

OECD/GREEN Action Task Force Event:

Is a green COVID-19 economic recovery possible? Perspectives for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

25 June 2021,

10:00 – 11:00 CEST

ZOOM Live Talk

Summary

The webinar “Is a green COVID-19 economic recovery possible? Perspectives for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia” brought together high-level policy makers and experts from the EECCA region and beyond.

The event was organised as part of the [GREEN Action Task Force](#), which supports the EECCA countries to reconcile environment and economic goals. The OECD hosts the Secretariat of the Task Force for the implementation of the programme, in co-operation with several partners.

1. Topic Introduction

There are very positive signs that COVID-19 cases are decreasing rapidly in many countries in the EECCA region, but the impacts of the pandemic will still be felt for months, if not years.

Many countries have put in place recovery measures. These measures help pave the way for a recovery that not only provides income and jobs, but also has broader well-being goals at its core, integrates strong climate and biodiversity action, and builds economic, social and ecosystem resilience. The economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic presents opportunities to build forward greener.

The webinar sought to answer the following questions:

- Have governments in the EECCA region made efforts to green their economic recovery?
- Can more be done in the context of budget constraints, impacts of the economic downturn on businesses or a relatively high share of the energy intensive sectors in the economies of the region? And finally
- And what are the co-benefits and trade-offs of greening post-COVID-19 economic recovery measures?

2. Presentations

Ms. Isabella Neuweg and **Mr. Douglas Herrick**, Policy Analysts from the OECD Environment Directorate, presented observations on the COVID-19 response measures in the EECCA region and more specific examples of what has been happening on the ground in the region in 2020 and 2021 based on the OECD policy brief “[COVID-19 and Greening the Economies of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia](#)”. The presentations also focussed on the rationale for a green recovery and that it is important to scale up some of the examples with a positive impact on the environment rather than continue on a business as usual pathway.

Mr. Andrew Prag, Senior Programme Manager, also OECD, presented the main findings from the [OECD database](#) that tracks and analyses COVID-19 measures across the OECD and the G20.

3. Panellist remarks

The presentations gave way to a discussion with a distinguished panel:

- Ms. Iryna Stavchuk, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, Ukraine
- Mr. Jusipbek Kazbekov, Deputy Chairman, State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection, Uzbekistan
- Ms. Isabel Blanco, Associate Director, Lead Economist on Green Economy Transition, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Ms. Iryna Stavchuk and Mr. Jusipbek Kazbekov highlighted examples of the green recovery measures in Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Ukraine has made progress on the energy efficiency upgrades of buildings as a response to the pandemic, notably through the ESCO mechanism, and on encouraging the take-up of organic agricultural practices. Going forward, Ukraine will continue to scale up energy saving measures more rapidly. Ms. Stavchuk identified a lack of ‘tagging’ of green measures as a barrier to understanding challenges for, and progress on, the green recovery. Such “tagging” could help to understand and optimise future budget allocations for such measures. Uzbekistan has set up an anti-crisis fund that, apart from supporting business and healthcare services, uses 15% of its revenues to support green measures, such as increasing water saving, energy efficiency and tree planting. Mr. Kazbekov also noted the adoption of a new water resources management strategy in 2020, which included tax subsidies for firms that take-up water saving. Regional cooperation in Central Asia has also increased during the pandemic, including through cross-country aid programmes.

Ms. Isabel Blanco highlighted the importance of focusing on sectors where improvements are harder to realise, such as in energy efficiency, in designing and implementing recovery measures. There is a danger to always pick the same few sectors and focus on them rather than on sectors where reductions in emissions and green job creation can also be large but may need more sustained efforts. She underlined that stress-testing of existing and planned infrastructure is important, especially of those with a long lifetime such as power generation. It will be increasingly important to ensure the resiliency of infrastructure.

The discussion showed that, while positive measures have emerged throughout the EECCA region, they are often on a small scale and need to be implemented more widely. There are also clear examples of mixed or negative measures that need to be reassessed and adjusted to ensure that the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic leads to a greener future. These issues will be discussed further at the upcoming 2021 Annual Meeting of the GREEN Action Task Force (12-13 October 2021, Tashkent, Uzbekistan).