

a tip: tap e.V. | c/o Thinkfarm | Oberlandstraße 26-35 | 12099 Berlin

European Commission
Commissioner Jessika Roswall
Executive Vice-President Teresa Ribera
Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra
1049 Bruxelles/Brussel
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EU-wide promotion of tap water is crucial for real action against plastic pollution and health risks

Dear Commissioner Jessika Roswall,
Dear Executive Vice-President Teresa Ribera,
Dear Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra,

Access to safe drinking water is a human right and in line with the principles of the new European pillar of social rights.¹² The Drinking Water Directive, renewed in 2020, stipulates that Member States shall take measures to improve access to water for all, in particular for vulnerable and marginalised groups, and ensure that outdoor and indoor facilities are available in public places to promote the use of tap water.³ It must therefore be ensured that the right to access good quality drinking water is addressed and upheld throughout the EU. We need to enhance the visibility for this precious drinking water resource, and ensure that it is kept clean and safe. Additional care should be reserved for regions more impacted by the effects of climate change and chemical pollutants, like PFAS.

In those regions of the EU where good quality tap water is available, use of tap water in private and public life should be promoted and encouraged over consumption of bottled water. It is essential to put efforts into securing access to good water quality rather than supporting a wasteful economy based on bottled water. Tap water is a wonderful example of sustainable consumption: a local product, packaging-free, low-emission and low-cost – making it an easy introduction to a more sustainable lifestyle for many people in the EU.

¹ <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/human-rights-water-and-sanitation>

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1606&langId=en>

³ EU Drinking water Directive Article 16

The top four benefits of promoting the consumption of tap water over bottled water in the EU:

1. No packaging waste

Citizens of the EU drink about **61.1 billion litres of packaged water** every year⁴⁵⁶. Switching to tap would reduce the use of fossil fuels and chemicals for the production of plastic packaging, as well as the creation of microplastics or toxic emissions from the production, use and disposal or recycling of packaging. In view of the ongoing negotiations on an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution⁷, it is important that the EU should reduce one of the most polluting products on its territory and inspire other countries. It is also important to reduce the use of packaged water made of other materials like glass or paper as these also consume raw materials and their production and disposal can have a negative impact on the environment.⁸

2. Lower greenhouse gas emissions

Tap water has a **100 to 600 times lower CO₂e** footprint than bottled water in plastic or glass bottles (no compensation required)⁹¹⁰. Based on the number of packaged water consumed in the EU, an average of **12.4 million tonnes of CO₂e** could be saved each year if only tap water was consumed instead of bottled water.¹¹

3. Saving money for EU citizens

Tap water **costs a small portion** of bottled water in the EU – less than 1 cent per litre tap water in all EU member states (price varies between countries and cities). Bottled water costs much more, up to several EUROS per bottle. An average family can **save around 1,000 EUROS per year** by switching to tap water.¹²

4. Improve heat resilience in the EU

Installing more public water fountains and refilling stations will provide additional hydration and cooling options in urban and rural areas. This is essential to protect the health of the population, especially in the face of rising temperatures due to climate change.

⁴<https://www.statista.com/statistics/620210/annual-packaged-water-consumption-in-the-european-union/>

⁵ Globally: 600 billion plastic bottles each year;

https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:9106/BottledWater_Report_Final_-compressed.pdf

⁶ Plastic bottles are the most frequently found item in the global brand audit project.

<https://brandaudit.breakfreefromplastic.org/brand-audit-2023/>

⁷<https://noplasticinmysea.org/call-to-support-universal-access-to-water-services-and-to-stop-plastic-bottles-expansion/>

⁸ <https://zerowasteurope.eu/library/reusable-vs-single-use-packaging-a-review-of-environmental-impact/>

⁹ https://atiptap.org/files/studie_co2_trinkwasser_versus_mineralwasser_2020.pdf

¹⁰<https://wvgw.de/aktuelles/aktuelle-oekobilanz-studie-belegt-trinkwasserkonsum-umweltschonender-als-mineralwasserkonsum/>

¹¹ based on carbon footprint analysis of tap and bottled water production in Germany

¹² <https://www.waternewseurope.com/water-prices-compared-in-36-eu-cities/>

To harvest these low hanging fruits, the EU and its member states should implement the following propositions:

The EU and its member states should implement **legal measures** to promote tap water and reduce plastic bottles by:

- strengthening the measures to reduce plastic bottles pollution and overconsumption with an ambitious revision of single-use plastic Directive in 2025
- banning (small) single-use plastic bottles for water in the EU (as already implemented in some places in the USA and Australia)
- banning the import of bottled water into the EU from distances of more than 1,000 km (i.e. Fiji water)
- increasing and adjusting VAT on plastic bottles between Member States¹³
- increasing and adjusting concession fees for commercial water extraction between Member States
- strengthening the control of bottled water (cf. the Nestlé affair ¹⁴ and the recent studies highlighting microplastics¹⁵ and PFAS in plastic bottles¹⁶)
- introducing mandatory environmental footprint labels for bottled water products to inform consumers about their environmental impact
- obliging restaurants and cafes to offer tap water - free or with charge like in Spain / Balearic¹⁷ or France¹⁸
- implementing an EU-wide deposit return system for reusable and single use plastic bottles.

The EU and its member states should improve the **availability of drinking water in the public** by:

- provision and upkeep of drinking water infrastructure for households is a standard in Europe
- installing more public water fountains, especially at specific transport sites like train or tube stations or heat-impacted areas
- encouraging and establishing additional water refill stations (e.g. <https://www.refill.org.uk/>)
- incentivise restaurants, canteens, bars, cafés and catering services to serve tap water (as mentioned in the new EU packaging and packaging waste regulation)
- encourage businesses and employers to offer tap water to guests and employees (e.g. by installing a water fountain for the team)
- promote tap water and reuse solutions in public schools and universities
- promote tap water and reuse solutions during sport and cultural events
- promote tap water consumption in the healthcare sector by providing information on how to offer hygienic safe tap water and install water fountains for patients

¹³ There are huge differences between e.g. 5.5% in France and 20% in Austria.

¹⁴<https://www.foodwatch.org/en/nestle-mineral-water-scandal-european-commission-severely-criticizes-french-authorities-in-new-audit-report>

¹⁵ <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2300582121>

¹⁶<https://www.pan-europe.info/resources/briefings/2024/12/tfa-forever-chemical-european-mineral-waters>

¹⁷ Ley 8/2019, de 19 de febrero, de residuos y suelos contaminados de las Illes Balears: consumers have the right to have access to tap water (2021).

¹⁸ Code de l'environnement (France 2021):

https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/L_EGIARTI000042883671

- provide EU funding or grants to help Member States to develop and maintain tap water facilities, particularly in rural and climate-affected regions

The EU and its member states should **strengthen communication on tap water** to counter the strong influence of bottled water advertising by:

- enhancing information and awareness of tap water in the EU, e.g. through a TV advertisement to promote tap water consumption
- Informing and raising awareness of the negative environmental and health impacts of plastic bottles and plastic in general
- increasing education on tap water consumption and promoting the use of tap water in schools and universities
- involving children and youth in solutions to reduce bottled water consumption
- including information on tap water in tourist maps and welcome packs for new citizens across the EU
- using tap water as a marketing tool for destinations

The EU and its member states should **act as role models** for tap water consumption by:

- offering tap water at all meetings and public events organised by the European Council, the Parliament and the Commission
- offering tap water at all meetings and public events organised by national or local political bodies
- stopping bottled water as part of the public procurement
- making tap water available in all public spaces like traffic stations, libraries or municipalities.
- ensuring that MEPs and staff of EU and national institutions have access to a refillable water bottle and places to refill the bottles. Where appropriate, distribute refillable water bottles to staff.

Yours faithfully,

The undersigned organizations

Undersigned organizations:

There are different regional challenges for tap water consumption throughout Europe. The 'Plastic-free drinking' task force brings together expertise and experience on various regional challenges (e.g. tourist regions, regions with immigrants who are not used to the quality of tap water, varying water quality) in order to improve and protect drinking water quality, promote tap water consumption and reduce plastic bottles.



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