

Voices for Change – Exploring Solutions for the Veles Stack

First Citizen Dialogue of the FIC-FIGHTERS Project to be held in Veles, North Macedonia

Veles, North Macedonia – 24 September 2025 –

The EU-funded **FIC-Fighters** project is proud to announce the launch of its first **citizen dialogue**, taking place in Veles under the title “*Voices for Change – Exploring Solutions for the Veles Stack*.” This interactive workshop marks the beginning of a series of dialogues designed to bring local voices to the forefront of environmental decision-making.



The Veles session will engage local residents and grassroots organisations, in an open exchange about the environmental and social impacts of the **phosphogypsum (PG) stacks** left as a by-product from the factory for production of chemical fertilisers, Chemical Industry Veles. The PG site also represents one of the 16 environmental hot spots in North Macedonia. Participants will share experiences, identify risks, and co-develop future scenarios and strategic proposals for managing these sites. The event will intentionally focus on **ordinary citizens’ perspectives**, avoiding power imbalances and ensuring a safe and inclusive space for dialogue.

At the heart of FIC-Fighters lies a strong vision: to **transform environmental and social challenges into opportunities for sustainable development and community empowerment**. The project integrates Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) perspectives into PG stack remediation, with the ambition to achieve a circular economy that not only mitigates environmental and health risks but also strengthens cross-border cooperation and local governance models. FIC-Fighters researchers develop methods for the valorisation of phosphogypsum waste to produce sustainable raw materials for the paper, cement, batteries, fertilisers, and detergent industries. In addition to revalorising phosphogypsum, the project will also make use of residues from the aluminium industry. This will enable one of the project’s chemical routes—based on a patent owned by the partner CapturaCO₂, S.L.—to generate new value from two types of residues that are currently only stored. In this way, the project supports the development of a circular economy in major industrial sectors such as detergents, apparel, and cement manufacturing.

Why now? The urgency is clear. PG stacks pose significant threats to both the environment and human health. Yet, they also present opportunities for innovation, knowledge-sharing, and sustainable economic development. By engaging local communities directly, the project ensures that solutions are not only scientifically robust but also socially just and reflective of lived experiences.

During the dialogue, participants will:

- Learn about phosphogypsum and the FIC-Fighters project objectives
- Map and prioritize risks and impacts from the community’s perspective
- Contribute to data and knowledge collection, bridging local insights with scientific research

- Co-create **strategic proposals and future scenarios** for sustainable management of the Veles site

The Chemical Industry Veles factory, opened in 1979 and closed in 2003, left behind approximately **3.7 million tons of gypsum over 70,000 m²**, located near the Vardar River. With equipment and facilities now destroyed, the area remains a pressing environmental challenge but also a unique opportunity for sustainable waste reduction strategies, alternative product applications, and local economic benefit.

The FIC-Fighters citizen dialogue in Veles will be a crucial **step toward redefining sustainable development and governance** in complex environmental contexts. By empowering citizens and valuing their knowledge, the project sets a precedent for inclusive and forward-looking environmental action in Europe and beyond.

The lead partner in North Macedonia is the Civil Engineering Institute of Macedonia (CEIM), which is organising the event in Veles together with the other project partners. The event is by invitation only, however, if you are interested in attending, please contact CEIM's representative, Azra Misini (azra.misini@gim.com.mk), to enquire whether additional places are available.

For more information, please visit fic-fighters.eu.

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About FIC-Fighters

The FIC-Fighters project is a groundbreaking initiative focused on advancing sustainable waste management solutions across Europe. By converting phosphogypsum waste into useful materials, the project supports the EU's Green Deal objectives and promotes sustainable urban development practices. Through innovative technologies and stakeholder collaboration, FIC-Fighters aims to set a benchmark in circular economy practices.