applied R\$36.37 million (US\$9 million) in penalties. These penalties 'have mainly been applied by the Ibama and [ICMBio](#) for illegal activities such as strip-mining¹ and illegal mining'. According to the [report](#) by the Ministry of Defense, 8 170 people took part in the operation during its first month (army personnel and staff from local, state and government agencies, and a new Joint Command was created in Mato Grosso (centre-west Brazil), which added to the two already based in Manaus (Amazonia State, north-west) and Belem (State of Pará, north).

Bolivia

Forest fires have especially affected the [Bolivian Chiquitania](#), a bio-diverse dry forest region adjacent to the Amazon basin, where at least four million hectares are estimated to have burnt in the Santa Cruz region alone in the summer of 2019. Environmentalists and critics accuse President Evo Morales of promoting forest burning to boost crop growth and cattle breeding, and denying the problem for too long. In July 2019, the Bolivian Government authorised 'controlled burning' in the Santa Cruz and Beni departments ([Supreme Decree 3973](#), 10 July 2019), to encourage agricultural and cattle farming activities. Earlier, in September 2015, Morales had introduced another law ([Ley 741](#)) authorising forest clearing of up to 20 hectares for small and community or collective properties for agricultural activities.

On 25 August 2019, President Morales expressed his readiness to [accept international aid](#) to fight forest fires, and on 27 August he declared an '[ecological pause](#)' in the Chiquitania – in the areas affected by fires – forbidding land sales. A few days before, Morales had set up an environmental emergency cabinet, presided by himself, hired a [tanker aircraft](#) from the United States of America to fight the fires, and agreed to join efforts with neighbouring Paraguay. Morales even suspended his electoral campaign for 'at least one week' to focus on managing the areas threatened by the fires. It is highly likely that his handling of the fires influenced the [controversial outcome](#) of the October 2019 Presidential elections. Forest fires in Bolivia are considered to have contributed to causing daytime [darkening of the skies](#) in São Paulo on 19 August 2019.

Other Amazonian countries

Although the problem of forest fires in the Amazon in 2019 has mainly affected Brazil and Bolivia (and the [Chaco](#) area of Paraguay outside the Amazonia), other countries in the region are also hit by fires and deforestation, or have policies in place that could favour destruction of the rainforest. [Colombian Amazonia](#) suffers similar deliberately set fires. In March 2019, the Colombian Government approved a [National Development Plan](#) that could result in the annual destruction of up to 280 000 hectares between 2018 and 2020. The [Peruvian rainforest](#) has lost over 2.1 hectares since 2001, with many small fires, mainly caused by migratory agriculture. From 2012 to 2016, Peru lost over 94 000 hectares to forest fires (62 000 in 2016), and is also affected by cocoa and oil palm plantations, illegal coca plantations and illegal mining. Deforestation in Venezuela is mainly caused by illegal mining, as 80 % of illegal mines in the Amazon region are on [Venezuelan](#) soil.

International protection efforts

Although Amazonia is widely recognised as a public good for the whole planet, some countries may see international action as interfering with their national sovereignty over their territories. At the

same time, to be most effective, such action needs to address the entire Amazonian territory. International structures are already in place for the protection of the region, such as the Organisation of the Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation ([OTCA](#), an intergovernmental organisation established by eight Amazonian countries, where summits at presidential level are not envisaged), or the [Amazon Fund](#) (whose main [donors](#) are Germany – KFW Entwicklungsbank – and [Norway](#)). However, the alarm raised by the 2019 Amazon forest fires has given rise to other international cooperation initiatives, like the G7 aid offer or the Leticia Pact, signed by the Amazonian governments. The [Development Bank for Latin America-CAF](#) announced a US\$500 million donation. The European Union also contributes to these efforts (see below).

Leticia Pact for Amazonia

At the initiative of the presidents of [Colombia and Peru](#), on 6 September 2019, the Heads of State and Heads of Delegation of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru and Suriname met in the Amazonian town of Letizia (a sort of 'Amazonian Schengen' in Colombia, bordering with Brazil and Peru), to sign the '[Leticia Pact for Amazonia](#)'. This document provides a roadmap to coordinate actions to end devastation of the region's biodiversity. The Pact has [eight](#) main objectives/key points:

- 1 **Creation of a cooperation network to deal with natural disasters**, to coordinate their national systems to deal more effectively with regional emergencies such as forest fires.
- 2 **Focus on the areas affected by fires and illegal mining**, to restore, recover and reforest the areas affected by fires and illegal activities, and recover the affected ecosystem and species.
- 3 **Establishment of an early warning system on deforestation and degradation** to better prevent disasters.
- 4 **Closer monitoring of climate and biodiversity**, as well as water resources, based on the water basin and its communities.
- 5 **Promotion of sustainable use of ecosystems**, and responsible use of resources to promote sustainable value chains and methods of production, respecting biodiversity.
- 6 **Empowerment of indigenous women**, as well as all Amazonian indigenous peoples, so that they may play a greater role in the preservation and sustainable development of the region.
- 7 **Education campaigns** to raise awareness of 'the role and function' of the Amazonian region and the threats and challenges faced by the forests and their population.
- 8 **Strengthening of financial mechanisms**, both private and public, to protect Amazonia and implement the Pact.

The document was signed by the presidents of Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador; as well as by the Vice-President of Suriname and the Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs, representing President Bolsonaro, as well as the Minister for Natural Resources of Guyana. The signatories also expressed their commitment to coordinating the formulation of an action plan and to organising follow-up meetings to evaluate its formulation and implementation. They also signalled their intention to cooperate with other interested countries and regional organisations.

Some [commentators](#) have criticised the Pact's vagueness, the lack of concrete targets and action envisaged, or the absences of the Brazilian and Venezuelan presidents (the latter was not invited, due to the legitimacy conflict between Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó). They argue that the Pact is no more than 'a declaration of intent' that will not save the rainforest. More precisely, one of the main criticisms made prior to the celebration of the summit was the [non-respect](#) of previous pacts and agreements aiming to protect Amazonia.

United Nations

Forest protection rose to the forefront of the international agenda for the first time at the United Nations (UN) 'Earth Summit' held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which led to the adoption of the [Agenda 21](#) comprehensive plan of action and the [UN Forest Principles](#) (a first, non-legally binding global consensus on the sustainable management of forests), which called for all countries 'to make efforts towards reforestation and forest conservation'. The intergovernmental panel and forum established to coordinate these efforts was replaced in 2000 by the UN Forum on Forests ([UNFF](#)). The UNFF meets every year to monitor progress on the implementation of the [Global Forest Goals](#)² of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, developed in 2017 as a response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Rio Earth Summit also adopted the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)), as well as the UN [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and the [Convention to Combat Desertification](#). The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC, and meets every year since 1995. The issue of 'reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries and approaches to stimulate action' was first introduced as an [agenda item](#) in the COP 11th session held in Montreal in 2005. Since then, the COP has adopted a series of decisions to fight deforestation, such as the [Warsaw Framework for REDD-plus](#) in 2013, which included 'addressing the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation'. UN-REDD is a collaborative programme on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, launched in 2008 by the UN, which promotes the involvement of all stakeholders. In 2015, the COP21 launched the [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#), the first 'global, universally binding global climate deal', adopted by 196 countries. Under Article 5 of the Agreement, countries are encouraged to 'take action to conserve and enhance' greenhouse gas sinks and reservoirs, including forests. To this effect, they should strive to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and promote sustainable management of forests. Although the issue of forests and Amazonia will feature on the agenda of the COP25 in Madrid (2-13 December 2019, under the Presidency of Chile), there is [uncertainty](#) as to whether concrete measures for its recovery and preservation will be adopted. A [Pre-COP25](#) preparatory meeting was held in Costa Rica in October 2019. As the five-year [commitments](#) made at the 2015 COP in Paris will expire in 2020, the COP25 will be key to reaching the 2020 summit with new, [more ambitious commitments](#) to fight climate change, including those on forest conservation.

G7 Summit

At the [G7 summit](#) held in Biarritz (France) in August 2019, the leaders of the G7 group of countries offered [US\\$22 million](#) in aid, available immediately, to fight the Amazonia fires. France also offered 'concrete support with military in the region'. However, the Brazilian Government rejected this offer, apparently on the grounds of a disagreement with some of French President Emmanuel Macron's declarations. [President Bolsonaro](#) implied that accepting this aid would amount to putting Brazil's sovereignty over its Amazonian territories into question, and he and his government have repeatedly rejected the [internationalisation of efforts](#) to protect the Amazon.

EU action

In July 2019, the European Commission adopted a [communication](#) on stepping-up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests, aiming 'to protect and grow the world's forest cover to improve people's health and livelihoods and ensure a healthy planet for our children and grandchildren'. This is in line with the EU objective 'to halt global forest cover loss by 2030' and the Union's international commitments, and responds to the calls of the European Parliament, the Council, and stakeholders from the public and private sectors. It proposes a 'new set of actions and aspirations', building on previous EU initiatives, such as the [2013 EU forest strategy](#), the [EU biodiversity strategy to 2020](#), the [7th environment action programme](#) and the Commission's '[clean planet for all](#)' strategic long-term vision for a climate neutral economy by 2050. The communication also follows the Commission's reflection paper '[Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030](#)', which

stresses that EU consumption of some products is one of the main drivers of environmental impacts, 'creating high pressure on forests in non-EU countries and accelerating deforestation' and encourages the consumption of 'products from deforestation-free supply chains' in the EU.

In its July 2019 communication, the Commission proposes a 'partnership approach', consisting of 'close cooperation with producer and consumer countries as well as business and civil society'. It establishes **five priorities** to step-up EU action against deforestation:

1. **Reduce the EU consumption footprint on land and encourage the consumption of products from deforestation-free supply chains in the EU** (by making it easier for stakeholders to 'identify, promote and purchase such products', e.g. through strengthening standards and certification schemes);
2. **Work in partnership with producing countries to reduce pressures on forests and to 'deforest-proof' EU development cooperation** (the EU is a leader in this area through its commitment to multilateral action and the forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) action plan (see below), or by promoting sustainability in trade);
3. **Strengthen international cooperation to halt deforestation and forest degradation and encourage forest restoration;**
4. **Redirect finance to support more sustainable land-use** (the EU external investment plan (EIP, launched in 2017 to attract more investment into EU neighbourhood and African countries) and Regional Blending Facilities are efficient tools to this effect);
5. **Support the availability of, quality of, and access to information on forests and commodity supply chains. Support research and innovation.**

The Commission communication has already been welcomed as an important step by some relevant stakeholders, such as the NGO [Rainforest Alliance](#).

The EU established its forest law enforcement, governance and trade ([FLEGT](#)) [action plan](#) in 2003, aimed at reducing illegal logging 'by strengthening sustainable and legal forest management, improving governance and promoting trade in legally produced timber'. The plan contained [seven measures](#) (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4 – FLEGT action plan



Source: European Commission; * For a definition of [conflict timber](#), see [endnote](#)³.

In the Amazon region, the EU has a FLEGT voluntary partnership agreement (VPA)⁴ with [Guyana](#) (agreed in November 2018).

The EU also contributes to combating tropical deforestation through its development aid. For instance, it commits around [€25 million a year](#) to initiatives piloting the global initiative on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Among other such initiatives to reduce deforestation in developing countries were the [EU REDD Facility](#) (2011-2017, with an EU contribution of €8 million); or the [EU FLEGT Facility](#), to support the implementation of the EU FLEGT action plan (2010-2018, with a €14 million EU contribution and the participation of eight Amazon region countries⁵ in [projects with the EU](#)).

The EU has also included [environmental provisions](#) in the trade and sustainability chapter of the [trade pillar](#) of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement; these include some commitments to [fight deforestation](#) and promote sustainable management of forests, as well as regarding the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements ratified by both sides, such as the Paris Agreement or the CITES Convention on Wildlife Trade. However, various NGOs, lawmakers, scientists, and even some [Members](#) of the European Parliament, have raised [concerns](#) about the [enforceability](#) of these commitments. In February 2018, the European Commission published a [Commission non-paper](#) entitled 'Feedback and way forward on improving the implementation and enforcement of trade and sustainable development (TDS) chapters in EU free trade agreements', which signals 15 actions to increase enforceability.

Joint environmental conservation actions in the region are also a priority area in the [Interreg V-Amazonia](#) cross-border cooperation programme for 2014-2020, agreed between the EU outermost region of French Guyana, Suriname and neighbouring Brazilian States of Amapá and Amazonas. The EU has also established an [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) to provide emergency support in response to disasters, including forest fires, for any country in the world that requests assistance. The mechanism has been activated more than 300 times since 2001; five times in response to [forest fire emergencies](#) in Europe. In its 2014-2020 budget, the EU decided to [integrate climate change](#) mitigation into all its major spending programmes and to make at least 20 % of this expenditure climate related. Furthermore, to help achieve the EU's climate goals, the European Commission has proposed to further strengthen climate action through the new long-term budget 2021-2027.

New EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has proposed a [European Green Deal](#) to combat climate change, which shall also include a biodiversity strategy for the next ten years, and has declared her will to make the EU take a leading role in protecting biodiversity. The EU and its Member States take part in the [COP25](#) Climate Change Conference.

European Parliament contribution

On 28 November 2019, ahead of the Madrid UN Climate Change Conference ([COP25](#), 2-13 December 2019), the EP adopted a [resolution](#) declaring a climate and environmental emergency in Europe and globally. And a separate resolution on COP25, urging the EU to submit to the UN Convention on Climate Change its strategy to reach climate neutrality by 2050, and calling on the new European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to include a 55% reduction target of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 in the [European Green Deal](#) proposed by her. The President of the European Parliament David Maria Sassoli will attend the Conference's official opening, and an EP delegation led by Bas Eickhout (Greens/EFA, The Netherlands) will be present at the COP25 discussions.

Over the last legislature (2014-2019), the European Parliament adopted several resolutions directly or indirectly dealing with the subject of deforestation in third countries. On 14 March 2019, the EP adopted a resolution on the [annual strategic report](#) on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), stressing the role of development cooperation in supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda in developing countries. Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on 11 September 2018 on 'Transparent and accountable management of natural resources in developing countries: the case of forests', noting that 'more than half of the

commodities produced and exported onto the global market are products of illegal deforestation'; pointing out that ... 'it is estimated that 65 % of Brazil's and 9 % of Argentina's beef exports, 41 % of Brazil's, 5 % of Argentina's and 30 % of Paraguay's soy exports are likely to be linked to illegal deforestation'; and calling 'on the Commission to include ambitious forest-specific provisions in all EU trade and investment agreements', which should be binding and enforceable. On 6 July 2017, Parliament adopted a resolution on [EU action for sustainability](#); and another resolution on 4 April 2017 on [palm oil and deforestation of rainforests](#). Earlier, in 2015, the European Parliament also adopted resolutions on 'Towards a new [international climate agreement](#) in Paris' and on '[A new EU Forest Strategy](#): for forests and the forest-based sector'.

During the Strasbourg plenary session of 17 September 2019, Members discussed the [Amazon forest fires](#) with (then) Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella and the President in Office of the [Council](#), Tytti Tuppurainen.

Outlook

The problem of forest fires in the Amazonia disappears from the headlines every autumn with the arrival of the rains that put an end to the [dry season](#), only to emerge again, with more or less virulence, the [following year](#). Nevertheless, the underlying problems causing the devastation of the world's largest rainforest will not disappear so easily. Experts believe that the current pattern of deforestation in the Amazon region, compounded by climate change, can lead to irreversible damage to biodiversity and ecosystems, once a tipping point is reached (40 % of total forest area lost or a temperature rise of 4°C). For the Amazon rainforest to survive, they argue, we need a new '[sustainable development paradigm](#)', which considers the Amazon a 'global public good', a source of 'biological assets' that enable 'the creation of high-value products and ecosystem services'.

The ecological emergency created by the 2019 Amazon forest fires has served to raise awareness of the need for increased cooperation both between the countries of the region and at global level, as well as between the different stakeholders – politicians, farmers, business, native peoples, consumers ... – in order to find an effective solution to deforestation and ensure sustainable development in the region.

The Leticia Pact, although criticised by some for its vagueness, shows that governments of Amazonian countries, including those of Brazil and Bolivia, are aware of the need to increase and improve cross-border cooperation on the issue. Nevertheless, it is still too early to judge, as the follow-up to the pact remains to be seen. In any case, governments should go beyond declarations of intention and aspirational language and identify more concrete steps of cooperation in practice.

International fora and institutions such as the [United Nations](#), who consider rainforest protection one of the top priorities to stop climate change, or the G7, have also shown genuine concern for this issue and can provide an invaluable contribution. The UNFCCC COP25 of December 2019 can also provide new impetus to global action to fight deforestation and protect Amazonia.

The EU is also contributing to Amazonian conservation through its various initiatives, and could increase its contribution, for instance by further expanding the EU's forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) projects in the region, or by leveraging the future EU-Mercosur Association Agreement to ensure that systematic law enforcement action against deforestation of the Amazon remains high on the agendas of Amazonian governments, as well as with its new European Green Deal. There is also growing consideration of the need to recognise [ecocide](#) as an international crime, in order to help save the Amazon and other threatened ecosystems.

MAIN REFERENCES

Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (OTCA), [Environment Outlook in the Amazonia-GEO Amazonia](#); United Nations Environment Programme, 2009.

European Commission, [Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests](#), Communication, COM (2019) 352 final, 23 July 2019.

Human Rights Watch, [Rainforest Mafias](#): How Violence and Impunity Fuel Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon, 17 September 2019.

Nobre, C. A. ; Sampaio, G; Borma, Laura S; Castilla-Rubio, J.C; Silva, J.S; Cardoso, M; [Land-use and climate change risks in the Amazon and the need of a novel sustainable development paradigm](#); *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 113(39): 10759–10768, September 2016.

Ramírez, J.C et al; [Amazonia posible y sostenible](#); CEPAL, [year missing].

Sabogal, César; [Informe Regional sobre la situación de los bosques en la región Amazónica](#); OTCA, GIZ, June 2018.

Erbach, Gregor; [COP25 climate change conference in Madrid](#); EPRS, 'At a glance' note, 22 November 2019.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Strip mining removes soil and rock above a layer, followed by the removal of the exposed mineral. The 'cycle of operations' consists of 'vegetation clearing, soil removal, drilling and blasting of overburden (if needed), stripping, removal of the...mineral commodity, and reclamation' (smoothing and revegetation of the spoil areas) ([Encyclopedia Britannica](#)).
- ² There are six goals: 1) Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, ... and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation and contribute to the global effort of addressing climate change; 2) enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people; 3) increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; 4) mobilise significantly increased, new and additional financial resources for the implementation of sustainable forest management and strengthen scientific and technical cooperation and partnerships; 5) Promote governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the United Nations forest instrument, and enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and 6) Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels ([United Nations](#)).
- ³ The term 'conflict timber' is used to refer to timber 'produced and sold to finance armed conflict', that 'has been traded at some point in the chain of custody by armed groups'. It is not necessary illegal (World Wildlife Fund, [GFTN Guide to Legal and Responsible Sourcing](#)).
- ⁴ A [VPA](#) is a bilateral trade agreement between the EU and a timber-exporting third country, guaranteeing that any wood exported to the EU from that country comes from legal sources, thereby assisting that country to end illegal logging. The agreement is voluntary, but legally binding for both sides once it has entered into force.
- ⁵ Guyana (9 projects); Colombia (9); Brazil (8); Peru (5); Ecuador (4); Bolivia (2); Venezuela (1); and Suriname (1 project).

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

© European Union, 2019.

Photo credits: © Pedarilhosbr / Shutterstock.com

eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)

