



**Pesticide
Action
Network**
Europe

Stop the export of EU-banned and hazardous pesticides

PAN Europe's feedback

The Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe supports the European Commission's intention to present legislative measures aimed at prohibiting the production and export of chemicals that have been banned in the European Union due to their hazardous properties. This is in line with its commitment under the European Green Deal and specifically the Chemical Strategy for Sustainability, towards a toxic free environment, where Europe shows global leadership in the protection from hazardous chemicals and promotion of sustainable practices.

The EU bans the use of hazardous chemicals but allows their export to countries with weaker safety laws.

It is in the provisions of the EU law to provide a high level of protection to human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals. Therefore, pesticides and other chemicals ought to be banned in the EU if there is evidence that their use can cause harm to humans and the environment. Safer alternatives must be promoted instead. A particular focus is given to the protection of vulnerable groups of our population, such as pregnant women and children, as well biodiversity and ecosystem. The sectoral legislation (pesticides, biocides, REACH chemicals etc), however, solely focuses on chemicals that are sold in the EU market, without addressing the impact on the exports if these get banned.

To our concern, once hazardous chemicals are banned for use in Europe for human health or/and environmental concerns, companies find alternative routes to keep profiting from their toxic products by exporting them to other regions of the world with weaker safety laws, and often much richer reservoirs of biodiversity than Europe. According to [an investigation](#), in 2018 about 81,000 tonnes of pesticides, containing more than 41 EU-banned hazardous substances, among them toxic paraquat and acetochlor, were exported from the EU to third countries. In 2017 [Germany exported](#) 21 substances that were not authorized at national level and 9 that were not authorized at EU level; among them cyanimid, a potential carcinogen accounted for up to 10,000 tonnes, whereas acetochlor and iprodione, both banned for human and environmental toxicity issues, accounted for 25-100 tonnes. Another [recent study](#) found that in 2021, a total of 13,200 tonnes of 'neonicotinoid bee-killing pesticides' were exported by 13 EU countries, among them Belgium, France, Spain, Germany, Netherlands, Hungary, Austria, Greece and Denmark. These were exported to 51 different countries among them Brazil, Ukraine, Indonesia, Guatemala, Togo, and Kenya by companies such as Syngenta, BASF and others.

It is extremely worrying that the EU grants consent to this practice, essentially turning a blind eye to the fact that these -for example- pesticides, deemed too dangerous for use in European agriculture, are now being sold for use elsewhere, where they will lead to the same harms that originally prompted their ban within Europe. Instead of promoting alternative, safer practices, in line with the principles of agroecology, Europe is promoting the use of toxic pesticides in full knowledge about the damage that these can cause. There are numerous cases where the use of such chemicals resulted in serious harm in people and children, but also in the contamination of water and natural resources as well as in the collapse of bee colonies and destruction of biodiversity. In Brazil, the increased use of pesticides has led to [an increased rate of poisoning in infants, and intoxication in adults](#), and has a serious impact on human rights of indigenous people- the agricultural expansion has resulted deliberate spraying of toxic pesticides over their lands and homes. In the meantime, the annual approval and import of EU-banned pesticides in Brazil is increasing. In terms of biodiversity, the use of neonicotinoid pesticides and fipronil (main producer is BASF) in Brazil have been found the culprit of mass deaths of [500 million](#) and [100 million](#) of bees, in 2019 and 2023, respectively. Similarly in Campeche region of Mexico, [millions of bees have been found dead](#) since March 2023 impacting more than 3,365 hives belonging to 110 honey producers and bee keepers, resulting in an economic impact of about 700,000 euros. [An analysis showed](#) that all the bee samples collected had fipronil residues exceeding the limits (of lethal dose) to kill 50% of the tested population (LD50). In Costa Rica, use of the fungicide chlorothalonil, one of the European exporting companies being Syngenta, resulted in [contamination of the drinking water](#) in the region exposing the local population to this health-harming pesticides. [Sales of paraquat](#) have been linked to several deaths in countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and India.

Such a double standard within the EU's approach to pesticides is unacceptable and contradicts European citizens' values to prioritise the protection of human health and preserve our nature. It is essential to address this issue and put an end to the practice of exporting banned chemicals to protect both human health and the global environment. This requires updating the current legislation to include strict measures.

Ensuring an effective export ban:

In the objectives of the 'call of evidence' roadmap, the Commission lists several options that are being considered. Here, we would like to highlight that the Commission's main objective is to increase the protection of human health and the environment in EU and globally from hazardous chemicals and to set an example as one of the global leaders. Therefore, it is important to set strict measures and tackle the problem at its source, at the EU level. This will only be possible if it sets legally binding measures **that will prevent EU companies continuing to produce and export hazardous chemicals** that have been banned across the EU for uses that can be dangerous for human health and/or the environment. For this to take place, the legal framework should be updated so that companies are not allowed anymore to send such a trade request under the PIC Regulation (EU Regulation No 649/2012 concerning the export and import of hazardous chemicals) to third countries, even if these countries give their consent. Providing the importing country with the complete toxicity information does not provide any guarantee. Moreover, in the case of hazardous pesticides that have been banned in Europe, their safety has been assessed under different conditions of use and has been rejected. These include the use of protection equipment and application of mitigation measures to reduce exposure. Therefore, there are no conditions of use under which these pesticides can be considered safe. Not even their use in greenhouses can be considered safe. Here an important finding is that the recommended protective equipment, which aim -in theory- to increase the level of protection of agricultural workers from pesticide exposure, was recently brought under the spotlight [for failing to](#)

[provide the indicated level of protection](#). Instead of providing protection, it was observed that in several cases, the equipment actually led to higher exposure to potentially harmful pesticides. This paradox arose because, on one hand, farmers felt a false sense of security and became less attentive in limiting their exposure. On the other hand, the protective equipment itself failed to provide adequate protection. Another study, focusing on environmental contamination from pesticides in [an apple production region in the Northern Italy](#) demonstrated that despite the enforcement of strict mitigation measures, such as water barriers, prohibiting pesticide use in windy conditions or at distances of 30 meters (buffer zones), residues of pesticides were detected still detected at distances up to 600 meters from where they had been used. These findings highlight that the notion of 'safe use' when dealing with harmful pesticides is, in fact, a misconception. As a result, the most effective approach to ensuring protection from harmful pesticides is to avoid using them altogether.

As highlighted in our [Joint CSO Statement](#), to achieve its objective towards a higher level of protection, the EU should prohibit the export of banned chemicals by amending the PIC Regulation for the following reasons (1) it has a list of chemicals that have been banned or severely restricted in the EU in order to protect human health and/or the environment (2) it contains a mechanism to annually update this list with newly banned or severely restricted chemicals (3) already includes an export ban that applies to a small list of hazardous chemicals in Annex V (4) is linked to Rotterdam Convention which gives the opportunity to parties to “take action that is more stringently protective of human health and the environment than that called for in this Convention” (Article 15).

Conclusion – EU must lead by example and put an end to toxic trade

It is of outmost importance that the Commission takes leadership and promotes the EU value towards a higher level of protection from hazardous chemicals at a global level and promotion of safer truly sustainable alternatives. The export of pesticides that have been banned in the EU for human health and environmental concerns must stop. What is toxic within the borders of Europe is also toxic elsewhere. Turning a blind eye to the impacts that EU-produced chemicals have on third countries, and allowing companies to increase their toxic profits **is unethical and should be illegal**. In times of environmental emergency and human rights violations, we need to set our priorities right by putting natural resources and peoples' health before the interests of the market. The time for action is now.