



World Water Day: Perspectives for the Environment in Eastern Partner Countries

World Water Day, held on 22 March every year since 1993, celebrates water and raises awareness of the 2 billion people living without access to safe water. Water is a key asset also in the six Eastern Partner (EaP) countries of the European Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus¹, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine's. Their water resources are experiencing increasing pressures, not least because of climate change. Industry, energy, agriculture and households, among others, all use freshwater resources. Effective water management is fundamental for economic resilience, people's well-being and sustainable livelihoods. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted water's significant role in ensuring health.

To support the EaP countries to address their water challenges the European Union launched in January 2022 a new programme [EU4Environment - Water and Data in Eastern Partner Countries](#). The Programme contributes to sustainable water resources management and policy development, sound environmental statistics and open data. Following up on the comprehensive EU support provided in the scope of the [European Water Initiative Plus \(EUWI+\)](#) and the [Shared Environmental Information System Phase II](#), the new programme focuses on updating and reinforcing the capacity of water management agencies and laboratories and of environmental data producers in the partner countries.

COVID monitoring in wastewater

The management of the pandemic continues to be a real challenge worldwide and for Eastern Partner countries. A tried and approved method to monitor the incidence of COVID-19 infections in a timely manner can help to maintain an overview of the pandemic development and plan timely response measures.

Subsequent to various aid provided from the European Union since 2020, the new offer is to set up in each country the new surveillance of virus in urban wastewater that has become standard across the EU member states. This can become an important method for early monitoring of infections and subsequent increase of health protection, or targeted or a reduced local health restrictions based on virus loads. In the framework of *EU4Environment – Water and Data*, knowledge and experience on this specific monitoring will be transferred into a pilot exercise in the Republic of Moldova.

The regional and national kick off meetings of the new Programme in February and March 2022 showed a very high interest of competent Government bodies and relevant stakeholders from the water use sectors, IFIs and the donor community, academia and civil society. Countries are eager to make use of EU support in policy reforms, river basin management and environmental data collection as a basis for decision-making and public engagement. Over the next few months, the programme will discuss with countries the strategic priorities to develop the work plans.

The programme in a nutshell

¹ With regard to the participation of Belarus, and in line with the EU Council Conclusions of 12 October 2020, the EU support will focus on intensifying cooperation with non-state stakeholders, including notably civil society, independent media and youth.



Within the *EU4Environment – Water and Data* programme, strategies for the protection and careful use of water in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus², Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine will be further developed and prepared for implementation in the period 2022-2024. The basis for these strategies are the Sustainable Development Goals, international agreements such as the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health and the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive.

The Programme will also support strengthening environmental information on waste, land use, agriculture, air and water quality and improve access to this data for decision-makers and citizens. Special topics refer to the economic soundness of water strategies and policies (economic instruments, water accounting) and support through new finance mobilisation for innovative and low-cost solutions. Experts from the Environment Agency Austria, the Austrian Development Agency, the International Office for Water (France), UNECE and the OECD support the partner countries on behalf of the European Commission.

The new EU4Environment - Water and Data reinforces the on-going [EU4Environment- Green Economy](#) programme in the EaP countries. It is also part of the “Team Europe Initiative on water and zero pollution”, which aims to re-energise Europe and its partners after the pandemic and to support the green recovery. The Programme supports the priorities of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood which include access to clean water for all and a pollution-free environment.

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