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**ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE
ENVIRONMENT POLICY COMMITTEE**

GREEN Action Task Force

COVID-19 response measures and their potential implications for greening the economies of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

Annual Meeting of the GREEN Action Task Force, 13 October 2020, virtual conference

This is the first draft of a review of “COVID-19 response measures and their potential implications for greening the economies of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia”, which aims to support the discussion under Agenda Item 2 of the Annual Meeting of the GREEN Action Task Force on 13 October 2020. Delegates are invited to provide comments, including additional information that could be included in the paper, during and after the meeting in written form to the contacts below by 30 October 2020.

This draft paper will be revised based on comments received. A revised version will be shared with Task Force members through written communications.

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COVID-19 response measures and their potential implications on greening the economies of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

1. Introduction

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health, social and economic challenge. Even as many countries grapple with a second wave of infections, governments around the world have begun adapting their medium- and long-term national strategies to stimulate post-COVID-19 economic recovery. This is also the case in the region of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)¹. However, limited fiscal space and budget deficits caused by the pandemic's economic consequences may tempt governments to approve projects and adopt policies with potential negative impacts on the environment because they attract much-needed investments and generate more tax revenues. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of climate change were already becoming increasingly evident across the region and the world, and the risks of climate change will not disappear once the pandemic has been overcome. If there is no decisive action on climate change, even greater health, social and economic damage lie in the future. Therefore, it is essential that stimulus measures and policy responses to COVID-19 align with countries' national goals and international commitments on climate change, biodiversity and wider environmental protection (OECD, 2020^[1]).

2. Stimulus measures can be an opportunity to invest in the economic transformations and technological innovations necessary to deliver the sustainable improvements in people's lives that depend, amongst other things, on a healthy environment. In addition to providing economic opportunities in the near term, such improvements are essential to enhance the overall resilience of societies. Both short-term and longer-term measures should aim at achieving the multiple purposes of delivering economic prosperity and wider well-being, improving productivity, enhancing resilience and decarbonising the economy. The window of opportunity to take strong action on climate is closing fast and short-term economic measures will have a significant impact on the ability to meet global goals (i.e. the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals).

3. Greener recovery measures can provide countries with an opportunity to "build back better", combining an emphasis on restoring growth and creating jobs with the achievement of environmental goals. A green recovery could create 395 million jobs by 2030 globally (World Economic Forum, 2020^[2]). The green transport sector alone could generate up to 15 million jobs, and investment in renewable energy could lead up to 63 million jobs worldwide by 2050 (UNECE, ILO, 2020^[3]; World Resources Institute,

¹ EECCA includes the following 11 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan

2020⁽⁴⁾). In this regard, investments in green infrastructure can become a central point in climate-resilient economic recovery after the pandemic due to its vast job creation potential (OECD, 2020⁽⁵⁾).

4. This draft report provides an overview of environmental implications of EECCA governments' responses to COVID-19 starting from the first confirmed cases of the virus in February 2020. The report groups policies and measures into national COVID-19 economic recovery plans, acceleration of pre-existing environmental policies and plans in light of the pandemic, and sector-specific measures such as (1) energy, transport and air quality, (2) waste management and (3) water, sanitation and hygiene. The report also provides an overview of some of the activities of development partners in the region to support the countries with COVID-19 response.

5. The measures compiled in this report include those that were implemented in response to the pandemic (e.g. quarantine restrictions, support to jobs, support to SMEs, sector-specific support, waste management, etc.) as well as those that were already planned, but whose implementation was accelerated or placed higher on the agenda due to specific issues raised during the pandemic, or slowed down or suspended during the time period of this review. The measures were then analysed based on whether they may have positive implications on achieving environmental objectives or may impede countries' progress in "greening" the economy. A list of potential measures identified in this preliminary study is presented in Annex A. Annex B presents a non-exhaustive list of measures identified so far in each country in the EECCA region.

6. The information included in the review has been collected using publicly available government sources and online news articles as well as through interviews with local experts. As the crisis is still ongoing and rapidly changing, there are considerable limitations on accessibility of information. At the same time, it is too early to make any definitive conclusions on whether a particular policy will have a positive or negative impact on the environment and countries' progress towards greening their economies. Thus, this draft review's aim is not to make any judgements on the policies or their efficiency, but rather to stimulate discussion and support members of the GREEN Action Task Force on "greening" economic recovery going forward.

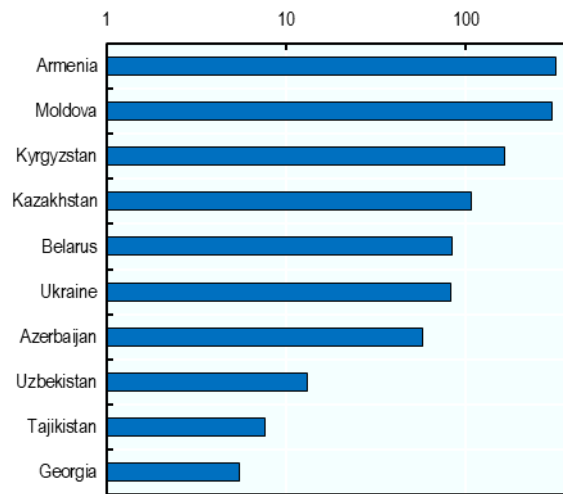
2. Background

7. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 12 March 2020. COVID-19 related restrictions introduced by national and local governments inflicted enormous damage on people's health and well-being globally. It put healthcare systems under strain, disrupted trade, slowed down production, consumption and investment. It has triggered the most severe economic and jobs crisis in recent years. Early data are making clear that the economic and social costs of the pandemic are large and will be felt in the years to come, with severe but heterogeneous impacts on different countries and regions (OECD, 2020⁽⁶⁾; OECD, 2020⁽⁷⁾).

8. The first confirmed cases of the virus in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries were reported in late February 2020 and in Central Asia in mid-March (OECD, 2020⁽⁶⁾; OECD, 2020⁽⁷⁾). The most affected countries in the region have been Armenia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan with more than a 100 deaths per million people (Figure 1).² As in other parts of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has had public health, economic and social consequences in the EECCA region.

² Challenges in attributing the cause of death to COVID-19 versus pneumonia may have under- or overestimated the reported number of deaths in the region

Figure 1. Total confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million inhabitants as of 22 September 2020 (log scale)



Note: No data available for Turkmenistan.

Source: (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020^[8])

3. Socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 in the EECCA region

9. The initial containment measures brought in by most governments to slow down the spread of the virus and limit the death toll focussed on closing down business activity in many sectors. After the initial measures that supported healthcare systems and people's incomes, the government actions have increasingly turned to economic support and measures that aim to minimise the economic downturn by preserving jobs and keeping markets and the whole economy functioning.

10. All of the countries in the region, with the exception of Belarus, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, have imposed strict lockdown measures. These included restricting the movement of people and mass gatherings, shifting education to distant learning platforms and encouraging working from home to stop the spread of the virus. Due to containment measures and slower international trade, all EECCA countries' growth projections by the IMF for 2020 have been cut by at least 4 percentage points, and in 8 out of 11 countries in the region GDP will contract in 2020 (Table 1). Estimates show that Ukraine is expected to experience the steepest decline (-7.7% of GDP) followed by Belarus (-6%), Kyrgyzstan and Georgia (-4%). These economic growth rates are likely to be further revised down in the coming months, as the risk of the second wave materialises and global trade forecasts remain bleak with a possible decline of up to a third by the end of 2020.

11. Reliance on fossil fuel rents has put many economies, especially Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan at additional risk due to the fall in commodity prices. Countries that are heavily reliant on remittances have also been affected by lockdown measures and travel bans as well as an increase in unemployment in migrant-receiving countries.³

³ Remittances account for around 30% of GDP in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and 10% of GDP in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (OECD, 2020^[7]; OECD, 2020^[6]).

Table 1. GDP growth in 2019 and forecasts for 2020 and 2021

	GDP growth 2019	GDP growth forecast 2020 (estimates as of October 2019)	GDP growth forecast 2020 (estimates as of April 2020)	GDP growth forecast 2021 (estimates as of April 2020)
Armenia	+7.6%	+4.8%	-1.5%	+4.8%
Azerbaijan	+2.3%	+2.1%	-2.2%	+0.7%
Belarus	+1.2%	+0.3%	-6.0%	+3.5%
Georgia	+5.1%	+4.8%	-4.0%	+3.0%
Kazakhstan	+4.5%	+3.9%	-2.5%	+4.1%
Kyrgyzstan	+4.5%	+3.4%	-4%	+8.0%
Moldova	+3.6%	+3.8%	-3.0%	+4.1%
Tajikistan	+7.5%	+4.5%	+1%	+5.5%
Turkmenistan	+6.3%	+6%	+1.8%	+6.4%
Ukraine	+3.2%	+3.0%	-7.7%	+3.6%
Uzbekistan	+5.6%	+6%	+1.8%	+7.0%

Source: (IMF, 2020_[9]; IMF, 2019_[10])

12. Even though economic growth is expected to resume in 2021, literature suggests that pandemics are usually associated with subsequent low returns to assets and weak investment opportunities (Jordà, Singh and Taylor, 2020_[11]). Growth rates may not return to the pre-pandemic trajectories as evidenced by previous global trends in the aftermath of an exogenous shock (OECD, 2020_[7]). Given the uncertainty around the forecast, the importance of appropriate policy-making will be critical in the near to medium term.

13. Lockdown measures have had a particular negative impact on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) due to the fall in demand for services other than food retail and pharmaceuticals. The tourism and transportation industries were particularly impacted. Contribution of travel and tourism industry to GDP in the region ranges from 4.5% in Uzbekistan to 8% in Kyrgyzstan, 12% in Armenia and 26% in Georgia, making countries in the top range particularly vulnerable to the impacts of lockdowns (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019_[12])⁴. According to the National Bank of Georgia, tourism revenues in January-July 2020 amounted to USD 468 million, which is less than a quarter of the volume generated in the same period of 2019. Consequently, loss of income and lower consumer confidence further decreased spending and consumption (OECD, 2020_[13]). This effect is even more pronounced in informal economic activities, which are prevalent in the region.⁵

4. Short-term positive impact of the economic slowdown on the environment

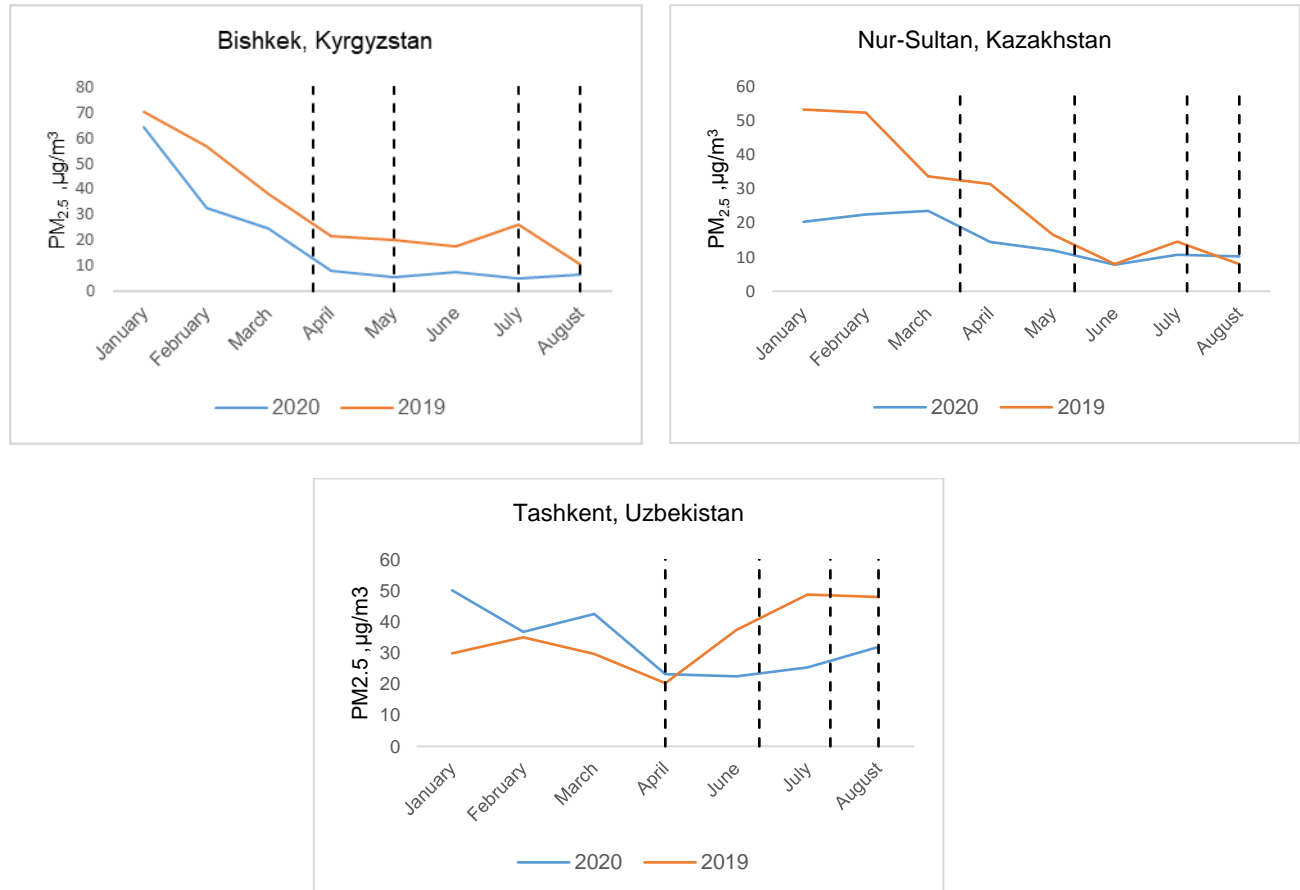
14. In most EECA countries, an improvement in air quality during the lockdown was recorded due to restrictions on mobility (including transport of goods and people) and reduced activity of enterprises. One study analysed the impact of lockdown in Georgia on the levels of air pollution in Tbilisi compared to the same period in 2017-2019. The study showed that between 17 and 27 April 2020, when the movement of automobiles was banned, there was a decrease in the levels of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), coarse

⁴ Turkmenistan is not included in this ranking due to lack of data.

⁵ The ILO estimates that percentage share of employment engaged in informal activities is 32% in Eastern Europe and 43% in Central Asia and the Caucasus. At the country level, the share of workers employed in the informal sector in Central Asia reaches as high as 49% in Kyrgyzstan and 75% in Tajikistan (ILO, 2018_[45]). In Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the size of informal employment ranges from 30% of GDP in Belarus to 50% of GDP in Georgia (OECD, 2020_[6]).

particulate matter (PM₁₀), nitrous oxide (NO₂) and carbon monoxide (CO) in the air although the levels of ground-level ozone (O₃) increased (Amiranashvili, Kirkitadze and Kekenadze, 2020^[14]). The Armenian Environmental Monitoring Information Centre has reported a decline in NO₂ emissions between 1 and 16 April 2020 compared to 1 to 16 March of the same year, which corresponds to the timing of the lockdown.⁶ Major cities in Central Asia experienced similar trends (Figure 2).

Figure 2. PM_{2.5} levels in selected major cities in Central Asia during the months of lockdown in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019



Note: Dotted lines represent the periods with quarantine restrictions in the cities

Source: AirNow US Department of State, <https://www.airnow.gov/international/us-embassies-and-consulates/>

15. Despite short-term improvements in the key indicators and anecdotal evidence of improved air quality in major cities, this positive environmental effect is likely to be temporary. This is already the case in China where emissions have already returned to pre-pandemic levels (Le Quéré et al., 2020^[15]). Daily global emissions of CO₂ are also slowly rising back up. In June 2020, they were just 5% below 2019 levels after the initial reduction of 17% in April (E&E News, 2020^[16]).

16. However, the impacts of the lockdown on environmental quality also revealed the complex nature of air pollution in big cities. A study which assessed the changes in air quality in Almaty showed that while concentrations of PM_{2.5} fell by an average of 21% between March 19 and April 14 compared to the same

⁶ For more information, see http://arka.am/en/news/society/armenia_reports_drop_in_nitrogen_dioxide_emissions/

period in 2018 and 2019, they still exceeded the WHO air quality guideline's daily limits on 18 out of the 27 days assessed (Kerimray et al., 2020_[17]). At the same time, concentrations of probable carcinogens such as benzene and toluene were two to three times higher than averages recorded over the same period between 2015 and 2019.⁷ Since traffic decreased dramatically during the lockdown, these findings point to coal-fired energy production in urban areas that did not cease operations during this period. An analysis of air quality in Almaty by the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan during the lockdown further illustrates this point. The analysis showed that 52% of pollution originates from transport emissions and 48% from two coal-fired combined heat and power plants “CHP-2” and “CHP-3”.⁸ This was a surprising finding, as earlier the Ministry did not evaluate the emissions from the power plants to be so great and had attributed air pollution mostly to traffic-related sources.

17. As border closures restricted international travel, domestic tourism has increased. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that environmental pressure from tourism continues to take its toll in areas such as Lake Sevan in Armenia and Lake Kobeituz in Kazakhstan.

5. Existing and planned environmentally related elements of the post COVID-19 government recovery plans in the EECCA region

18. The outbreak of COVID -19 has forced governments to mobilise resources and channel efforts to safeguard public health and support the economy. As part of these efforts, several EECCA countries have implemented measures that promote greening their economies. These included designing action plans to “green” COVID -19 responses (Armenia, Moldova), providing green support to SMEs (Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova), creating green jobs (Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan), reinforcing resilient supply chains (Georgia, Kazakhstan), accelerating existing environmental plans (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova), introducing measures to better manage medical waste (Georgia) and incentivising electricity saving by the population (Georgia).

19. At the same time, there are several examples of measures that may hamper countries’ progress towards a green economy. The analysis revealed that countries are rolling back or freezing the adoption of environmental regulations (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine), directing government support to energy-intensive industries (Kazakhstan), imposing a prolonged moratorium on ecological control (Kyrgyzstan) and redirecting financing away from planned green investments (Armenia, Ukraine).

20. The sections below present a preliminary overview of existing and planned measures of the post COVID-19 government recovery plans that may have an impact on the environment in the EECCA region.

COVID-19 response and recovery plans

21. To address the immediate impact of COVID-19, **Armenia** dedicated one of the 22 programmes to creating new jobs in the environment sector (The Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2020_[18]). In the framework of this programme, participants were involved in planting local willow tree cuttings along several rivers in the country and fencing off the planted areas. In exchange for their work, they earned up to AMD

⁷ Increased concentrations of benzene and toluene could be attributed to the no-precipitation conditions during the sampling days in 2020 compared to previous years

⁸ For more information, see <https://vlast.kz/novosti/40124-52-sostavlaet-vklad-avtotransporta-v-zagraznenie-vozduha-almaty-mirzagaliev.html>

10 000/day (approximately EUR 18).⁹ The programme was estimated to create at least 1 000 seasonal jobs. As of June 1 2020, more than 2 million seedlings had already been planted.¹⁰ Given the successful outcome of the project, the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) has provided additional support for the 2nd phase of this programme.

22. **Armenia** is also developing a National COVID-19 Strategic Management Plan, which provides targeted policy interventions to contain the spread of the virus as well as a National COVID-19 Mid-term Recovery Plan with a focus on building back better. In addition, Armenia is taking actions to incorporate green measures in its economic recovery plans. In this regard, under the NDC Partnership Plan, a Senior Economic Advisor has been posted to Armenia's Ministry of Economy for a duration of 12 months (NDC Partnership, 2020_[19]). The Advisor will support the government with greening Armenia's economic recovery packages to ensure alignment with the country's sustainable development and climate change goals, identify low-carbon and/or climate-resilient projects for investment and support responsible ministries on the revision of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), considering the economic drawbacks and other relevant repercussions brought by the pandemic.

23. In the short term, **Kazakhstan** has adopted a Comprehensive Economic Growth Recovery Plan until the end of 2020, which covers more than 150 recovery measures targeted towards attracting investment, sector support, SMEs, macroeconomic policy, etc. The plan however does not seem to include any environmental priorities. In the medium term, instead of devising a new national strategic COVID-19 response plan, Kazakhstan is revising its pre-existing Strategic Development Plan 2025 to incorporate COVID-19 socio-economic responses. The plan promotes increasing renewable energy supply, improving water efficiency and reducing GHG emissions.

Acceleration/Strengthening of green elements in pre-existing national plans

24. Despite the socioeconomic challenges that countries face due to the COVID crisis, they are continuing or in some cases, accelerating pre-existing policies and measures aimed at greening of the economy.

25. Highlighting its vulnerability to external shocks, **Kyrgyzstan** is pushing the agenda of the transition to innovative and less capital-intensive activities through the concept of Intellectual Economy, which aims to shift to a more knowledge-based and diversified economy and reduce dependency of the economy from migrant remittances and revenues from the polluting and energy-intensive mining sector.

26. Despite the pandemic-related crisis, **Moldova** continues its efforts in implementing environmental elements of the National Strategy "Moldova 2030", where the priority objective is to improve water and soil quality, minimise the discharge of hazardous substances into the environment and reduce the share of untreated wastewater. Moldova also continues to implement the Action Plan for 2020-2030, which includes activities in the fields of waste management, air quality and biodiversity conservation.

27. In **Kazakhstan**, the pandemic highlighted the importance of developing domestic securities markets and the role that Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC) can play in the country's recovery and sustainable economic development using green finance opportunities.¹¹ One of AIFC's priorities includes providing support to green projects by issuing green bonds and introducing green financial tools.

⁹ Average monthly wage in 2020 in Armenia is AMD 187 224 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, 2020_[46]).

¹⁰ For more information, see <https://newsarmenia.am/news/armenia/pochti-2-mln-sazhentsev-ivy-posazhenov-armenii-v-ramkakh-antikrizisnoy-programmy-pravitelstva/>

¹¹ For more information, see <https://astanatimes.com/2020/07/tokayev-plans-to-rely-heavily-on-aifc-role-in-kazakhstans-economic-recovery/> and <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/nur-sultans-financial-hub-to-be-at-heart-of-kazakhstans-recovery-and-greening/>

In this regard, on 11 August 2020, the centre announced the issuance of the first green bonds in the amount of KZT 200 million on the Astana International Exchange (AIFC, 2020^[20]). The bonds were issued by JSC "Entrepreneurship Development Fund "Damu" in cooperation with UNDP to stimulate investment in renewable energy projects implemented by SMEs. This achievement could further support the green recovery of SMEs in the aftermath of the pandemic.

28. During the Eastern Partnership leaders' meeting on 18 June 2020 dedicated to overcoming the consequences of the pandemic, **Belarus** highlighted several priority directions in the partnership, among which was the use of renewable energy and low-emission technologies.

Green support to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)

29. Given the particular negative impact of the COVID crisis on MSMEs, many countries in the region such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus are designing and/or revising their national strategies for private sector development. It is crucial that these plans are in line with GHG reduction targets in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term climate commitments under the Paris Agreement and provide appropriate incentives to businesses by supporting their sustainable development. Several countries have already incorporated green aspects in the support provided to SMEs (Box 1).

Box 1. Examples of green aspects in support provided to SMEs as part of COVID-19 response

Armenia's Ministry of Economy together with the Business Support Office and Investment Support Centre organised webinars "Business against COVID19 Coaching" for businesses. Several webinars targeted the agricultural sector and focussed on plant cultivation and protection, opportunities for agricultural development and hydroponic plant growing, an alternative to soil-based methods, which increases water efficiency.

Georgia has taken several measures to support MSMEs through expanding the "Produce in Georgia" programme, increasing the grant amount of the "Micro and Small Business Grants Programme" with a particular focus on green, innovative and eco-friendly businesses and providing aid to farmers to support ecologically clean domestic production.

Kazakhstan will introduce a new financial stimulus for SMEs through the Green Finance & Tech Accelerator to support post-COVID "greener" economic recovery focussed on energy efficiency and renewable energy. The pilot project is being carried out in the coal-dependent Pavlodar region and supported by international organisations and IFIs.

Moldova has launched the National Greening Programme for SMEs on 3 June 2020 to develop the capacity of SMEs in adopting green practices. The programme provides methodological and financial support to businesses by improving knowledge and skills related to the efficient use of resources, providing economic incentives to encourage SMEs to pursue green actions, and advising on international standards implementation and eco-labelling certification.

Source: (EBRD, 2020^[21]; EU Neighbours East, 2020^[22]; UNCT in Kazakhstan, 2020^[23]; Organization for Small and Medium Enterprises Sector Development, 2020^[24])

Green elements in international initiatives in support of COVID response

30. International development partners have played an important role in supporting EECCA countries confront the consequences of the pandemic. For example, **Georgia** and **Kyrgyzstan** are working with development partners on grants aimed at green economic recovery. In **Georgia**, the EU and UNDP launched a GEL 9 million grant programme designed to boost rural entrepreneurship, create jobs, improve management of natural resources and promote climate action in the aftermath of the pandemic (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 2020^[25]). In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNDP is launching an "Early economic recovery - Recovering together" initiative within the framework of a grant from the Government of Japan.

The project includes providing support to businesses that guarantees preservation of jobs in the green economy, sustainable agriculture or new growth sectors (Government of Kyrgyzstan, 2020^[26]).

31. UN country teams in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have used a five-pillar framework for the socio-economic response to COVID-19 to align their support with the national COVID-19 response and long-term development plans.¹² These plans include a specific focus on ensuring that environmental consideration is included in the COVID-19 response (Box 2).

Box 2. Green elements in the United Nations' COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan

In **Armenia**, the plan involves environmental considerations in each pillar including development of tools for economic valuation of the impact of pollution on human health, biodiversity and infrastructure, environmentally friendly social services, green urban recovery as well as climate sensitive recovery of migrant households.

In **Kazakhstan**, the plan includes recommendations on fiscal stimulus packages with redirection of public resources to resource efficiency, low carbon development, health and education, as well as provisions for sustainable housing and urban development and innovative financing of smart sustainable cities.

In **Moldova**, the plan includes provisions for supporting green resilient recovery through green investments, improved environmental standards and green fiscal stimulus packages. It also has a specific focus on improvement of air quality through instalment of air quality monitors, taxation measures restricting the use of old vehicles and promotion of alternative means of public transport.

In **Tajikistan**, UN's Integrated Socioeconomic Response Framework is anchored to the COVID-19 Country Preparedness and Response Plan and the Ministry of Economic Development & Trade (MEDT's) economic plan. It includes provisions for providing support for green economic recovery as well as improved medical waste management and sanitation.

In **Turkmenistan**, the Immediate Socio-Economic Response Plan to Acute Infectious Disease Pandemic includes provisions for maintaining "green" practices in agriculture and supporting climate-resilient livestock practices.

Source: (United Nations Armenia, 2020^[27]; United Nations Kazakhstan, 2020^[28]; United Nations Moldova, 2020^[29]; United Nations Tajikistan, 2020^[30]; United Nations Turkmenistan, 2020^[31])

32. Despite quarantine restrictions, many projects launched prior to the pandemic continued their operation as planned and new initiatives emerged to specifically target "green" responses to COVID-19 (Box 3).

Box 3. Examples of green support provided by international organisations and institutions

UNDP is providing support for COVID-19 response measures, including elements with potentially positive environmental implications, to the following countries:

- **Kazakhstan** by providing equipment for treatment of infectious waste and containers for safe waste collection
- **Moldova** by giving grants for women-headed households, women entrepreneurs and rural communities to implement environment-friendly practices (supported by the Government of Sweden)

¹² The United Nations' framework for the socio-economic response to COVID-19 include five pillars: (1) health first; (2) protecting people; (3) economic response & recovery; (4) macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration; and (5) social cohesion and community resilience.

- **Tajikistan** by introducing a sustainable drinking water supply system in Laboba village within the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project
- **Uzbekistan** in improving awareness on COVID-19 in the environmentally vulnerable areas in the Aral Sea region

In **Armenia**, EU4Business has provided additional support during the pandemic by working with banks such as Credit Agricole and Ameriabank to provide special credit terms and grants for SMEs, particularly those involved in green technology.

In **Tajikistan**, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) launched Cash for Work projects to support 15,000 vulnerable people affected by the socio-economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The projects provide participants with cash assistance for three months in exchange for their work on rehabilitating irrigation canals, drinking water supply systems and forestry areas in the targeted communities.

In **Ukraine**, the Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production Centre (RECP) carried out a survey to understand how COVID-19 affected manufacturing enterprises and what kind of support they need to restore operations and improve economic and environmental performance. Additionally, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has revised the Ukraine Humanitarian Response Plan to incorporate responses to COVID-19 with a particular focus on provision of clean water and sanitation facilities.

The EU funded EU4Environment Programme, that is implemented in the **Eastern Partnership countries of the European Union** and supported by OECD, UNECE, UNEP and UNIDO, readjusted its activities in light of the COVID-19 impacts on the economies of the region. This includes projects that support the development of green economy strategic planning, application of environmental assessments of policies and projects (EIA and SEA), green economy awareness raising, greening SMEs or identifying mechanisms for greening the public and private finance.

The EU and EBRD are joining forces to provide more financial support to the municipal, infrastructure and industrial sectors that have been affected by the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic in **Eastern Europe and the Caucasus**. The loans will be used for sustainable investments in green city infrastructure, greener logistics chains, energy efficiency and green technology transfers in industrial processes, commercial operations and buildings.

Source: (UNDP Kazakhstan, 2020^[32]; UNDP in Europe and Central Asia, 2020^[33]; UNDP Tajikistan, 2020^[34]; UNDP Uzbekistan, 2020^[35]; The Armenian Weekly, 2020^[36]; United Nations World Food Programme, 2020^[37]; Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production Centre, 2020^[38]; EBRD, 2020^[39])

Sector-specific measures

Energy, transport and air quality

33. The pandemic highlighted the importance of measures to reduce air pollution (Box 4). Some countries in the region are already taking steps towards these goals:

- In light of the pandemic, **Kyrgyzstan** pledged to revise the items of the Action Plan of Comprehensive Measures to Improve the Environmental Situation in selected regions in 2020-2023 with the focus on reducing air pollution.¹³
- In **Georgia**, the mayor of Tbilisi proposed to introduce a ban on car travel for two days a week after the end of the national lockdown to prolong its positive environmental effects. The City Hall also

¹³ For more information, see <https://elgezit.kg/2020/08/06/v-pravitelstve-obsudili-plan-meropriyatij-po-uluchsheniyu-ekologicheskoy-situatsii-v-bishkeke/>

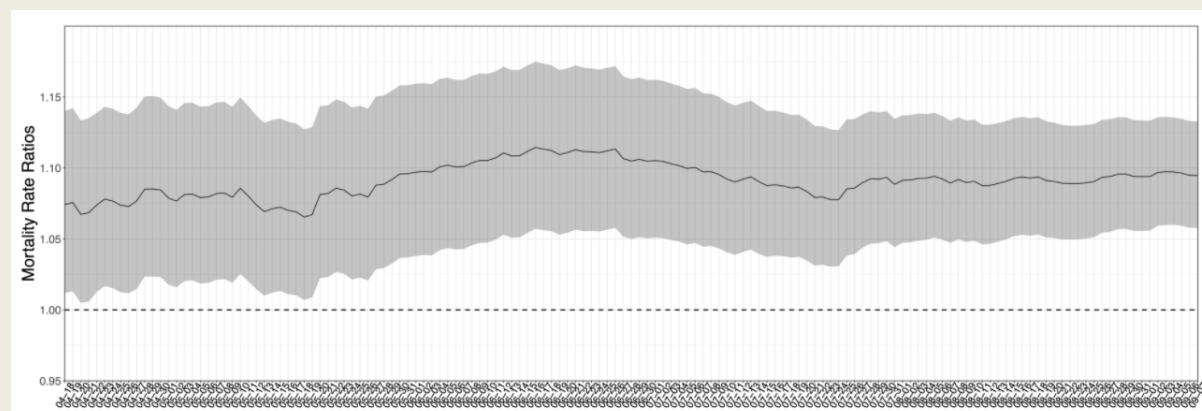
installed electric scooters and announced its plans to buy bicycles to be rented by city residents to promote alternative means of transport.¹⁴

- In **Ukraine**, the number of cyclists in the capital increased by 2.5 times during the lockdown. In order to extend this effect after the lockdown's end, the city authorities will continue developing Kyiv's cycling infrastructure by increasing the number of bicycle lanes and expanding the Nextbike bicycle rental network.¹⁵

Box 4. Possible relationship between COVID-19 and air quality

There is emerging evidence of a potentially positive correlation between poor air quality and COVID-19 mortality. A number of correlational studies, such as (Zhu et al., 2020^[40]) in China, show a statistically significant positive relationship between increased air pollution and COVID-19 infection rates. Another recent study conducted in Italy by (Zoran et al., 2020^[41]) shows that daily new cases are positively correlated with particulate matter (PM) levels and the Air Quality Index. Specifically, fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), tiny suspended particles with a diameter of 2.5 µg or less, high levels of which are often caused by vehicle exhaust, power plant and industrial emissions, has been linked to respiratory morbidity and mortality. The preliminary results of the Harvard study by (Wu et al., 2020^[42]) have shown that an increase of 1 µg/m³ in PM_{2.5} is associated with an 8% increase in the COVID-19 death rate in the United States (Figure 3).¹⁶ While more research is needed to better establish causality, this relationship provides countries with an additional impetus to continue pursuing their environmental objectives to improve air quality.

Figure 3. COVID-19 mortality rate ratios (MRR) per 1 µg/m³ increase in PM_{2.5} and 95% confidence interval using daily cumulative COVID-19 death counts from 18 April 2020 to 7 September 2020



Source: (Wu et al., 2020^[42])

34. Most of the recovery measures in the energy sector focus on household budget support, where countries and utilities have made commitments to reduce financial hardship in the population during the

¹⁴ For more information, see <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/Tbilisi/20200428/248349732/Kaladze-sobiraetsya-peresadit-tbilistsev-na-velosipedy.html>

¹⁵ For more information, see https://kyivcity.gov.ua/news/vitaliy_klichko_kiv_prodozhuye_rozvivati_veloinfrastrukturu/

¹⁶ The model adjusts for 20 potential confounders including population size, age distribution, population density, time since the beginning of the outbreak, time since state's issuance of stay-at-home order, hospital beds, number of individuals tested, weather, and socioeconomic and behavioural variables such as obesity and smoking.

crisis. The support measures include payment moratoria, additional assistance with bills or pledges not to disconnect customers in arrears (Box 5). While such measures with affordability considerations are crucial to alleviate the socio-economic hardship caused by COVID-19, they could better reflect the environmental objectives in addition to being well targeted, means-tested and time-bound, and to be phased out once people's livelihoods and the economy are back on a stronger footing.

Box 5. COVID-19 response and recovery measures in the energy sector in the Eastern Partnership countries

Armenia: The main measure in the energy sector provided direct budget support to the utilities selling natural gas and electricity on behalf of eligible consumers. The measure targeted consumers of natural gas and electricity who experienced difficulties paying their utility bills (electricity, gas and water).

Azerbaijan: The energy sector is not included in the category of areas of the government support package. However, the Government Support Programme "100 kWh of Preferential Light Limit for the Population" provided support to residential users of electricity for the period April-May 2020.

Belarus: The Belarusian government postponed the introduction of the tariff for heat supply and gas supply in the presence of individual gas heating devices for the population outside of the labour force. This measure was planned to be introduced on May 1, 2020 and has been postponed by one year due to the financial difficulties of the population as a result of the pandemic.

Georgia: In order to alleviate the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, the state budget financed utility bills for households with low electricity and gas consumption (March, April, May 2020). According to the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission, the total estimated budget for this measure amounted to approximately GEL 150 million. More than 1 200 000 electricity customers and more than 670 000 natural gas customers participated in the subsidy scheme. This initiative has been extended to cover November 2020 through February 2021 for those who had a reduction in income during the pandemic.

Moldova: While no specific direct support measures have been envisaged for the energy sector, a regulation banning the disconnection of customers in case of late payment for communal services, including for electricity and heat, has been introduced.

Ukraine: Analysis of planned budget spending before the crisis (January 2020) and after budget amendments approved in April 2020 shows that the government revised budget spending in the energy sector as well. For example, spending on several state support programmes in the coal sector was cut, but expenditure on the restructuring of the coal sector was almost doubled, which resulted in a total increase of subsidies to the coal sector by UAH 837 million.

Source: OECD (forthcoming), *Fossil-Fuel Subsidies in the EU's Eastern Partnership Countries: Estimates and Recent Policy Developments*.

Waste management

35. With the rise in the use of disposable personal protective equipment during the pandemic, countries worldwide have been facing health and environmental trade-offs. In order to minimise the risk of the spread of infection, some countries such as **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine** have issued statements recommending that citizens wrap masks in one or even two plastic bags. Increased use of single-use plastic bags puts an additional strain on the environment as well as countries that already operate at reduced waste management capacities.

36. At the same time, some EECCA countries are also taking steps to manage additional waste generated during the pandemic:

- Several initiatives were implemented in large cities in **Kazakhstan** and the city of Osh in **Kyrgyzstan** that installed dedicated disposal containers for medical waste in public places. However, these initiatives were carried out on a very small scale and did not reach rural regions.
- An NGO in **Belarus** has recommended to use multi-use masks to reduce the ecological footprint¹⁷.
- **Georgia** has significantly increased fines for pollution with hazardous (medical) waste – by 25 times for individuals and by 10 times for legal entities.¹⁸

Water, sanitation and hygiene

37. Some countries have also started to incorporate water-related issues in their post-pandemic recovering plans. In its State Program, **Ukraine** includes "Water supply, sewerage, waste management" in the list of priority economic activities.¹⁹

38. The report on "Azerbaijan after the pandemic: development scenario" provides scope for cooperation between **Azerbaijan** and Russia to work together on environmental problems in the Caspian Sea.

39. In its "Budget for citizens – 2020", **Uzbekistan** allocates additional funds (UZS 10 trillion) from the Anti-Crisis Fund to implement measures to mitigate the negative economic impact of the pandemic, which includes construction of water supply and sewerage facilities as well as irrigation and melioration objects (approximately UZS 1 trillion).

Policy developments with potential negative effects on the environment

40. Lockdown measures have put many activities, including those related to environmental protection, on hold. Although most of the activities are scheduled to resume after the lifting of restrictions, in some cases prioritising economic development took the upper hand. For instance, the legislative process leading to the adoption of a new Environmental Code and a Low-Carbon Development Strategy in Kazakhstan has been suspended due to resistance from some economic stakeholders. In Ukraine, the pandemic froze the development of legislation on the right to use reusable packaging containers. However, this was related to the lack of sufficient studies on the risks of packaging being contaminated with the virus.

41. Several countries have also implemented temporary moratoria on environmental inspection during the lockdown (e.g. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine). In most cases, these measures were justifiably implemented for a short period for sanitary reasons and to help relieve businesses from additional administrative and financial burden during the crisis. However, in some countries environmental inspection activities have been suspended for a much longer period, such as in Kyrgyzstan, where the moratorium has been extended until 1 January 2022.

42. Restrictions on movement have also hindered the activity of scientists conducting field studies in the river basins and studying wildlife. For example, in Kazakhstan, scientists were not able to conduct the yearly count of critically endangered saiga antelopes, which happens in April. This is important as Kazakhstan is planning to build a "Centre-West" highway, which will pass through the most important habitats and migration paths of saiga antelopes. Thus, uninterrupted activities of some scientists prove to

¹⁷ For more information, see the page of the Centre for Environmental Solutions <https://ecoidea.by/ru/article/4416>

¹⁸ Fine for hazardous (medical) waste for individuals increased from 162 USD to 1 600 USD and for legal entities - from 325 USD to 3 250 USD. For construction waste, the fine for individuals increased from 65 USD to 1 600 USD and for legal entities - from 485 USD to 4 850 USD.

¹⁹ State Program of Economic Stimulation to Overcome the Negative Consequences of Restrictive Measures to Prevent the Occurrence and Spread of Acute Respiratory Disease COVID-19 Caused by SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus for 2020-2022 (of May 27, 2020 № 534)

be crucial in providing evidence to policy makers and advocating for preservation of habitats. In this sense, countries may explore the possibility of creating a special status for certain types of environmental professionals, whose activities should continue uninterrupted while strictly observing all necessary physical distancing and other precautions.

43. Due to the urgent need for finances in the healthcare sector, some budget has been reallocated away from environmental awareness initiatives. In Ukraine, the budget for 2020 has been considerably revised to create a special fund directed towards the fight against the virus. One of the affected projects was the Energy Efficiency Fund, which started in 2018 and was designed to help reduce energy costs, improve living conditions and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The budget of the Fund has been cut by UAH 1.6 billion. The funds that were set out for the purchase of air quality monitoring equipment in Ukraine have also been redirected towards the fight against the virus. In Armenia, 60 billboards that were planned to inform population on water resources, air pollution reduction, forest conservation and the fight against plastic have been reassigned to posters aimed at combatting the COVID-19 virus.

44. Although some of these reallocations are justified taking into account the budget constraints, redirection of finances from environmental projects and budgets has put additional pressure on already underfinanced institutions responsible for green and sustainable development. Once health emergencies are addressed, it will be important to provide adequate support to environmental measures and institutions to implement national environmental commitments. Linking COVID-19 awareness raising campaigns with such issues as access to clean water or safe waste disposal could also offer “win-win” solutions.

45. Lack of oversight frameworks to ensure that emergency funds directed to the fight against the virus are allocated in a transparent manner can indirectly affect funding for other projects, including in the environment sector. In this regard, one way to improve oversight on public budget allocations can be through increasing public participation in public procurement systems. In conditions that required fast action to meet the medical supply needs, some countries in the region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine) have turned to simplified procurement procedures. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that some governance challenges and a lack of transparency may have created opportunities to artificially inflate procurement expenditures directed at the fight against the virus. Participation of the public in procurement control allowed to detect a number of offenses in Kazakhstan and Ukraine and detect unreasonably high prices for some items purchased in Kyrgyzstan. In Moldova, public pressure and dialogue with the Ministry of Health allowed to open access to all medical procurement-related data related to the fight against the virus that was at first excluded from the transparent e-procurement system MTender (Open Contracting Partnership, 2020^[43]).

6. Preliminary conclusions and recommendations

46. An analysis based on experience from OECD countries provides a good baseline for recommendations on how to better align economic recovery measures with national and international goals on climate change, biodiversity and wider environmental protection (Box 6).

Box 6. Policy recommendations

OECD analysis has shown that in developing immediate, short-term, sector-specific and macroeconomic policy responses to the COVID-19 emergency, governments may wish to:

- **Systematically evaluate possible unintended negative environmental impacts of new short-term fiscal and tax provisions.** While the priority is rightly on providing urgent relief to impacted businesses and individuals, a careful screening of the environmental impacts of stimulus measures would significantly add coherence to policies

and avoid creating perverse and unintended environmental consequences that might damage future resilience and environmental health of societies.

- **Avoid rolling back existing environmental standards as part of recovery plans.** As countries implement urgent measures to tackle the health and immediate economic impact of the crisis, it will be important not to retreat from the gains made in recent decades in addressing climate change, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and other environmental challenges.
- **Make sector-specific financial support measures conditional on environmental improvements where possible.** The use of financial support measures such as preferential loans, loan guarantees and tax abatements could be directed towards supporting stronger environmental commitments and performance in pollution-intensive sectors that may be particularly affected by the crisis.
- **Ensure that the measures will enhance levels of environmental health in order to strengthen the resilience of societies.** A cleaner environment will have a positive impact on human health; for example, reductions in air pollution will improve the health of vulnerable segments of urban populations and can make them more resilient to health risks.
- **Communicate clearly on the benefits of improving the overall environmental health of societies.** Underscoring the benefits to well-being and prosperity from more resilient societies can strengthen public support for measures aimed at enhancing environmental health.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[44])

47. While these recommendations are largely targeted at OECD countries, they are equally relevant and applicable to the EECCA region. The following list proposes more specific observations and preliminary recommendations for consideration in the EECCA region:

- Ensure that moratoria on environmental inspections and monitoring during the lockdown that aimed to help relieve businesses from additional administrative and financial burden are well justified, targeted and used only temporarily and are lifted as soon as the health situation improves.
- Ensure strong links between the provision of financial support including from development partners to strengthen economic recovery measures, and the commitments by the recipients to incorporate green measures in their operations.
- Maintain, and where possible, increase commitments to funding green measures, and ensure that funding for environmental agencies and ministries return at least to pre-pandemic levels soon after health emergencies are addressed.
- Reinforce governance systems to increase transparency and public participation in decision-making, including in public procurement, to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of government interventions.
- Share good practices on effective greening of economic stimulus packages among the countries in the region and beyond.
- Ensure that economic recovery is aligned with national sustainable development/green growth/low-emission development strategies until at least 2030.
- Ensure that societal resilience to future shocks including impacts from climate change is made a strategic priority.

48. As the COVID-19 emergency evolves, the effects of governments' stimulus packages will need to be assessed with respect to the long-term environmental impacts. A focus on the transition to low emissions and resource efficient economies will be a central component of such a process. For example, the investment plans associated with recovery will be critical in setting the environmental pathway for the next few decades, crucial for global efforts to avoid dangerous climate change.

7. Questions for discussion

49. In discussing the challenges and opportunities of a green recovery, the Task Force members may wish to consider the following questions:

- What policy measures have been implemented in your country but are not captured by this report?
- What specific measures are being considered to ensure that the recovery is green and inclusive, supports progress towards national and global environmental goals, and maximises the impact of green activities and sectors for jobs, income and growth?
- How can governments use recovery measures to better allocate public funds and leverage private sources of sustainable finance and boost sustainable infrastructure investment?
- To what extent has COVID-19 pushed green growth down the priority list?
- How can the GREEN Action Task Force help to promote green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the EECCA region?

Annex A. Examples of measures with positive and negative environmental implications

Below is a list of potential measures identified before the launch of the study to provide a basis for collection of information from the EECCA region.

Examples of measures with positive environmental implications:

- systematic evaluation of possible unintended negative environmental impacts of new short-term fiscal and tax provisions;
- alignment of long-term GHG emission reduction goals, including those formally communicated in Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in post-COVID-19 economic development policies, factoring in resilience to climate impacts (climate adaptation), slowing biodiversity loss and increasing circularity of supply chains;
- making sector-specific financial support measures (preferential loans, loan guarantees and tax abatements) conditional on environmental improvements, catalysing the shift towards clean(er) mobility systems, or/and investing in low-carbon and decentralised electricity systems;
- introducing environmental factors into the banking regulations and banks' new lending as well as investment project appraisal and applying innovative financial instruments for green investment;
- direct additional financial support towards supporting stronger environmental commitments and performance and country climate resilience, including green innovation, afforestation, reductions in air pollution that may improve the health of vulnerable segments of urban populations and can make them more resilient to health risks;
- building capacity to evaluate, develop and report on climate change-related financial risks, along the lines of some of most recognised internationally initiatives (e.g. Network for Greening the Financial System, Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures, or green taxonomies);
- communication of the benefits of improving the overall environmental health of societies;
- revision of terms of bilateral and multilateral support programmes with development partners to include environmental requirements;
- reinforcement of support towards adoption of best available techniques and greener technologies (for both emission mitigation/adaptation);
- acceleration of the design and approval of a pipeline of "ready-to-go" sustainable (i.e. environmental, energy-efficient, climate-resilient, low-carbon) infrastructure projects;
- adapting the public procurement process to accelerate the adoption of green practices while responding to emergency measures;
- reinforcement of resilient and circular supply chains with reduced climate and environmental footprints;
- introduction of rules and measures to support utilities and soften tariff debts to keep services being provided to the population at this difficult time.

Examples of measures with negative environmental implications:

- rolling back/relaxing existing environmental targets, standards or compliance measures for businesses/industry as part of recovery plans;
- directing government support (e.g. deferral of tax and social security contribution payments; direct lump-sum transfers) without conditions for environmental improvement to pollution-intensive sectors or technologies (e.g. fossil fuel mining/extraction, fossil fuel-based energy production, diesel engine-based car manufacturing, air transport) that may be particularly affected by the crisis;
- incentivising behaviour changes for citizens with negative environmental impacts (e.g. private car ownership vs. public transport or cycling);
- redirecting financing away from the planned green investment for other purposes;
- negative impacts on environmental infrastructure (e.g. water supply and sanitation services, electricity supply) that may come from moratoria on public utilities payments.

Annex B. Specific measures implemented by EECCA countries

This is a non-exhaustive list of measures identified so far in each country in the EECCA region. The information has been collected using publicly available government sources and online news articles as well as through interviews with local experts. Delegates are invited to provide additional information and comment on the list below during and after the meeting in written form by 30 October 2020.

Armenia

- Working on “greening” COVID-19 responses under the NDC Partnership plan
- Implemented the 15th measure to neutralise the economic consequences of COVID-19 designed to create new jobs in the environment sector. Participants were involved in planting local willow tree cuttings along several rivers in the country and fencing off the planted areas.
- UN has developed a COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response & Recovery Plan that includes environmental provisions to be embedded within national strategies
- Developing business models with the use of green agriculture technologies to encourage and support agribusinesses to switch from traditional to green agriculture for improved productivity and increased incomes (with the support from UNDP)
- Created a hotline to be used in case of urgent issues related to air emissions and permits for substances that deplete the ozone layer during the pandemic
- EBRD’s Business Support Office organised webinars "Business against COVID-19 Coaching". Several webinars targeted the agricultural sector and focussed on plant cultivation and protection, opportunities of agricultural development and hydroponic plant growing, an alternative to soil-based methods, which increases water efficiency.
- EU4Business has provided additional support during the pandemic by working with several of Armenia’s largest banks, including Credit Agricole and Ameriabank to provide special credit terms and grants for SMEs, particularly those involved in green technology
- Caucasus Nature Fund provided a grant in the amount of EUR 500 thousand to finance national parks, forest state reserves and biosphere complexes as a support to Armenia to curb the impacts of COVID-19
- Reassigned 60 billboards related to environmental protection to the fight against the virus
- Postponed the program to plant 10 million trees by 10 October 2020 until the end of 2021
- Issued recommendations to put masks in a plastic bag before disposal to limit the spread of the virus

Azerbaijan

- Organised an initiative to plant trees in the cleared area of the former iodine-bromine plant as a token of gratitude for the dedication of health workers and police officers during the pandemic

- Discussed cooperation with Russia on environmental problems of the Caspian Sea in the framework of the project “Azerbaijan after the pandemic: development scenario”
- Coordinated collection and utilisation of hazardous medical waste from medical institutions and quarantine hotels
- Purchased and delivered plastic bags to medical institutions and quarantine hotels for the purpose of collection and transportation of hazardous medical waste

Belarus

- Determined several priority directions in the Eastern Partnership, among which was the use of renewable energy and technologies with low levels of emissions as well as the early launch of the nuclear power plant
- NGO “Ecodom” organised a series of webinars on the relationship between air pollution and mortality from COVID-19 as well as public air monitoring system in Belarus
- Centre for Environmental Solutions issued detailed recommendations on how to minimise the ecological footprint when using face masks
- Put on hold the law-making process on lifting the ban that prohibits the use of reusable containers for packaging purchased products in stores

Georgia

- Expanded and re-designed the "Produce in Georgia" programme to provide improved conditions to businesses
- Enterprise Georgia supports small firms with a particular focus on green, innovative and eco-friendly businesses under the "Micro and Small Business Grants Programme". The programme grant amount will increase from GEL 20,000 up to GEL 30,000 and the co-financing required from beneficiaries will decrease from 20% to 10%. The programme budget will be increased 4 times in 2020 and will be raised to GEL 40 million.
- Providing additional government aid to farmers and agricultural businesses and supporting domestic production including bio-products
- Fully covered utility bills for citizens with low electricity and gas consumption in March, April and May (covered consumption of up to 200 kilowatts of electricity per month and up to 200 cubic meters of gas). This initiative has been extended to November through February for those who had a reduction in income during the pandemic.
- EU and UNDP launched a GEL 9 million grant programme together with the Agriculture and Rural Development Agency (ARDA) of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture to help Georgia’s rural regions respond to the economic and social challenges emerging amidst the COVID-19 crisis. The programme is providing up to GEL 170,000 per project to non-agricultural business start-ups and growing enterprises and up to GEL 30,000 to businesses to improve energy efficiency.
- Caucasus Nature Fund provided an “emergency grant” of an additional EUR 1.2 million to cover salaries and operating costs for Georgia’s Protected Areas system in 2020
- EU in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia has launched the Green Week Campaign under the slogan “Together for Better Environment”. From June 2 to June 8, the Green Week information campaign targeted children, youth and the general public and highlighted the importance of the environment to people and their health.

- Increased fines for pollution with construction and medical waste by 25 times for individuals and by 10 times for legal entities
- Issued recommendations to put masks in a plastic bag before disposal to limit the spread of the virus

Kazakhstan

- Revision of the Strategic Development Plan 2025, which promotes increasing renewable energy supply, improving water efficiency and reducing GHG emissions priorities to incorporate COVID-19 socio-economic responses
- UN has developed a COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response & Recovery Plan that includes environmental provisions to be embedded within national strategies
- Increased the total lending volume under the Economy of Simple Things program by 400 billion tenge to 1 trillion tenge. The program focusses on providing support to SMEs in manufacturing and agricultural sectors to develop locally produced food and industrial goods.
- Working on adoption of a law against cruelty to animals
- Issued first green bonds and placed them on the Astana International Exchange with the support of UNDP to stimulate investment in renewable projects among SMEs
- Organisations responsible for waste disposal placed separate containers for disposable masks in large cities
- UNDP provided equipment for treatment of infectious waste and containers for safe waste collection
- Provided exemptions to producers of gasoline (excluding aviation) and diesel fuel from the payment of excise taxes until 31st of December 2020
- Postponed adoption of a new Environmental Code planned for the spring of 2020
- Postponed adoption of a Low-Carbon Development Strategy for the implementation of the Paris Agreement

Kyrgyzstan

- Made a number of proposals including the need to develop a program to swap debt for projects in the field of environment, climate change and green economy during the international forum "High level event on development finance in the coronavirus era and beyond"
- Continues work on transition to less capital intensive and innovative activities through the concept of Intellectual Economy whose overarching aim is to the shift to a more knowledge-based and diversified economy and reduce dependency of the economy from revenues from the mining sector and migrant remittances.
- UNDP is launching projects "Early economic recovery - Recovering together" within the framework of a grant from the Government of Japan, focused on assisting in the creation of jobs, providing advisory and other support to businesses (providing co-financing grant / credit support, supporting business plans that guarantee the preservation of jobs in green economy, sustainable agriculture or in new growth sectors), etc.
- The World Food Programme (WFP) continued to carry out projects in villages and remote rural areas during the pandemic. These include tree-planting, canal-recovery work and construction initiatives, which are critical for sustaining livelihoods and supporting the ongoing agriculture season. Participants in these projects receive monthly food assistance in return for their work.

- Urged to revise the items of the Action Plan of Comprehensive Measures to Improve the Environmental Situation in Bishkek City, as well as Sokuluk and Alamudun Districts of Chui Oblast for 2020-2023 and make proposals for setting specific deadlines for their implementation
- Placed 4 containers for medical waste from COVID-19 in the city of Osh
- Extended moratorium on checks by state regulatory authorities (including environmental inspections) until January 1, 2022

Moldova

- UN in Moldova has developed a Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan that includes environmental provisions
- Moldova has launched the National Greening Programme for SMEs on 3 June 2020 to develop the capacity of SMEs in adopting green practices.
- Continues implementation of the National Strategy “Moldova 2030” which includes promotion of environmental priorities
- Continues implementation of activities approved in the Action Plan for 2020-2030 in the field of waste management, extended producer responsibility, green economy promotion, air quality, industrial emissions, environmental impact assessment and biodiversity conservation
- Plans to introduce more efficiency in terms of use of energy and resources, reduced pollution and ensuring public health to promote the local companies to become more sustainable and competitive
- UNDP with the support from the Government of Sweden provided grants for women-headed households, women entrepreneurs and rural communities to implement environmentally friendly practices
- UNDP aims to form "green" alliances with international financial institutions and other UN agencies to put the issue of the transition to a green economy high on the Government's agenda

Tajikistan

- Held a seminar on environmental challenges of Tajikistan and the COVID-19 pandemic in Dushanbe
- Held a meeting to develop a draft of a new program on ecological education and training
- UN has developed a COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response & Recovery Plan that includes environmental provisions to be embedded within national strategies
- UN WFP launched Cash for Work projects to support 15,000 vulnerable people affected by the socio-economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The projects provide participants with cash assistance for three months in exchange for their work on rehabilitating irrigation canals, drinking water supply systems and forestry areas in the targeted communities.
- UNDP introduced a sustainable drinking water supply system in Laboba village within the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project

Turkmenistan

- Developed an Immediate Socio-Economic Response Plan containing five pillars in collaboration with UN Turkmenistan. The third pillar specifically focusses on providing support to SMEs and informal sector workers and includes maintaining “green” practices in agriculture.

Ukraine

- Included “Water supply, sewerage, waste management” as one of the priority economic activities of the State Program of Economic Stimulation to Overcome the Negative Consequences of Restrictive Measures to Prevent the Occurrence and Spread of Acute Respiratory Disease COVID-19 Caused by SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus for 2020-2022
- Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production Centre (RECP) carried out a survey to understand how COVID-19 affected manufacturing enterprises and what kind of support they need to restore operations and improve economic and environmental performance
- UN OCHA has revised the Humanitarian Response Plan to incorporate responses to COVID-19 with a particular focus on provision of clean water and sanitation facilities.
- Conducted an online championship for children to create their version of the world after the pandemic. One of the nominations included carbon-free city, which offers energy efficient solutions for the functioning of the world
- Issued recommendations to put masks in one and/or two plastic bags before disposal to limit the spread of the virus
- Transferred the funds dedicated to the purchase of air quality monitoring system to the fund to fight the coronavirus
- Cancelled public hearings related to the Law "On Environmental Impact Assessment" that were scheduled during the quarantine
- Cut the budget for the Energy Efficiency Fund by UAH 1.6 bln. The project started in 2018 and was designed to help reduce energy costs, improve living conditions and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Ukraine. During the pandemic, UNDP used the network of coordinators of the Fund to launch an educational campaign about the danger of COVID-19.

Uzbekistan

- Additional expenses in the amount of UZS 10 trillion will be allocated from the Anti-crisis fund to implement measures to mitigate the negative economic impact of the pandemic, which includes construction of water supply and sewerage facilities as well as irrigation and melioration objects (approximately UZS 1 trillion).
- UNDP launched projects to improve awareness on COVID-19 in the environmentally vulnerable areas in the Aral Sea region

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