

Better Regulation



Water Legislation

Action 2 - Help make water legislation support the circular economy in cities

Sustainability in the water sector is a major concern and compliance with the current legislation alone does not seem to be enough to face major challenges like climate change or urban population growth.

Scope and Output

The partnership considered the issue of water reuse as key factor at urban level. Discussion among the members of the Partnership as well a recognition of legislative barriers at European and at national level was carried out in order to propose an effective action. Meanwhile, in 2018, a proposal for “Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on minimum requirements for water reuse” was presented. In the European Parliament, the rapporteur, Simona Bonafè, submitted her draft report at the end of September 2018. The Partnership welcomed the proposal and, after consultation with relevant stakeholders (e.g. Eurocities, EurEau) decided to deliver a position paper in January 2019.

Drivers and Barriers

The position paper provides the following comments and proposal of integration:

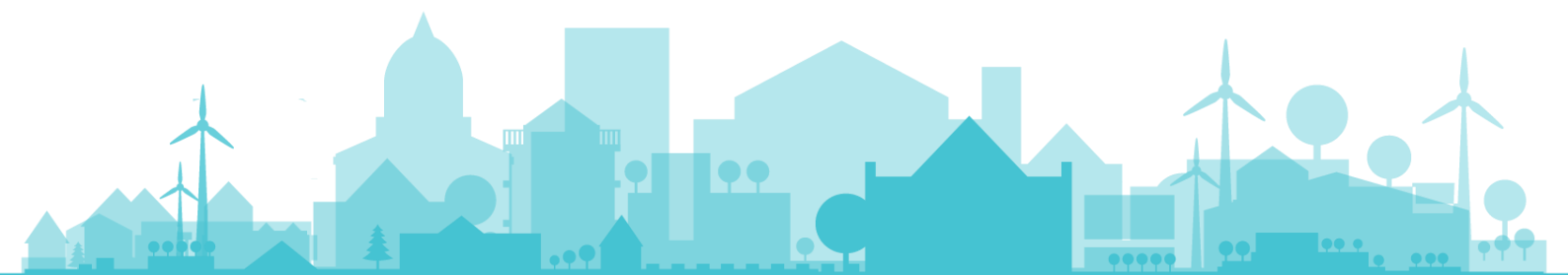
1. The regulation should include, among the classes of destination, water reuse for civil purposes (e.g. street and car washing; watering of flowerbeds, public gardens and parks). For each purpose, it should be crucial to define distinct levels of quality, according impact to human health and environment.
2. Requirements are realistic and vary in a reasonable manner in correspondence with the different types of crops and destination.
3. The competent authority should be in charge of overseeing the risk management in collaboration with the entities responsible for water reuse projects, operators of reclamation facilities and users. In order to guarantee a standardization in risk management, the regulation should expressly indicate to refer to international recognized standards.
4. In order to ensure that the reclaimed water is safe, thus protecting citizens and the environment, a collaboration among the reclaimed plant operator and food operators could create positive industrial symbiosis.

The draft legislation was adopted by the European Parliament in February 2019 with 588 votes in favor. The amended texts, adopted by the European Parliament, met with our position paper.

Potential impact

Main potential sustainability impacts are:

- Social – The use of reclaimed water creates strong social relationships among the involved local actors, end-users, including surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Financial – Reclamation activity needs to be considered as part of a wider water reuse project, involving several actors and stakeholders. It is required for cities in the long period the interconnection of all waters (freshwater supply, rain, rivers, and wastewater) with each other and other urban areas



(parks, roads, energy and waste) so that efficiencies and circular synergies arise from a coordinated approach.

- Environmental – At local level, with several activities and productive processes, many different by-products are generated (e.g. wastewater, among them), and the range of potential uses can be equally various, according circular economy principles.

How will this help the new Circular Economy Action Plan (March 2020) of the European Commission?

Ensuring a more broadly reuse of treated wastewater could limit extraction from water bodies and groundwater. An integrated approach in terms of water supply, wastewater treatment and drainage services needs to be followed in order to protect the environment and biodiversity, together with the safeguard citizens' health and wellbeing.

Recommendations from the Partnership to the EU Commission

The following recommendations are addressed to DG ENV and DG RTD:

- 1) The goal of a more sustainable water cycle at urban level needs new infrastructures and the definition of innovative policies.
- 2) Definition of specific funding programmes to stimulate innovation and R&D support innovation in reclamation technologies at urban level and the up-skilling of professionals in the water sector.
- 3) New regulation on water reuse need to be broadly communicate to member state level through information campaigns. The aim is to raise awareness among end users and citizens about the saving of water resources resulting from the reuse of urban wastewater and the controls able to guarantee conformity of water.

The necessary next steps

Members of the partnership could organize workshops, at national level, inviting policy makers, stakeholders, authorities and treatment plants in order to discuss the possible applications of the new regulation at territorial level. With this activity, the members of the partnership can close the loop in this action.

Where to find more information

Position paper developed by Partnership, [available here](#).

Proposed text by the European Parliament, [available here](#).

Connection to the SDGs

