

## Taking wastewater monitoring to the next level: The European Union Water Initiative Plus discusses COVID-19 monitoring in wastewater



Webinar

**Wastewater  
monitoring** for  
tracking of  
**C**  **VID-19**  
infections

**Vienna, 4 November 2020** – COVID-19 and human health are subjects that water management cannot ignore. About 90 public health and water professionals from Eastern Partnership countries, European Union Member States, representatives of EU institutions, and international organizations, such as WHO, UNECE and OECD, gathered in a webinar to discuss COVID-19 tracing in wastewater. This can serve as a decision-making support tool for managing the COVID-19 crisis. The EU Water Initiative Plus programme facilitated this exchange, which is due to continue in the future.

### **Eastern Partnership focus on resilience and benefits for people**

The pandemic showed that the central goal of resilience for the post-2020 Eastern Partnership agenda was well chosen. Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit at the European Commission, highlighted on-going work to shape up the future elements of cooperation, with contribution from a wide range of stakeholders. The Eastern Partnership will continue focusing on benefits for citizens and the environment.

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted and amplified vulnerabilities in many areas, not just health. The European Union put in place a rapid response. A support package for the six Eastern Partnership countries was decided already in March 2020: €80 million for immediate needs including the health sector and €900 million for longer-term socio-economic recovery.

### **Wastewater as mirror of our society**

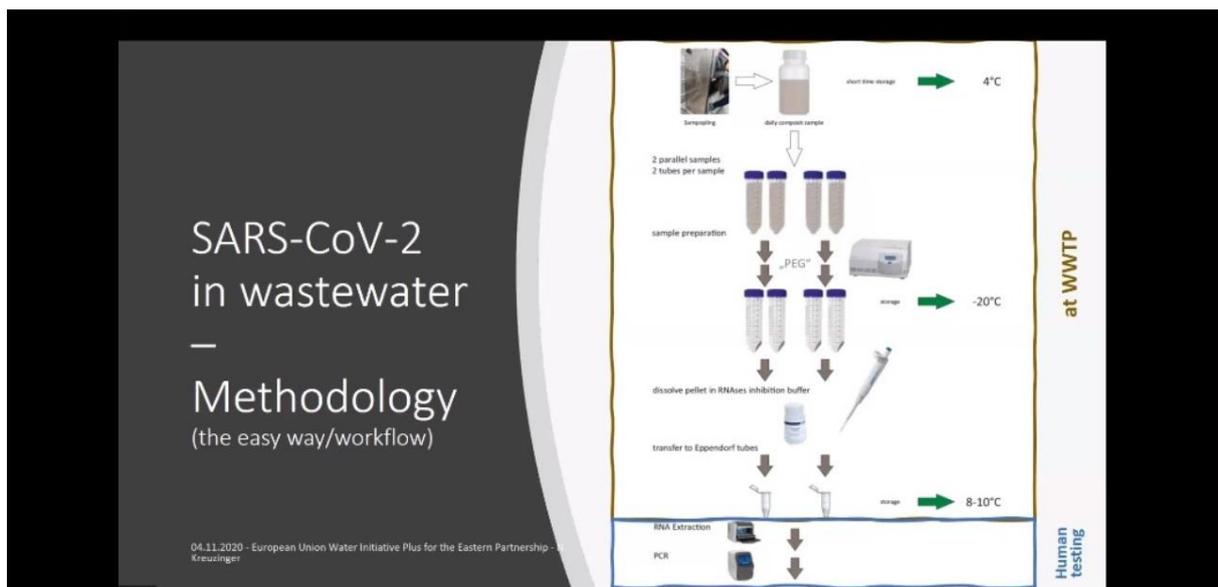
Communal wastewater-based epidemiology can provide valuable information on viral infections. This can be achieved by analyzing wastewater molecular epidemiology, including

from a geographical perspective. This is a novel approach that can however be deployed within a short time, if health and water professionals work together effectively.

The participants of the webinar shared information about current research on COVID-19 monitoring in wastewater in Austria as well as in France and the Netherlands. They discussed challenges like data management, analytical uncertainties and feasibility of such a monitoring approach in the EU Member States and in Eastern partner countries. The European Commission has facilitated such work in the Member States through its Joint Research Centre.

Georg Rebernik, Managing Director of the Environment Agency Austria, underlined the role of environmental expert institutions in monitoring and providing relevant knowledge. In the context of EUWI+, this supports a sound management of water resources as a key for a sustainable economic and social development. Concerning more specifically the COVID-19 crisis, data from wastewater monitoring can deliver valuable additional information for decision-makers responsible for public health.

Experience from Austria was subject of a case study. Norbert Kreuzinger, professor at the Technische Universität Wien, gave an overview of wastewater-based epidemiology, limitations and opportunities for trend analysis of virus infections in the populations (7 to 10 days earlier than contact tracing) served by wastewater treatment plants, monitoring of the effectiveness of pandemic management measures, and cluster tracing.



## European Union support to modernize water monitoring in the partner countries

The webinar participants also received an update on water monitoring in Eastern Partnership countries. Philipp Hohenblum, expert at the Environment Agency Austria, reviewed the legal requirements for water monitoring and the progress achieved by the partner countries with support from the EU Water Initiative Plus. The programme has provided multiple trainings to water professionals, delivered new equipment, and conducted water quality surveys. Remaining challenges, such as the need to address pollution with microplastics and establish early warning systems on pollution, were highlighted.

Angela Bularga, Programme Manager at the European Commission, informed the participants about on-going efforts to extend EU support for improving water resources management within the Eastern Partnership framework.

## About EUWI Plus

The webinar was part of activities implemented by the European Union Water Initiative Plus for the Eastern Partnership Countries (EUWI+) programme. The programme is funded by the European Union (EUR 23.5 million) with co-funding by France and Austria (EUR 1.0 million). Launched in September 2016 for a duration of 4 years, it is one of the biggest policy dialogue and technical support commitments of the European Union to the water sector in the 6 Eastern Partner countries. The EUWI+ programme is implemented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and a consortium of EU member states comprising the Environment Agency Austria (Austria) and the International Office for Water (France).

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### Recommended downloads:

- [Short paper: Wastewater monitoring for tracking of COVID-19 infections, Norbert Kreuzinger, Technische Universität Wien Institute for Water Quality and Resources Management](#)
- [PPT presentation: Wastewater monitoring for tracking of COVID-19 infections, Norbert Kreuzinger, Technische Universität Wien, Institute for Water Quality and Resources Management](#)
- [PPT presentation: Water Monitoring in the Eastern Partnership countries – EUWI+ AND BEYOND, Philipp Hohenblum, Environment Agency Austria](#)