

European Water Legislation

Brief description and main aims:

Over the years, the EU has adopted several pieces of legislation in the field of water protection and quality. The EU's main objective is to ensure that all Europeans have access to good quality and sufficient water, and to guarantee the good status of all water bodies throughout Europe. EU legislation aims to ensure that water is managed sustainably in the long term, that water pollution is reduced and that aquatic ecosystems are protected. Since 2000, the EU's *Water Framework Directive* (WFD) has been the main piece of water legislation in Europe.

The WFD has been complemented by other EU legislation such as the *Groundwater Directive* (GWD), the *Drinking Water Directive* (DWD), the *Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive* (UWWTD), and the *Floods Directive*. While these policies have primarily focused on water quality and pollutants, water quantity management, scarcity, droughts, and other extreme weather events are now receiving more attention. These challenges lack a comprehensive strategy and vision to address them.

In 2023, the *Consultative Committee for Industrial Changes* (CCMI), a *European Economic and Social Committee* (EESC) body, published plans for an *EU Blue Deal* to make the water crisis a policy priority for the 2024 - 2029 mandate of the European Commission. After the re-election of Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President, the development of a *Water Resilience Strategy* (WRS) was included among the priorities for the new mandate. A dedicated *Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience, and a Competitive Circular Economy*, the Swedish Jessika Roswall, will lead the work on this file.

Why FIEC is dealing with this topic:

Contractors face a growing number of challenges related to water stress (situations in which the demand for water exceeds the amount available in a given period), excess water and water quality. Extreme weather events such as droughts and heavy rainfall are becoming more frequent, posing huge challenges to the built environment and resulting in huge damages and high insurance costs. Flood defenses and other water management systems are needed to deal with these situations. To the contrary, a major factor contributing to water scarcity and water loss is leakage from water networks: On average, 25 percent of treated water is lost in public water supplies. At EU level, this adds up to 6.5 billion m³ lost annually, equaling the combined consumption of France and Germany.
