

# EU pesticides export ban: what could be the consequences?

An investigation into the arguments and rationales for the export of selected highly toxic pesticides





# Summary

## **EU pesticides export ban: economic costs and beneficial effects**

This document is the summary extracted from the report “EU pesticides export ban: what could be the consequences?” commissioned by a coalition of civil society groups, which provides an analysis of the likely impacts of an EU halt to the manufacture and export of highly toxic pesticides that are already banned for use in the EU. Our investigation focuses on how a ban would affect EU employment, as well as the impacts on human health and the environment in importing countries. We conclude that stopping the export of EU-banned pesticides would neither endanger employment nor burden the EU economy. At the same time, a ban would positively impact people’s health and the environment in importing countries.

While pesticides are banned in Europe because they are too hazardous for humans and/or the environment, European companies are

still allowed to manufacture and export them in other parts of the world. This EU double standard poses a threat to human health and the ecosystems in importing countries, mainly Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC). At the same time, the EU imports food grown using these substances, leading to exposure of EU consumers via residues in imported foods and also putting EU farmers in an unfair competition.

In 2020, in response to the concerns raised by civil society groups in Europe and third countries, the European Commission committed to ending this practice and to setting measures to ensure that “hazardous chemicals banned in the European Union” are no longer “produced for export”. As expected, EU-based pesticide manufacturers reacted strongly, arguing that the proposed measures would generate significant job losses and would harm the sector’s competitiveness. Furthermore, they claimed that a ban would have no positive effect on importing countries. This report reveals that neither of these claims are true.

## Countering job loss claims

According to the available data, the EU is the world's number one exporting region for pesticides. A total of 714,000 tons of agricultural pesticides – with a value of EUR 6.6 billion – were exported in 2022 (excluding intra-European exports and imports). Out of this amount, 81,615 tonnes of 41 banned pesticides were exported for agricultural use in other countries. Our estimates show that exports of EU-banned pesticides from France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Hungary represented only a small proportion of the total volumes and value of exported agricultural pesticides (5 per cent in 2018 and 2 per cent in 2019).

Based on these figures, it was possible to extrapolate the total number of jobs that would potentially be at risk in the seven main European countries as a result of a hypothetical EU export ban. The amounts would have been as low as 133 jobs in 2018, 213 jobs in 2021, and 173 jobs in 2022. These estimates were further fine-tuned by taking a closer look at the consequences of France's 2022 agricultural pesticides export ban for jobs and employment.

In fact, job losses resulting from the French export ban have been negligible. While the French agrochemical industry argued that the ban would lead to massive layoffs – some 2,700 direct jobs and 1,000 indirect jobs in their constituencies – research conducted by investigative journalists showed that output did not decrease in the main affected factories. Although some job positions were made redundant, staff were

simply relocated within the company and no workers were dismissed. Assuming this 'French ratio' of affected jobs would also apply in other EU countries, we calculated that the ban would lead to a total potential loss of 25 jobs in 2022 for the entire EU.

## Positive impacts for importing countries

While the negative impact on the EU's economy would be minimal, the positive impact for third countries would be significant. In LMICs, EU-banned pesticides accounted for up to 71 per cent of the total volumes and value of agricultural pesticides imported from the EU in 2018. A ban would mean that the availability of highly hazardous pesticides in importing countries would decrease, which would stimulate the impetus to replace them with safer alternatives.

At the global level, Europe is responsible for at least 9 per cent (in tonnes of active substances) of the use around the world of 12 EU-banned substances. In addition, European countries exported approximately 2,930 tonnes of three EU-banned, highly bee toxic neonicotinoid active ingredients in 2018. This means that approximately 15 per cent of the world's annual consumption is sourced in the European Union.

Taking a substance-by-substance approach, the data published by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) from 2018 to 2019 shows that the most exported EU-banned pesticides by volume are also some of the most toxic substances.

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This is particularly problematic in LMICs, where pesticide regulations are often less stringent than in Europe. The result is that people in importing countries have significantly higher levels of exposure to these toxic pesticides.

Other factors amplify the negative impacts generated by the export of EU-banned pesticides for agricultural use in LMICs. Examples include the lack of specific rules and training on the use of pesticides, a higher proportion of the population working in agriculture, the presence of vulnerable children in the labour force, and the unavailability of protective equipment for workers.

## EU as global benchmark setter

The combined result of these risk factors makes it clear that an end to the export of EU-banned pesticides would have an important positive impact on many Low- and Middle-Income Countries (and more widely on other destination countries). At the same time, the facts and figures detailed in this report demonstrate that stopping the export of agricultural pesticides banned in the EU would put only a negligible number of jobs at risk, and that these could be maintained by shifting tasks.

Opponents of an EU export ban argue that importing countries will simply turn to other suppliers (i.e. in non-EU exporting countries, potentially through the subsidiaries of the same EU manufacturing companies located outside Europe). While this risk is real, it does

not release the EU from its human rights obligations. To address this scenario, the European Union could take action against the imports of agrifood products that are produced using banned pesticides or that have residues of these pesticides. The EU should also campaign for a global phase-out of such pesticides.

For example, paraquat was banned in Europe in 2007, and in 2008 the Maximum Residue Level (MRL) of this substance for food products was decreased to the lowest level of quantification. This herbicide was subsequently banned in 58 countries worldwide. This clearly shows the capacity of the EU to lead by example and to stimulate other countries to follow good practices, with the outcome of a further reduction in the global supply and use of highly hazardous agricultural pesticides.

Stopping the export of EU-banned pesticides would be a practical implementation of the EU's new trade policy to stimulate sustainability, as well as testimony to the potential role of the European Union as a global benchmark setter for chemical regulation.

Please find the whole report [here](#)

