

# Executive Summary

## Overview

Current patterns of resource use are pushing the planet well beyond safe ecological limits, even as millions of people are still struggling to satisfy basic needs. The message is clear: the way we currently meet our needs and pursue our aspirations cannot continue without risking severe consequences. Unsustainable lifestyles – particularly in high-income countries and among the wealthiest people – are driving growing pressures on land, water, species and climate. This pressure is mainly due to what we eat, how we travel, how we live and what we buy. Rethinking how needs are met more equitably and sustainably requires a focus on key impact areas, a clear understanding of how provisioning systems shape individual behaviour, and stronger action by governments, the private sector and communities to make sustainable living the default.

This report is written for policymakers, as well as for experts and stakeholders working across biodiversity, sustainability and behaviour change. It explores how food, mobility, housing and consumer goods connect to the drivers of biodiversity loss and environmental impacts. It identifies high-impact areas and outlines evidence-based strategies for action, providing both a strategic framing and a practical policy toolkit for

making lifestyle transition a central pillar of nature-positive development.

The report argues that transitioning to more sustainable lifestyles must become a core strategy for halting and reversing biodiversity loss. Protecting nature cannot be achieved solely through conservation and restoration; it also requires reshaping the social, economic and cultural systems that drive demand for land, materials and energy in the first place. By aligning how societies meet everyday needs with ecological limits and social equity, policymakers can address the root causes of biodiversity loss while delivering co-benefits for climate, health and well-being.

The report advances three core propositions:

- Lifestyles are a major driver of biodiversity loss and climate change; they are therefore a key lever for reversing these crises.
- Lifestyle impacts can be measured and managed through robust, consumption-based indicators.
- Sustainable lifestyles can be mainstreamed through systemic, policy-led transformations of markets, infrastructures and social norms.

### Quantifying the biodiversity impacts of lifestyles

Central to this report is the calculation of a biodiversity footprint of everyday lifestyles. While carbon footprints are now widely used to guide climate action, biodiversity impacts have remained largely invisible to decision-makers, whether individuals, businesses or government representatives. The biodiversity footprint fills this gap by tracing household consumption – across food, mobility, housing and consumer goods – through global supply chains, revealing the resulting pressures it places on ecosystems and species.

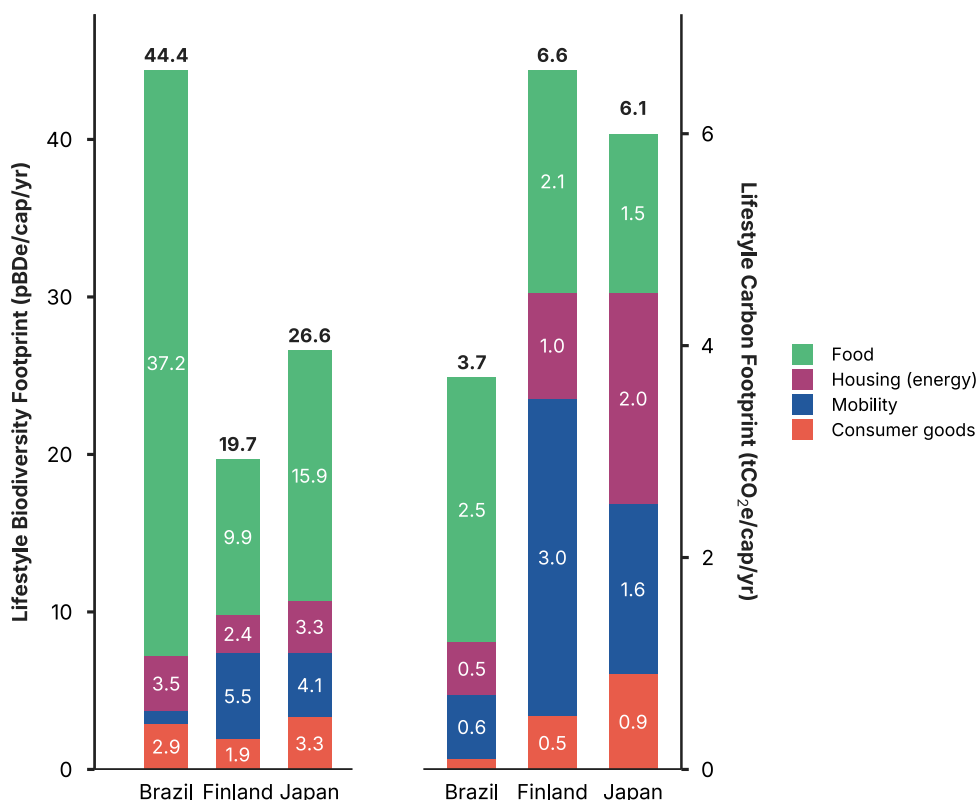
The case studies of Brazil, Finland and Japan show that lifestyle choices cause substantial and highly uneven pressures on biodiversity, often beyond national borders. What people eat, how they travel, the living space they occupy and the goods they purchase all affect land use, pollution, climate change and resource extraction in various places across the world.

The results reveal three crucial insights:

- Food is the dominant driver of biodiversity loss, especially diets rich in animal-based products.
- Mobility and household energy use also contribute substantially to biodiversity loss and dominate climate impacts, providing strong opportunities for co-benefits when low-carbon and nature-positive solutions align.
- Consumer goods and housing also matter for biodiversity, particularly where systems designed for fossil-based materials, large living spaces and inefficient infrastructure lock societies into high-impact patterns.

By comparing the biodiversity and carbon footprints of lifestyles (Figure A), the report shows that many of the most effective climate actions – such as shifting to plant-rich diets, reducing car dependency and improving energy efficiency – also deliver large biodiversity gains. At the same time, it highlights the need to anticipate and manage trade-offs, for example

Figure A: Lifestyle biodiversity and carbon footprint across countries.



Left bar = lifestyle biodiversity footprint (pico biodiversity equivalents, pBDe/capita/year);

Right bar = lifestyle carbon footprint (tCO<sub>2</sub>e/capita/year).

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between land use for climate mitigation and biodiversity conservation, underlining the importance of integrated policy design.

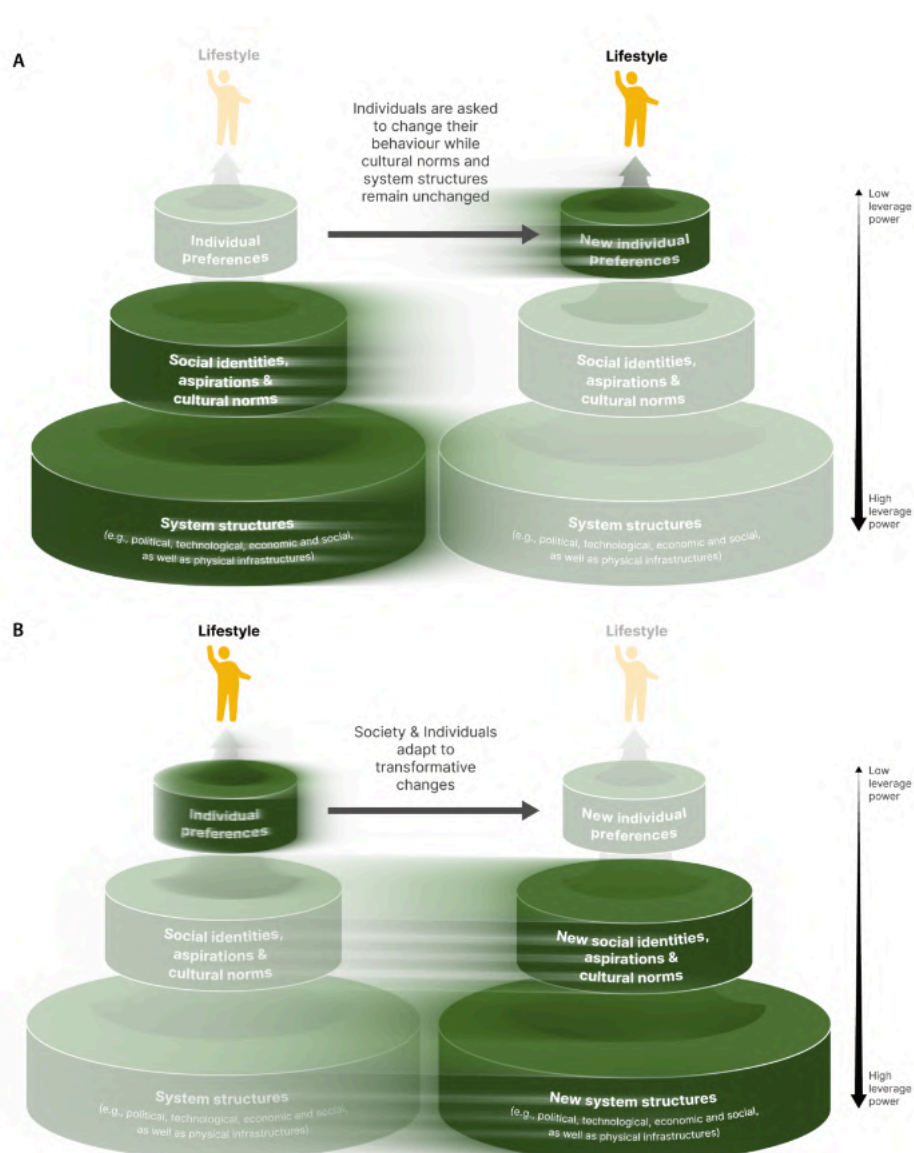
Linking biodiversity loss to lifestyles transforms how policy priorities can be set. By connecting biodiversity impacts to how people eat, travel, live and consume, policymakers can clearly identify high-impact lifestyle domains and behaviours where targeted interventions can deliver the greatest benefits for nature, climate and people.

### Why lifestyles are a systems issue

Lifestyles are not simply the outcome of individual choice. They are shaped by two interlocking systems:

- Provisioning systems – how food, housing, mobility and goods are designed, produced, traded, distributed, priced and made available.
- Aspirational systems – the cultural values, social norms, narratives and status signals that define what is considered desirable and normal.

Figure B: Aligning systems to enable lasting lifestyle change.



Individual behaviour change is unlikely to persist when provisioning systems and cultural norms continue to favour high-impact options. Aligning what is available with what is socially desirable creates conditions in which nature-positive choices become the default. Choice-editing provides a policy approach to enable this systemic shift.

Today, these systems largely reward overconsumption. Car-dependent mobility, meat-heavy diets, large homes, fast fashion and disposable goods are often the easiest and most heavily promoted options. Advertising, media and economic incentives reinforce material-intensive notions of success, while sustainable alternatives tend to remain low-status, costly or inconvenient.

While individual choices matter, they are insufficient. Transforming lifestyles requires systemic change, not just awareness-raising. Society, with governments playing a key role, must transform both the material factors that shape lifestyle choices and the cultural meanings attached to consumption and various modes of needs-satisfaction, so that nature-positive ways of living become the default (Figure B).

### Choice-editing: making sustainable options the default

This report identifies choice-editing as a powerful way for governments to turn this systems perspective into practical action. Choice-editing means deliberately redesigning markets, infrastructures and social environments so that high-impact options are progressively phased out and low-impact, nature-positive options become easier, cheaper and more attractive.

A core contribution of the report is a structured collection of more than 100 existing policy measures from around the world that already apply choice-editing across food, mobility, housing and consumer goods (Table A). Together, these examples provide policymakers and practitioners with a practical reference for replication, adaptation and scaling.

Table A: Examples of existing policies across key lifestyle domains. See Chapter 5 for the full set of policy examples.

<p><b>Food</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiscal incentives: <a href="#">Germany</a> uses differentiated VAT rates to support a shift toward plant-based diets.</li> <li>• Subsidy reforms: The <a href="#">Netherlands</a> is redirecting subsidies to favour more sustainable food production.</li> <li>• Guideline updates: <a href="#">Nordic countries</a> have updated national dietary guidelines to promote sustainable eating habits.</li> </ul> <p><b>Mobility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban design: <a href="#">Barcelona</a> and <a href="#">Cape Town</a> are reallocating street space to prioritise shared and active mobility.</li> <li>• Awareness campaigns: <a href="#">Italy</a> is reshaping transport aspirations through targeted media and behavioural campaigns.</li> <li>• Fiscal measures: <a href="#">Scotland</a> is introducing taxes on private jet flights to better reflect their climate impacts and curb highly carbon-intensive travel.</li> </ul> <p><b>Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small housing: <a href="#">Japan</a> is implementing zoning laws that encourage small housing, reducing the impact on land and energy use.</li> <li>• Energy-efficient appliances: <a href="#">India</a> is encouraging the manufacturing and adoption of energy-efficient appliances to reduce climate change impact on nature.</li> <li>• Land-use planning: <a href="#">Nairobi</a> is dedicating land to forests and greenery to prevent sprawling residential or industrial developments in those areas.</li> </ul> <p><b>Consumer Goods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficiency policies: <a href="#">Amsterdam</a> is adopting sufficiency-focused policies to reduce material throughput.</li> <li>• Progressive taxation: The <a href="#">United States</a> is trialling taxes targeting high-impact consumption.</li> <li>• Regulatory bans: <a href="#">Naples</a> is introducing bans on luxury goods to curb excessive consumption.</li> </ul>
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They demonstrate that many of the tools needed to shift lifestyles already exist, and that the main challenge lies not in invention but in coordination, ambition and policy integration.

When bundled into coherent policy packages, choice-editing aligns individual intentions with systems conditions, making sustainable lifestyles realistic and desirable.

### **Measuring what matters**

To steer this transition, policymakers need better data. Current biodiversity frameworks still focus mainly on ecosystems within national borders, even though much of the damage is driven by consumption along global supply chains.

This report therefore calls for:

- Strengthening the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including Target 16, with indicators that capture consumption-driven biodiversity loss.
- Standardising national consumption data in physical units, disaggregated by socio-economic groups.
- Integrating consumption-based biodiversity and carbon footprints into national and international reporting systems.

The biodiversity footprint case studies of Brazil, Finland and Japan demonstrate the feasibility of assessing lifestyle impacts on biodiversity and show how this can generate policy-relevant insight. Making lifestyle impacts visible allows governments to prioritise action, track progress and align national policies with global goals.

### **Co-creating a nature-positive future**

A nature-positive future is one in which human well-being improves while ecosystems recover and thrive. Achieving this requires new visions of good living based on health, sufficiency, equity and care for the natural world.

This transition must be built with society, not for it. Policymakers, businesses, civil society and communities must work together to co-design pathways that reflect diverse needs and values. Indigenous peoples and local communities, artists and cultural actors, youth, consumer groups and marketers all have vital roles to play in reshaping what is considered normal, desirable and meaningful.

Participatory processes and cultural engagement can build legitimacy, trust and political momentum for ambitious change.

### **From momentum to mainstream**

Momentum is building. Policies that reshape choices, shift values and support sustainable lifestyles are already being implemented, with tangible results. Yet broader and faster uptake is needed. By combining robust footprint metrics, systemic policy tools and inclusive governance, countries can move beyond incremental change toward lifestyles that allow people and nature to thrive together.

The transition to nature-positive lifestyles is not about sacrifice. It is about creating societies that live well within ecological limits – healthier, more equitable and more resilient for generations to come. By making sustainable living the new normal, through ambitious policy, inclusive collaboration and cultural transformation, policymakers can help unlock a future in which both people and nature thrive.