EU contribution to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations related to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment on the Global Water Crises

Introduction

The European Union would like to thank the UN Special Rapporteur on the issues of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Mr David Boyd, for his call for contributions to his upcoming report on the Global Water Crises. The contribution from the European Union is comprised of both EU internal and EU external actions and policies (with thanks to DG CLIMA, DG ENV, DG NEAR, DEVCO and EEAS). As recommended, the questionnaire was used to structure the input.

EU's contribution to each question

1. *Please provide examples of ways in which water pollution, water scarcity and floods are having adverse impact on human rights. Adversely affected rights could include, among others, the rights to life, health, water and sanitation, food, culture, livelihoods, non-discrimination, a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and indigenous peoples' rights.*

The quantity and quality of water available for food production, drinking and hygiene is essential for health and livelihood. There are numerous cases in which competing demand for water by hydroelectric investments or extractive industries, compounded by water pollution or water grabbing, lead to severe degradation of rivers and associated ecosystems, hence jeopardising the human right to food and a safe and clean environment of local communities.

Within the EU, we find several examples of ways in which water pollution, water scarcity and flooding had an adverse impact on human rights. Recently in France and Italy but also at a much larger scale in the early 2000s in central Europe we see a direct impact on infrastructure, human health, on personal property and on people's source of income. Another example is water scarcity, increasingly common across a large section of Europe, leading to a loss of income as well as a reduced provision of ecosystem services.

In EU's southern neighbourhood, water scarcity and water pollution has been a long-standing problem with negative affect on the life and health of the population. This problem is exacerbated in countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, with a large migrant population from Syria. Therefore, the EU, through its regional "Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis", provide Syrian refugees and Lebanese and Jordanian communities with improved water and sanitation infrastructures to help alleviate this problem and improve their rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Service Européen pour l'Action Extérieure, B-1046 Bruxelles / Europese dienst voor extern optreden, B-1046 Brussel - Belgium.
Telephone: (32-2) 584 11 11.
Office: EEAS SCHU 07/006 Telephone: direct line (32-2) 584 3968
E-mail: Lotte.Knudsen@eeas.europa.eu

The right to life itself can also be put at risk by increased natural hazards. For instance, loss of coastal habitats and coral reefs due to floods and hurricanes has increased the risk to the rights to life and property for 100-300 million people worldwide.

Ecosystem degradation can also make already scarce resources, as water even scarcer, leading to increased competition that may escalate into violent conflict. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) suggests that in the last 60 years, at least 40 % of all intrastate conflicts have a link to natural resources, and that this link doubles the risk of a conflict relapse in the first five years. Since 1990, at least 18 violent conflicts were fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources like timber, diamonds, gold, minerals and oil, or scarce ones like fertile land and water.

2. *How has climate change exacerbated water-related problems?*

Climate change has already exacerbated water-related problems, and it will continue to do so on a much large scale in the future. To understand how, one needs to realize that the global climate system and the global water-cycle system are very closely interlinked. Any change in the average temperature of the earth's atmosphere leads to direct impacts in the water-cycle equilibriums. It is therefore that changes in water related indicators already are omnipresent in relation to the rise of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and directly related rise in the average temperature of the global atmosphere with more than 0,9 °C.

A first direct result of the warming of the oceans and seas is sea level rise. Another result of the warming of the atmosphere is change in the cryosphere, leading to the melting of polar ice, melting of glaciers, reduction of permafrost. The loss of glaciers on land (such as Greenland and Antarctica) also contributes to the sea level rise.

Another result of the warming atmosphere is changing precipitation patterns, both in place and in time. In Europe overall, the average rainfall in southern parts will diminish and it will increase in northern parts. If one looks at rainfall intensity, this will increase with rising temperatures. Long intensive rainfall and/or cloudburst leads to increased risk of flooding of rivers and/or water problems in cities and rural areas. Less precipitation in combination with higher evaporation (as a direct result of increasing temperatures) is already leading to increased risk of droughts and will continue to do so with further increasing climate change.

Rise in sea level is not only a threat to coastal areas and low-lying river deltas. Together with the increase of flooding due to storm surges, it will also have an impact on the salinity of fresh water in these areas. This impact can increase by reduced river discharge due to prolonged droughts.

Another impact of climate change, often overlooked, is the acidification of the oceans and seas. This will have a substantial impact on organisms living in these ecosystems, with direct consequences for fisheries and other ecosystem services.

In Europe, climate change has exacerbated water scarcity problems in already dry areas, leading to depleting groundwater reserves, saltwater intrusion, a reduction of biodiversity, less reliable supplies for water users, etc. Traditionally the countries on the

northern side of the Mediterranean Sea were exposed to drought but more recently also areas of central, north western and Northern Europe have become exposed. Even with a moderate climate change scenario, it is expected that the number of people that are exposed to the effects of further water scarcity will increase by 13% and the economic damage by 14%.

Changing precipitation patterns has led to an increase of both droughts and floods with effects on both access and quality of the water, which again affects people's livelihoods, health and habitat. This is in particular apparent in already vulnerable areas, such as the Middle East or Central Asia. In some areas, the increase in water scarcity or water stress increases the risks and occurrences of water related conflicts, both at a local level and transboundary levels. In addition, the rise in sea level creates an urgent demand to manage water flows in order to limit the occurrence of floods and its negative consequences. The EU is therefore adopting its international programmes to be accommodate these negative impacts of water related problems caused by climate change.

3. *To protect a wide range of human rights, what are the specific obligations of businesses in terms of addressing water pollution, water scarcity and floods? Please provide specific examples of constitutional provisions, legislations, standards, policies and programmes that apply a rights-based approach to preventing, reducing or eliminating water pollution, water scarcity and floods. Please include, inter alia, any instruments that refer directly to the right to a healthy environment and/or the right to clean water and adequate sanitation.*

For over 20 years[1] sustainable development has been one of the fundamental objectives of the European Union. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) article 11 provides that "Environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of the Union's policies and activities, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development". The protection of environment and sustainability issues are therefore integrated across EU legislation, policies and programmes. It is therefore not possible to summarise all the relevant specific obligations in the EU but some examples are provided below:

The Court of Justice of the European Union has adopted a rights based approach that entitles NGOs to bring legal challenges to actions or inactions of the national administration in respect of the EU Nature Directives. The Court has taken account of Article 9(3) of the Aarhus Convention, which is a broad access to justice provision[2]. It is difficult to summarize the nature of the rights concerned – but in simple terms, it is a right to protect nature for the common good. It refers to the intrinsic value of nature itself and not just its value for or links to the protection of human rights.

The EU Water Framework Directive contains an obligation to meet 'Good Ecological Status' for all European surface and groundwater. It also contains a prohibition to let water quality deteriorate. The Floods Directive impose a system of flood risk reduction

[1] Already in 1997 sustainable development became a fundamental objective of the EU when it was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam as an overarching objective of EU policies.

[2] Reference: 2017 Commission Notice on access to justice in environmental matters.

and contains several pieces of legislation regulating particular types of water such as urban waste water, drinking water, bathing water and particular pollutants e.g. nitrates.

Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that 'everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water'. The Drinking Water Directive and its Article 16 foresees an obligation for EU Member States to take the necessary measures to improve or maintain access to water intended for human consumption for all, in particular for vulnerable and marginalised groups. On 5 February 20203, EU Council approved provisional deal, which updates quality standards ensuring that tap water across the EU is safe to drink, and revise the Drinking Water Directive. Under the new rules, the quality standards that drinking water must meet are brought up to date, and a cost-effective risk-based approach to the monitoring of water quality is introduced. The updated rules also set out minimum hygienic requirements for materials in contact with drinking water, such as pipes. The aim is to improve the quality of such materials to ensure that human health is protected and no contamination takes place.

In a communication from 2014 on European Citizens' Initiative 'Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!', the Commission invited Member States to ensure access to a minimum water supply for all citizens, in accordance with the WHO recommendations and to 'improve access to safe drinking water […] for the whole population through environmental policies'. To address the aspect of access to water, which includes both availability and quality, EU Member States were encouraged to install outdoor and indoor equipment in public spaces, public administrations and public buildings. They were also encourage to promote the use of tap water and access to clean water for free or for a low service fee, for customers in restaurants, canteens and catering services.

The Union and the Member States have committed themselves, within their respective competences, to achieving the SDGs, whilst recognising the primary responsibility of Member States in the follow-up and review, at national, regional and global levels, of progress towards those goals. Some of the SDGs such as SDG 6 and the associated target to 'achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all', do not fall within the Union's environment policy or the Union's social policy, which is limited and complementary in nature. Whilst bearing in mind the limits of Union competence, it is nevertheless appropriate to ensure that Member States' continued commitment to the right to water is in accordance with the EU Drinking Water Directive, whilst respecting the principle of subsidiarity. In this regard, Member States currently undertake considerable efforts to improve access to water intended for human consumption.

In addition, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the WHO Regional Office for Europe's Protocol on Water and Health, and the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, to which many Member States are also Parties, aims to protect human health through better water management and by reducing water-related diseases. Member States could make use of the guidance documents developed under the remit of that Protocol to assess the policy

[3] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/05/safe-and-clean-drinking-water-council-approves-provisional-deal-which-updates-quality-standards/

background and the baseline situation on access to water and to define the actions necessary to improve equitable access for all to water intended for human consumption. The recast of the Drinking Water Directive will come into force late 2020 or early 2021.

The EU Council adopted the EU human rights guidelines on safe drinking water and sanitation in June 2019[4]. They underline EU's commitment to help realise the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation worldwide, and define priorities for EU external action. These guidelines are one of the many steps that the EU is taking towards the progressive realisation of SDG 6 and SDG 13 on 'taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impact'.

While recognising that water is a prerequisite for human survival and dignity and a fundamental basis for the resilience of both societies and the environment the Council resolved to enhance EU diplomatic engagement on water, as a tool for peace, security and stability. The EU, in particular, actively supports the globalisation of the UNECE Water Convention as one tool to ensure that challenges related to water pollution, water conflicts, water quality, water distribution or water protection and conservation are addressed and hence, water related human rights are safeguarded.

Both the guidelines on safe drinking water and sanitation and the 2018 Council conclusions on Water Diplomacy are fully align with the rights based approach. In addition, the EU applies a Right Based Approach to all its development cooperation[5], including on water.

4. *If your State is one of the 156 UN Member State that recognises the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, has this right contributed to preventing, reducing, or eliminating water pollution, water scarcity and floods? If so, how? If not, why?*

The EU has some of the world's highest environmental standards, developed over decades. Environment policy helps the EU economy become more environmentally friendly, protects Europe's natural resources, and safeguards the health and wellbeing of people living in the EU.

EU environmental policy is required to contribute to protecting human health, amongst other objectives[6]. Many individual pieces of EU environmental legislation have specific requirements related for instance to the protection of human health, for example laws on air quality, bathing waters and drinking water. These requirements create rights, which can be invoked by individuals and environmental NGOs before national courts. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has also confirmed an entitlement of NGOs to bring judicial challenges related to the protection of nature. In a significant number of cases, the right of such NGOs has contributed in practical ways to protecting, conserving and restoring biodiversity and health ecosystems**.**

[4] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/17/safe-drinking-water-and-sanitation-council-approves-eu-guidelines

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/online-170621-eidhr-rba-toolbox-en-a5-lc_en.pdf

[6] Article 191(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

5. *Please provide specific examples of good practices in preventing, reducing or eliminating water pollution, water scarcity and floods. These examples may occur at the international, national, sub-national, or local level. Examples may involve water quality and quantity monitoring, guaranteeing procedural rights (e.g. public access to water quality information, public participation in decision-making about proposed uses of water, access to remedies); water use and water quality legislating, regulations, standards, and policies, and initiatives to reduce water consumption and/or water pollution from specific sectors (e.g. agriculture, electricity generation industry, transportation, domestic use). Where possible, please provide evidence related to the implementation, enforcement and effectiveness of the good practices.*

As mentioned above, the EU is ensuring that tap water across the EU is safe to drink. On 5 February 2020, EU Council approved provisional deal, which updates quality standards and revise the drinking water directive.

Within the EU, an example of good practice in preventing, reducing and eliminating water pollution, water scarcity and floods is the integrated water management system, in particular, at river basin level. Today about 170 European river basins have each their specific 6 year plan towards this end.

Secondly, within the EU, stakeholder involvement is very strong at all levels. From the level of the river basin, to regional and national level, all the way up to the EU level. Stakeholder involvement is also supported by a system of access to environmental information based on the Aarhus convention and subsequent EU legislation. Implementation and enforcement are a national responsibility but structural cases on incorrect application of EU law are also pursued at European level.

In EU's southern neighbourhood, the regional project "Water and Environment support" (WES) promotes an integrated and efficient management of water through training and technical assistance. For example, in Tunisia, the WES support pilot municipalities on improving water knowledge and data collection and from there help them to realise water action plans aiming to allocate water and water-related funding more efficiently, foster water efficient technologies, and recover sustainable water resources. All this is done by involving the different actors in the sector such as water authorities, local communities, civil society and so forth.

With regards to EU external cooperation, a good example is the NEXUS Water Energy food security programme. Since 2015, the programme supported national and regional dialogues at technical and political level, in 5 regions and 84 countries, to enhance a more efficient and affordable use of water resources. The programme interfaces with regional authorities that have the competence to discuss with governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

Another good example is the Panj-Amu river basin programme. By improving water management from the community level to the basin level, it improved security, ensured economic development and participated to gender equity. It was also an important

component for a sound management of the Aral sea basin, hence contributing to regional stability[7].

Two relevant multilateral environment agreements to which EU is party and actively support also contributes to

6. *Please identify specific challenges that your government, business or organisation has faced in attempting to employ a rights-based approach to address water pollution, water scarcity and floods and the impacts of these problems on human rights.*

When EU work internationally in partnerships with private companies, the EU demands specific attention to due diligence for environmental and social issues, including on water. Because water is often a sub-part of a project (water access in a project of the construction of hospital, wastewater treatment in a project of a garment factory, irrigation in a project of agriculture development), more efforts have to be put in place to ensure that it is properly covered.

The Right Based Approach (RBA) is based on the EU's legal foundation on human rights. RBA reinforces the EU's most recent political commitments on environment protection embodied in its European Green Deal[8]. There are however a number of challenges for its effective application, such as:

- Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC) living in the most remote naturel areas are amongst the poorest with poor access to formal education and employment in most countries while being at the forefront of the fight against the consequences of climate-change and water scarcity and water-related disasters.

- Trade agreements, financial investments and private sector activities in natural habitats, which are vulnerable to human activities, should be carefully monitored and mitigated in case of environmental harm. It is paramount to leverage indigenous peoples' and local communities' input, to curve any potentially negative human impact from the environment and biodiversity degradation.

- Customary rights and other forms of legitimate tenure rights to natural resources such as water are often not formally recognized in national frameworks or not effectively protected.

- Public participation and access to justice on environmental matters, including judicial remedies are not sufficiently ensured (both due to weak legal framework and weak implementation and enforcement).

7. *Please specify ways in which additional protection is provided (or should be provided) for population who may be particularly vulnerable to water pollution, water scarcity and floods (e.g. women, children, persons living in poverty, members of indigenous peoples and traditional communities, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic, racial and other minorities and displaced*

[7] https://www.landell-mills.com/news/2019/10/4/landell-mills-produces-publication-showcasing-the-eu-funded-panj-amu-river-basin-programme-p-arbp-in-afghanistan

[8] COM(2019) 640 final. The European Green Deal.

persons). How can these populations be empowered to protect and improve water quality and availability?

Protection of the most vulnerable groups are prominent in the RBA approach and the EU human rights guidelines on safe water and sanitation. The five working principles of the RBA are: applying all rights, participation an access to decision making, non-discrimination and equal access, accountability and the rule of law and transparency and access to information.

- Applying all rights: EU action in the field of water and sanitation builds upon legally binding international human rights law, bearing in mind that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interlinked. The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are components of the right to an adequate standard of living embedded in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

- Participation and access to the decision making process: EU promotes participation of all stakeholders in a spirit of balanced partnership, both in relation to civil society and the EU, and civil society and the partner country. Participation by representatives of all concerned including women and girls, persons with disabilities, those affected by caste-based discrimination, persons belonging to minorities, and, indigenous peoples is key to ensuring that water and sanitation solutions answer the actual needs of communities.

- Non-discrimination and equal access: EU interventions in the field of water and sanitation has an inclusive approach and emphasise the principle of non-discrimination. Special priority is given to persons in vulnerable situations including but not limited to children, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and persons who are most vulnerable to poverty and human rights violations. These include, inter alia, persons belonging to minorities, and indigenous peoples, persons in displacement such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrants and refugees. Water and sanitation facilities and services must be accessible to all without discrimination on any grounds. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is particularly important in realising the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. In some places, women and girls face the risk of being physically threatened or assaulted, including subjected to sexual violence, when collecting household water and when accessing sanitation facilities outside of their home or practising open defecation. In many cases girls are not able to go to school because of the time spent in collecting water, or because the school does not have adequate water and sanitation services. The 2019 UN World Water Development Report entitled "Leaving no one behind" provides an extensive overview and status of the challenges of achieving the realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation in particular for women and girls and other persons and groups in marginalised situations.

- Accountability and rule of law: EU action promote accountability to ensure that those who have been denied their rights to safe drinking water or sanitation have access to effective judicial or other appropriate remedies. It is essential that accessible, transparent, and effective mechanisms of accountability, such as in the

form of grievance mechanisms, exist both at central and local levels of government. There are established monitoring and other mechanisms for supervising the different actors responsible for ensuring access to water and sanitation services. In this regard, the availability of disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators are indispensable for monitoring progress on human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as for achieving SDG 6 and related SDGs.

- Transparency and access to information: Everyone should have access to the relevant information regarding decision-making processes that may affect the exercise of the rights to water and sanitation, including EU interventions in this field, for example in the form of development projects or programmes.

In addition to these five principles, the principle of sustainability has particular relevance for the human rights to a healthy environment and safe drinking water. EU interventions should be sustainable in the sense that services must be available for present and for future generations, and the provision of services today should not compromise the ability of future generations to realise their human rights to a healthy environment and safe drinking water. Furthermore, water and sanitation must be provided in a way that respects the environment and in this perspective, EU interventions should be conscious of the vulnerability of the water sector to climate change and of its potential in terms of human resilience.

Provision for the protection of the most vulnerable are also found in the Council conclusion on Water Diplomacy and the EU human rights guidelines on safe drinking water and sanitation. In addition, to reinforce this principles, the EU is among the most generous supporters of the UNECE Water Convention e.g. EU funds projects related to opening up its membership worldwide especially in Africa.

EU is party to the Aarhus Convention focused on access to environmental information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice. The EU adopted on 14 October 2020[9] legislative proposal amending the Aarhus Regulation to allow for better public scrutiny of EU acts affecting the environment. The Commission has also adopted a Communication[10] to facilitate access to justice in environmental matters for individuals and NGOs in EU Member States. National and local authorities take many important decisions when applying EU environmental laws, for example when granting permits to infrastructure projects or industrial installations that may pollute nature and soil, air or water. It is important to improve public scrutiny over these decisions as well.

8. *How do you ensure that the rights of environmentalists working on water issues (environmental human rights defenders) are protected? What efforts has your Government or business made to create a safe and enabling environment for them to freely exercise their rights without fear of violence, intimidation or reprisal?*

[9] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/news/commission-proposes-improve-public-scrutiny-eu-acts-related-environment-2020-10-14_en

[10] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus/pdf/communication_improving_access_to_justice_environmental_matters.pdf

The EU recognise that environmental human rights defenders face increasing threats, violence and other safety problems as a result of their work and EU fully support efforts to protect human rights defenders and to respect their fundamental rights. All EU programmes are applying the Rights Based Approach (see above) in line with the European Consensus for Development[11]. It is creating an environment where environmentalists are enabled to play their role. The EU Council adopted in November 2018 the Water Diplomacy Conclusions and the EU human rights guidelines on safe drinking water and sanitation in June 2019, both confirming the rights and the importance of environmental defenders.

The EU is always seeking to formulate coherent, effective responses to promote the work of environmental human rights defenders (HRD) and strengthening their protection. Since June 2004 the EU guidelines on human rights defenders, identify practical ways for the Union to support and assist HRDs working in third countries. Human rights defenders are also protected thanks to a dedicated programme[12] and through specific projects under the EIDHR programme[13].

All around the world, EU Delegations are active on a daily basis, liaising with and protecting environmental human rights defenders. We pass strong messages to the authorities to call them to protect them from threats and harassment, to release them after arbitrary arrests or to duly investigate the killings (in particular in Latin America).

In fact, since 2004, the EU has assisted and promoted the work of human rights defenders and strengthened their protection, including Indigenous Peoples and those defending the right to a healthy environment. Through emergency support grants, environmental human rights defender have received support for temporary relocation, legal costs, medical costs, to finance protection measures for their offices and/or communities. In addition, EU delegations regularly organise meetings with environmental defenders, monitor their trials or visit them in detention. EU consider it fundamental to protect them, as they are key actors in ensuring sustainable development and fighting environmental degradation and climate change.

The EIDHR funds the EU human rights defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu (EUR 20 million for 2015-2019 renewed in November 2019 with EUR 15 million until 2021), which provided support to more than 30.000 HRDs and their families since 2015 through a combination of short, medium and long-term initiatives. The EU specifically reacted to the situation of Human right defenders working on environment. The global EIDHR call for proposals in 2017 allocated 5 million to projects "Supporting Human Rights Defenders in the area of land-related rights, indigenous peoples, in the context of inter alia 'land grabbing' and climate change". Thanks to this projects the situation on hundreds of environmental human rights defenders have improved around the world.

[11] The new European consensus on development 'our world, our dignity, our future' , 2017 (https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24011/european-consensus-for-development-st09459en17.pdf)

[12] https://www.protectdefenders.eu/en/index.html

[13] https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/human-rights_en#header-1948 .

9. *There is substantial evidence that the actions of high-income States (from high levels of material consumption to high levels of greenhouse gas emissions) are linked to adverse effects on water availability and water quality in low and middle-income States. What are ways in which high-income States should assist low-income States in responding to and preventing water pollution, water scarcity and floods?*

The EU is supporting the low-income states to prevent water pollution, water scarcity and floods in particular through:

- support to the integrated management of water resources at watershed and basin levels,
- better management of conflict through water diplomacy and support to transboundary, basins management programmes and accession to UNECE water convention,
- ensure due diligence and environmental standards in all projects financed,
- support to investments in water access, sanitation and water treatment, and
- support to investments in water management infrastructures such as dikes, dams, weirs or irrigation.

10. *For businesses, what policies or practices are in place to ensure that activities, products and services across the entire supply chain (extraction/sourcing, manufacturing, distribution, sale and end-of life management) minimize water use and water pollution and meet human rights standards, especially those articulated in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights?*

In line with its commitment to promote the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the EU has put in place rules and policies for promoting respect of human rights and environmental standards by businesses along the supply chain. With regard to sustainable use of water, relevant policies include non-financial disclosure requirements and promotion of sustainability standards in textile, garment and leather supply chains.

The Non-Financial Reporting Directive[14] require requires large companies as well as other public-interest entities with more than 500 employees listed on EU markets (about 6,000 of the largest EU companies) to disclose the due diligence process that they implement with regard to environmental and social issues, human rights, and bribery and corruption. In particular, the Directive requires companies to disclose their business model, policies (including due diligence processes), outcomes, principal risks and risk management and performance indicators regarding those issues.

The EU has also put in place measures to foster sectorial due diligence in garment, textile and leather industries, with the objective to foster improvements in the medium- to long-term in terms of environmental impacts and working conditions in producing countries.

[14] Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups Text with EEA relevance (OJ L 330, 15.11.2014, p. 1–9).

These measures include, for instance, promoting best practices on social and environmental standards and funding projects to increase transparency and sustainability of value chains.

In addition, the European Commission has announced an initiative on sustainable corporate governance for 2021 covering mandatory cross-sectoral human rights and environmental due diligence requirements through the supply chain, which may impose obligations on companies to define and implement due diligence processes to prevent, mitigate and account for abuses of human rights, including environmental damage.

ANNEX

Some excerpts of the text of chapter 7 ‘Climate change’ of ‘ State of the European Environment’ (SOER, 2020):

7.3.4 Climate change and its impacts on ecosystems

[…]

Total precipitation

Annual precipitation has increased in most parts of northern Europe and decreased in parts of southern Europe. These changes are projected to exacerbate in the future with continued climate change, and the projected decrease is greatest in southern Europe in the summer (Map 7.2) (EEA, 2017e).

[…]

Heavy precipitation and inland floods

The intensity of heavy precipitation events, which can cause floods, has increased in summer and winter in most parts of northern Europe. The largest increase has been observed for particularly strong precipitation events. Different indices show diverging trends for southern Europe. The intensity of heavy daily precipitation events is projected to increase over most of Europe, most strongly in north-eastern Europe (EEA, 2019h).

The number of very severe flooding events in Europe has increased in recent decades, but there is large interannual variability. Various European-wide studies project river flooding to become more frequent in north-western and central-western parts of Europe, whereas the results diverge in other regions (Kundzewicz et al., 2016, 2018). Pluvial floods and flash floods, which are triggered by intense local precipitation events, are likely to become more frequent throughout Europe (EEA, 2017f).

[…]

Droughts

Drought conditions have generally increased in southern Europe and decreased in northern Europe, but there are variations across seasons and some differences between various drought indicators. The increased droughts in southern Europe are driven by reductions in precipitation as well as by rising temperatures, which increases evapotranspiration. This pattern is projected to continue in the future (Map 7.3) (EEA, 2019i).

[…]

Global and European sea level

Global mean sea level has increased by about 20 cm since 1900. The rise in global sea level has accelerated in recent decades as a result of human-induced climate change. The model simulations used in the IPCC Fifth assessment report (AR5) projected a rise in global sea level over the 21st century that is likely to be in the range of 28-98 cm

(depending on the emissions scenario), but substantially higher increases in sea level were not ruled out. Several recent model-based studies, expert assessments and national assessments have suggested an upper bound for 21st century global mean sea level rise in the range of 1.5-2.5 m. Further increases by several metres by 2300, and by many metres by 2500, are possible if the stabilisation goal of the Paris Agreement is not met (EEA, 2019e).

[…]

Further changes in the climate system

Climate change is also evident through melting glaciers (EEA, 2016e), decreasing sea ice (EEA, 2018c) and warming oceans (EEA, 2016h). Furthermore, the CO2 emissions driving global climate change are making the oceans more acidic, which inhibits the growth of calcifying organisms (EEA, 2016f).