

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPENDITURES AND TRENDS IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

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Abstract

Environmental policy aims to guarantee for the current and future generations a clean and healthy environment that ensures the protection of nature, quality of life, in conjunction with green and competitive economic development, low carbon dioxide and efficiency in terms of resource use. The circular economy represents a new perspective on the country's political agenda.

The basic purpose of environmental economic instruments is to determine the responsible behavior of the population and economic agents towards the environment, including by accumulating budgetary financial resources for the proper management of natural resources and the prevention of pollution environment. The Republic of Moldova aligns with this international practice and applies various economic levers to promote environmental policies.

The environmental protection system faces many constraints and problems in its activity, such as legal issues, harmonization of environmental legislation with the provisions of EU directives, staff turnover which reduces the degree of institutional experience, and the need to increase number of specialists in the area of environment as well as strengthen the institutional system.

Keywords: *environment, environment pollution, quality of life, policies, strategies*

1. Introduction

The price of comfortable living in the 21st century is the damage that human activity brings to the environment. The impact of people and businesses on the environment is becoming increasingly significant and impossible to ignore, and many developed countries have put this issue on the list of national priorities.

Protecting the environment is essential for the quality of life of present and future generations. The current challenge is to combine environmental protection with continuous economic growth in a sustainable way.

One of the biggest environmental problems today is outdoor air pollution. The research made by the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that approximately 4.2 to 7 million lei people die from air pollution worldwide each year and that nine out of 10 people breathe air that contains high levels of pollutants.

When determining the state's priorities, we must start from the premise that without air and water none of us would exist today [8]. Without measures to rectify the situation and prevent new pollution, we are heading for self-destruction.

For this reason, when reviewing its areas of intervention, the state must take this into account. Although the Republic of Moldova faces major environmental problems, the state's current investments in environmental protection are still insufficient.

The state aims to streamline the application of economic instruments to ensure better implementation of environmental policies. The state's vision regarding the application of economic instruments in the area are stipulated in the "Environmental Strategy for 2014-2023".

Thus, the specific objective no. 4 stipulates for reducing the negative impact of economic activity on the environment and improving measures to prevent environmental pollution. This objective is to be achieved by improving and streamlining environmental economic instruments.

Moreover, countries and the entire world have recently faced an unprecedented challenge - the COVID-19 pandemic -, which poses serious risks not only from a public health point of view, but also from an economic and social perspective.

In order to ensure the maintenance of a high level of competitiveness and supply solutions that contribute to a sustainable natural resource management and continuous economic growth, at the national and international level it is supposed to be promoted the activities aimed at rethinking the way of producing and consuming by adopting a circular approach. Such an approach can also open up an accelerated transition to green technologies and services.

Increased production has led to pressures on the environment to the detriment of water and soil quality, biodiversity, Eco systemic services and climate - among others. In order to prevent further depletion and overexploitation of the earth's limited resources, a change of system is needed.

2. The extent of the current study of the problem, objective of the study

The purpose of the research is to identify the factors and financial resources required to improve the protection of environmental pollution in the Republic of Moldova.

The objectives set to achieve the proposed goal are the following: study and analysis of legal acts in the area of environmental protection (documentary research of various bibliographic sources); conducting complex research using statistical data relevant to the researched field.

Promoting a consistent policy in the area of environmental protection in the Republic of Moldova is a current requirement of the time and is aimed at consolidating the country's path towards sustainable development, the integration into European structures and the intensification of international cooperation processes in order to solve multiple environmental problems. Achieving this will ensure the right of every human being to an environmentally safe and healthy life from an ecological point of view.

3. Methods and materials applied

In order to carry out this study, various research methods were used such as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, and comparative analysis, and documentation, scientific abstraction with a systemic and complex approach. The informational support uses various bibliographic sources with reference to environmental protection. The basis of the substantiation of the environmental research, the respective results and conclusions were the analysis, synthesis, deduction, inductive, table, graphic method, used for a clear and representative interpretation of the research results.

4. Results obtained and discussions

The area of environmental protection is regulated by a set of legal and normative acts, elaborated, adopted and, as the case may be, modified according to the new conditions and provisions of environmental protection. Moreover, some of them have been partially linked to the provisions of the European Union's environmental legal framework.

The development of the legal/ normative framework began with the adoption of law no. 1515-XII of June 16, 1993 on the protection of the environment. Currently, the area of environmental protection is regulated by about 30 legal acts and a set of normative acts, elaborated on the basis of the mentioned framework law.

Table 1. Legal acts in the area of environmental protection

Law no. 1515/1993 on environmental protection	This law is the basic legal act for the elaboration of special normative acts and instructions in the regulation of environmental protection. It establishes the basic principles of environmental protection, including the collection of taxes and the charges of fees concerning the relevant legislation and the exclusive use of the tools obtained to combat environmental pollution, drainage of natural resources, development of hazardous geological processes and environmental recovery.
Law no. 1102/1997 on natural resources	Mentions the use of natural resources against payment (payment for natural resources and payment for environmental pollution). Payment is the compensation in cash by the beneficiary of public expenditures for the exploration, conservation and restoration of usable natural resources, as well as the company's efforts to compensate for them.
The law of the vegetal kingdom no. 239/2007 and the Law of the animal reign no. 439/1995	Describes the economic mechanism for the rational use of plant / animal objects, which includes: (i) <i>the financing of rational use programs, strategies, action plans</i> ; (ii) <i>payments for the acquisition and export of objects of the plant / animal kingdom</i> ; (iii) <i>economic stimulation of the rational use of plant / animal objects</i> .
Law no. 1041/2000 for the improvement by afforestation of degraded lands	It stipulates that the afforestation of degraded lands, as well as other related works and is financed from: (i) <i>the allocations from the local budgets of the Local Public Authorities level I and level II</i> , (ii) <i>the allocations from the state budget</i> , (iii) <i>the contributions of the national ecological fund</i> .

Source: prepared by the authors based on the Report by "Expert group", 2020 [4]

Although there are legal and normative acts that regulate practically all environmental sectors, they do not fully comply with the international environmental treaties to which the Republic of Moldova is a part and do not ensure adequate management of natural resources to prevent environmental pollution and the right to a healthy environment. This also stems from the need to bring national legislation into line with European Union directives.

The existence of a clean environment contributes to ensuring the fundamental human rights provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova: the right to life and the right to physical and moral health. This involves maintaining the quality of the main components of the environment (air, water, soil, flora and fauna), in conditions of sustainable development.

The circular economy is seen as a lever for state policies to ensure the sustainable development of the economy and meet the needs of present consumers and future businesses. The circular economy plays an important role in environmental policies that are increasingly geared towards protection, greening, economy and efficiency.

The circular economy is defined as an ideal model of production and consumption, which aims at the manufacture, use and reuse of all recyclable raw materials, to put them back on the market and to help them to live as long as possible. Thus, production and reuse become the key words of the circular economy [3]. The shift to a circular economy has only benefits in terms of reducing environmental pressure.

Among the definitions reflected in the policy documents there is the notion of "green" economy - the economic model that aims to improve welfare and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and the ecological deficit, and the circular economy - economic model in which the value products and materials is maintained as much as possible; waste and resource use are kept to a minimum, and when a product reaches the end of its life, it is used again to create

The Republic of Moldova promotes the green economy in the sectors of the national economy and is seen as a long-term priority. At the same time, practice shows that in addition to the funds attracted from development partners to achieve the "2030 Agenda" on Sustainable Development and achieving the goals of the circular economy, it is important that the private sector does not focus exclusively on attracting green investment from public funds but also to reallocate own resources in clean and important projects from an economic, ecological and social point of view.

Like other countries in the region, the Republic of Moldova faces many significant environmental problems. Insufficient management of solid waste causes soil, air and water pollution; inadequate forest management and irrational agricultural practices cause soil degradation and biodiversity loss; rivers and wells are heavily polluted due to agricultural activities, obsolete water treatment infrastructure, illegal waste storage and animal manure; industrial activities and the large number of old cars cause air pollution in urban areas, and the lack of renewable energy sources induces energy insecurity.

The elaboration of the Environmental Strategy for 2014-2023 was also dictated by the European integration of our country, by the current requirements of aligning the national legislation with the provisions of the European Union directives and ensuring a sustainable development of the country by promoting the green economy [7].

The general objective of the Strategy is to create an efficient environmental management system, which will contribute to increasing the quality of environmental factors and ensure for the population the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable natural environment. Adequate investment is needed to implement this goal. According to p.52 of the Environmental Strategy for the years 2014-2023, the cost of implementing this Strategy in the period 2014-2023 is estimated at 9.1 billion lei, which is approximately 910 million lei per year (approximately 1% of Annual GDP) [8].

Taxation related to environmental protection in Moldova is based on the principles of "polluter pays" and "extended producer responsibility", in terms of entrusting consumers, producers and generators of pollutants and waste, in adopting a regulatory framework and a set of tools corresponding to environmental requirements.

Environmental economic instruments are considered to be taxes for the use of natural resources, payments for environmental pollution and fines for non-compliance with the existing legislation and for the recovery of damage caused to the environment. The system of environmental taxes and pollution payments has not changed much in the last 10 years.

In 2019, compared to 2018, the revenues from environmental taxes increased from 4.6 billion lei to 4.9 billion lei. In this regard, our country is in close proximity to the average of European countries with a level of revenues relative to GDP of 2.4% in 2018 and 2.5% in 2019 [4].

At the same time, it is noteworthy that the potential of environmental taxes in the Republic of Moldova is not fully exploited, and a number of shortcomings in their establishment drop their ability to significantly change the behavior of the population and economic agents and thus solve environmental problems.

Despite international practices in this field, public authorities continue to rely on a different interpretation of the concept of "environmental taxes".

Thus, in the document that represents the state's vision in the field of environmental policies (Environmental Strategy for 2014-2023), as fiscal instruments are addressed only the taxes for the use of natural resources and the payments for environmental pollution, to which are added payments such as fines and injury. Thus, energy taxes and transport taxes are not treated as environmental taxes, which affect the quality of the involvement of public institutions responsible for environmental protection in setting fiscal policies on the environmental dimension, as well as the effective implementation of environmental policies [7].

At the same time, budget expenditures for environmental protection do not meet needs. On the one hand, they are quite small, so we cannot say that this area is really a priority of the state. On the other hand, there is often a distribution of resources that does not correspond to the commitments made in the policy documents or even the inability of the authorities involved to execute them. Therefore, these gaps reduce the capacity and effectiveness of environmental policies, as well as their expected results.

Expenditure on environmental protection reflects the financial flows allocated to actions aimed at preventing, reducing or combating damage to the environment. These actions refer to the reduction of emissions of pollutants into the air, the protection of surface and groundwater, soil, the avoidance of waste production, their collection and treatment, the

reduction of noise. Also it concerns the protection of natural resources and the conservation of biodiversity, scientific research to obtain products, raw materials or the production of environmentally friendly production processes, general environmental management, and other environmental protection activities [10].

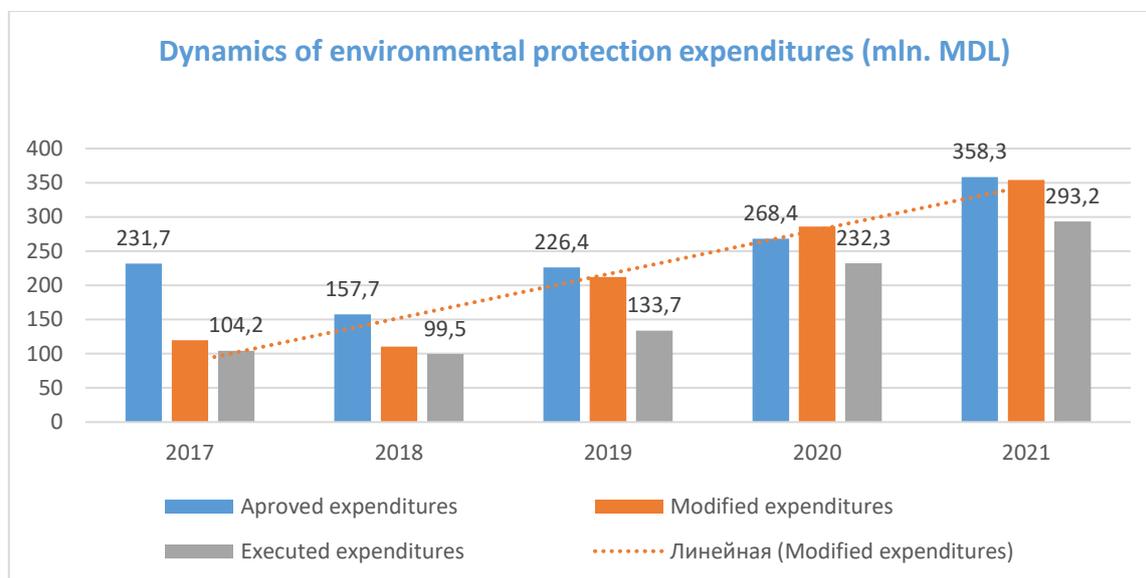


Figure 1. Dynamics of environmental protection expenditures

Source: <https://mf.gov.md/ro/trezorerie/rapoarte-privind-executarea-bugetului/rapoarte-anuale> [6].

The Republic of Moldova allocates 0.1% of GDP for environmental protection or about 200 million lei annually, with this allocation being the lowest in Europe. Although growing, the level of public spending on the environment remains very low.

In the table below it is presented the dynamics of allocations and expenditures and their share in the total state expenditures.

Table 2. Dynamics of allocations and expenditures for environmental protection for the years 2018-2021 (million lei)

Indicators	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Modified	Executed	Modified	Executed	Modified	Executed	Modified	Executed
Total state budget expenditures	42031,9	38708,3	46346,2	43073,9	53280,6	49635,4	57658,8	54116,9
Expenditure on total environmental protection, including	110,5	99,5	212,4	133,7	285,9	232,3	353,9	293,2
<i>Share in total state budget expenditures, %</i>	0,4	0,3	0,5	0,3	0,5	0,5	0,6	0,5
Current	92,7	82,2	117,7	97,1	212,1	186,7	245,8	228,2

expenditures								
Capital expenditures	17,8	17,3	94,7	36,6	73,8	45,6	108,1	65,0
Total resources related, inclusive	110,5	99,5	212,4	133,7	285,9	232,3	353,9	293,2
general	99,7	89,6	203,6	126,7	239,4	214,7	279,5	266,8
funded projects from external sources	2,7	0,8	0,5	0,00	32,0	6,7	60,6	14,3
revenue collected	8,1	9,1	8,3	7,0	14,5	10,9	13,8	12,1

Source: Reports of the Ministry of Finance on the execution of the budget for the years 2018-2021 [6]

The data from the table show that the share of expenditures executed for environmental protection in the total state budget expenditures increased from 0.3% in 2018 and 2019 to 0.5% in 2020 and 2021.

The given expenditures were executed in proportion of 90% in 2018, 62.9% in 2019, 81.3% in 2020, and 82.8% in 2021, respectively, compared to the specified annual expenditures. In economic terms, a high degree of non-execution is registered by Capital expenditures, especially in 2019 in a proportion of 38.6% in 2020 - 61.8% and 60.1% in 2021, which has a negative impact on the implementation of investment projects and the development of environmental infrastructure. The trend of capitalization is a worrying one, which reveals a number of shortcomings in the planning and efficient use of resources [6].

In the structure of the state budget expenditures for 2021, those for environmental protection constitute 0.5%, with the amount being clearly lower than the needs of the field.

Table 3. Dynamics of environmental protection expenditures by areas for the years 2018-2021 (thousands MDL)

Areas	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total, including total, inclusive	284309,2	285007,3	280047,9	334114,9
<i>Current expenditures</i>	269046,8	258478,7	264982,5	314678,6
<i>Expenses for the repair of fixed assets</i>	15262,4	26528,6	15065,4	19436,3
For the protection of the atmospheric air and the prevention of climate change, total, inclusive	7989,9	18843,2	10837,0	11056,2
<i>Current expenditures</i>	7496,8	3573,5	5553,0	8753,2
<i>Expenditures for the repair of fixed assets</i>	493,1	15269,7	5284,0	2303,0
For the collection and treatment of wastewater, total, inclusive	188345,7	187650,2	190651,7	195448,9
<i>Current expenditures</i>	180161,5	179276,3	182530,3	189528,0
<i>Expenditures for the repair of fixed assets</i>	8184,2	8373,9	8121,4	5920,9
For waste management, total, inclusive	65991,3	61501,8	67356,9	126993,3
<i>Current expenditures</i>	64765,6	61266,7	66258,6	124585,9
<i>Expenditures for repair of fixed assets</i>	1225,7	235,1	1098,3	2407,4
For the protection and rehabilitation of the	3829,0	4768,9	3553,8	3205,8

total soil, inclusive				
<i>Current expenditures</i>	3829,0	4742,3	3553,8	3205,8
<i>Expenses for repair of fixed assets</i>	0,00	26,6	0,00	0,00
For the protection and rehabilitation of total groundwater and surface water, inclusive	7286,1	7572,9	3792,2	11489,4
<i>Current expenditures</i>	4595,0	5891,7	3284,1	3119,3
<i>Expenses for repair of fixed assets</i>	2691,1	1681,2	508,1	8370,1
For the conservation of biodiversity and natural areas, total, inclusive	2230,5	70,7	173,5	125,0
<i>Current expenses</i>	615,4	70,7	173,5	125,0
<i>Expenses for repair of fixed assets</i>	1615,1	0,0	0,00	0,00
For other areas total, inclusive	8636,7	4599,6	3682,8	5232,6
<i>Current expenses</i>	7583,5	3657,5	3629,2	4797,7
<i>Expenditures for repair of fixed assets</i>	1053,2	942,1	53,6	434,9

Source: <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=ro&id=2193&idc=263> [2]

From the data of the table, it is evident that during 2018-2021 the largest share of expenditures in total expenditures belongs to current expenditures with an average of 93.3%, with capital expenditures amounting to 6.7%.

Regarding the current expenditures for environmental protection in the period 2018-2021, the largest share was held in the field of “wastewater” management with an average for the entire period of 68.1% followed by “waste management” with 24,5%. In 2021, the most significant current expenditures for environmental protection were registered, in the field of “wastewater management” 189528.0 thousand.

Also in this field were registered the highest expenditures for the repair of fixed assets, which represents 5920.9 thousand lei with a share of 53.9% of the total.

It is notable that the annual expenses are much lower than those indicated in the strategy. Although increasing, the level of environmental spending remains low compared to several indicators. Moreover, the comparative analysis of the expenditures approved at the beginning of the year and of those executed indicates an average discrepancy of about 100 million MDL for the last 5 years. Practically only a little over half of the environmental expenditures that the state proposes at the beginning of the year end up being executed.

The causes of this situation are multiple, from the sacrifice of environmental priorities in favor of other current priorities (the Government reduces environmental expenditures during the budget year) to the inability of the responsible institutions to implement the expenditure programs assumed.

The allocation of public resources for maintaining and improving the quality of the environment in the Republic of Moldova should be done according to the environmental benefits, which can be obtained as a result of investments.

In the Republic of Moldova, the potential of environmental taxes is not fully exploited, and a number of shortcomings in their establishment erode their ability to change the behavior of the population and economic agents, as well as to solve environmental problems. At the same time, budget expenditures for environmental protection do not meet the needs.

On the one hand, they are quite small, so we cannot say that this area is really a priority of the state. On the other hand, there is often a distribution of resources that does not correspond to the commitments made in the policy documents or even the inability of the authorities involved to execute them.

Therefore, these gaps reduce the capacity and effectiveness of environmental policies, as well as the expected results of the state, citizens, the business environment and external partners.

5. Conclusions

1. There is a need to increase budgetary allocations for environmental protection and to pay greater attention to this area at the central level;
2. For transport taxes - elaboration of the calculation formula that would include components that take into account pollutant emissions and distance travelled;
3. For taxes on goods that cause environmental pollution – it is proposed to replace the taxation on value with that on quantity of goods;
4. For all environmental taxes except energy taxes – there is a need to consider formulations that provide for the application of fixed taxes adjusted annually to the inflation rate.

The allocation of public resources for maintaining and improving the quality of the environment in the Republic of Moldova should be based on environmental benefits, which can be obtained as a result of investments. Policy objectives should ensure the accessibility of vulnerable segments of society, including.

The amount of these environmental tax payments is insignificant and has not been calculated in relation to the cost of recovering the damage caused to the environment. These payments also do not create incentives for polluters to take action to reduce pollution, as they prefer to pay the given penalties, which are much lower than the potential costs of pollution reduction measures. The role of the current system of payments and taxes for the environment is very small in relation to the needs and challenges in the area of financing environmental activities. Regarding environmental taxes in the Republic of Moldova, their potential is not fully exploited, and a number of shortcomings in their establishment do not effectively change the behavior of the population and economic agents, as well as to solve environmental problems.

Clearly defining objectives and targets, assuming responsibilities, monitoring procedures, consulting the public, verifying results, auditing and reporting are crucial for the effective implementation of environmental protection measures.

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Rezumat

Politica în domeniul protecției mediului are scopul de a garanta generației actuale și celor viitoare un mediu curat și sănătos, care să asigure protejarea naturii, calitatea vieții, în corelare cu o dezvoltare economică verde și competitivă, cu emisii reduse de dioxid de carbon și eficiență din punctul de vedere al utilizării resurselor. Economia circulară reprezintă o perspectivă nouă pe agenda politică a țării.

Prin urmare, scopul de bază al instrumentelor economice de mediu este de a determina un comportament responsabil din partea populației și agenților economici vis-a-vis de mediul înconjurător, inclusiv prin acumularea de resurse financiare bugetare pentru gestionarea adecvată a resurselor naturale și pentru prevenirea poluării mediului. Republica Moldova se aliniază la această practică internațională și aplică diverse pârghii economice pentru a promova politicile de mediu.

Sistemul de protecție a mediului se confruntă cu numeroase constrângeri și probleme în activitatea sa, precum: probleme de ordin legislativ, armonizarea legislației de mediu la prevederile directivelor UE sau de ordin instituțional, fluctuația cadrelor, care determină reducerea gradului de experiență instituțională, precum și a numărului de specialiști în domeniul mediului, etc. (necesitatea de a se consolida sistemul instituțional).

Cuvinte-cheie: mediu, poluarea mediului, calitatea vieții, politici, strategie

Аннотация

Политика в области охраны окружающей среды направлена на то, чтобы гарантировать нынешнему и будущему поколениям чистую и здоровую окружающую среду, способную обеспечивать охрану природы, качество жизни, в сочетании с зеленым, конкурентоспособным, низкоуглеродным и ресурсоэффективным экономическим развитием. Циркулярная экономика – это новое направление в политической повестке дня страны.

Поэтому основной целью эколого-экономических инструментов является формирование ответственного поведения населения и экономических субъектов по отношению к окружающей среде, в том числе путем накопления бюджетных финансовых ресурсов для надлежащего управления природными ресурсами и предотвращения загрязнения окружающей среды. Республика Молдова присоединяется к этой международной практике и применяет различные экономические рычаги для продвижения экологической политики.

Система охраны окружающей среды сталкивается с многочисленными ограничениями и проблемами в своей деятельности, такими как: проблемы законодательства, гармонизации природоохранного законодательства с положениями директив ЕС, проблемы институционального характера, текучка кадров, что приводит к снижению степени институционального опыта, а также количества специалистов в области окружающей среды, и т. д. (необходимость укрепления институциональной системы).

Ключевые слова: *окружающая среда, загрязнение окружающей среды, качество жизни, политика, стратегия*

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