

Mapping environmental problem shifting:

Towards building a database

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Section: Environmental Governance (Project **PROBLEMSHIFTING**)
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Project description

Sometimes decisions made to address an environmental problem create new environmental problems. Examples of this phenomenon – known as ‘**environmental problem shifting**’ – are plentiful. These include the production of biofuels damaging local ecosystems, the conservation of invasive species harming native species, and the use of HFCs for a better protection of the ozone layer exacerbating climate change.

Some of these problem shifts are promoted by international environmental treaties, including the Paris Agreement. With over a thousand international environmental treaties in force, the scale and complexity of environmental problem-shifting is severe and expected to increase. Therefore, it is important to understand when and why environmental problem shifting occurs in global environmental governance, and what their effects are both on individual treaties and the larger institutional systems they constitute.

As a key first step to answering these questions, you will work with our research team and contribute to **building an online database** on environmental problem shifting. An expert survey has been conducted through which we have identified more than 200 cases of problem shifting. We are now at the most exciting phase of database building, where we process these cases by filtering, categorizing, and clustering them. Ultimately, we seek to identify generic types with common characteristics and some discernible shifting patterns.

Your tasks as a Bright Minds Assistant will be organized in three phases: (1) **data collection**, including case elaboration through literature review and expert interviews; (2) **data analysis** using a variety of methods, such as statistics and network analysis; and (3) **data curation** in a systematic and accessible form. Throughout the process, you will be also invited to engage in writing with the rest of the team and contribute as a co-author of an eventual scientific journal article.

This Bright Minds Assistantship will be part of the research project PROBLEMSHIFTING (problemshifting.org) funded by the European Research Council, and work closely with the larger research team. There will also be some support from the members of the advisory board, some of whom are based at our own Institute (e.g., Prof. Frank Biermann with expertise in earth system governance and Prof. Detlef van Vuuren with expertise in earth system science).

Job requirements

I am looking for a highly motivated and talented student who is determined to conduct scientific research and co-author a journal article based on the Assistantship. A strong interest in the topic of environmental problem shifting is a must, along with an affinity to an interdisciplinary approach to research at the intersection between environmental governance and environmental science. Some experience with the above-mentioned methods is desired. I hope to build a long-lasting collaborative relationship with the Bright Minds Assistant, which may also result in a Master’s thesis project.