

## ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME AS A BARRIER TO SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

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### ABSTRACT

Environmental crime represents a significant barrier to the global sustainability transition by compromising environmental integrity, economic stability, and social well-being. The study assesses the multifaceted impacts of illegal activities, including wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, pollution, and illicit waste disposal, on sustainable development pathways. Utilizing interdisciplinary perspectives from environmental economics, criminology, and sustainability science, the analysis explores how environmental crime disrupts resource efficiency, weakens institutional frameworks, and erodes public trust in governance systems. Drawing on case studies from the European Union, particular emphasis is placed on regulatory gaps, corruption, and transnational networks that enable these activities, thereby complicating enforcement and policy implementation. The study highlights the economic consequences of environmental degradation, such as biodiversity loss, reduced ecosystem services, and long-term financial burdens on governments and communities. The research findings indicate that addressing environmental crime is essential for effective and equitable sustainable development, necessitating coordinated action among policymakers, businesses, and civil society to mitigate risks and strengthen resilience. Strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing cross-border cooperation, and leveraging technological innovations such as environmental monitoring systems are essential for effective prevention and enforcement. Furthermore, integrating anti-crime measures into sustainability strategies can enhance policy coherence and reinforce economic and environmental resilience in the long term.

**Keywords:** Environmental crime, sustainability, transition, EU countries, prevention.