The EU-funded SWITCH Asia programme supports the Maldives in its goal to phase out single-use plastic

Tourism is one of Maldives' most important economic sectors, contributing more than 23% to GDP in 2018. Annual visitors in 2019 amounted to 1,7 million, having doubled in sum over the past decade. While the country is a world-renowned tourism destination, the lack of effective waste management systems creates serious environmental and social challenges. Fisheries are the second most important economic sector, and the ineffective handling of plastics waste directly affects marine life, thereby threatening livelihoods of local fishermen.

Waste generation has more than doubled in the last decade and waste management capacities are not sufficient. More than 600 tons of solid waste are generated daily in the Maldives, much of it consisting of single-use plastics. Both tourists and tourism businesses, as well as affluent inhabitants of the urban centre Malé, are among the strongest drivers of plastics use and disposal. In addition, waste from cruise ships and one carried from other countries through the currents of the Indian Ocean, globally make Maldivian coastlines those with the highest concentrations of micro plastic pollution.

The EU SWITCH-Asia funded grant project PROMISE – Prevention of Marine Litter in the Lakshadweep Sea will be launched on **26 January** (see video). The aim of this project is to promote source-to-sea solutions to reduce marine littering in tourism clusters along the Lakshadweep shorelines of the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India. Tourism MSMEs will be supported in waste minimization, consequently enhancing the attractiveness of tourism industries, avoiding further deterioration of marine ecosystems and improving people's livelihoods.

"Marine litter is an existential threat to our planet. If we continue dumping plastics into waterways, by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans. Since 2015 through its European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy, the EU has been implementing ambitious measures. It is therefore comforting to be part of the launch of the PROMISE Project, which aligns with the EU's Green Deal Strategy, and brings together Maldives, Sri Lanka and India in a crucial regional clean sea collaboration", highlights H.E. Denis Chaibi, the EU Ambassador to Sri

Lanka and the Maldives.

As part of its technical assistance to the Republic of Maldives, the EU SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility and the EU Delegation to the Maldives are supporting the country in the implementation of SCP policies at national level. Following a multi-stakeholder consultation that took place in January 2019, experts were able to identify the SCP landscape and assess key priorities. The need for improving the environmental sustainability of the tourism sector, and responding to the increasing marine litter and waste management problems the country is currently facing, were reported as high priorities on the agenda.

To tackle these issues, the parliament recently approved a resolution which aims to phase-out single-use plastics by 2023. Closely working with the Ministry of Environment, the SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility seeks to develop and pilot sustainable waste management policies and tools for plastics in the tourism sector, through minimization, prevention, and resource efficiency. To support this process, knowledge will be shared and understanding on policy and economic instruments for the tourism sector enhanced, while strengthening linkages among stakeholders.

Important target groups that will be involved in the action include governmental institutions (ministries, executive agencies and local authorities), responsible for setting framework conditions, waste management actors, and local SMEs, tourism associations and resorts who could potentially offer alternatives to single-use plastics.

Photo credit: SWITCH-Asia PROMISE