

(English version)

Question for written answer E-001260/25
to the Commission
César Luena (S&D)
(26 March 2025)

Subject: Increasing frequency of climate whiplash events affecting European cities

A new report reveals how cities worldwide are increasingly exposed to extreme droughts followed by floods due to climate change. This phenomenon, i.e. the abrupt change between dry and wet conditions, is known as a ‘climate whiplash’. The study ⁽¹⁾, conducted by WaterAid together with academics from the universities of Bristol and Cardiff, analysed the world’s 100 most populous cities and found that 90% of all climate-related disasters involve either an excess or a shortage of water and that these events have increased fourfold in the last 50 years. In Europe, all the cities analysed showed a trend of increasing aridity over the last forty-two years.

1. Does the Commission plan to address climate whiplashes with measures to mitigate them in the future water resilience strategy?
2. Given that drought affects the quality of drinking water, how is the effective implementation of the Drinking Water Directive ensured in cities most vulnerable to these phenomena?
3. In what way is the Commission collaborating with Member States to implement nature-based solutions that mitigate the effects of climate whiplashes, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy?

Submitted: 26.3.2025

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(21 May 2025)

1. The Water Resilience Strategy will offer a comprehensive vision for water-related policies. It will build on the solid existing *acquis* and focus on how to better implement rules for sustainable freshwater management, including the Floods Directive ⁽²⁾ and marine protection. It aims to improve source-to-sea water governance and awareness, enhance prevention and preparedness across economic sectors and society, enhance access to information and funding, and boost innovation. This will increase the EU’s preparedness against rapid swings between weather extremes.
2. The Drinking Water Directive ⁽³⁾ mainly regulates the quality of drinking water by setting standards for certain pollutants and requires Member States to comply with them. The directive includes provisions on risk assessment and management, meaning that local authorities must monitor changes in source water quantity and quality due to drought or floods, and adjust treatment processes accordingly. The directive’s provisions on reducing water leakage levels, restrictions of use, derogations, access to water and information to the public could also prove relevant in case of ‘climate whiplashes’. Cities vulnerable to these phenomena may need to adapt local regulations ⁽⁴⁾ or introduce temporary measures ⁽⁵⁾ to maintain water quality.
3. The Commission has published guidance ⁽⁶⁾ and helps Member States through the EU Biodiversity Platform ⁽⁷⁾ and its sub-groups on the Nature Restoration Regulation ⁽⁸⁾ and on Green Infrastructure ⁽⁹⁾. Moreover, nature-based solutions are being supported through the Water Sensitive City ⁽¹⁰⁾ thematic partnership under the European Urban Initiative ⁽¹¹⁾, the Green Cities Accord ⁽¹²⁾ and the European Green Capital and Leaf Awards ⁽¹³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxooof256/files/2025-03/Water-and-climate-Rising-risks-for-urban-populations.pdf>.

⁽²⁾ Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood, OJ L 288, 6.11.2007, p. 27-34.

⁽³⁾ Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast), OJ L435, 23.12.2020, p.1-62.

⁽⁴⁾ e.g. encouraging citizens to save water.

⁽⁵⁾ Such as restricting water use.

⁽⁶⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/urban-environment/urban-nature-platform_en.

⁽⁷⁾ https://green-forum.ec.europa.eu/business-and-biodiversity_en.

⁽⁸⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-regulation_en.

⁽⁹⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure_en.

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/water-sensitive-city>.

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/>.

⁽¹²⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/urban-environment/green-city-accord_en.

⁽¹³⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/urban-environment/european-green-capital-award_en.