

United Nations Environment Programme and Green Growth Knowledge Partnership

United Nations Development Account

Project “Enhancing sustainable public procurement for the regional transition to inclusive green economy in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia”

Eco-labels: How can they be scaled up, streamlined and used to drive sustainable consumption and production?

23 March 2021

SUMMARY

On 23 March 2021 the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and Green Growth Knowledge Partnership (GGKP) – as part of the UN Development Account project "Enhancing sustainable public procurement for the regional transition to inclusive green economy in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)" (UNDA SPP project) – held a [webinar](#) on how eco-labelling can drive sustainable consumption and production, as well as to discuss first steps on eco-labelling application, challenges and prospects in EECCA countries.

Panellists, representing different organizations and countries, including developed countries and those with economies in transition, were as follows:

- [Mr Kuanysh Baltabayev](#), Executive Director, ECOJER, Kazakhstan
- [Ms Evgeniia Kuznetsova](#), Head of Certification Body, Ecological Union, Russian Federation
- [Ms Iordanca-Rodica Iordanov](#), Executive Director, EcoContact, Moldova
- [Ms Giulnara Jusupjanova](#), Chairman, For Quality, Kyrgyzstan
- [Dr Ulf Jaeckel](#), Head of Division of Sustainable Consumer Protection, Product-related Environmental Protection, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany
- [Ms Lesya Nikolayeva](#), Project Manager, UNDA SPP
- [Mr Björn-Erik Lönn](#), Chairman, Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN)
- [Ms Kateryna Shor](#), Project Manager, Green Dossier Information Center, Ukraine
- The webinar was moderated by [Mr Nils Heuer](#), Associate Programme Officer, Consumption and Production Unit, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

In the webinar, panellists described their experience in developing or applying eco-labels, challenges that governments usually have to face in promoting eco-labelling systems, support to businesses on obtaining eco-labels, and other solutions and prospects. Below is a brief summary of the discussion.

How effective are eco-labels in scaling up sustainable consumption and production?

“Every year we see that step-by-step they use less water and electricity and produce less solid waste. We see that eco-labels can make a good contribution in regulating pollution with hazardous substances. [But] these national legislative regulations are not enough to drive our economies to sustainable development.”

– **Evgeniia Kuznetsova**, Head of Certification Body, Ecological Union, Russian Federation

“Eco-labelling impacts sustainable development in Kazakhstan; it improves sustainability. On the market side, B2C [business-to-consumer], eco-labelling is very popular and the population is very keen to seek and choose eco-labelled products and devices. If we’re talking about public procurement, eco-labelling is

not very helpful to the producers/manufacturers; legislation is not oriented around creating products that are eco-labelled to indicate sustainability over the overall production system because, regrettably, the priority is the price of the product.”

- **Kuanysh Baltabayev**, Executive Director, ECOJER, Kazakhstan

“There is a need for information in the marketplace. The environmental information needs to be credible; to be something that the buyer trusts, and producers need to be true in presenting it. [Eco-labels] are a market tool and we must remember that it is for the producer/manufacturer/importer to ascertain the environmental quality of the product in a trustworthy way to the buyer. And the buyer must be able to make the correct environmental choices, as a company or a private person, or a public purchase. [Public] authorities also need this information to be credible and correct.”

- **Björn-Erik Lönn**, Chairman, Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN)

“We always discuss the environmental considerations and the price as being kind of trade-offs. But products should just internalize the external costs of environmental costs so that unsustainable products would be more expensive than the sustainable ones ideally.”

- **Nils Heuer**, Associate Programme Officer, Consumption and Production Unit, UNEP

How can eco-labeling open business opportunities, particularly with public procurers?

“For business, eco-labelling means improving reputation with customers, increasing the number of customers and increasing overall competitiveness in relation to other businesses.”

- **Rodica Iordanov**, Executive Director, EcoContact, Moldova

“In Ukraine, we have a good system – an online public procurement platform implemented in 2016. This has become a model for collaboration between business, government and civil society, and we are looking forward to the positive development of this environmental criterion and producer involvement in consultation processes.”

- **Kateryna Shor**, Project Manager, Green Dossier Information Center, Ukraine

“In Russia, we don’t have much experience in green or sustainable public procurement, and it is a challenge for us to somehow enhance the development of green procurements in the public sector. The project has already led to the appearance of seven new [type 1 Vitality Leaf] licenses, and the production of thousands of eco-labelled paints. These products retained low prices after eco-labelling, which is very important.”

- **Evgeniia Kuznetsova**, Head of Certification Body, Ecological Union, Russian Federation

What is the biggest challenge for governments in an increasingly complex eco-certification landscape?

“Consumer awareness is still a high priority for Moldova. It is important to increase the understanding on why we would like to use environmentally friendly products and services. Institutional and production infrastructure is still a big issue. We still need to have support to develop and to train the public and private companies to apply transparency in the process of procurement.”

- **Rodica Iordanov**, Executive Director, EcoContact, Moldova

“The first step for us (Kazakhstan) is raising awareness. Currently, when tenders are announced through the public procurement system, the only offers that are considered are those that meet the technical criteria. Eco-labelling in public procurement is not very relevant. However, in the private sector for the population, it is.”

- **Kuanysh Baltabayev**, Executive Director, ECOJER, Kazakhstan

“It should be clear information how the quality [of sustainability] was achieved, how the products were produced, who could guarantee [the product information], and what will happen with the products or producers if they are not fulfilling some requirements or criteria.”

- **Kateryna Shor**, Project Manager, Green Dossier Information Center, Ukraine

“There is a need to create and establish some international assessment criteria. If tomorrow all our [Kyrgyzstan] producers would want to certify their products, they will be lost when it comes to choosing their eco-labels.”

- **Giulnara Jusupjanova**, Chairman, For Quality, Kyrgyzstan

“There is a need to strengthen infrastructure and to raise awareness on the consumer side.”

- **Nils Heuer**, Associate Programme Officer, Consumption and Production Unit, UNEP

“We have to support the procurement officers. In Germany, we have 30,000 procurement officers, and we have to support them by setting up websites to provide support and training courses. This is absolutely necessary.”

- **Ulf Jaeckel**, Head of Division of Sustainable Consumer Protection, Product-related Environmental Protection, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany

How can we strengthen collaboration and knowledge exchange for global coordination on eco-labelling?

“It’s about creating credibility between programmes, creating mutual recognition as well as having formal agreements between different schemes. You have to be open in a type 1 eco-label, open for an application from anywhere in the world. It’s not only for an eco-label in Kyrgyzstan, it’s also for Uzbekistan products or Russian products or European products. Everyone should be able to apply for the label. So, the label is connected more to the market where it is sold, not to where the product is produced.”

- **Björn-Erik Lönn**, Chairman, Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN)

“It’s very important to have transparent processes and open participation opportunities for different types of stakeholders.”

- **Nils Heuer**, Associate Programme Officer, Consumption and Production Unit, UNEP

How can we better promote the benefits of eco-labelling to consumers?

“We try to collaborate as much as possible with business media for example. We try to do it using their language. We try to be comfortable for them in our collaborations. We try to give them high-quality information, trustful information, and we are doing it very fast. We try to communicate a lot with consumers. We try to give them credible information in social nets, in mass media, we developed a mobile application. We try to take part in all international events and afterwards, to communicate to consumers and businesses.”

- **Evgeniia Kuznetsova**, Head of Certification Body, Ecological Union, Russian Federation

“It should be clear information how the quality was achieved, how the products were produced, who could guarantee and what will happen with the products or producers if they are not fulfilling some requirements or criteria.”

- **Kateryna Shor**, Project Manager, Green Dossier Information Center, Ukraine

“Social media is becoming so important with a lot of younger consumers who are more open to sustainable products.”

– **Nils Heuer**, Associate Programme Officer, Consumption and Production Unit, UNEP

“We are not solving the climate crisis or the environmental crisis from buying eco-labelled products. We cannot consume ourselves out of the situation where we are over-consuming natural resources and over-consuming products.”

– **Björn-Erik Lönn**, Chairman, Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN)

The seminar was attended by 157 people out of 265 registered (109 women and 48 men) (the list is attached).

The UNEP’s moderator thanked panellists for their interesting discussion and diverse opinions on the prospects on eco-labelling, as well as all participants for their active contributions to promote eco-labels in their countries.

The recording of the webinar is available at: ggkp.org/eco-label.

