Sustainability Blog

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5th International Sustainable Finance Conference: Resilience and innovation

Key Takeaways

The 5th International Sustainable Finance Conference brought together leading experts from finance, industry and academia to discuss how financial services can drive resilience and innovation in the transition to a sustainable economy. One central message emerged: continuing on the net zero transition pathway is a fundamental prerequisite for continued competitiveness and progress is real, there are many business cases for value creation through sustainability

The theme “Resilience and innovation: The role of financial services in a changing world,” guided the presentations and discussions focussing on the following questions:

- How can financial institutions seize business opportunities arising through the net zero transition and drive
- How can financial institutions innovate and tap into new markets by offering sustainable financial and insurance products and services, and what is the impact of regulation?

Aligning Capital, Impact and Innovation

Prof. Dr. Ulf Moslener, Professor for Sustainable Energy Finance at the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management, highlighted that real-world climate impact only emerges when three pillars reinforce each other:

1. Credible real-economy regulation
2. Decision-useful financial transparency
3. Effective support for innovation which creates opportunities

He stressed that these are complements—not substitutes. Sustainable finance plays an important but limited role: it can make risks and opportunities visible, but cannot replace targeted and continuous climate policy, infrastructure delivery, or innovation support.

A thought experiment underscored the significant physical risks of inaction, while the transition itself implies major structural change associated with financial, political and technological risks.

The Role of Financial Companies in the Sustainability Transition

The panel discussion with Miye Kohlhase, Member of the Executive Board of the Association of German Banks (BdB), and Götz Treber, Head of the Centre of Competence Corporate Management and Regulation at the German Insurance Association (GDV) focused on how financial institutions can drive and enable the transition, while managing risks and opportunities.

For banks and insurers alike, the transition requires close client engagement and tailored products that encourage progress, while progress also depends on market demand. Both speakers emphasized the need for credible and continuous political direction and targeted regulation to unlock investment and prevent delays. A stable and credible carbon price is only one of the key instruments in this regard.

The transition is increasingly seen as a broader resilience challenge, going beyond decarbonisation to also include energy security and industrial competitiveness, particularly in Europe. A central enabler in this context is large-scale infrastructure investment. Financing of the energy transition is associated with technology and regulatory risks and benefits from public/private risk-sharing models and public private partnerships.

In addition, the discussion highlighted the complementary roles of financial institutions: banks are evolving into strategic advisors supporting clients on their transition pathways, while insurers provide a long-term perspective on risk. Related projects can only go ahead if they are both bankable and insurable.

Capitalising on the Net Zero Transition

Speakers highlighted that the transition to a net-zero economy is clearly underway at a global scale, but progress remains uneven across regions. A central discussion point was the need for large-scale investment in structural transformation, particularly in infrastructure (e.g. grids, batteries), industry and new technologies. Despite ongoing uncertainty, participants noted strong and growing investor interest, driven by increasing awareness of long-term physical climate risks and their impact on asset values.

The capital is available and there are increasingly new finance models for sharing of technology and market risks between public and private sector, e.g. involving KfW or other actors. From an energy company perspective new financing models are needed to address the equity side which has reached its limits. The majority of energy companies is no longer able to cover their investment needs for the next 10 years from their own resources.

At the same time, the discussion emphasised that policy stability and predictability are critical to unlocking investment. Unclear or shifting political signals can lead to delays and hinder progress. In this context, Europe needs a clearer strategic direction on its industrial transformation priorities, including key infrastructure.

Finally, participants stressed that the focus must now shift towards transition finance and active engagement. Financial institutions are expected to move beyond commitments and work more closely with clients to support concrete and credible transition pathways.

Seizing Opportunities through Sustainable Financial Products

Speakers highlighted that the market for sustainable financial products is evolving, with Europe remaining the dominant region and recent signs of renewed inflows. These are mainly driven by passive strategies, while actively managed funds continue to face pressure, reflecting changing investor preferences.

A key theme was the growing relevance of transition finance, particularly climate transition funds, which continue to attract capital. This indicates strong investor interest in supporting the real-economy shift from ‘brown’ to ‘green’ and provides opportunities for the financial sector.

At the same time, credibility and data quality are becoming increasingly important. Investors require clear, comparable and decision-useful data, especially on companies’ transition plans, while ongoing improvements in disclosure still come with challenges around complexity and reliability.

The discussion also touched on the expected impact of SFDR 2.0, which will likely reshape the market through clearer product categories and a stronger focus on transition products. However, stricter requirements may reduce the number of funds classified as sustainable and create new challenges for product design. In addition, client understanding and communication remain critical, as sustainability labels are often misunderstood.

Looking ahead, speakers emphasised that sustainable investing will increasingly depend on clear regulation, consistent KPIs, and a stronger focus on transition finance and long-term impact, alongside a growing role for social aspects.

Value Creation through Sustainability

The panel explored how sustainability is moving from a compliance topic to a core driver of business value, while also highlighting the challenges of making this shift operational. A key message was that value creation increasingly depends on embedding sustainability into core processes, including risk management, pricing and product development, rather than treating it as a standalone function.

At the same time, participants stressed that ESG integration remains complex, particularly due to data limitations, inconsistent methodologies and the need to translate ESG factors into concrete business decisions. This creates a strong need for training and awareness, especially in front-office roles, to ensure that sustainability is effectively reflected in day-to-day client interactions and decision-making.

Another important aspect was the growing role of client engagement. Financial institutions are increasingly seeking to better understand their clients' strategies, financing needs and transition pathways, leading to more open dialogue and a higher willingness to engage on sustainability topics.

Finally, the discussion highlighted the importance of partnerships and collaboration, both within the financial sector and across public and private actors. This is particularly relevant for areas such as climate adaptation, where coordinated approaches and new forms of cooperation will be essential to deliver impact at scale.

Key takeaways

Sustainability is increasingly becoming a key driver of value creation, with tangible progress and growing business cases across sectors. At the same time, maintaining momentum on the net-zero transition is critical for competitiveness, while delays and unclear political signals pose significant risks. Financial institutions play a central enabling role by making risks and opportunities transparent and supporting clients through financing, advisory, and incentives—however, scaling impact ultimately depends on stable political frameworks, continued commitment, embedding sustainability into strategy, products, and risk management, and close collaboration between the financial sector and the real economy.

Further links:

- CSRD-Benchmarking von Banken und Versicherungen PwC Studie 2026: CSRD Berichte von 50 Finanzunternehmen im Vergleich
- Blogbeitrag: Transformation vorantreiben: Was Finanzinstitute von ihren Kunden brauchen
- Whitepaper: Innovation und Resilienz – die Rolle des Finanzsektors in der Nachhaltigkeitstransformation
- Anmeldung: Sustainable Finance Newsletter

Get ongoing updates on the topic via regulatory horizon scanning in our research application, PwC Plus. Read more about the opportunities and offerings **here**.

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Schlagwörter

ESG, EU-Klimapolitik, Net Zero, Sustainable Finance (SF), Sustainable Innovation

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