



Policy Brief: A Climate for Sufficiency.

**Pathways for 1.5-Degree Lifestyles in the PSLifestyle
countries.**



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A Climate for Sufficiency

Policy Pathways for 1.5-Degree Lifestyles in the PSLifestyle countries

PSLifestyle is a pan-European research project funded by the European Commission. It has developed a Lifestyle Test to help individuals adopt positive, sustainable, and healthier lives and to reduce their climate impact. By taking the Test, individuals can see how their daily activities impact their carbon footprint. They also receive personalised tips to help reduce their footprint through lifestyle changes that can be tailored to fit their needs and capabilities. Additionally, the test collects anonymous data on the reasons why people may be unwilling or unable to adopt certain lifestyle choices, providing valuable insights to promote sustainable lifestyles more effectively.

The carbon footprint calculations used in the Test consider the national carbon footprint of consumption in each of the PSLifestyle countries, adjusting it based on user responses to the Test. This Policy Brief explores national carbon footprint of consumption and reduction scenarios in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Türkiye and presents policy recommendations for aligning consumption emissions with the 1.5° target of the Paris Agreement.

Executive Summary

Limiting global heating to 1.5°C requires profound lifestyle transformations in high- and middle-income countries. Current consumption patterns in food, housing, transport, and goods drive emissions far beyond safe levels. The latest data show that average lifestyle carbon footprints in Europe remain 3–7 times higher than what would be compatible with the Paris Agreement.

This Brief highlight evidence and actionable recommendations for eight countries — Italy, Finland, Portugal, Türkiye, Estonia, Greece, Slovenia, and Germany. Each faces different challenges, but the core message is the same: incremental efficiency gains are not enough; sufficiency measures are needed.

Sufficiency means reorganising societies around the question 'how much is enough' rather than the pursuit of endless growth. While it may be perceived as sacrifice, sufficiency actually improves lives: it strengthens mutual trust, reduces inequalities, and delivers better health and wellbeing.

Introduction and Context

The PSLifestyle countries represent a diverse mix of EU member states and Türkiye, ranging from high-income economies (Germany, Finland, Italy) to smaller transition economies (Estonia, Slovenia, Greece, Portugal) and an emerging middle-income country (Türkiye). Despite differences, they share a common challenge: consumption footprints exceed the fair share of the global carbon budget available to keep global warming below 1.5°C.

Food, housing, and transport together account for more than 70% of lifestyle emissions. Addressing these areas is not just about climate mitigation – it can also improve public health, reduce energy poverty, and strengthen social resilience.

This Brief frames action through the lens of sufficiency. Sufficiency differs from efficiency: while efficiency is about doing more with less, sufficiency is about reducing absolute consumption and reorganising provisioning systems so that everyone can live well within planetary boundaries. It shifts priorities from material accumulation to shared wellbeing and fairness. In practice, sufficiency means smaller but better homes, healthier plant-rich diets, safe and accessible public transport, and lifestyles that value time, care, and community.

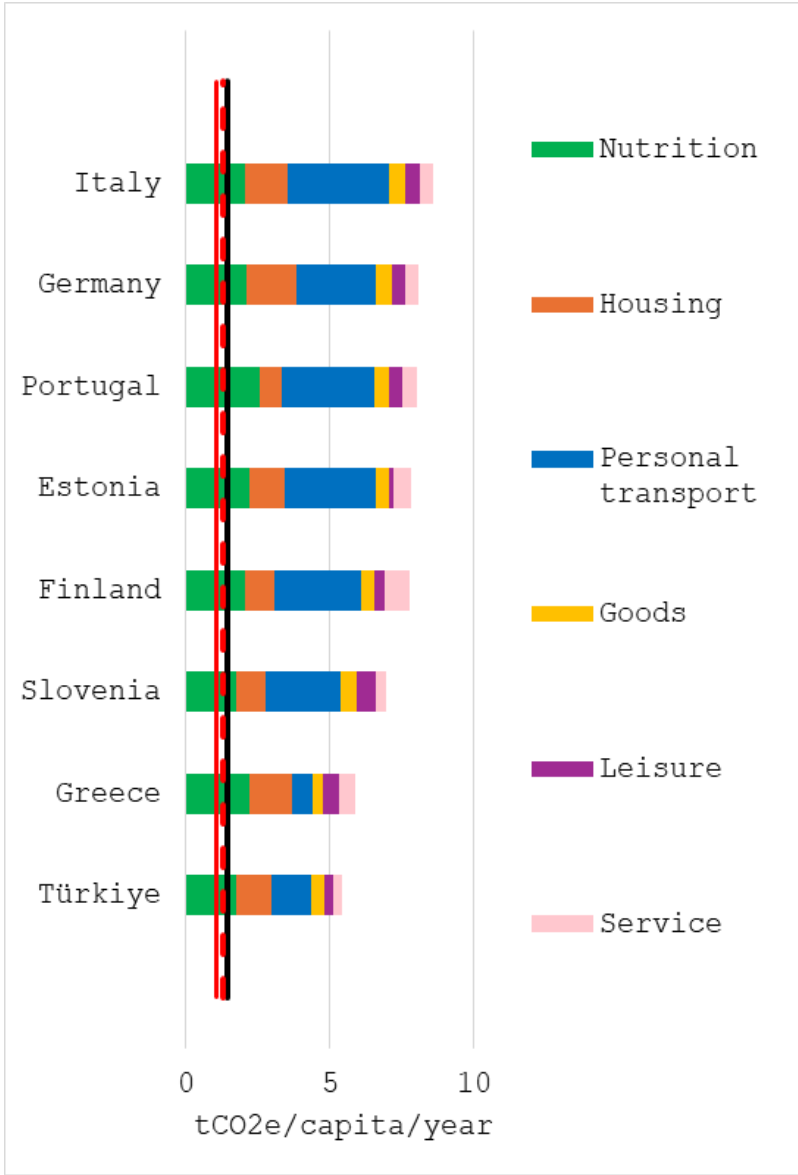
Sufficiency living means meeting human needs at a fair level of consumption that secures wellbeing without excess. Building on the Decent Living Standards (DLS) framework, this Brief extends the idea beyond basic necessities to reflect cultural and societal requirements for dignified lives—nutritious food, secure housing, mobility, healthcare, education, and communication—delivered equitably and within ecological limits (Table 1).

Table 1: Provisioning Needs for Sufficiency Living (Hot or Cool Institute, 2025)

| Domain | Provisioning Need | How it supports Sufficiency Living? |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Nutrition | Diverse and nutritious diet within planetary boundaries (EAT-Lancet Planetary diet; 2,500 kcal/cap/day, adjusted for country-specific requirements). Access to drinking water. | Provides all essential nutrients while keeping food-related environmental impacts within planetary limits; balances personal health and planetary health by emphasising plant-based foods and moderate animal product consumption. |
| Housing | Adequate living space of ~15–20m² per person (measured as average floor area in a household or shared dwelling), zero-energy building standards and renewable energy systems by 2035. | Ensures comfort, privacy, and health while avoiding excessive floor area; adjusts minimum living space needs according to household size, while acknowledging existing disparities in per-capita space across countries; prioritises zero-energy buildings and renewable energy, reducing long-term resource demand and emissions. |
| Personal transport | Sufficient mobility for work, education, and social life (~4,200–8,000 km/cap/yr). Modal split assumes high public and active transport share (on average 40% public transport, 24% active transport, limited car use and no flying). | Access to opportunities and services without car dependency; prioritises walking, cycling, and public transport to minimise emissions and resource use. Minimum mobility needs are adjusted using population-weighted density to reflect differences in settlement patterns and accessibility. |
| Goods | Sufficient, functional wardrobe of 74 clothing items per year, essential appliances and household items. | Meets functional needs for daily life without promoting unnecessary accumulation; focuses on durability, repairability, sharing systems, and low-impact production. Enables wellbeing, personal growth and participation while relying on shared facilities and efficient infrastructure. |
| Leisure and Services | Access to cultural, educational and healthcare services. | Enables wellbeing, personal growth and participation while relying on shared facilities and efficient infrastructure. |

Translating these requirements into lifestyle carbon footprints shows that achieving sufficiency today corresponds to about 3.7 tCO₂e per person annually. Under a low-carbon transition—including renewable energy, electrified and efficient transport, low-carbon buildings, passive housing, and shifts in consumption such as reduced commuting and shared goods—this could fall to roughly 1.2 tCO₂e by 2035 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Lifestyle carbon footprint by country and consumption domain, and globally unified targets for lifecycle carbon footprint and sufficiency living (tCO₂e/capita/year) (Hot or Cool Institute, 2025)



Evidence and Analysis

Food

Animal-based diets remain the largest contributor to food-related emissions. Finland and Germany have among the highest per-capita meat consumption in Europe, while Greece and Italy show high dairy and cheese intake. Portugal and Estonia are notable for their reliance on fish and dairy. Türkiye, although still below Western European averages, is experiencing rapid dietary transitions towards higher meat consumption.

Evidence shows that shifting to plant-rich diets could reduce emissions by 1–1.5 tCO₂e per person annually, while also delivering health benefits. National traditions — such as the Mediterranean diet — provide strong cultural anchors for promoting sustainable eating.

Housing

Housing footprints vary but are consistently above sufficiency benchmarks. Finland faces high energy demand due to its cold climate, though its electricity mix is comparatively clean. Southern European countries like Portugal, Greece, and Italy contend with older, less efficient housing stock. Estonia and Slovenia show relatively large average living spaces, while Germany faces both high heating demand and significant embodied emissions in its large housing sector.

Retrofitting homes with insulation, heat pumps, and renewable energy systems is one of the most effective strategies, with potential savings of up to 500 kgCO₂e per person annually. Policies should also address sufficiency — encouraging smaller housing footprints, shared spaces, and reduced material demand.

Transport

Transport remains the most difficult sector to decarbonise. Slovenia has the highest car modal share in Europe, with over 90% of passenger travel by private vehicle. Germany’s transport footprint is the largest in absolute terms, while Italy and Greece face high levels of urban congestion. Portugal and Estonia struggle with limited alternatives outside major cities. Türkiye’s rapid urbanisation risks locking in car dependency if not addressed.

Shifting investment from road expansion to rail, bus, and cycling infrastructure is key. Modal shifts could reduce per-capita emissions by 1–2 tCO₂e in high-income countries.

Consumption of Goods and Services

Patterns of consumer spending add further pressure. Germany, Slovenia, and Estonia show high footprints from imported goods like coffee, cocoa, and electronics. Policies addressing advertising, consumer standards, and product lifespans can significantly reduce these impacts.

A Shifting Geopolitical Context

These results unfold in a turbulent geopolitical landscape. Rising inequality, strained public trust, and geopolitical rivalries intensify the challenge of implementing lifestyle transformations. Resource competition and climate impacts risk fuelling social and political instability. Against this backdrop, sufficiency is not only an ecological necessity but also a stabilising principle: by reducing overconsumption among the wealthiest and ensuring equitable access to essentials, governments can ease social tensions, build trust, and strengthen resilience.

Policy Recommendations

Cross-cutting Priorities

- **Dietary Shifts:** Introduce national dietary guidelines that integrate health and sustainability. Support plant-based school meals and regulate marketing of high-impact foods.
- **Housing Transformation:** Expand renovation programmes targeting insulation, heat pumps, and renewable heating, with public support for low-income households.
- **Transport Transition:** Redirect subsidies from road fuels to public transport and active mobility. Introduce stricter car emission standards and reduce incentives for private car ownership.
- **Sufficiency Culture:** Use education, cultural campaigns, and fiscal incentives to shift social norms from 'more is better' to 'living well with enough'.

Country-Specific Highlights

- **Italy:** Leverage the Mediterranean diet and cultural soft power to normalise sustainable eating; accelerate retrofitting of historic housing; expand rail.
- **Finland:** Target meat reduction and frequent flying; promote teleworking and efficient housing retrofits.
- **Portugal:** Support protein diversification; expand urban cycling; modernise housing energy systems.
- **Türkiye:** Avoid high-emission lock-ins; expand rail and metro systems in growing cities; promote plant-based dietary transitions.
- **Estonia:** Address high dairy and coffee footprints; decarbonise district heating; support electric mobility.
- **Greece:** Reduce dairy reliance; regulate tourism emissions; improve urban public transport.
- **Slovenia:** Break car dependency through massive public transport investment; reduce imports of high-carbon goods.
- **Germany:** Accelerate modal shift to rail and cycling; promote plant-rich diets; implement climate assembly recommendations in law.

Conclusion

Staying within the 1.5°C carbon budget while ensuring decent living standards requires bold action. Incremental efficiency is not enough – sufficiency must become a guiding principle. Far from reducing quality of life, sufficiency fosters healthier diets, stronger communities, greater equality, and safer societies. By embedding sufficiency into housing, mobility, and food systems, the PSLifestyle countries can lead the way in reconciling wellbeing with planetary boundaries, offering their citizens better lives in a fairer and more stable world.

Find out more

This Policy Brief is based on the report [1.5-Degree Lifestyles: A Climate for Sufficiency](#)

Find out more about the PSLifestyle initiative here: <https://pslifestyle.eu/>

Take the Lifestyle Test here: <https://pslifestyle-app.net/> and help us to share the word!



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