



European
Commission

EU Environmental Implementation Review: Highlights

Greece



“EU environmental laws make people’s lives better but rules only work if they’re actually applied. Environmental laws improve water & air quality, raise recycling rates & protect nature, to mention a few. And they provide huge economic benefits. But they can only be effective if implemented. It is here that the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) comes in: It is part of our response to citizens, who want the EU to make sure that environmental rules are applied correctly in their countries.”

Karmenu Vella

Member of the European Commission responsible for environment, maritime affairs and fisheries



Country profile of Greece

Greece faces significant difficulties in implementing EU environmental legislation. This can be demonstrated by the high number of infringement cases currently ongoing against the country, very often at an advanced stage. Waste management is the area where the biggest problems can be observed, with illegal landfilling, very low recycling rates and the management of hazardous waste at the top of the list. Challenges remain in the field of urban waste water treatment, as well as air quality, particularly in urban centres. Greece has a rich natural environment able to create numerous opportunities for sustainable development and growth. However, its protection needs to be strongly enhanced. Finally, it can often be observed that complex administrative structures and procedures can cause significant delays and bottlenecks and are sometimes the main obstacle to implementing environmental legislation in Greece. Financing is also a significant issue, particularly for areas where EU funding is not available.

Challenges

The main challenges Greece faces with regard to implementing EU environmental policy and law are:

- Addressing the main waste management problems (closure of illegal landfills, treatment of hazardous waste) as a matter of absolute priority.
- Putting in place an efficient national system for the comprehensive administration and functioning of protected areas, raising awareness about Natura 2000 and creating incentives for investments promoting its benefits, improving the capacity of competent authorities, ensuring effective environmental assessments at plan and project level, and improving enforcement of legislation on the ground.
- Completing implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, giving priority to those agglomerations that are subject to an infringement case.

Opportunities

Greece could perform better on issues where a sound knowledge base and good practices already exist. This applies in particular to:

- Investing in separate collection and recycling and using economic instruments to improve the country’s overall waste management performance, which could create jobs and revenues.
- Effectively protecting, restoring and ensuring the sustainable use of the country’s natural capital, especially under the Natura 2000 network, so as to maximise potential benefits deriving from ecosystem services which can serve as powerful economic drivers, including through green tourism and other sustainable activities.
- Simplifying administrative procedures and improving cooperation among those public authorities involved in the application of environmental policies, which will allow for their smoother and quicker implementation.

Points of excellence

Where Greece leads in environmental implementation, it could share its innovative approaches more widely among other countries. Concrete examples include:

- According to the EEA report 'European Bathing Water quality in 2015, 97.2 % of bathing waters in Greece were of excellent quality.
- Greece achieves very high compliance rates of 99-100 % for the microbiological, chemical and indicator parameters laid down in the Drinking Water Directive.
- Greece made good and early use of LIFE funds for a substantial national list of sites for Natura 2000 under the Habitats Directive. In some cases, close collaboration between the authorities and conservation NGOs has enabled building expertise and putting in place effective measures in specific areas.

Towards a circular economy

The transformation of our economies from linear to circular provides an opportunity to reinvent them and make them more sustainable and competitive. This will stimulate investments and bring both short- and long-term benefits for the economy, the environment and citizens.

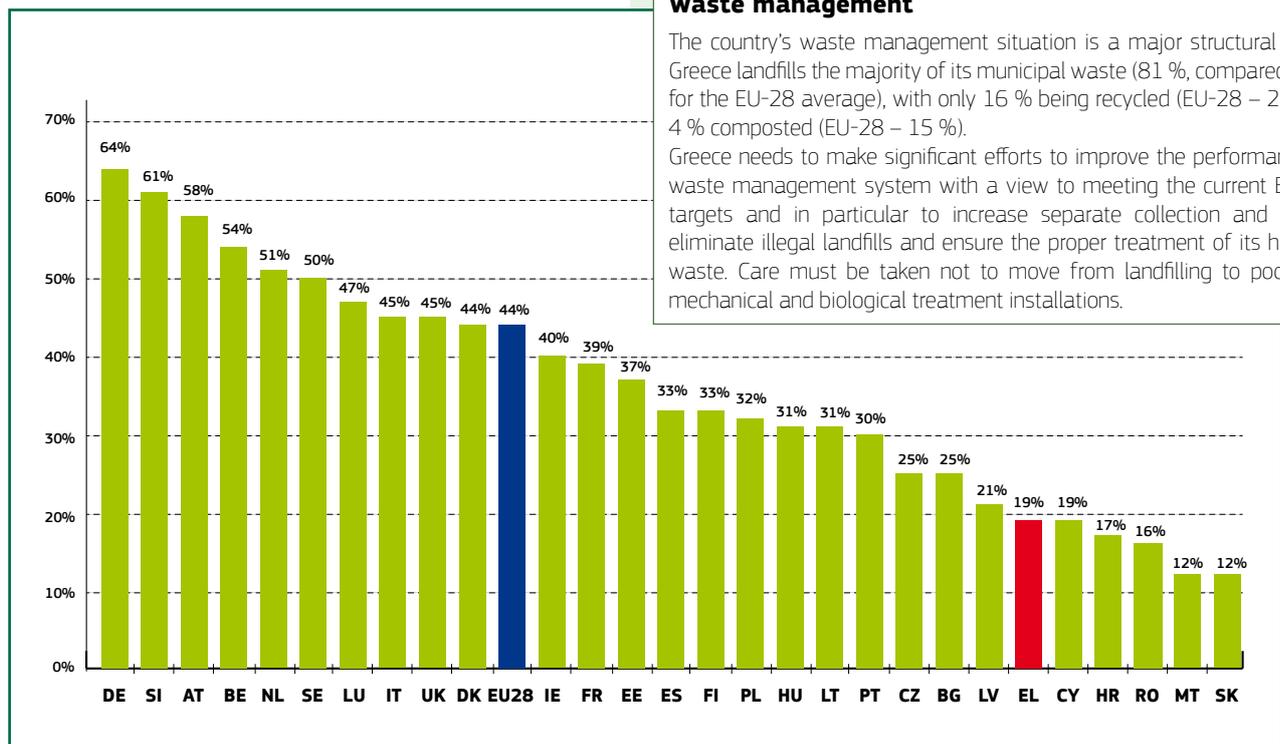
Greece established a Green Fund in 2010, the objective of which is to stimulate growth by protecting the environment and providing support for environmentally friendly projects and initiatives.

About the Environmental Implementation Review

Europeans want common decisions followed by swift and efficient implementation. Weak implementation generates high societal, economic and environmental costs and creates an uneven playing field for businesses. More than 75 % of European citizens consider EU environmental legislation is necessary to protect the environment in their country, and nearly 80 % agree that the EU institutions should be able to check that environmental laws are being applied correctly in their country.

In the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), the European Commission analyses the main challenges and opportunities regarding the implementation of EU environmental legislation and policies in each Member State. The findings are published in short but comprehensive country reports released every two years. The reports are meant to stimulate a positive debate both on shared environmental challenges for the EU, as well as on the most effective ways to address the key implementation gaps and improve environmental outcomes by each Member State. These reports rely on more detailed implementation reports collected or issued by the Commission under specific environmental legislation and the State of the Environment Reports by the European Environment Agency. The EIR reports will not replace the specific instruments to ensure compliance with the EU legal obligations. Climate change has not been addressed in the first report.

This factsheet presents the highlights of the EIR country report for Greece.



Waste management

The country's waste management situation is a major structural problem. Greece landfills the majority of its municipal waste (81 %, compared to 31 % for the EU-28 average), with only 16 % being recycled (EU-28 – 27 %) and 4 % composted (EU-28 – 15 %).

Greece needs to make significant efforts to improve the performance of its waste management system with a view to meeting the current EU waste targets and in particular to increase separate collection and recycling, eliminate illegal landfills and ensure the proper treatment of its hazardous waste. Care must be taken not to move from landfilling to poor quality mechanical and biological treatment installations.

Recycling rate of municipal waste in % in 2014



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Marine environment

Since Greece has yet to report on its monitoring programmes under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Commission has not carried out any assessment. It is too early to say whether or not Greek waters have achieved good status.

Nature protection

Greece must make significant efforts to put in place an efficient national system for the administration and functioning of protected areas and improve the enforcement of relevant environmental legislation on the ground.

Water quality and management

Greece needs to make significant efforts to achieve the Water Framework Directive's objectives. In addition, it should make further efforts to meet the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and the Nitrates Directive.

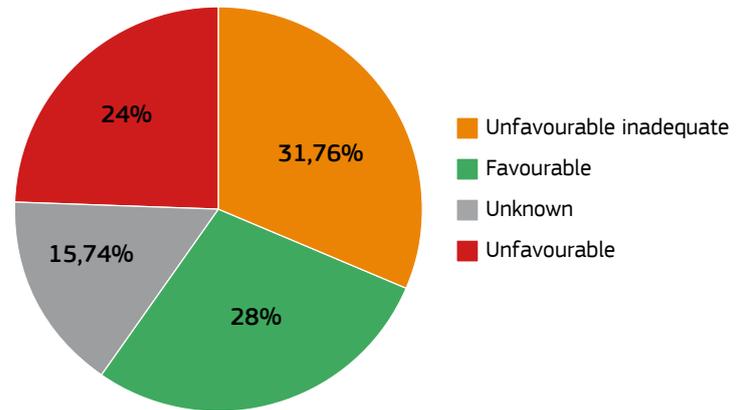
The main pressure on Greek surface waters is diffuse pollution, which affects 63 % of water bodies. Point sources of pollution affect 44 % of water bodies and abstraction 6 %.

Greek legislation related to nitrates is obsolete. The nitrate-vulnerable zone designation has been improved, but Greece still needs to improve the measures implementing the Nitrates Directive and establish proper action programmes for all nitrate-vulnerable zones.

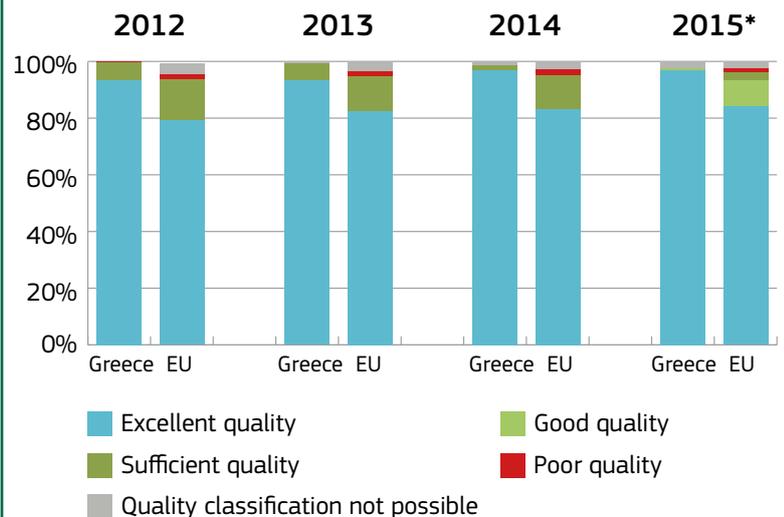
The country demonstrates high general compliance rates with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. However, some areas have been very slow to comply, resulting in advanced legal action.

In 2015, of the 1542 bathing waters in Greece, 97.2 % were of excellent quality and 0.6 % of good quality; it was not possible to assess the remaining 34 bathing waters.

Conservation status of protected species in 2013 - Greece



Bathing water quality 2012-2015



*The category 'good' was introduced in the 2015 bathing water report

Air pollution

Greece must make further significant efforts to meet EU air quality standards, especially for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter and ozone concentrations.

The emission of several air pollutants has decreased significantly. At the same time, air quality in Greece continues to cause concern. For 2014, exceedances above the EU air quality standards were registered for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM₁₀) in one air quality zone each (Athens and Thessaloniki, respectively). Furthermore, in several air quality zones, the target values and long-term objectives for ozone concentrations are not being met.

Environmental taxation

A 2016 study suggests that there is considerable potential for shifting taxes from labour to environmental taxes. Under a good practice scenario, these could generate an additional EUR 1.41 billion in 2018, rising to EUR 3.01 billion in 2030 (both in real 2015 terms). This is equivalent to an additional 0.72 % and 1.09 % of GDP in 2018 and 2030, respectively. The largest potential source of revenue would come from the proposed amendments to taxes on transport fuels: currently, Greece taxes diesel fuel at a much lower rate than petrol, which is not justified by the environmental impact those fuels create. The increase could account for EUR 1.12 billion in 2030 (real 2015 terms), equivalent to 0.4 % of GDP.

Effective governance and knowledge

The number of open infringement cases against Greece in the area of the environment is very high (27 infringement cases, 19 of which are at 258 stage and 8 are at 260 stage). In general, there are no significant problems regarding the quality of transposition of the EU Directives (the problems are essentially related to their implementation). The Court of Justice has imposed fines on Greece for non-compliance with EU law provisions in the fields of solid waste and urban waste-water treatment and penalty payments remain due as long as the Court's judgments are not fully executed by the Member State.



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The full country report on Greece, the other 27 country reports, as well as the Communication 'The EU Environmental Implementation Review: Common challenges and how to combine efforts to deliver better results' are available here:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index_en.htm