

Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E)
Actions by the UNECE Secretariat to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)

Organization: UNECE Secretariat to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)

Title:

Promoting effective and inclusive public participation as a key tool for greening the economy

Focus area 9: Promote public participation and education for sustainable development

Description of the action: Under the frameworks of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (the Protocol on PRTRs), and within the available resources, UNECE is committed to advise on legal issues and practices with regard to access to information and public participation in decision-making on different plans, policies, projects and programmes related to the greening of economy. It will also facilitate consensus building among countries and a wide range of stakeholders and will continue providing advisory services to Governments and international organizations on these issues. Furthermore, it will continue supporting: (a) multilateral decision-making processes to take joint commitments; (b) regional multi-stakeholder platforms to share challenges and good practices in access to information and effective public participation; and (c) development of recommendations, guidance material and electronic information tools. Specific activities include sessions of the respective meetings of the Parties and subsidiary bodies, round tables and workshops and coordination mechanisms.

Time frame/milestones, as appropriate: As of present and as planned until 2021 and beyond, depending on the decisions by the countries as well as the availability of resources. Some of the activities are continuous e.g. exchange of information and experience during the intergovernmental and expert meetings of the treaty bodies.

Type of action: These actions are related to legal, regulatory and policy instruments as well as to information, education-based, capacity-building and voluntary instruments.

Economic sectors: Through the promotion of effective access to information and public participation in environmental matters, the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs provide solid frameworks for engaging public and bringing its perspective with regard to environmental and health concerns into programmes, plans, policies, projects and legislation economy-wide as well as specific economic sectors including: agriculture, forestry and fishing; energy; mining; manufacturing ; transport; water; waste; tourism; and housing, buildings and construction, as well as to regional and urban development.

Reference instruments and sources, as appropriate: UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention); UNECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (the Protocol on PRTRs) 2014-2017 and draft 2018-2021 work programmes under the two treaties
Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters; Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools to provide public access to environmental information; The Aarhus Convention: An Implementation Guide; Guidance to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

Expected co-benefits and impact of the outcome: Effective public participation in decision-making ensures that the activity on the greening the economy (the related plan, programme or project) is more acceptable to population and less harmful to the environment.

Hidden/unexpected aspects of the proposed activity can be uncovered early, helping to avoid costly mistakes, public unrest and the required remedy actions

Integration of environment and health considerations into sectoral development plans, programmes and policies, as well as to projects, through raising public awareness and promoting effective public participation in decision-making related to greening the economy;

Improved governance, inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder coordination at the national and sub-national levels and coordination for promotion of green economy;

Strengthened national capacities for providing effective access to information and for engaging different stakeholders through application of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs as tools for greening economies;

Promotion of PRTR data as a major driving force for pollution reduction throughout different sectors of the economy; it will lead to competition among generators of pollutants to reduce their releases;

Promotion of PRTR data to policymakers as the key indicator for measuring progress in reducing pollutants, advancing sustainability and the success of a green economy.

Governments, academia, research institutions, the public, and businesses driving eco-innovation can utilize the PRTR as a common indicator.

SDGs target(s) that the action may contribute to implement: As cross-cutting legal instruments, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers provide solid frameworks to assist countries in achieving the SDGs by implementing commitments on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding a wide range of issues that affect environment and human health, e.g. 1.4; 1.5; 2; 3.d; 4; 6; 7; 9.4; 11; 12.4; 12.6; 12.8; 13; 15.6; 16.3; 16.6; 16.7; 16.10; 16.b; 17.6 (see also informal document ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/1)

Implementation of Environmental Performance Review (EPR) recommendations, as appropriate: Helps implementing EPR recommendations through assisting to improve national legislation and practice in the area of access information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

Objectively verifiable indicators, as appropriate: Laws and practice are improved in the area of access to information and public participation; Clear evidence of effective engagement of the public in different laws, policies, programmes and projects related to green economy; Number of officials trained on how to provide effective access to information and to effectively engage the public. Guidance documents and awareness raising material: e.g. Protecting your environment: The power is in your hands - Quick guide to the Aarhus Convention; The Aarhus Convention: An Implementation Guide; Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters; A simplified guide to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers; Guidance to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.

Partners: Partners include Ministries responsible for environmental matters in Parties and other interested Member States; NGOs; Regional Environmental Centres and Aarhus Centres; OSCE, UNEP, OECD, CBD/Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, UNITAR, UNFCCC, OHCHR, IFIs.

Contact point:

UNECE Secretariat to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)

Secretary: Ella Behlyarova

Phone: +41 22 917 2376

E-mail: public.participation@unece.org