

[Article – Parliament calls for better protection of cross-border and seasonal workers](#)



Following [a call by the European Council end of March](#), the [European Commission issued guidelines on 30 March](#) to follow a coordinated approach at EU level and to ensure that mobile workers, especially those critical in the fight against Covid-19, can reach their workplace. It provided a non-exhaustive list of critical workers such as health professionals, child and elderly care workers, scientists in health-related industries as well as workers in the food sector, for which a smooth and fast border-crossing, including proportionate health screening, should be guaranteed.

On 26 May, Parliament's [employment committee debated](#) reports of precarious working conditions of cross-border workers with the Croatian Presidency, the Commission and the European Labour Authority. On 18 June, ahead of the vote, MEPs [debated](#) the issue in plenary.

Next steps

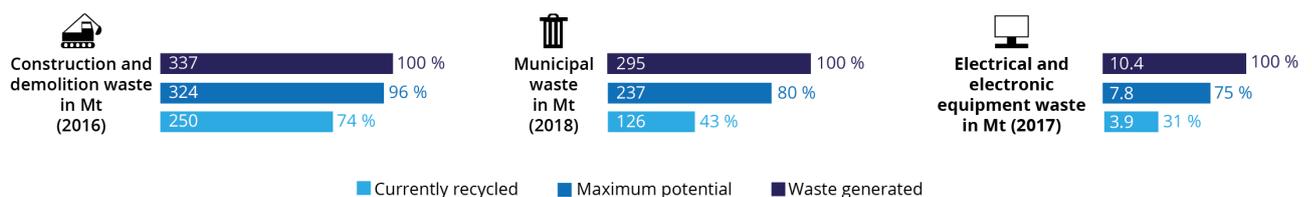
The Commission is expected to respond to the Parliament's call with new specific guidelines to protect cross-border and seasonal workers in the context of Covid-19.

Doubling recycling across Europe is feasible, for certain waste streams

Increased recycling rates are being hindered due to economic, technical and regulatory barriers. Low market prices for virgin resources, recycling capacity and the complexity of certain products are holding up increased recycling rates, according to the EEA briefing '[The case for increased recycling: estimating the potential for recycling in Europe](#)'. The briefing notes that the full implementation of measures supporting the recycling targets set under European Union legislation will help. Additionally, implementing new policy measures, some of which are included in the EU's 2020 circular economy action plan can also help increase recycling of waste materials.

Recycled amounts from municipal, construction and electronic waste have increased over past years. Landmark EU directives, such as the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) and the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive, have fuelled the increase. These laws follow principles designed to achieve a gradual, but steady, increase in the level of recycling of a waste stream compared with the amount generated. For example, the existing municipal waste recycling target for 2035 aims to exploit much of the waste stream's recycling potential. In addition, the new circular economy policy framework also calls for keeping materials in the economy for as long as possible and their value as high as possible.

Potential for increasing separate collection for recycling and current (based on latest available data) generation and recycling for construction and demolition, municipal and electronic waste



Note: Data for construction and demolition waste are from the EU-28, Iceland and Norway (2016). Data for municipal waste are from the EU-28, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey (2018). Data for electronic waste are from the EU-28, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway (2017).

Source: Eurostat, EEA.

The EEA briefing is based on a [technical study](#) commissioned by the EEA which looks more in-depth into what factors hinder wider recycling.

COVID-19: New EMCDDA study highlights decline in stimulant drug use but some rises in the use of cannabis, alcohol and prescription medicines to combat anxiety and depression

A decline in stimulant drug use but some rises in the consumption of cannabis and licit substances are among the findings presented today in a new EMCDDA report [The impact of COVID-19 on patterns of drug use and drug-related harms in Europe](#). The report describes how national confinement measures and disrupted street drug markets have reduced both the opportunities to use drugs within social environments as well as the availability of some substances. But it also suggests a rise in the use of alcohol and prescription medicines, in some groups, as a means of conquering anxiety and depression during lockdown.

The report is the second in a series of briefings resulting from an EMCDDA 'trendspotter' study, launched in April to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the drug situation and responses to it (¹). The findings released today stem from the second wave of the investigation, which focused on drug use patterns and drug-related harms during the first three months of the pandemic. The analysis draws on a range of sources, including: expert surveys, virtual consultations with professionals and NGOs and a recent 'European Web Survey on Drugs: COVID-19' (EWS-COVID), which received over 10 000 responses.

Survey responses from people who use drugs and evidence from national experts indicate that stimulants associated with the nightlife setting (mainly cocaine and MDMA) saw the sharpest reduction in use during this period. This is largely due to the closure of the night-time economy and orders to 'stay at home' (rather than to market factors). A few cases have been reported of physical socialising being replaced by 'streaming parties' – where people use drugs at home, listen to music and meet friends online. However, illegal raves are reported to have taken place in a number of countries.

For cannabis, the picture is mixed, with data suggesting that occasional users may have stopped or decreased their use during lockdown, while frequent users may have stocked up and consumed more. Shortages of heroin in some localities may have contributed to a decline in use of this drug and potentially resulted in an increase in demand for opioid substitution treatment as well as in the use of replacement substances. While the majority of respondents in the EWS-COVID reported stable or reduced drug use, a quarter reported increased use, often due to boredom and anxiety.

Drinking alcohol alone, and in greater quantities, is reported by some respondents across user groups, as is the increased use of prescription medicines (e.g. benzodiazepines). Among high-risk drug users, motivations for

this include managing depression and withdrawal symptoms.

A survey of 15 hospital emergency lead clinicians indicated a rise in drug-related acute presentations due to mental health issues and violent harms but a reduction in drug-related hospital emergencies. An area where there is almost no evidence to date, is the level of COVID-19 infection and related health problems among people who use drugs.

The report states that: 'While undoubtedly changes in drug use patterns and new harms have emerged, with the easing of the lockdown measures and the return to a new social reality under COVID-19, it remains uncertain as to whether the identified changes will remain. It will take time and further investigation to ascertain the longer-term and lasting implications of the pandemic and resultant measures on drug-using populations.'

[EMCDDA Trendspotter briefing: impact of COVID-19 on patterns of drug use and drug-related harms in Europe](#)

EMCDDA, Lisbon, June 2020

Summary

Since the start of 2020, European countries have been experiencing an unprecedented public health threat with the emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In order to investigate the effects and implications of this pandemic for people who use drugs in Europe, the EMCDDA instigated a mixed-method trendspotter study to investigate the current situation. This briefing provides a snapshot of the state of play with respect to the impact of COVID-19 on drug consumption patterns and drug-related harms during the early stages of the pandemic.

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Main subject:

[drug situation](#)

[Reconciling forestry and agriculture: we need a new certification scheme to protect forests](#)



In this interview, [Roby Biwer \(LU/PES\)](#), Member of Bettembourg Municipal Council, answers six questions on the EU action to protect and restore forests worldwide. In the context of the COVID-19, the rapporteur of the CoR opinion on [‘Stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests’](#) calls for a new EU certification scheme and information system that endorses deforestation-free products and short, transparent supply chains. The opinion is to be adopted at the [1-2 July plenary session](#).[□]

Extensive deforestation in the Amazon is driven by global demand for meat, with thousands of hectares being felled every year to feed world meat markets. Are we literally eating up the Amazon rainforest? In general terms, how can we make sure that food production (meat, coffee, cocoa and palm oil) does not have a negative impact on forests? What is the EU role in protecting and restoring the world’s forests? Is the EU doing enough?

Although most consumers are not aware of it, meat, coffee, cocoa and palm oil are amongst the products that are currently causing heavy deforestation at the global level. We must work in two fronts if we want to make markets move towards more sustainable and deforestation-free products. As a first step, we need to reinforce information and educational actions to ensure that consumers are aware of the economic, social and environmental impact of their food-consumption habits. Consumer behaviour can definitely shape food markets and accelerate the production of sustainable and deforestation-free products. For that same purpose, we must also promote healthier and ethically correct diets, stressing both the nutritive and socio-economic benefits of plant-based intakes with high levels of fruits and vegetables that are certified as resulting from deforestation-free supply chains. The second front we need to work on is a European commitment to design and implement a new certification scheme that encourages deforestation-free products and contributes to the promotion worldwide of a forward-looking European vision on forestry and food production.

While significant deforestation mostly happens in non-EU countries, forests

are being currently logged in many mountain areas in Europe, for instance in Romania and Slovakia and in some Balkan countries. Why is it happening here? What can be done at the local and regional level to prevent deforestation from happening? Do you have any concrete examples? What would your message be to mayors, presidents of regions and local and regional representatives across the European Union?

I cannot comment on the specific situation in individual countries, but based on my own experience, I can say that it is always key to have a constructive dialogue between all concerned stakeholders and their interests, and we, as local and regional authorities, are best placed to conduct this dialogue. We need to protect forests and biodiversity, and we need to work with farmers and forest-owners to find appropriate solutions, which will also benefit them in the long run – including those who want to develop the recreational use of forests in a sustainable way. In this context, it has to be clear that international agreements and EU and national laws on forests protection need to be respected and enforced, but local and regional authorities have an important role in mediating conflicts between different interests at the local and regional levels.

Today, it is very difficult to trace where our food comes from, especially with products such as cocoa and rubber, as there are many small producers involved and the supply chain is long and untransparent. What can be done to make supply chains more transparent? How can we ensure that businesses operate in a sustainable manner and that only sustainably sourced goods from deforestation-free supply chains are produced in the EU? Are voluntary and existing codes of conduct sufficient?

Supply chains are difficult to trace, and, in order to make them more transparent and easy to monitor, an information system (starting from the experience of the Ecolabel database) should be implemented, with the help and close involvement of all the stakeholders who can share their expectations, experiences and concerns in order to implement useful and feasible procedures. The information system should include and promote deforestation-free products and implement procedures to check the accuracy of the information and assessments collected in order to improve confidence in the information provided, including strong traceability requirements guaranteeing the origin of products, and stronger monitoring and enforcement systems in order to help prevent fraud and the mislabelling of products.

How would you convince me that I should buy a 'sustainable' bar of chocolate rather than the cheapest type? What is the role of consumers in making our supply chains more sustainable and preventing deforestation in particular?

Given the increasing demand for organic food, which is driven by a higher consumer appetite for bio- and environmentally friendly food products, deforestation-free and sustainable products are increasing their market share. Indeed, the purchase of sustainable products that are environmentally friendly has become a trend, a fancy and sexy statement to make. Thus, a person is willing to pay more for an environmentally friendly product because she or he is making a statement that has a social value and recognition. Citizens' role is definitely crucial in influencing markets.

The Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies were published by the European Commission on 20 May. Both are central to the European Green Deal. What are your first reactions? Is there a reason for hope? How important is reforestation to achieving climate-neutrality in the EU?

The Green Deal lists among its many objectives the design of a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, and the 'zero pollution' objective for an environment free of toxic substances. To protect European citizens and ecosystems, the EU must be more effective in monitoring, reporting, preventing and remedying air, water, and soil and the pollution of consumer products. We can therefore deduce that reforestation to achieve climate neutrality in the EU is of fundamental importance. Europe is moving towards a new way of life, sending a key message to the whole world and aiming at becoming the leader of a new economy decoupled from resource use.

The Covid-19 crisis has hit our global supply chains hard. What are the lessons we can learn from this crisis?

This crisis was caused by globalisation, which spread the virus at a high speed. Today, we know better the extent to which supply chains, such as those linked to industrial farms, are closely intertwined and how the system can easily collapse if a link is broken. Rethinking these mutual dependencies and making supply chains more resilient to global challenges is becoming a must. We must equally reconsider the important role of short (and probably more easily traceable) supply chains, and the need to monitor the relationships with and between long-chain suppliers. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we have also learned that social disparity leads to less attention being paid to the environment. This occurs because human survival is put in the foreground, while taking care of the environment is only a background consideration for low-income social groups.

Notes:

The European Union has close to 182 million hectares of forests, covering 43% of its land area, making it one of the most forest-rich regions in the world. In addition to providing lumber and wood products, our forests are home to a major part of Europe's biodiversity and contribute to our health and well-being. As a major carbon sink, forests act as an important stopgap to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change ([European Commission](#)).

Since 1990, it is estimated that 420 million hectares of forest have been lost through conversion to other land uses, although the rate of deforestation has decreased over the past three decades. Between 2015 and 2020, the rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares per year, down from 16 million hectares per year in the 1990s. Agricultural expansion continues to be the main driver of deforestation and forest degradation and the associated loss of forest biodiversity. These and other insights can be found in the report ['The State of the World's Forests 2020'](#).

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