

## ECHA's Transparency Approach – update on actions for 2021-2022

60<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Management Board 16-17 December 2020

### Proposal

The Management Board (MB) is invited to:

- take note of a report of the actions undertaken in 2019-2020 to improve transparency of the Agency's work;
- endorse the foreseen actions 2021-2022 for continual improvement in transparency.

### Background

Linked to [ECHA's Approach to Transparency](#) ECHA has for some years already committed to an action plan to continuously improve its efforts in transparency.

For the years 2019-2020 two main areas for continual improvement were identified (see also [MB/16/2019 final](#)):

1. Further developing the dissemination of information on chemicals;
2. Open communication and participatory decision making.

A lot of effort has been put into implementing improvement in these two areas and therefore the Management Board is presented in Annex 1 with a full report of actions that have been undertaken.

### Rationale

Transparency is a core value of the Agency. While ECHA's performance in this area has generally been regarded as very good (see e.g. REACH review, discharge, stakeholder survey), it cannot be considered as finished. Therefore it is important to set additional targets for the coming two years to maintain and further enhance ECHA's strong reputation in this field. The ECHA Secretariat has therefore set new goals for improvement for the years 2021-2022, which the Management Board is invited to endorse (see Annex 2).

### Alternative options

ECHA could rely on its merits from the past, but without a continued focus there is a risk that stakeholder satisfaction in this area will drop and/or its good reputation would decline.

### Drawbacks

While ECHA is already one of the most transparent agencies, transparency is also a moving target, constantly requiring a recalibration of what is expected of an EU institution. In this light, a proactive approach including continual improvement, will help ECHA to remain a frontrunner. Proactively tackling aspects that are known areas for improvement will also give more credibility than a reactive response.

**Attachments:**

- Annex 1: Report on transparency improvements during 2019-2020
- Annex 2: Goals for continual improvement in transparency 2021-2022

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## Annex 1 - Report on transparency improvements during 2019-2020

### 1) Further developing the dissemination of information on chemicals

- ECHA has published a list of over 21 000 REACH registered substances mapped in its '**chemical universe**'. The substances have been divided into five pools based on the regulatory actions in place, initiated or considered for them. It is a planning and monitoring tool that helps Member States and EU authorities focus on substances of (potential) concern and identify appropriate regulatory actions, where needed. For companies and other stakeholders, publishing the mapping provides additional transparency on the work of authorities and the progress made in regulating chemicals. ECHA intends to automate the generation of the chemical universe in 2021 to allow an easy and more frequent update of the information that will facilitate the monitoring of progress.
- A new interactive flowchart on ECHA's **Integrated Regulatory Strategy (IRS)** explains how ECHA deals with substances of concern and guides users to the various interrelated processes.<sup>1</sup> In a next phase, ECHA plans to publish more information on how the grouping approach is used as part of the priority setting in the context of the IRS.
- The EU Chemicals Legislation Finder (**EUCLEF**) was launched in 2020, giving companies access to a free-of-charge overview of 40 pieces of EU chemicals legislation they may need to comply with. The first version of the finder covers legislation dealing with air and water quality, worker protection, pesticides, food contact materials, cosmetic products, toy safety and many more.
- The first version of the dissemination portal for the **SCIP database**, aiming to bring transparency on the presence of SVHCs in articles and complex objects (products), is under development, for release in early 2021.
- The **Dissemination Portal** has been further improved with additional data and better search functionalities. The improvements include increased transparency on the activities and status of registrants<sup>2</sup> through a new specific and dedicated view which summarises various pieces of information, such as years in which they updated their registration dossiers, etc.; and the integration of the Persistent Organic Pollutants' (POPs) Regulation key datasets in the Dissemination Platform. The use of the dissemination portal has been continuously increasing with over 40 000 daily users currently.
- The transparency on **information on nanomaterials** has been increased. Information from REACH registration dossiers on characterisers and study summaries on nanoforms are now published on the Dissemination Portal, and the Infocards have been enhanced with information from the EU Observatory for Nanomaterials (EUON), indicating whether the substance is placed on the EEA market as nanoforms. Furthermore, through the EUON's search for nanomaterials, information on over 300 nanomaterials on the EU market can be found and linked to hazard data, where available.
- ECHA contributed extensively to the shaping and kick-off of a **Commission feasibility study** (initiated by the European Parliament), regarding a **common open platform for chemical safety data** and to increase the exchange of data across legislative silos. ECHA is committed to the initiative and puts its experience of more than 10 years making information on chemicals and regulatory processes available to accelerate the progress towards such a central platform, which will be a key pillar for the implementation of the one substance one assessment principle.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://echa.europa.eu/irs-infographic>

<sup>2</sup> <https://echa.europa.eu/information-on-chemicals/registered-substances>

## 2) Open communication and participatory decision making

- ECHA's **Interact Portal**, a tool to cooperate with national authorities, has been greatly enhanced to include additional authorities (Biocides' Enforcement Authorities and the POPs competent authorities) in the scope and adding new features. Currently the Portal covers a collaboration tool for drafting documents, a tool for publishing meetings and a tool to publish consultations. The latter tool, besides consultations with authorities, now also covers the consultations with the public at large. Last but not least the Platform covers also the Activities Coordination Tool (ACT) which helps to coordinate the hazard/risk assessment on chemicals across different public authorities.
- The public version of ACT, the **Public Activities Coordination Tool (PACT)** offers companies and other stakeholders an overview of information on substances that are on an authority's radar for potential regulatory risk management. Users can find a summary of each activity per substance, and be directed to process-specific lists, which give an information on all the substances subject to a particular process. The advance notice enables companies to consider their business strategy and gives all stakeholders more time to prepare their contributions to the public consultations that are ran during the formal risk management processes.
- ECHA adopted a new **Communications Strategy 2019-2023** with a special focus on more targeted engagement with stakeholders, in line with its growing portfolio. Special emphasis on remaining approachable and understandable by the target audiences;
- Specific attention was given to initiatives to reach concerned citizens and workers. **Infographs** to visualise data, videos on key topics and **social media** campaigns are an excellent way to reach out to consumers and provoke some interest in understanding the impact of chemicals on their lives. **Podcasts** were the newest addition to the portfolio of communication tools to reach wider audiences. Hot topics pages on the website summarise key files in an understandable manner;
- The maintenance of a dedicated web section with Q&As on the **withdrawal of the UK** from the EU, with aim of supporting transparently affected companies.
- Maintenance of a **public agenda** of all ECHA Directors on the ECHA website (meetings with external stakeholders) as well as publication of the outcome of post-employment decisions regarding senior management published on the ECHA website.

## Annex 2 – Goals for continual improvement in transparency 2021-2022

### 1) Further developing the dissemination of information on chemicals

ECHA has a legal duty to make certain information on substances publicly available, free of charge. However, instead of simply **disseminating** data from the registration dossiers 'as is', ECHA has invested heavily into making this data easily accessible to enhance its usability and transparency. Continued efforts will be invested in further enhancements of the Dissemination Portal (Infocard, Brief Profile and detailed source data) also in the coming years. ECHA will further strive to integrate the information on substances arising from different legislations and regulatory processes so that users can easily obtain an overview of the available data for that substance and follow the progress on its evaluation.

More in particular, ECHA has prepared in 2020 a Data availability roadmap, which will form the basis for the further development of the dissemination efforts in the coming years. It is structured around 4 bigger blocks:

1. *Review of publication policy*: This block entails the review ECHA's publication policy when it comes to information on chemicals submitted via REACH dossiers. The review is based on the principle that we aim to publish all relevant non-confidential information available to ECHA.
2. *Regulatory visibility of substances and processes*: This block aims at improving clarity in the way information and data on substances and related regulatory processes are made available to match the needs of various stakeholders. It also aims at increasing coherence and avoiding the currently occurring duplications on different sections of our website. This block is expected to increase the usefulness and meaning of the available data to the Agency's stakeholders.
3. *Integration of (new) data sources*: This block focusses on the efficient and effective integration of different sources of information on chemicals coming from the various pieces of legislations under ECHA's mandate or delegated to the Agency. Almost all the tasks recently added to the Agency's portfolio have some level of requirements to make data available, and this trend is expected to continue in the future e.g. with the implementation of the Drinking Water Directive.
4. *Ways to make data available*: The Roadmap also includes the purpose to explore the ways data is made available based on the needs of different internal and external stakeholder groups.

Further consultations on the Roadmap will take place in 2021 and based on the feedback received and resource availability, as well as other developments (e.g. outcome of the Commission's feasibility study for a common open platform for chemicals safety data), the priorities may still shift, but currently the following activities are put forward for the first implementation rounds:

- **Extension of the publication of information from registration dossiers** to additional items and **increased visibility of regulatory processes** in the disseminated data by improved navigation between different parts of ECHA's chemicals database and clearer indication and granularity of dossier/substance evaluation status;
- A further 16 pieces of legislation will be added to **EUCLEF** in 2021;
- **C&L Inventory redesign and integration**, adding also new information such as the identity of notifiers and spanning 2021-2022
- **Refactoring and integration of PIC** in the Dissemination Portal, also using this opportunity also to review the information currently being published from PIC submissions and identify possible improvements that could be included in the new solution; the activity will take place throughout 2021-2022 and will be carried out in

- cooperation with DG ENV.
- **Dissemination Platform portal for SCIP:** under the revised Waste Framework Directive (WFD), ECHA is required to set up a database of articles containing Candidate List substances and to provide access to this so-called SCIP Database to waste treatment operators and to consumers. The first version of the Dissemination Platform portal for SCIP is on track to go live in Q1/2021 and a subsequent release is planned in Q4/2021 to enhance the first version.
  - At the moment, ECHA mainly makes data available to its external stakeholders in human readable format. ECHA will explore new ways to make data available for different stakeholder target groups.

Finally, ECHA will expand the eChem portal to include information collected under the Biocides Regulation.

## 2) Open communication and participatory decision making

Transparency on how the Agency reaches its decisions and opinions will continue to be ensured and ECHA will maintain, and where necessary further enhance, its high standards in conflict of interest prevention and transparency about the interests held by its decision-makers.

Also the transparency of the work of the Committees, Forum and expert groups will remain a priority. ECHA's accredited stakeholders can support ECHA's work through various bodies and networks. As observers they can participate to the discussions at the discretion of the Chair. Closed sessions are limited to the extent necessary.

The ambition of the Agency to become climate neutral by 2030 and thereby reduce drastically the amount of physical meetings, also has a potential upside for transparency. Due to the reduced time and cost of travel, additional stakeholders can follow the work of the Committees and expert groups **virtually**, which may also have a positive impact on attendance and achieving a more balanced stakeholder representation. Special attention will be given to avoid any reduction in the level of transparency during online meetings and as a consequence of the increased amount of written procedures.

**Consultations**, including calls for comments and evidence are another opportunity to participate in the development of ECHA's opinions. ECHA makes a lot of effort to proactively inform interested stakeholders of ongoing consultation procedures.

The ECHA **communication strategy** 2019-2023 will be further implemented, with a more tailored approach taking into account the various needs of different audiences, including the general public and to reach out to any new stakeholders that ECHA's new work areas could bring.

As our window to the world, the ECHA **website** provides a wealth of information on the chemicals in use in Europe today, the work and decisions of the Agency and the regulations it implements. In view of the growing portfolio of tasks of the Agency and after a thorough user insight survey, a major revamp of the website will be undertaken to reflect these changes and to improve the website's usability. The subscription feature of the website will be enhanced to allow tailoring the content and more targeted communication, e.g. by allowing users to subscribe to the news topics and channels of their interest.

Specific attention will be given to initiatives to reach concerned **citizens** and workers, including proactive work with mainstream media to maximise outreach. In addition, increasing use of data visualisation, video material, podcasts and social media campaigns will help reach out to consumers and provoke some interest in understanding the impact of chemicals on their lives.

ECHA staff and management will be further empowered and encouraged to act as **ambassadors** in social media. This will help raising awareness and building citizen trust while giving a human touch to ECHA.

ECHA will continue to invest in direct dialogue with its **stakeholders**. Accredited stakeholder organisations are invited to a variety of events throughout the year. Wider stakeholders are invited to interact with ECHA through workshops and online webinars, where they can directly interact with ECHA in an open forum. Experience is being built up also with hosting large virtual events. These events are all free to attend, and mostly they are conducted online, or recorded and made available online, so that a wider audience can benefit.