



EU Environmental Implementation Review: Highlights

France



“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 France

France is a politically centralised country which has delegated several environmental competences at regional and local level while keeping the assessment of environmental impact at the national level. Recently (August 2015), the loi ‘NOTRe’ (Act on the new territorial organisation of the French Republic) has allocated more competences on sustainable development at the regional level (waste, renewable energies, mobility, land-use planning, etc.).

- Reducing the percentage of incinerated and landfilled waste and increasing reuse and recycling in order to create more business opportunities.

Points of excellence

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

- Good administrative capacity (e.g. inspection bodies specially dedicated to environment protection and an environmental authority involved in the assessment of plans and programmes).
- The green and blue belt network (‘trame verte et bleue’) aiming to create a network of biodiversity corridors and reservoirs.
- Innovative and participative governance tools to protect biodiversity, such as dedicated structures for Natura 2000 (a steering committee with local stakeholders and a dedicated management plan) and regional nature park policy for protecting the environment while ensuring the sustainable development of human activities (Parcs Naturels Régionaux - PNR).

Main challenges

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

- Improving air quality by taking forward-looking, speedy and effective action to reach EU-based air pollution limit values.
- Implementing the necessary measures to improve the water quality, notably by reducing the pollution by nitrates.
- Effectively protecting biodiversity by ensuring the enforcement of the law to protect habitats and species.

Opportunities

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

- Incentivising a shift from diesel fuel for motor vehicles, notably through taxation.
- Achieving waste management plans across its entire territory.

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 France.

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.

France is performing above the EU average in terms of resource productivity (how efficiently the economy uses material resources to produce wealth), with EUR 2.8/kg (EU average is EUR 2/kg) in 2015. France has had a modest but stable increase in resource productivity since 2007.

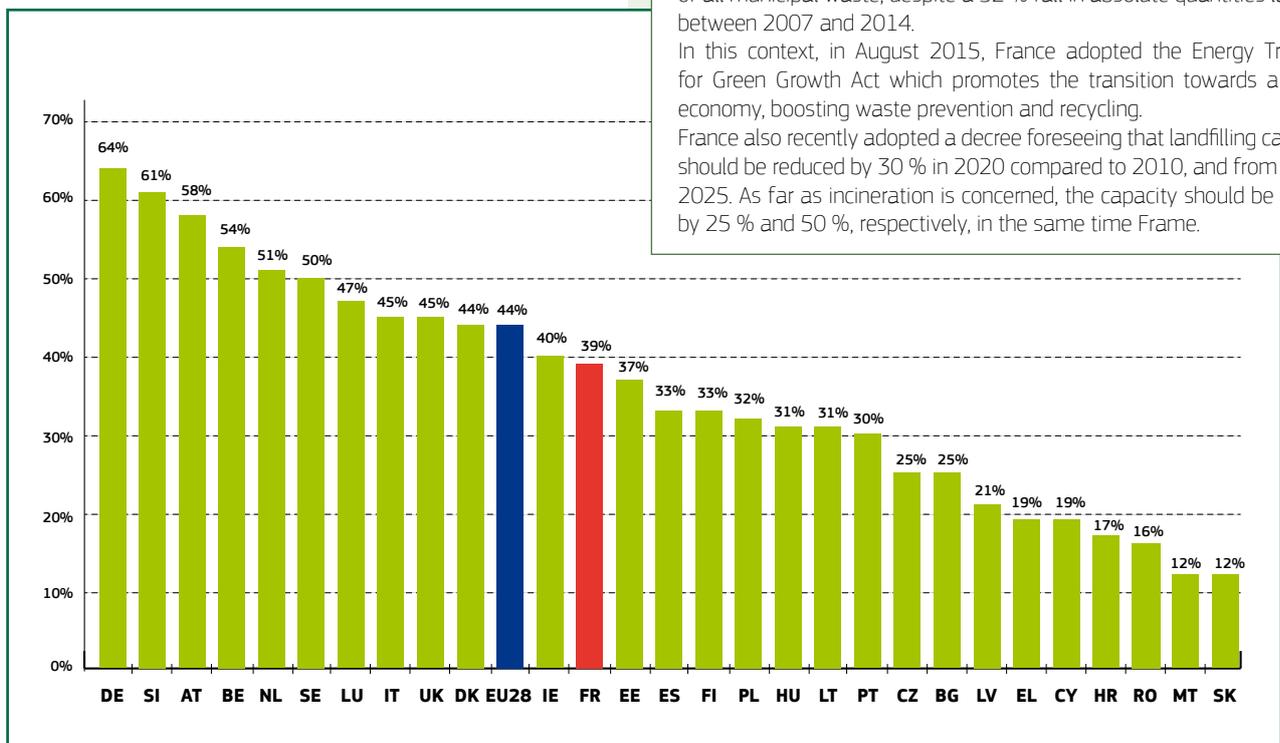
The French central government has strongly supported the development of eco-industries, eco-innovation and the circular economy over recent decades by deploying a number of policy initiatives and programmes to support to eco-innovation and R&D programmes, including the circular economy. These policy measures complement existing support schemes, including those that are not fully dedicated to eco-innovation but target innovation as a whole.

Waste management

With a recycling rate of 38 % in 2013 and a progression of 2.5 % since 2010, France should reach its European objective of 50 %. However, it is still over-reliant on incineration. Similarly, landfilling still accounts for 26 % of all municipal waste, despite a 32 % fall in absolute quantities landfilled between 2007 and 2014.

In this context, in August 2015, France adopted the Energy Transition for Green Growth Act which promotes the transition towards a circular economy, boosting waste prevention and recycling.

France also recently adopted a decree foreseeing that landfilling capacities should be reduced by 30 % in 2020 compared to 2010, and from 50 % in 2025. As far as incineration is concerned, the capacity should be reduced by 25 % and 50 %, respectively, in the same time frame.



Recycling rate of municipal waste in % in 2014



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Marine environment

In 2014, France established a monitoring programme for its marine waters. However, with the exception of marine litter and underwater noise, this monitoring must provide a framework for charting progress towards good environmental status and environmental targets.

Nature protection

The main challenge in France with regard to the implementation of Natura 2000 is to ensure appropriate financing, from both national and EU funds, as well as to work towards a better integration between nature and agricultural policies. Together with the fact that the regions will now lead on biodiversity matters and are responsible for implementing the European funds, the recent territorial reshuffle in France will create both challenges and opportunities.

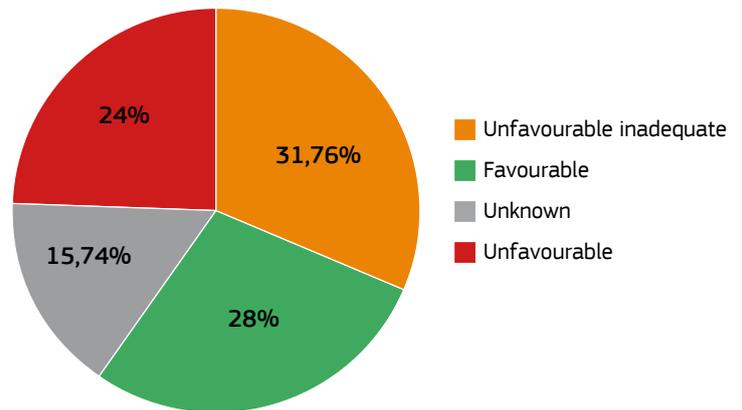
Water quality and management

The most widespread pressure on the French surface waters is diffuse pollution which affects 39 % of water bodies. Some progress has been made to address water pollution by nitrates from agricultural sources and eutrophication.

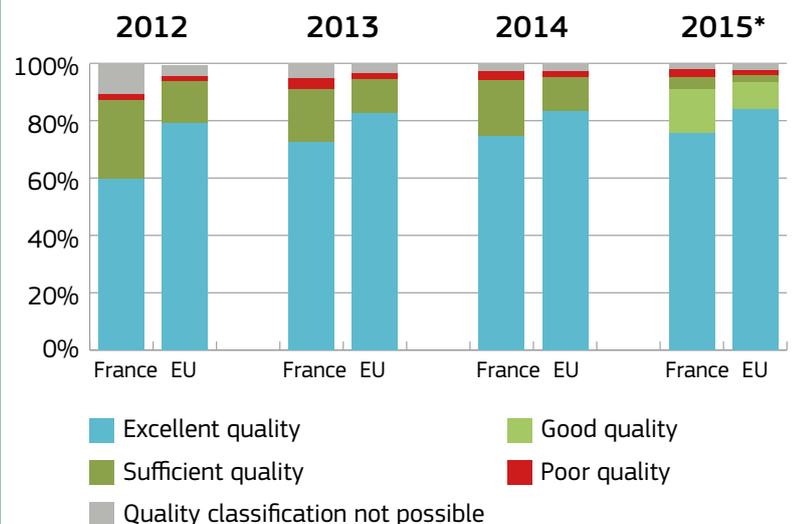
As regards drinking water, France achieves very high compliance rates of 99-100 % for the microbiological, chemical and indicator parameters laid down in the Drinking Water Directive.

In 2015, of the 3355 bathing waters in France, 76.0 % were of excellent quality, 15.1 % of good quality and 4.2 % of sufficient quality. 95 bathing waters were of poor quality or non-compliant while it was not possible to assess the remaining 63 bathing waters.

Conservation status of protected species in 2013 - France



Bathing water quality 2012-2015



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

Air pollution and traffic congestion

In France, the emission of several air pollutants has decreased (sulphur oxides, volatile organic compounds). For 2014, exceedances above the EU air quality standards have been registered related to concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) in 19 air quality zones and related to particulate matter (PM₁₀) in 17 air quality zones.

It should be noted that the exceedance of the current ceilings for nitrogen oxides is partly due to the actual driving emissions of these pollutants from diesel vehicles.

Air pollution in urban areas

Although there have been improvements for several air pollutants, air quality in France continues to cause serious concern. Even though significant reductions in emissions of nitrogen oxide (55 %) have been recorded they remain at 9 % above the current EU ceiling. This is partly due to current emissions of these pollutants from diesel vehicles.

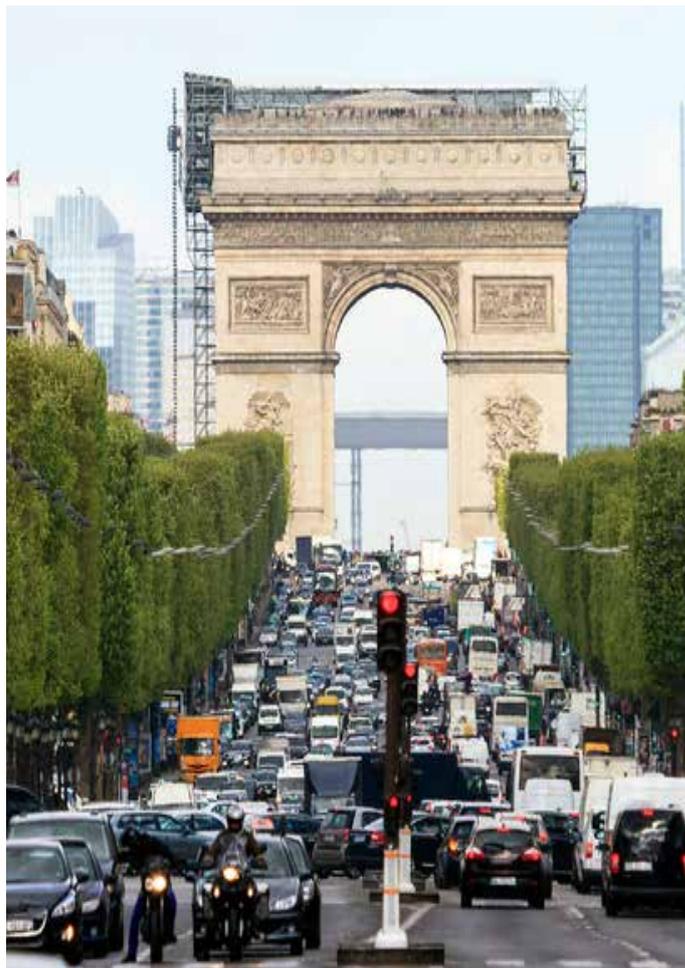
Environmental taxation

In its 2016 budget, France has continued to increase environmental taxation. The recently adopted carbon tax will be raised from EUR 14.5 to 22/tCO₂ in 2016 and EUR 30.5/tCO₂ in 2017, with the aim of reaching EUR 56/tCO₂ in 2020 and EUR 100/tCO₂ in 2030. In addition, the taxation gap between diesel and petrol will be further reduced (which has also been underlined in the 2016 OECD environmental performance review for France).

France is closing the gap with the EU average in terms of environmental taxation although there is still room for improvement.

Effective governance and knowledge

On environmental impact assessment on plans and programmes, France has recently revised its legislation on the regional organisation of the consultative authority with environmental responsibilities in order to align it with EU law. A body representing the national environmental authority will be set up in each of the 13 regions. These bodies will function separately from the public authorities in charge of approving programmes with potential environmental effects.



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As regards access to justice, the French system of administrative appeal/judicial review in the environmental area is based on a clear set of rules that ensure legal certainty for all potential litigants in terms of the predictability and transparency of rules related to access to justice. However, the costs for court procedures remain high, in particular due to the mandatory legal representation before the courts of major jurisdiction.

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The full country report on France, 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