

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 and a half years. The project continues strengthening the policy dialogue on sustainable development between the CA partner countries and facilitating their cooperation with the EU on environment and climate change. Specifically, the project efforts are focused on improving and rationalising policies and enhancing the capacities of national ministries and government agencies working in 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 CO₂ 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 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 (UNECE, WHO, IEA). Special attention is paid to the documents developed under the umbrella of the European Green Deal.

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

2. UN WATER CONFERENCE 2023

On 22-24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the **Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028**, was held at the UN Headquarters in New York.

The Conference was attended by 7 heads of state and government, vice presidents, deputy prime ministers and more than 70 national ministers with water portfolios.

Within the framework of the Conference, 5 interactive high-level dialogues and more than 30 side events on various topics were organized.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, speaking at the opening of the Conference, proposed consolidating joint efforts in the following **four areas to overcome the global water crisis**:

- fair access to water
- investments in water management
- sustainable consumption of water resources
- fight against climate change.

During the Conference, along with high-ranking representatives of national governments, the Presidents of the UN General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs also delivered the statements.

The main goal of the conference was the **adoption of voluntary commitments** by the UN Member States, international organizations and financial institutions to implement the second phase of the International Decade for Action on Water and implement the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN 2023 Water Conference closed with the adoption of the **Water Action Agenda**, a “milestone” action plan containing **almost 700 commitments to protect “humanity’s most precious global common good”**. The Agenda sets out a series of action-oriented game changing commitments, from making smarter food choices to re-evaluating water as a powerful economic driver, and part of the Earth’s

EU at 2023 Water Conference

The UN Water Conference was an opportunity to accelerate action for clean water and sanitation for everyone by 2030. The EU has brought a number of commitments to the conference.

EU vision by 2050

- water security for all
- global resilience to water stress
- protected and restored aquatic ecosystems

- a fair balance between water supply and demand
- the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, without compromising the rights of future generations

EU priorities

The EU has advocated for

- access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right
- protecting and restoring aquatic ecosystems for sustainable development, climate mitigation and adaptation
- promoting a more integrated approach to the management of water resources across sectors
- promoting circularity in the use of water for industry, energy and agriculture by increasing water efficiency and water reuse
- developing transboundary water cooperation, as a catalyst for peace and security

The European Commission presented a set of voluntary commitments, demonstrating the EU’s will to take concrete and transformative action. The aim is to increase political attention, visibility and public awareness of global water challenges. The EU will also learn from partners worldwide, including governments, youth leaders, NGOs and private sector representatives. The list of voluntary commitments to the Water Action Agenda can be found at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7443-2023-INIT/en/pdf>. More information on the EU water policy can be found at https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water_en

Kazakhstan at 2023 Water Conference

Kazakh Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources Zulfya Suleimenova said that **committed cooperation, harm avoidance, and equitable water usage are the fundamental principles for the countries**. She stressed that one of the most effective mechanisms of the Water Convention is the national water dialogue to create the necessary platform between stakeholders to discuss and find solutions to water issues. According to Suleimenova, the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) envisage water usage by each country without harming other states.

Water resources management in Kazakhstan requires a regional **approach considering their uneven distribution**. The minister noted the importance of focusing on more coordinated and integrated water resources management. As a UN member, Kazakhstan makes the necessary efforts to achieve the water-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Kyrgyzstan at 2023 Water Conference

The delegation of Kyrgyzstan stated that Kyrgyzstan believes that **issues of water resources use should be**

resolved through an open and constructive dialogue with mutual consideration of the interests of states.

The delegation also noted that **the recognition and calculation of the value of water resources, its inclusion in decision-making is essential for the management of water resources in a sustainable and equitable manner.**

The delegation took part in various events, including an interactive dialogue on the relationship between water, energy and food and sustainable economic and urban development, side events on transformation of the desert into a forest for the revival of the Aral Sea region, relationship "water-energy-food-environment" for water energy transition.

Tajikistan at 2023 Water Conference

The UN 2023 Water Conference was co-hosted by the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of Netherlands. The President of Republic of Tajikistan H.E. Emomali Rahmon at the closing ceremony of the UN 2023 Water Conference said: *"We came together because of the urgency: the water is connected to everything else: food, health, climate, nature, culture, and our economies. And we came together because of the opportunity: water is connected to everything life. It's indeed life itself. We know **we must radically change the way we understand, value and manage water.** There is a need for a new water vision that will reflect the prospects for the development of water resources for the period after 2030, which in its turn will help to reinforce the role of freshwater resources in the next global agenda."*

The President stressed that the nexus approach should be strengthened for water, food, health, cities and rural areas, as well as energy and climate. The precious and limited resource, fresh water, is the lever for scaling up climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience.

The full Statement of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan (English): <https://bit.ly/3TMdyj3>.

Turkmenistan at 2023 Water Conference

Addressing the forum, the Turkmen delegation outlined the main approaches of Turkmenistan on water issues and key areas for the development of the country's international cooperation in this field.

In particular, it was underlined that Turkmenistan proceeds from the principle that **water is the common heritage of humanity, and equal and fair access to water and sanitation are fundamental human rights.** In this regard, it is the responsibility of national governments to ensure the right to access water, especially in the current challenging environment of global health and food security crises.

It was also emphasized that Turkmenistan stands for **addressing all emerging regional water and energy challenges through following principles:**

- **firstly, on the basis of universally recognized norms of international law;**
- **secondly, taking into account the interests of each country;**
- **thirdly, with the active participation of international organizations, primarily the United Nations.**

Stressing that **water diplomacy is one of the priorities of the foreign policy of Turkmenistan**, the delegation reiterated national initiatives on rational use of water resources and strengthening international cooperation in solving environmental problems, in particular, the proposal to develop a UN Water Strategy, the establishment of a UN Special Program for the Aral Sea Basin and the establishment of a Regional Centre for Climate Change Technologies in Central Asia.

Uzbekistan at 2023 Water Conference

During a high-level plenary session of the conference on 23rd March 2023, a member of the Uzbekistan delegation, Ms Saida Mirziyoyeva, addressed the UN conference and delivered a speech about the **consequences of the Aral tragedy**, the large-scale work carried out by Uzbekistan to mitigate them, as well as the leadership of the country in uniting international efforts in this direction.

In particular, Ms Mirziyoyeva emphasized that **Muynak on the Aral coast** used to be a port city with large production capacities; later, the balance was disturbed. The dead shores of the sea became a graveyard of ships, and she read lines from a poem of the famous Karakalpak poet Ibrayim Yusupov, describing how the sea turns into a desert in the blink of an eye.

When talking about the **measures implemented by Uzbekistan**, it was said that over USD 14 mln had been allotted to boost the region, improve its economic potential, ensure the public health of its population, and create green parks in the area.

The tenacity, hard work, and creativity of the people of Karakalpakstan were specially recognized. Furthermore, it was emphasized that women especially need intense care and support and the need to expand opportunities for them.



3. EU POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

3.1 NEW EU POLICIES

EU agrees stronger rules to boost energy efficiency

The European Commission welcomes the provisional agreement reached on 10 March 2023 with the European Parliament and the Council to reform and strengthen the EU Energy Efficiency Directive. This deal marks a further step in the completion of the 'Fit for 55' package to deliver the European Green Deal and the REPowerEU Plan. It shows once again the EU's determination to become climate neutral by 2050.

Reaching higher targets with better instruments

For the first time, the energy efficiency first principle is given legal strength with a clear requirement for EU countries to take energy efficiency into consideration in policy, planning and major investment decisions in the energy sector and beyond.

The agreement establishes an **EU energy efficiency target of 11.7 % for 2030**, exceeding the Commission's original 'Fit for 55' proposal. It requires EU Member States to collectively ensure an additional reduction of final and primary energy consumption, compared with energy consumption forecasts made in 2020.

Under the provisional deal, the annual energy savings obligation nearly doubles to ensure continual progress. **EU countries will be required to achieve new savings each year of 1.49 % of final energy consumption on average, from 2024 to 2030**, up from the current level of 0.8 %. They will gradually have to reach 1.9 % by the end of 2030. This is an important instrument to drive energy savings in end-use sectors such as buildings, industry and transport.

The revised rules also give a **greater responsibility to the public sector to increase energy efficiency**. Public bodies will need to systematically take into account energy efficiency requirements in their public procurement of products, services, buildings and works. **A new annual energy consumption reduction target of 1.9 % is introduced for the public sector. EU countries' obligation to renovate each year at least 3 % of the total floor area of buildings owned by the public administration now also covers the regional and local levels.**

Companies will be encouraged to be more energy-efficient under the revised Directive. First, **energy management systems will become a default obligation for large energy consumers. All enterprises, including SMEs that exceed 85TJ of annual energy consumption, will have to implement an energy management system. If less than 85TJ, they will be subject to an energy audit (if their annual consumption exceeds 10TJ).** For the

first time, a reporting scheme for energy performance of large data centres is also introduced.

Under the agreed rules, **EU countries will also have to promote local heating and cooling plans in large municipalities having populations above 45,000**. Also, with the revised definition of efficient district heating and cooling, minimum requirements will be gradually changed to ensure **a fully decarbonised district heating and cooling supply by 2050**. Support to new high-efficiency cogeneration units using natural gas and connected to district heating in efficient district heating and cooling systems will only be possible until 2030, whereas any other fossil fuel use will be banned for new heat generation capacities in such systems.

The deal further strengthens provisions on energy efficiency financing to facilitate the mobilisation of investments. Under the new provisions, **EU countries will be required to promote innovative financing scheme and green lending products for energy efficiency**, by ensuring their wide and non-discriminatory offer by financial institutions. EU countries will have to report on the volume of energy efficiency investments.

Alleviating energy poverty and empowering consumers

The agreement includes **the first ever EU definition of energy poverty**. Member States will now have to implement energy efficiency improvement measures as a priority among people affected by energy poverty, vulnerable customers, low-income households, and where applicable, people living in social housing. The revised rules put a stronger focus on alleviating energy poverty and empowering consumers, including the creation of one-stop-shops for, technical and financial assistance and out-of-court mechanisms for the settlement of disputes.

Next steps

This provisional agreement now requires formal adoption by the European Parliament and the Council. Once this process is completed, the new legislation will be published in the Official Journal of the Union and enter into force.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3n67Ufo>

The Green Deal Industrial Plan – Putting Europe's net-zero industry in the lead

A clean-tech race is in full swing. The largest economies in the world – from the United States to India, from China to Japan – have all started to invest massively in green innovation. While this can only be good news for our planet, it is of course a lot of pressure on the EU's own clean transition.

In order to achieve the EU's clean transition, we need

both a global and a European level playing field. This means getting better at nurturing our own industry – from hydrogen to chemicals, from biotech to nanotech. And it is to achieve this goal that the Green Deal Industrial Plan for Europe has been launched.

The Green Deal Industrial Plan enhances the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and is accelerating the transition to climate neutrality. It does so by creating a more supportive environment for scaling up the EU's manufacturing capacity for the net-zero technologies and products required to meet Europe's ambitious climate targets.

To secure Europe's place as the home of industrial innovation and clean tech, the Green Deal Industrial Plan will cover four key pillars:

- **Predictable and simplified regulatory environment**
- **Faster access to funding**
- **Enhancing skills**
- **Open trade for resilient supply chains**

A predictable and simplified regulatory environment:

This pillar of the plan is about the regulatory environment. This means creating a simpler, faster and more predictable framework, securing the volumes needed for raw materials, and ensuring users are able to benefit from the low costs of renewables. There are three initiatives to support this work: **Net-Zero Industry Act (see this Bulletin – part 2.2.1)**, **Critical Raw Materials Act (see this Bulletin – part 2.2.1)** and **Reform of electricity market design**.

Faster access to funding: The second pillar of the plan will speed up investment and financing for clean-tech production in Europe. Under competition policy, the Commission aims to guarantee a level playing field within the Single Market while making it easier for the Member States to grant necessary aid to fast-track the green transition. To that end and in order to speed up and simplify aid granting, the Commission consulted Member States and amended the Temporary State Aid Crisis and Transition Framework and revised the General Block Exemption Regulation in light of the Green Deal. The Commission will also facilitate the use of existing EU funds for financing clean tech innovation, manufacturing and deployment, with a focus on REPowerEU, InvestEU and the Innovation Fund. The Commission will also look to set up the European Sovereignty Fund, as a mid-term structural answer for the investment needs.

Enhancing the necessary skills: With a huge growth in new technologies, we will need a huge growth in skills and skilled workers in this sector. To develop the skills needed to make the green transition happen, the Commission will:

- propose to establish Net-Zero Industry Academies that will help roll out up-skilling and re-skilling programmes in strategic industries

- consider how to combine a 'Skills-first' approach, recognising actual skills, with existing approaches based on qualifications
 - look at how to facilitate access of third country nationals to EU labour markets in priority sectors
- look at measures to foster and align public and private funding for skills development

Facilitating open and fair trade: The fourth pillar is about global cooperation and making trade work for the green transition, under the principles of fair competition and open trade, building on the engagements with the EU's partners and the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO). To that end, the Commission will continue to develop the EU's network of Free Trade Agreements and other forms of cooperation with partners to support the green transition. It will also keep defending the Single Market from unfair trade practices.

Document: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions **A Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age**. COM(2023) 62 final

Link (English): <https://europa.eu/!FDX7xm>

A New Deal for Pollinators

Around four in five crop and wild-flowering plant species in Europe depend, at least to some extent, on animal pollination delivered by thousands of insect species. This service brings tangible benefits to the economy: its contribution to the EU's agricultural output is estimated to be at least EUR 5 billion per year. Most of the essential benefits that pollinators provide remain unquantified, such as their contribution to nutrition security and health, or to maintaining ecosystem health and resilience by pollinating wild plants.

Yet, Europe and the world are confronted with a dramatic loss of wild pollinators. **According to the European Red List, the population of around one in three bee, butterfly and hoverfly species is declining.** Moreover, one in ten bee and butterfly species, and one in three hoverfly species are threatened with extinction. While these figures already raise alarm bells, the full picture is not yet known. An increased understanding of the state of pollinators could reveal an even more concerning situation.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 set the overall ambition of reversing the decline in pollinator numbers and diversity by 2030 as part of a series of commitments and targets for restoring nature in the EU.

The revised Pollinators Initiative sets objectives for 2030 and related actions under **three priorities**:

1. Improving knowledge of pollinator decline, its causes and consequences
2. Improving pollinator conservation and tackling the causes of their decline
3. Mobilising society and promoting strategic planning and cooperation at all levels

Document: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions **Revision of the EU Pollinators Initiative A new deal for pollinators**. COM/2023/35 final

Link (English): <https://europa.eu/MfNGV8>

3.2 NEW EU LEGISLATION

3.2.1 Legislation in progress

Net-Zero Industry Act

On March 16, the European Commission proposed the Net-Zero Industry Act to scale up manufacturing of clean technologies in the EU and make sure the Union is well-equipped for the clean-energy transition.

The Act will strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of net-zero technologies manufacturing in the EU, and make our energy system more secure and sustainable. It will create better conditions to set up net-zero projects in Europe and attract investments, with the aim that the Union's overall strategic net-zero technologies manufacturing capacity approaches or reaches at least 40 % of the Union's deployment needs by 2030. This will accelerate the progress towards the EU's 2030 climate and energy targets and the transition to climate neutrality, while boosting the competitiveness of EU industry, creating quality jobs, and supporting the EU's efforts to become energy independent.

The proposed legislation addresses technologies that will make a significant contribution to decarbonisation. These include: solar photovoltaic and solar thermal, onshore wind and offshore renewable energy, batteries and storage, heat pumps and geothermal energy, electrolyzers and fuel cells, biogas/biomethane, carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and grid technologies, sustainable alternative fuels technologies, advanced technologies to produce energy from nuclear processes with minimal waste from the fuel cycle, small modular reactors, and related best-in-class fuels. The Strategic Net Zero technologies identified in the Annex to the Regulation will receive particular support and are subject to the 40 % domestic production benchmark.

The Net-Zero Industry Act is built on the **following pillars**:

- **Setting enabling conditions:** the Act will improve conditions for investment in net-zero technologies by

enhancing information, reducing the administrative burden to set up projects and simplifying permit-granting processes. In addition, the Act proposes to give priority to Net-Zero Strategic Projects, that are deemed essential for reinforcing the resilience and competitiveness of the EU industry, including sites to safely store captured CO₂ emissions. They will be able to benefit from shorter permitting timelines and streamlined procedures.

- **Accelerating CO₂ capture:** the Act sets an EU objective to reach an annual 50 Mt injection capacity in strategic CO₂ storage sites in the EU by 2030, with proportional contributions from EU oil and gas producers. This will remove a major barrier to developing CO₂ capture and storage as an economically viable climate solution, in particular for hard to abate energy-intensive sectors.
- **Facilitating access to markets:** to boost diversification of supply for net-zero technologies, the Act requires public authorities to consider sustainability and resilience criteria for net-zero technologies in public procurement or auctions.
- **Enhancing skills:** the Act introduces new measures to ensure there is a skilled workforce supporting the production of net-zero technologies in the EU, including setting up Net-Zero Industry Academies, with the support and oversight by the Net-Zero Europe Platform. These will contribute to quality jobs in these essential sectors.
- **Fostering innovation:** the Act makes it possible for Member States to set up regulatory sandboxes to test innovative net-zero technologies and stimulate innovation, under flexible regulatory conditions.
- **A Net-Zero Europe Platform** will assist the Commission and Member States to coordinate action and exchange information, including around Net-Zero Industrial Partnerships. The Commission and Member States will also work together to ensure availability of data to monitor progress towards the objectives of the Net-Zero Industry Act. The Net-Zero Europe Platform will support investment by identifying financial needs, bottlenecks and best practices for projects across the EU. It will also foster contacts across Europe's net-zero sectors, making particular use of existing industrial alliances.

Document: **Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a framework of measures for strengthening Europe's net-zero technology products manufacturing ecosystem (Net Zero Industry Act)**. COM(2023) 161

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3ZaXtol>

Critical Raw Materials Act

On 16 March, the European Commission proposed a comprehensive set of actions to ensure the EU's access to a secure, diversified, affordable and sustainable supply of critical raw materials. Critical raw materials are indispensable for a wide set of strategic sectors including the net zero industry, the digital industry, aerospace, and defence sectors.

While demand for critical raw materials is projected to increase drastically, Europe heavily relies on imports, often from quasi-monopolistic third country suppliers. The EU needs to mitigate the risks for supply chains related to such strategic dependencies to enhance its economic resilience, as highlighted by shortages in the aftermath of the Covid-19 and the energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This can put at risk the EU's efforts to meet its climate and digital objectives.

The Regulation and Communication on critical raw materials adopted today leverage the strengths and opportunities of the Single Market and the EU's external partnerships to diversify and enhance the resilience of EU critical raw material supply chains. The Critical Raw Materials Act also improves the EU capacity to monitor and mitigate risks of disruptions and enhances circularity and sustainability.

Together with the reform of the electricity market design and the Net Zero Industry Act, today's measures on critical raw materials create a conducive regulatory environment for the net-zero industries and the competitiveness of European industry, as announced in the Green Deal Industrial Plan.



Internal Actions

The Critical Raw Materials Act will equip the EU with the tools to ensure the EU's access to a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials, mainly through:

Setting clear priorities for action: In addition to an updated list of critical raw materials, the Act identifies a list of strategic raw materials, which are crucial to technologies important to Europe's green and digital ambitions and for defence and space applications, while being subject to potential supply risks in the future. The Regulation embeds both the critical and strategic raw materials lists in EU law. The Regulation sets clear benchmarks for domestic capacities along the strategic raw material supply chain and to diversify EU supply by 2030:

- At least 10 % of the EU's annual consumption for extraction,
- At least 40 % of the EU's annual consumption for processing,
- At least 15 % of the EU's annual consumption for recycling,
- Not more than 65 % of the Union's annual consumption of each strategic raw material at any relevant stage of processing from a single third country.

Creating secure and resilient EU critical raw materials supply chains: The Act will reduce the administrative burden and simplify permitting procedures for critical raw materials projects in the EU. In addition, selected Strategic Projects will benefit from support for access to finance and shorter permitting timeframes (24 months for extraction permits and 12 months for processing and recycling permits). Member States will also have to develop national programmes for exploring geological resources.

Ensuring that the EU can mitigate supply risks: To ensure resilience of the supply chains, the Act provides for the monitoring of critical raw materials supply chains, and the coordination of strategic raw materials stocks among Member States. Certain large companies will have to perform an audit of their strategic raw materials supply chains, comprising a company-level stress test.

Investing in research, innovation and skills: The Commission will strengthen the uptake and deployment of breakthrough technologies in critical raw materials. Furthermore, the establishment of a large-scale skills partnership on critical raw materials and of a Raw Materials Academy will promote skills relevant to the workforce in critical raw materials supply chains. Externally, the Global Gateway will be used as a vehicle to assist partner countries in developing their own extraction and processing capacities, including skills development.

Protecting the environment by improving circularity

and sustainability of critical raw materials: Improved security and affordability of critical raw materials supplies must go hand in hand with increased efforts to mitigate any adverse impacts, both within the EU and in third countries with respect to labour rights, human rights and environmental protection. Efforts to improve sustainable development of critical raw materials value chains will also help promoting economic development in third countries and also sustainability governance, human rights, conflict-resolution and regional stability.

Member States will need to adopt and implement national measures to improve the collection of critical raw materials rich waste and ensure its recycling into secondary critical raw materials. Member States and private operators will have to investigate the potential for recovery of critical raw materials from extractive waste in current mining activities but also from historical mining waste sites. Products containing permanent magnets will need to meet circularity requirements and provide information on the recyclability and recycled content.

International Engagement

Diversifying the Union's imports of critical raw materials: The EU will never be self-sufficient in supplying such raw materials and will continue to rely on imports for a majority of its consumption. International trade is therefore essential to supporting global production and ensuring diversification of supply. The EU will need to strengthen its global engagement with reliable partners to develop and diversify investment and promote stability in international trade and strengthen legal certainty for investors. In particular, the EU will seek mutually beneficial partnerships with emerging markets and developing economies, notably in the framework of its Global Gateway strategy.

The EU will step up trade actions, including by establishing a Critical Raw Materials Club for all like-minded countries willing to strengthen global supply chains, strengthening the World Trade Organization (WTO), expanding its network of Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreements and Free Trade Agreements and pushing harder on enforcement to combat unfair trade practices.

It will further develop Strategic partnerships: The EU will work with reliable partners to promote their own economic development in a sustainable manner through value chain creation in their own countries, while also promoting secure, resilient, affordable and sufficiently diversified value chains for the EU.

Documents:

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions **A secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials in support of the twin transition.** COM(2023) 165 final

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/40s8Edo>

Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/102. COM (2023) 160

Link (English): <https://europa.eu/!VrVBHV>

Rules for renewable hydrogen

In February 2023, the European Commission has proposed detailed rules to define what constitutes renewable hydrogen in the EU, with the adoption of **two Delegated Acts required under the Renewable Energy Directive**. These Acts are part of a broad EU regulatory framework for hydrogen which includes energy infrastructure investments and state aid rules, and legislative targets for renewable hydrogen for the industry and transport sectors. They will ensure that **all renewable fuels of non-biological origin (also known as RFNBOs) are produced from renewable electricity**. The two Acts are inter-related and both necessary for the fuels to be counted towards Member States' renewable energy target. They will provide regulatory certainty to investors as **the EU aims to reach 10 million tonnes of domestic renewable hydrogen production and 10 million tonnes of imported renewable hydrogen in line with the REPowerEU Plan** (see WECOOP Bulletin Special issue 3).

Delegated regulation on Union methodology for RFNBOs

The first Delegated Act defines under which conditions hydrogen, hydrogen-based fuels or other energy carriers can be considered as an RFNBO. The Act clarifies the principle of “additionality” for hydrogen set out in the EU's Renewable Energy Directive. Electrolysers to produce hydrogen will have to be connected to new renewable electricity production. This principle aims to ensure that the generation of renewable hydrogen incentivises an increase in the volume of renewable energy available to the grid compared to what exists already. In this way, hydrogen production will be supporting decarbonisation and complementing electrification efforts, while avoiding pressure on power generation.

While initial electricity demand for hydrogen production will be negligible, it will increase towards 2030 with the mass rollout of large-scale electrolysers. The Commission estimates that around 500 TWh of renewable electricity is needed to meet the 2030 ambition in REPowerEU of producing 10million tonnes of RFNBOs. The 10Mt ambition in 2030 corresponds to 14 % of total EU electricity

consumption. This ambition is reflected in the Commission proposal to increase the 2030 target for renewables to 45 %.

The Delegated Act sets out different ways in which producers can demonstrate that the renewable electricity used for hydrogen production complies with additionality rules. It further introduces criteria aimed to ensure that renewable hydrogen is only produced when and where sufficient renewable energy is available (known as temporal and geographic correlation). To take into account existing investment commitments and allow the sector to adapt to the new framework, the rules will be phased in gradually, and designed to become more stringent over time. Specifically, the rules foresee a transition phase of the requirements on “additionality” for hydrogen projects that will start operating before 1 January 2028. This transition period corresponds to the period when electrolyzers will be scaled up and come onto the market. Furthermore, hydrogen producers will be able to match their hydrogen production with their contracted renewables on a monthly basis until the 1 January 2030. However, Member States will have the option of introducing stricter rules about temporal correlation as of 1 July 2027.

The requirements for the production of renewable hydrogen will apply to both domestic producers as well as producers from third countries that want to export renewable hydrogen to the EU to count towards the EU renewables targets. A certification scheme relying on voluntary schemes will ensure that producers, whether in the EU or in third countries, can demonstrate in a simple and easy way their compliance with the EU framework and trade renewable hydrogen within the Single Market.

Delegated regulation for a minimum threshold for GHG savings of recycled carbon fuels

The second Delegated Act provides a methodology for calculating life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions for RFNBOs. The methodology takes into account greenhouse gas emissions across the full lifecycle of the fuels, including upstream emissions, emissions associated with taking electricity from the grid, from processing, and those associated with transporting these fuels to the end-consumer. The methodology also clarifies how to calculate the greenhouse gas emissions of renewable hydrogen or its derivatives in case it is co-produced in a facility that produces fossil-based fuels.

Documents:

Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) .../... of 10.2.2023 supplementing Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing a Union methodology setting out detailed rules for the production of renewable liquid and gaseous transport fuels of nonbiological origin. C(2023) 1087 final

Link (English): <https://europa.eu/!XXh8QD>

Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) .../... of 10.2.2023 supplementing Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing a minimum threshold for greenhouse gas emissions savings of recycled carbon fuels and by specifying a methodology for assessing greenhouse gas emissions savings from renewable liquid and gaseous transport fuels of non-biological origin and from recycled carbon fuels. C(2023) 1086 final + Annex

Link (English): <https://europa.eu/!RPg9Qx>

Note: numbers will be assigned to the documents when they are published.

Zero-emissions target for new city buses by 2030 and 90 % emissions reductions for new trucks by 2040

In February 2023, the European Commission proposed ambitious new CO₂ emissions targets for new heavy-duty vehicles (HDVs) from 2030 onwards. These targets will help to reduce CO₂ emissions in the transport sector – trucks, city buses, and long-distance buses are responsible for over 6 % of total EU greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and more than 25 % of GHG emissions from road transport. These strengthened emissions standards would ensure that this segment of the road transport sector contributes to the shift to zero-emissions mobility and the EU's climate and zero pollution objectives.

The Commission proposes phasing in **stronger CO₂ emissions standards for almost all new HDVs with certified CO₂ emissions, compared to 2019 levels, specifically:**

- **45 % emissions reductions from 2030;**
- **65 % emission reductions from 2035;**
- **90 % emissions reduction from 2040.**

To stimulate faster deployment of zero-emission buses in cities, the Commission also proposes **to make all new city buses zero-emission as of 2030.**

In line with the European Green Deal and REPowerEU objectives, this proposal will also have a positive impact on the energy transition, by lowering demand for imported fossil fuels and enhancing energy savings and efficiencies in the EU's transport sector. It will provide benefits for European transport operators and users by reducing fuel costs and total cost of ownership, and ensure a wider deployment of more energy-efficient vehicles. It will also improve air quality, notably in cities, and the health of Europeans.

Moreover, this is a key sector to support the European clean tech industry and boost international competitiveness. The EU is a market leader in the production of trucks and

buses and a common legal framework helps to secure that position for the future. In particular, the revised standards provide a clear and long-term signal to guide EU industry investments in innovative zero-emission technologies and boost the rollout of recharging and refuelling infrastructure.

Document: **Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1242 as regards strengthening the CO₂ emission performance standards for new heavy duty vehicles and integrating reporting obligations, and repealing Regulation (EU) 2018/956.** COM(2023) 88 final

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3FNidvn>

Euro 7 standards proposal

The new Euro 7 emission standards will ensure that cars, vans, lorries and buses are much cleaner, in real driving conditions that better reflect the situation in cities where air pollution problems are largest, and for a much longer period than under current rules. The proposal tackles emissions from tailpipes as well as from brakes and tyres. It also contributes to achieving the new stricter air quality standards proposed by the Commission on 26 October 2022.

The new requirements based on the Euro 7 standards:

- **The proposal replaces and simplifies previously separate emission rules for cars and vans (Euro 6) and lorries and buses (Euro VI). The Euro 7 standards rules bring emission limits for all motor vehicles, i.e., cars, vans, buses and lorries under a single set of rules.** The new rules are fuel- and technology-neutral, placing the same limits regardless of whether the vehicle uses petrol, diesel, electric drive-trains or alternative fuels. They will help to:
- **Better control emissions of air pollutants from all new vehicles:** by broadening the range of driving conditions that are covered by the on-road emissions tests. These will now better reflect the range of conditions that vehicles can experience across Europe, including temperatures of up to 45°C or short trips typical of daily commutes.
- **Update and tighten the limits for pollutant emissions:** limits will be tightened for lorries and buses while the lowest existing limits for cars and vans will now apply regardless of the fuel used by the vehicle. The new rules also set emission limits for previously unregulated pollutants, such as nitrous oxide emissions from heavy-duty vehicles.
- **Regulate emissions from brakes and tyres:** the Euro 7 standards rules will be the first worldwide emission standards to move beyond regulating exhaust pipe emissions and set additional limits for particulate

emissions from brakes and rules on microplastic emissions from tyres. These rules will apply to all vehicles, including electric ones.

- **Ensure that new cars stay clean for longer:** all vehicles will need to comply with the rules for a longer period than until now. Compliance for cars and vans will be checked until these vehicles reach 200,000 kilometres and 10 years of age. This doubles the durability requirements existing under Euro 6/VI rules (100,000 kilometres and 5 years of age). Similar increases will take place for buses and lorries.
- **Support the deployment of electric vehicles:** the new rules will regulate the durability of batteries installed in cars and vans in order to increase consumer confidence in electric vehicles. This will also reduce the need for replacing batteries early in the life of a vehicle, thus reducing the need for new critical raw materials required to produce batteries.
- **Make full use of digital possibilities:** Euro 7 rules will ensure that vehicles are not tampered with and emissions can be controlled by the authorities in an easy way by using sensors inside the vehicle to measure emissions throughout the lifetime of a vehicle.

Document: **Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on type-approval of motor vehicles and engines and of systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles, with respect to their emissions and battery durability (Euro 7) and repealing Regulations (EC) No 715/2007 and (EC) No 595/2009.** COM(2022) 586 final + Annex

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/40s7rmj>



4. REPORTS AND STUDIES

4.1 EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (EEA)

EEA Briefing: Managing the systemic use of chemicals in Europe

Chemicals are embedded in practically every single manufactured good in the EU. On the one hand, chemicals play a key role in ensuring quality of life and offer new solutions to deliver the green and the digital transitions. On the other, our increasing reliance on chemicals leads to serious problems. From creating adverse health effects to contributing to the climate crisis, chemicals come with a cost — so much so that we have now exceeded the planetary boundary for chemical pollution. Where do we go from here? This briefing describes the systemic use of chemicals across Europe's current systems of production and consumption. Moreover, it discusses key policy measures foreseen in the European Green Deal's Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability that offer significant potential to ensure consumer safety, cut pollution and clean up material flows.

In this briefing, the term 'chemicals' covers both synthetic chemicals and those that are unintentionally released by human activities, including naturally occurring chemicals such as heavy metals.

Key messages

- The growing volume and diversity of chemicals in use hinder authorities from adequately assessing and managing the associated risks to human health and the environment. Tackling groups of chemicals rather than single substances could accelerate chemical risk assessment and management.
- EU production and consumption of chemicals and downstream products impact the environment and health, both within and outside Europe. Evidence shows that the planetary boundary for chemical pollution has been exceeded.
- Chemical production is tightly integrated into the fossil fuel sector, with petrochemicals used as both feedstock and an energy source for production. There is increasing awareness that our reliance on chemicals and downstream products, such as plastics and fertilisers, is reinforcing our dependence on fossil fuels.
- The presence of certain chemicals in specific material flows can prevent re-use or recycling, presenting a barrier to the circular economy.
- Transitioning to chemicals that are safe and sustainable by design and applying the essential use concept to upstream chemical risk management can enable the chemical industry to provide technologies, materials and products that are non-toxic, low-carbon and fit for circularity.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3FJYLj8>

EEA Briefing: Assessing the costs and benefits of climate change adaptation

Climate change is happening. To reduce its economic impact, adaptation and mitigation actions are urgently needed. Decision-makers need to understand their benefits and costs compared to not acting at all. This briefing summarises the main assessment concepts, key methods and related challenges and constraints, and provides practical examples of approaches relevant to the EU.

Key messages

- Lack of adaptation action is costly. Despite ongoing mitigation and adaptation efforts, economic losses from weather and climate-related extremes in the EU reached over half a trillion euros between 1980 and 2021. This signals an urgent need to speed up the implementation of adaptation measures.
- Adaptation actions are cost-efficient when the benefit-cost ratio exceeds 1.5. Measures resulting in a lower ratio require careful consideration because of the uncertainty of their economic costs and benefits.
- Assessing the benefits of adaptation measures requires taking into account not only the reduced impact of natural hazards but also their contribution to overall economic development. Assessments also need to consider ancillary benefits to biodiversity, air quality, water management, greenhouse gas emission reductions, and health and well-being.
- Assessing the benefits and costs of adaptation at the adaptation measures programme level enables the combined effects of such measures to be systemically evaluated. This is not always possible when assessing the benefits and costs of individual actions.
- The quality and quantity of national-level data on yearly adaptation budgets, costs of measures in adaptation plans and resources used for adaptation have improved in recent years. However, current data do not allow for a systemic assessment of all programmes of measures affecting a given sector or area. This emphasises the need for consistent data on the economic aspects of adaptation.
- Current knowledge does not allow easy comparison between the costs and benefits of adaptive actions across various economic sectors. This indicates a need for methodological improvements in benefit-cost analysis.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3z12llh>

EEA briefing: Decarbonising heating and cooling — a climate imperative

The EU has met its target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 % by 2020, compared with 1990 levels. However, meeting targets for 2030 and beyond requires a doubling of the annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions achieved between 2005 and 2020. Heating and cooling account for half of the final EU energy use. With energy used for heating being significant, decarbonising heating is therefore critical. Solutions to save energy and introduce efficient, renewable heating and cooling systems exist and must be rolled out faster. This briefing looks at heating and cooling trends across the EU. It highlights the twin benefits — for climate mitigation and security of supply — of combining energy efficiency and conservation measures with rapidly switching to renewable and waste energy use in heating and cooling.

Key messages

- To meet the EU's climate change mitigation targets for 2030 and the longer term, national decarbonisation strategies for heating and cooling must include significant energy conservation measures and phase out fossil fuels as soon as possible.
- Historical efforts to substitute fossil fuels with renewable energy sources for heating and cooling have been too slow and focused on the use of biomass. However, since 2005, other renewable energy sources for heating and cooling, such as heat pumps, have developed faster. This indicates that we now have more options for decarbonising heating and cooling in buildings and industry than before.
- Modern district heating and cooling systems can integrate other emission-neutral energy sources, especially in urban settings where neighbourhood solutions can work well. The advantages and disadvantages of investing in such systems need to be carefully assessed in each case and in relation with other, potentially more cost-effective and sustainable local solutions.
- With appliances and systems for heating and cooling lasting considerably longer than a decade, converting gas, coal and oil boilers to systems that burn biomass could drive a fuel lock-in for many years. Possible implications, such as for feedstocks, land carbon sinks and health, need to be further assessed.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3z3KLx3>

EEA Briefing: Pathways towards circular plastics in Europe — good practice examples from countries, business and citizens

Plastics play an essential role in modern society. However, their value chain is currently unsustainable, contributing to the generation of climate changing emissions and

increasing waste and pollution. Reducing such impacts while retaining plastics' usefulness requires a shift towards a more circular and sustainable plastics system. This shift can be accelerated by scaling up good practice examples and making improvements across the plastics value chain.

Key messages

- Three pathways can lead to a more circular, sustainable plastics system: smarter use, increased circularity and renewable material. Good practice examples for each of these pathways have been found across Europe among business, policymakers and citizens. These good practice examples can serve as an inspiration for how to make plastics more sustainable and circular.
- Most good practice examples found are small scale and would need to be scaled up and implemented much more broadly to strengthen the circular plastics economy. More examples are found in waste management than in design, production or use.
- The pathways are not developing at the same pace. Increased circularity is the most developed, with several relatively large-scale good practise examples. Smarter use is emerging, with a growing number of good practice examples showing potential to be scaled up. Renewable material is the least developed, but many examples show high potential for further development.
- Good practice examples of the smarter use pathway include reducing the use of unnecessary plastics through less packaging, fewer single-use products and, to a lesser extent, circular product design, extending product lifetimes and increasing reuse and repair.
- Good practice examples of the increased circularity pathway focus on maintaining the value and utility of plastics in multiple loops through collection, sorting and recycling.
- Good practice examples of the renewable material pathway include switching to renewable feedstocks to help eliminate the dependence of plastic production based on fossil fuels. However, it is important that renewable materials production is not in direct competition with food and feed production, and using biowaste should be prioritised over new biobased feedstocks.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3LLlqOP>

4.2 ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD)

Best Available Techniques (BAT) to Prevent and Control Mercury Releases to Land and Water. OECD Series on Risk Management No 72

A growing number of countries use Best Available Techniques (BAT) to set evidence-based industrial emission levels following a multi-stakeholder dialogue. BAT policies are a trusted means to prevent or reduce emissions from polluting industries. In the process of the identification of BAT for a particular industry sector or type of industry, BAT Reference Documents (BREFs) are usually prepared to collect and evaluate candidate techniques. Thereby BREFs contribute to the transparency of the BAT determination process. Given that much information on the available techniques is gathered under the multi-stakeholder involvement, BREFs are unique and rich sources of information on available techniques. The OECD has prepared and published online a list of BREFs gathered from Member and Partner countries.

The Minamata Convention is a multilateral environmental agreement that was adopted in 2013 and came into force in August 2017. It aims to control and, where feasible, reduce the use, release and emission of mercury from anthropogenic sources and, therewith, human exposure to mercury from anthropogenic activities. The Convention highlights the impact of mercury emissions and releases on the environment as a whole and the use of BAT to control and reduce impacts. Particularly, Article 9 on releases requires adoption of guidance on best available techniques and best environmental practices which the Conference of Parties (COP) have started to discuss recently, resulting in the need for relevant information.

Therefore, this study was conducted by the Expert Group on BAT with the aim to:

- compile the best available technical approaches for reducing or controlling mercury releases to water and land across countries;
- contribute information needed for the development of Guidance on Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practices for reducing or controlling mercury releases to water and land under Article 9 of the Minamata Convention; and
- support other articles of the Minamata Convention in addition to Article 9 that address specific practices and are potential sources of releases to water and land.

Seven target sector categories were selected: large-scale mining, non-ferrous metal, waste (waste treatment, incineration, storage, and disposal), organic chemicals, chlor-alkali production, oil refining and thermal power plant (TPP). For these sectors, relevant BREFs from the OECD BREF list as well as other documents were gathered. The study identifies and summarises common techniques to control or reduce mercury releases to water and land.

Four common techniques are identified and described for mercury removal from wastewater:

- Precipitation of metals
- Adsorption on ion-exchange resins
- Adsorption on activated carbon
- Biological treatment

Four common techniques for mercury removal from soil and waste are identified:

- Mechanical/physical treatment
- Chemical treatment
- Thermal treatment
- Solidification and stabilisation

This study also describes other techniques and provides direct links to descriptions in the source document. The practices summarised in this report are thus expected to contribute toward the development of the Guidance on Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practices for reducing or controlling mercury releases to water and land in the context of Article 9 of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and in supporting the objectives of other articles.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/42f3vH9>

4.3 UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (UNECE)

Growing Challenges for Sustainable Development: Can the UNECE Region Turn the Tide in 2023?

This publication provides a progress assessment on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), based on the data available in the United Nations Global SDG Indicators Database.

The results are presented at the regional level, identifying the SDG targets that the UNECE region is on track to achieve by 2030 as well as targets where progress needs to accelerate or where the current trend needs to be reversed.

The publication contains stories provided by agencies and United Nations country teams participating in the Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia, and by all UNECE programmes. These stories are rich in information on how various regional and country level actions relate to sustainable development outcomes, and show concrete ways in which progress towards SDGs is made in the region.

The publication was prepared by the UNECE Statistical Division to inform the 2023 UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, 29 and 30 March).

Link (English): <https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/376257>

How to Accelerate the Funding and Financing of Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development? Opportunities and Challenges (Brief)

More than 60 per cent of the world's freshwater flow is shared between two or more riparian states. The sustainable and cooperative management of these transboundary water resources is crucial for access to water, sustainable development as well as regional stability and peace.

However, many countries and basins struggle to identify and mobilize the needed funding for transboundary water cooperation processes and basin development projects. Financial capacity constraints faced by countries and limited understanding of the benefits of cooperation often hinder the mobilization of financial resources for transboundary water cooperation and basin development.

This Brief provides an overview of the main issues related with the funding and financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development. It features an overview of the existing financial needs for the establishment and operation of joint bodies and for the elaboration and implementation of basin management and development projects; explores the sources of funding and financing available to support transboundary water cooperation and activities related to the management and development of shared basins and analyses the key opportunities and challenges related to each of them.

This Brief aims to point out the main issues to be considered by policy and decision-makers from the water management and financing communities to accelerate the channelling of financial resources to transboundary water cooperation and basin development.

Link (English): <https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/376037>

Guidance document on reduction of emissions from agricultural residue burning

Agricultural residue burning is a challenge in many countries in the ECE region, as well as at the global level. Substantial and clear evidence exists that fire use has negative impact on soil organic matter by reducing soil fertility and ultimately reducing yields. Moreover, the emissions generated by agricultural residue burning contribute to air pollution and are important drivers of climate change, with harmful effects on both human health and the environment at the global level. The implementation of the practices, methods, approaches, and technical instruments described in the present guidance may significantly contribute to reducing air pollution from residue burning in agriculture and its negative impact within the ECE region and beyond.

Link (English, French and Russian):
<https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/376236>

4.4 INTERNATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY AGENCY (IRENA)

The changing role of hydropower: Challenges and opportunities

Hydropower is an important component of power systems worldwide. It is the largest source of renewable electricity and can enable a higher penetration of variable renewables such as solar and wind by providing balancing and flexibility services. Beyond electricity, hydropower also provides other services including storage for drinking and irrigation water, increased resilience to flooding and droughts, and recreational opportunities.

Despite being the most mature renewable technology, hydropower faces a number of challenges. These include the need to ensure sustainability and climate resilience; ageing fleets and related investment requirements; the need to adapt operation and maintenance (O&M) to modern power system requirements; and outdated market structures and business models that do not recognise the full range of services provided by hydropower. As challenging as the present situation is, it also presents opportunities to modernise hydropower plants and equip them with the means to continue providing critical services to power systems globally.

This report is aimed at policy makers and hydropower practitioners within the Member States of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Its objective is to raise awareness among IRENA stakeholders regarding hydropower's perceived challenges and needs, and to serve as a catalyst for debate in the context of IRENA's Collaborative Framework on Hydropower. The report also provides a snapshot of the current status of hydropower and presents a vision for how its full potential may be realised.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/40biLTt>

4.5 INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY (IEA)

Global Methane Tracker 2023

Methane is responsible for around 30 % of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution, and rapid and sustained reductions in methane emissions are key to limiting near-term global warming and improving air quality.

The energy sector – including oil, natural gas, coal and bioenergy – accounts for nearly 40 % of methane emissions from human activity. The IEA's Global Methane Tracker is an indispensable tool in the fight to bring down emissions from across the energy sector.

This year's update provides our latest estimates of

emissions from across the sector – drawing on the more recent data and readings from satellites and ground-based measurements – and the costs and opportunities to tackle these emissions. For the first time the Tracker includes the opportunities and costs to reduce emissions from coal supply, allowing for a comprehensive overview of abatement options for fossil fuel operations.

Link (English):

<https://www.iea.org/reports/global-methane-tracker-2023>

4.6 WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO)

Risk communication of ambient air pollution in the WHO European Region: review of air quality indexes and lessons learned

This report provides an overview of air quality indexes used in 37 Member States of the WHO European Region and some observations/suggestions for future developments to improve risk communication on air pollution. In the Region, air quality information is widely available to the public, both online and through official mobile apps. Forecasted air pollution information is often reported alongside near real-time air pollution monitoring data. Most countries use a national Air Quality Index instead of a uniform index, such as that provided by the European Environment Agency, and some use several different indexes. A wide range of approaches are used to calculate index values, but the general structure of indexes is similar.

Many indexes lack rigorous validation to ensure that index values correspond to population-level health risks. Quality of the accompanying health messaging varies widely, but good examples were found throughout the Region. The best examples provide information on the affected subpopulations, describe likely symptoms and make specific recommendations to reduce exposures and health risks.

Given the wide range of pollutant concentrations, mixtures and risk preferences observed, it is critical to provide tailored health messaging to accompany index levels. In addition to health-based validation studies, research should focus on understanding how the public uses air quality indexes (including special alerts): how many people are aware of the index, whether they consult it regularly, whether they modify behaviour in response to the information, and what specific actions they take in response to index values and associated health messages.

Link (English): <https://bit.ly/3TEXn7g>

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The 3rd phase of the EU's WECOOP Project coincided with some notable events and developments not only in the EU and the countries of Central Asia, but worldwide. To overcome climate change and environmental degradation, and as a lifeline out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU approved a new course – the European Green Deal. Many policies and regulations have been revised or newly adopted under the overarching aim of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The WECOOP Project has been consistently reporting on these new developments and emerging legislation through these news bulletins. All countries of Central Asia have also undertaken to achieve climate-neutrality in the meantime. As the largest donor in the world, the EU welcomes this forward-looking decision. At the Seventh EU–Central Asia High-Level Conference on Water and Environment Cooperation on 23-24 February 2023 in Rome, Italy, the EU reiterated its support to the five countries of the region accelerating a green transformation of their economies to ensure sustainable development.

After three and a half years of dedicated work to enhance national environment, climate change and water policies and to promote green investments in Central Asia, the WECOOP project is closing on 14 April 2023.

The Project team, namely, Team Leader Mr Valts Vilnītis, Key Experts Dr Anatoly Krutov and Dr Vladislav Bizek, and all senior and junior experts, would like to sincerely thank all the colleagues and partners in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as in the European Union, for professionalism and respectful cooperation. The success of our project would not be possible without the mutual trust and dedication to the common goal – sustainable development of the Central Asian region.



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