# Quality of water intended for human consumption. Drinking Water Directive

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The Commission presents a synthesis report on the quality of drinking water in the EU examining the Member States' reports for the period 2008-2010 under Directive 98/83/EC.

The Drinking Water Directive, introduced in 1980 and revised in 1998, has led to the availability of high-quality drinking water across the EU. Joint efforts from EU institutions, Member States and service providers have resulted in high compliance rates with the drinking water standards and the Directive is therefore one of the success stories, albeit not a very well known one, of EU legislation in the field of environment and public health.

This document gives a summary of the status of implementation of the Drinking Water Directive, based on the latest data reported by Member States:

**Drinking water quality**: in order to ensure that drinking water is safe for human consumption, the Drinking Water Directive sets out minimum water quality requirements. Reported data on these parameters show that drinking water quality in the EU is in general very good. The overall trend is also positive.

- ***For the large supplies***, the vast majority of Member States show compliance rates for microbiological and chemical parameters of between 99% and 100%. For the few Member States showing compliance rates lower than 99%, reinforced action will be required to ensure that all citizens served by the large supplies concerned can safely use drinking water.

- ***As regards the small water supplies***, the picture is more divergent. Lower compliance levels are noted for the microbiological parameters, with only three Member States achieving compliance rates between 99% and 100%. A breakdown of compliance rates for microbiological parameters shows that the compliance for small supplies is significantly lower than for large supplies.

For the **chemical parameters** for small supplies, similar high compliance levels are noted as for the big supplies. In some supply zones, problems were reported in relation to nitrate, nitrite, arsenic, and to a lesser extent, boron and fluoride. The assessment of reported data on the small supplies showed that some Member States are struggling to manage small supplies in a safe way.

Concerns in relation to small water supplies have also been recognised by the 7$^{th}$ Environmental Action Programme (7th EAP), which calls for increased efforts in the implementation of the Directive in particular for small drinking water supplies.

**Monitoring**: the Directive requires Member States to ensure that regular monitoring of the quality of water intended for human consumption is carried out. However, monitoring approaches differ between Member States and even between different water supply zones within individual Member States, resulting in different levels and availability of monitoring data. This does not necessarily amount to a failure in meeting the legal requirements as the Directive allows for adapted monitoring programmes depending on the specific characteristics of the water supply zone. The analysis suggests, however, the need to **review and better streamline the current monitoring approaches**.

To address Member States' monitoring and performance, the Commission is working on a so called "Structured Implementation and Information Framework" (**SIIF**), establishing systems at national level which actively disseminate information about how EU environment legislation is being implemented. This information is then brought together to provide an EU-wide overview. The Directive's requirement that up-to-date information on drinking water quality is made available to consumers could also be linked to such an information framework and be improved in this context. Drinking water data could also be more clearly linked to the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) which comprises a wide range of data and information collected by the EU institutions.

**Information**: the report also notes that it is important for the public to have access to information on drinking water quality. While often provided on national websites, it is frequently not up to date and is difficult to understand. The majority of Member States do not use comprehensive maps or other public supports. The current set-up for reporting does not provide the Commission with adequate and timely information to perform a thorough synthesis of drinking water quality developments in the European Union. This makes it difficult to provide the Council, European Parliament and the public with updated EU-wide information on drinking water policy and quality on a regular basis. In addition, the way data are collected, processed and reported differs across the EU, which makes it difficult to compare situations in different Member States with regard to their performance and compliance with the Directive. A **revised or new reporting concept** could facilitate transparent data dissemination and management at both national and EU level. Also, benchmarking drinking water quality could allow easier interpretation and visualisation of water quality data across the EU and better comparison of water quality and trends between Member States.

**Derogations**: the Directive allows derogations from the drinking water quality standards under very strict conditions and limited in time. The Commission has so far granted a number of derogations to the Czech Republic, Italy, Hungary and Germany, referring mainly to the parameters of nitrate and nitrite, fluoride, boron, arsenic and nickel. It has refused one request for a derogation, from Estonia. Derogations and other possible exemptions in exceptional circumstances could **jeopardize a consistent EU-wide implementation of the Directive** if not applied prudently.

**Challenges**: EU policy on drinking water has led to the development of high drinking water quality across the EU over the past decades. However, in order to keep these high quality standards and address specific remaining challenges, there may be a need to **further adapt the EU legal framework**.

**Main conclusions**: although enforcement of the Drinking Water Directive is satisfactory and progress has been made in many areas, the following issues and challenges have been identified:

- the supply of high-quality water, in particular in **remote and rural areas**, should be improved. Small water supplies in these areas require specific risk-based management approaches and the role of the Drinking Water Directive in this context should be explored;
- **risk-based approaches** to the management of big water supplies would allow for more cost effective monitoring and parameter analysis in relation to identified risks and provide better guarantees for the protection of human health;
- methodologies for **monitoring** and analysis should reflect the latest scientific and technological developments;
- new scientific information about chemical and other parameters in relation to the drinking water parameter list should be considered in line with the on-going revision of the WHO drinking-water guidelines, including emerging pollutants;
- modern information technology and easier **access to environmental information** should be used to provide more up-to-date information for consumers, and to explore how to link different monitoring data with reporting and consumer information;

- implementation **timescales and derogation mechanisms** are out- of-date and would benefit from a general update and overhaul;
- an **EU-wide public consultation** will be a first step towards a further in-depth assessment of the above mentioned challenges and how they could be best addressed. It may also identify additional issues to be tackled in order to ensure and further improve high drinking water quality standards across the EU.