



# WECOOP NEWS BULLETIN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

European Union – Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation (WECOOP)

The EU renewed the project “**European Union – Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation (WECOOP)**” in October 2019 to run for three years. The project will continue strengthening the policy dialogue on sustainable development between the CA partner countries, and to facilitate their cooperation with the EU on environment and climate change. Specifically, the project efforts will be focused on improving and rationalising policies and enhancing the capacities of national ministries and government agencies working in the relevant fields.

The WECOOP project aims to enhance environment, climate change and water policies in Central Asia through **approximation to EU standards** and to **promote green investments** in relevant sectors with the aim of contributing to measurable reductions in man-made pollution, including CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

**Priority areas** for consultations and cooperation include **environmental governance, circular economy and sustainable consumption and production, climate change adaptation and mitigation and water resources management.**

The WECOOP News Bulletin regularly provides brief information on the recent developments in EU policies and legislation, as well as on new relevant reports and studies published by the European Environment Agency, OECD or other specialized agencies (UNEP, UNECE, WHO).

**The WECOOP News Bulletin Special issues are released to inform on one specific topic or event of current interest and importance.**

**The present special issue is mainly focused on a newly adopted EU Zero Pollution Action Plan, which represents one of the main follow up activities to the European Green Deal.**

Detailed information on the WECOOP project is available at the project website <https://wecoop.eu>.



## 2. EU POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

### EU ACTION PLAN: “TOWARDS ZERO POLLUTION FOR AIR, WATER AND SOIL”

On 12 May 2021, the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan: “Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil”. The plan is a key deliverable of the European Green Deal and sets out an overarching, integrated vision for achieving by 2050: a world where **pollution is reduced to levels that are no longer harmful to human health and natural ecosystems**, whilst respecting our planetary boundaries.

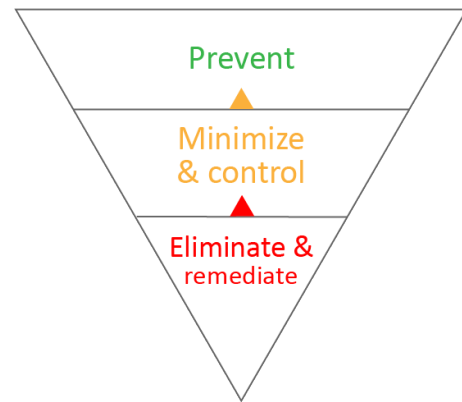
*Pollution can cause cancer, ischaemic heart disease, obstructive pulmonary disease, strokes, mental and neurological conditions, diabetes and more, especially among children, people with certain medical conditions and the elderly. Despite tangible progress, in 2015 pollution still led to an estimated 9 million premature deaths worldwide (16% of all deaths) – three times more deaths than from AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined and 15 times more than from all wars and other forms of violence. In the EU, every year, ambient air pollution causes over 400 000 premature deaths.*

**A toxic-free environment is also crucial to protect our biodiversity and ecosystems.** It reduces the ability of ecosystems to provide services such as carbon sequestration and decontamination.

*Pollution is one of the five main drivers of biodiversity loss. Today it is threatening the survival of more than 1 million of the planet’s estimated 8 million plant and animal species.*

In line with the European Green Deal, the new EU Action Plan: “Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil” provides a response to these challenges. Together with the Chemicals Sustainability Strategy, adopted last year, it translates the EU’s ambition to achieve a toxic-free environment, as announced in the European Climate Pact. **It goes hand in hand with the EU’s climate neutrality, health, biodiversity and resource efficiency objectives and builds on initiatives in the fields of energy, industry, mobility, food and agriculture.**

Alongside efforts to achieve climate neutrality, the EU needs a more effective ‘**zero pollution hierarchy**’ taking into account principles enshrined in the Treaty: notably, that EU environmental policies should be based on the **precautionary principle** and on the **principles that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should, as a priority, be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay.**



The Action Plan sets the key 2030 targets for reducing pollution at source and outlines a number of flagship initiatives and key actions.

### KEY ZERO POLLUTION TARGETS FOR 2030

Under EU law, Green Deal ambitions and in synergy with other initiatives, by 2030 the EU should reduce:

- **by more than 55% the health impacts (premature deaths) of air pollution**
- **by 30% the share of people chronically disturbed by transport noise**
- **by 25% the EU ecosystems where air pollution threatens biodiversity**
- **by 50% nutrient losses, the use and risk of chemical pesticides, the use of the more hazardous ones, and the sale of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture**
- **by 50% plastic litter at sea and by 30% microplastics released into the environment**
- **significantly total waste generation and by 50% residual municipal waste.**

### FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES

*The purpose of the flagship initiatives is to stimulate innovation in areas relevant to elimination of pollution and to promote transdisciplinary collaboration. The Initiatives strive for solutions to current or future challenges, which concern several actors and can only be solved through collaborative work.*

- Flagship 1: **Reducing health inequalities through zero pollution**
- Flagship 2: **Supporting urban zero pollution action**
- Flagship 3: **Promoting zero pollution across regions**
- Flagship 4: **Facilitating zero pollution choices**
- Flagship 5: **Enforcing zero pollution together**
- Flagship 6: **Showcasing zero pollution solutions for buildings**
- Flagship 7: **Living Labs for green digital solutions and smart zero pollution**
- Flagship 8: **Minimising the EU’s external pollution footprint**
- Flagship 9: **Consolidating the EU’s Knowledge Centres for Zero Pollution**



## KEY ACTIONS

- align the air quality standards to the latest recommendations of the World Health Organisation
- review the standards for the quality of water, including in EU rivers and seas
- reduce soil pollution and enhance restoration
- review the majority of EU waste laws to adapt them to clean and circular economy principles
- foster zero pollution from production and consumption (through the revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive, EU Ecolabel and other measures)
- minimize EU external pollution footprint through export restriction of harmful products and wastes
- present a Scoreboard of EU regions' green performance to promote zero pollution across regions
- showcase zero pollution solutions for buildings
- launch Living Labs for green digital solutions and smart zero pollution, including by targeting the building and farming sectors
- consolidate the EU's Knowledge Centres for Zero Pollution and bringing stakeholders together in the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform
- stronger enforcement of zero pollution together with environmental and other authorities.

## KEY EXTERNAL ACTIONS

In addition, as pollution does not stop at borders and as the EU acknowledges that it is both the victim and the source of pollution, **the Action Plan foresees reinforced external action**. The EU in fact is committed to leading the global fight against pollution.

- With regards to water and soil contamination by pharmaceuticals, in addition to the EU objective on the reduction of antimicrobial sales, promote international cooperation to address environmental risks in other countries where pharmaceutical emissions from manufacturing and other sources may contribute to the spread of antimicrobial resistance
- Support global and regional transboundary water cooperation and work with major partners bilaterally

- Revise the Mercury Regulation to phase out the use of dental amalgam and prohibit the manufacture and trade of a number of mercury-added products
- Reduce the EU's external pollution footprint by restricting the export of products and wastes that have harmful, toxic impacts in third countries
- Support global action on the export of end-of-life vehicles (ELVs) and used vehicles and encourage the adoption of stricter rules on imports of the most polluting vehicles <sup>1</sup>
- Better monitor and manage trade in waste electrical and electronic equipment and waste batteries
- Support a global initiative to end informal recycling of used lead acid batteries
- Promote international cooperation on black carbon policies to reduce the effects of climate change and improve air quality
- Promote a green finance agenda to mobilize private capital for environmentally sustainable investments that support zero pollution goals, including through the International Platform for Sustainable Finance
- Better integrate the zero pollution ambition into EU external cooperation programs supporting the transition to low emission and circular economies, sustainable urban development, clean energy and clean cooking solutions, water and sanitation, climate and environmental action, health, sustainable mobility and agriculture
- Under the umbrella of Horizon Europe, which is open to external participation, fund research and innovation geared towards the zero pollution ambition with the focus on health waters and soils, climate smart cities, clear transport etc.

More information in English: [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en).

<sup>1</sup> The EU is the biggest exporter of used vehicles worldwide, notably to West Africa and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

## 3. CONTACTS

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