

ROADMAP

Roadmaps aim to inform citizens and stakeholders about the Commission's work in order to allow them to provide feedback and to participate effectively in future consultation activities. Citizens and stakeholders are in particular invited to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions and to make available any relevant information that they may have.

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE	EU Action Plan "Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil – building a Healthier Planet for Healthier People"
LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT	ENV.C - Quality of Life
LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE	Communication
INDICATIVE PLANNING	Q2 2021
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	<i>The action plan is foreseen in the European Green Deal – see https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en</i>

This Roadmap is provided for information purposes only and its content might change. It does not prejudice the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content. All elements of the initiative described by the Roadmap, including its timing, are subject to change.

A. Context, Problem definition and Subsidiarity Check

Context
<p>Pollution harms citizens and ecosystems. The COVID 19 pandemic has made the urge to build a healthier planet for healthy people greater than ever. To secure clean air, water and soil, healthy ecosystems and a healthy living environment for Europeans, the EU needs to better prevent, remedy, monitor and report on pollution, mainstream the zero pollution ambition into all its policy developments and further decouple economic growth from the increase of pollution as well as strengthen the inter-linkages between environmental protection, sustainable development and people's well-being, in line with United Nations driven efforts. The zero pollution ambition also has the potential to contribute to the transition to a clean and circular economy, create ample green business opportunities, including in short term, enhancing the EU's competitive edge in the recovery from the COVID 19 economic crisis. The Zero Pollution Action Plan will be coordinated with other existing and upcoming Commission initiatives that address related challenges.</p>
Problem the initiative aims to tackle
<p>Pollution causes multiple physical and mental diseases. In the EU, despite important improvements over the last decades, every year over 400 000 premature deaths (including from cancers) are attributed to ambient air pollution, and 48 000 cases of ischaemic heart disease as well as 6.5 million cases of chronic sleep disturbance to noise¹, next to other diseases attributable to both. Pollution's most harmful health impacts are typically born by vulnerable citizens, notably children, people with certain medical conditions, the elderly and people living in socio-economic deprivation.</p> <p>Pollution of air, water and soil is also one of the five main drivers of biodiversity loss and contributes largely to the current 6th species extinction. It comes at a high price for society and ecosystems, including health-related costs (healthcare, lost workdays, lost productivity), reduced yields (e.g. in agriculture, fisheries and tourism), remediation costs (e.g. water treatment, soil decontamination, marine depollution) and loss of ecosystem services (e.g. pollination)². Pollution is also strongly interrelated with other environmental, social and economic risks for businesses and citizens. The current recovery efforts are an opportunity to increase the resilience of our society as well as social sustainability, by reducing the often-unequal impacts of pollution on different groups of citizens. Safe and sustainable design and low-emission technology offer strong opportunities for sustainable innovation, cleaner economic recovery and EU leadership in green growth. Recent evaluations and</p>

¹ EEA Report No 22/2019: Environmental Noise in Europe – 2020

² e.g. Fitness Check of the Ambient Air Quality Directives (SWD(2019)427) and Biodiversity Strategy (COM(2020)380)

numerous infringement procedures point to significant implementation gaps in implementing existing EU law on pollution. Important types of pollution, such as from agriculture, households, industry and transport, are not yet effectively tackled at source, entailing failures to comply with binding health and environmental standards.

If no action is taken, EU citizens and ecosystems could stay exposed to harmful levels of pollution for long. Pollution of increasing concern, such as from certain pharmaceutical residues, persistent and toxic chemicals, pesticides, and micro-plastics, needs adequate consideration. It will also be important to clarify the association between pollution and the spread and/or impact of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Technological developments, innovation (including social innovation), digitalisation as well as further promotion of sustainable consumption, production, mobility and finance (incl. implementation of the polluter pays principle) can provide significant opportunities to address existing and emerging pollution challenges.

Basis for EU intervention (legal basis and subsidiarity check)

Article 191(1) of the Treaty requires Union policy to contribute to preserving and improving the quality of the environment and human health, next to promoting the rational utilisation of natural resources. In light thereof, pollution control at EU level has started decades ago, to help Member States address the transboundary nature of pollution whilst providing a level playing field for economic operators and ensuring a high level of protection across the Internal Market, *“taking into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Union”*. Article 191(2) of the Treaty entails the key principles of precautionary approach, prevention and rectification of environmental damage at source and that the polluter should pay. Given the cross-border nature of pollution, action at EU level provides clear added value compared to national, regional or local action alone. Many pieces of EU law addressing pollution already exist, but some policy gaps also persist, e.g. for addressing soil contamination. Related legislative updates might be done only at the EU level.

B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how

The European Green Deal announced that to protect Europe’s citizens and ecosystems, the EU needs to move towards a zero pollution ambition, and better prevent and remedy pollution from air, water, soil, and consumer products. To address these interlinked challenges, in 2021 the Commission will adopt a Zero Pollution Action Plan. This action plan will also support the post-COVID 19 recovery by promoting a more sustainable re-launch of the EU economy, creating job opportunities and reducing social inequalities, as pollution often affects the most vulnerable people most seriously. It will seek synergies with and consider actions and results of related strategies (e.g. on pharmaceuticals), policies and evaluations. Specifically, the Plan will:

1. Focus on measures to **strengthen implementation and enforcement**, so that public authorities, businesses and citizens can use EU rules on pollution more effectively.
2. Consider the need to **improve the existing health and environment acquis** (which will be subject to separate initiatives). To this end it will carefully review the preparatory work, evaluations and/or impact assessments carried out under dedicated initiatives for pollution of the air, water and marine environment as well as from road transport and industrial emissions, waste and wastewater, and noise. The plan will also consider **other pollution forms** such as soil pollution.
3. Seek **improvements to the governance of pollution policies**, including at the international level and notably via a monitoring and outlook tool using existing (e.g. collected by various EU agencies or reported by Member States) and new (e.g. from EU satellite observation) data sources and models. The Action Plan will also clarify the opportunities provided by the EU’s instruments and recovery efforts to direct financing towards supporting the Zero Pollution ambition through notably existing mechanisms such as the Environment Implementation Review. The Action Plan will also address the international aspects of the EU’s zero pollution ambition such as diplomacy, trade policy, development support.
4. Drive **societal change**, amongst others using digital solutions and contributing to a sustainable consumption agenda attentive to pollution impacts.

C. Better regulation

Consultation of citizens and stakeholders

The preparation of the Action Plan will be supported by an extensive consultation of stakeholders, including Member States’ managing authorities, experts from Member States and EEA countries, businesses (with a

specific attention to SMEs) and civil society (including environmental, consumer and health NGOs), cities, scientific and commercial technical experts, such as farm advisory services and innovators, as well as other relevant stakeholders including the general public. The consultation activities will as a minimum entail:

- an open online public consultation of at least 13 weeks, to be launched in the Q4 2020,
- stakeholder meetings and workshops, and dedicated outreach activities.

Moreover, exchanges already foreseen with Member States, the local level and stakeholders in the relevant areas (e.g. revision of Ambient Air Quality Directives) will be used to engage with the stakeholders.

A synopsis report and summary of the consultation process will be published on the consultation page.

Evidence base and data collection

The Action Plan does not require an impact assessment per se. It builds on a substantial knowledge base, notably evaluations in the areas of [air](#), [water](#) and [noise](#), as well as evaluations in the areas of [road vehicle](#) and [industrial emissions](#). In addition, there is a significant evidence base in all areas published e.g. by the European Environment Agency, Eurostat and the Joint Research Centre, including on soil. Separate inception impact assessments have been put forward for the revision of the [Industrial Emissions Directive](#), the [Urban Waste Water Directive](#), and [emission standards for cars, vans, lorries and buses](#). Any future envisaged legislative revisions would follow their own regulatory cycle, including own specific impact assessments. The Zero Pollution Action Plan will also be able to rely on a wealth of other existing evidence³, including several studies and reports⁴.

³ e.g. in the context of Commission Communication (COM(2019)128 final) that set an EU Strategic Approach on pharmaceuticals in the environment

⁴ e.g. EEA Report No 21/2019: Healthy environment, healthy lives; EEA Report No 22/2018: Unequal exposure, unequal impacts; EEA Report No 10/2019: Air quality in Europe