

Quality of water intended for human consumption. Recast

2017/0332(COD) - 28/03/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a legislative resolution on the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast), closing its first reading.

Parliament's position in first reading following the ordinary legislative procedure amended the Commission's proposal as follows:

Ensure universal access to drinking water

The proposed directive aims to protect human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by ensuring that it is wholesome and clean and providing universal access to such water for all in the Union. Measures taken to implement the Directive should be in accordance with the precautionary principle.

Parliament introduced the principle of access to water for all in the EU in Parliament's resolution on the follow-up the European Citizens' Initiative Right2Water, which asked the Union to strengthen its efforts to ensure universal access to water.

In particular, Member States shall take measures to:

- identify people with limited access to drinking water, assess opportunities and take measures to improve access for those people and inform them of the possibilities of connecting to a distribution network or alternative means of access to water intended for human consumption;
- ensure the public supply of water for human consumption;
- improve water access, such as setting up free fountains in cities and public places, where technically feasible and proportionate;
- ensure the free provision of such water in administrations and public buildings;
- encourage tap water to be provided in restaurants, canteens and catering services for free or for a low service fee;
- launch campaigns to encourage the general public to carry reusable water bottles and launching initiatives to raise awareness of the location of refill point.

Risk-based approach

The risk-based approach shall consist of three components:

- firstly, an assessment by the Member State of the hazard associated with the abstraction area, in line with the WHO's Guidelines and Water Safety Plan Manual;
- secondly, a possibility for the water supplier to adapt monitoring to the main risks;

- thirdly, an assessment by the Member State of the possible risks stemming from domestic distribution systems (e.g. Legionella or lead), with special focus on priority premises such as hospitals, retirement homes, schools or nurseries.

Member States shall ensure a clear and appropriate distribution of responsibilities between stakeholders, as defined by the Member States, for the application of the risk-based approach according to their national institutional and legal framework.

Member States should also inform consumers and owners of public and private premises about measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of non-compliance with the quality standards for water intended for human consumption due to the domestic distribution system.

Drinking water quality parameters

New legislation shall introduce new chemical parameters or groups of parameters, to tighten the maximum limits for certain pollutants such as lead (to be reduced by half), per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), harmful bacteria, and introduce new caps for endocrine disruptors Bisphenol A and Beta-estradiol (50-28-2). It also monitors levels of microplastics, an emerging concern.

Surveillance

With regard to the regular monitoring, Member States shall ensure access to installations in priority premises for the purposes of sampling and may set up a monitoring strategy, in particular as regards Legionella pneumophila, which are responsible for the majority of cases of legionnaire's disease in the Union.

Parliament stated that it is important to monitor newly occurring substances in drinking water and to be able to introduce parameter values where a health risk is identified.

The Commission may adopt delegated acts to supplement the Directive by establishing maximum values for the presence in water intended for human consumption of microplastics, pharmaceuticals and other newly identified pollutants.

Quality standards: a new Article was proposed stipulating that Member States shall take all necessary measures to ensure that the treatment agents, the materials, and the disinfection procedures used for disinfection purposes in water supply systems do not adversely affect the quality of water intended for human consumption. Any contamination of water intended for human consumption from the use of such agents, materials and procedures shall be minimised without, however, compromising the effectiveness of the disinfection.

Parliament also introduced minimum hygiene requirements for products, substances and materials in contact with water intended for human consumption.

Leakages

Member States shall take measures to ensure that competent authorities carry out an assessment of the water leakage levels on their territory and of the potential for improvements in water leakage reduction in the drinking water sector. That assessment shall take into account relevant public health, environmental, technical and economic aspects.

Member States shall adopt, by 31 December 2022, national targets to reduce the leakage levels of water suppliers in their territory by 31 December 2030. Member States may provide meaningful incentives to ensure that water suppliers in their territory meet the national targets.

Transparency and information for consumers

Transparency concerning water quality information and how it is provided to consumers is likely to encourage water operators to make every effort to meet their obligations in this area. Members stressed the need to guarantee easy access to up-to-date information that is understandable and relevant to consumers, for example in a booklet, on a website or on a smart application with the aim of boosting citizens' confidence in the water supply and the use of tap water.