

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
Access to Information, Public Participation
in Decision-making and Access to Justice
in Environmental Matters

Task Force on Access to Information

Seventh meeting

Geneva (online), 16-17 November 2020

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Closing

Key outcomes¹

summarized at the Task Force on Access to Information at its seventh meeting²

I. Opening and adoption of the agenda

1. The Task Force adopted the agenda as set out in the document AC/TF.AI-7/Inf.1.

II. Access to environment-related product information

2. The Task Force:

(a) Thanked the speakers and welcomed the exchange of experiences, good practices and challenges related to the implementation of the respective provisions of the Aarhus Convention to promote effective public access to environment-related product information as presented by the speakers;

(b) Highlighted that effective public access to environment-related product information harnessing the benefits of digitalization can support Parties in achieving a number of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Resilient and Sustainable Cities), SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), and in implementing effectively the initiatives related to the European Green Deal, transition towards green and circular economy, greening public procurement and implementing zero wastes approaches;

(c) Called on Parties to continue developing and improving the frameworks encouraging operators whose activities have a significant impact on the environment to apply tools such as eco-labelling, energy-labelling, product passports, product declarations, warning labelling, and other tools to inform the consumers;

(d) Called on Parties to establish green public procurement mechanisms, to promote the use of pollutant release and transfer registers and to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues in the different economic sectors, bringing together suppliers, producers, retailers, consumers, environmental non-governmental organizations and other interested members of the public in order to promote full consumer product transparency, traceability,

¹ The document was not formally edited.

² The list of speakers, other documents, presentations and statements are available from: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53318> .

accountability and the interoperability of product information systems using best available state-of-the-art digital technologies and open data principles;

(e) Encouraged Parties to promote and support efforts towards the development of methodologies, crowdsourced mobile applications and tools to provide the public with accessible, comprehensive, up-to-date and comparable information on the environmental impact of products that enables consumers to make informed environmental choices;

(f) Invited partner organizations and donors to support the initiatives mentioned above;

(g) Invited Parties to provide further information on practical arrangements to promote access to environment-related product information in the 2021 Convention's national implementation reports and to continue submitting useful resources to the Aarhus Clearinghouse with a view of addressing this matter in the next intersessional period.

III. Access to information with respect to genetically modified organisms (GMO)

3. The Task Force:

(a) Expressed its appreciation to the representative of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity for informing about the work undertaken under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity with regard to promoting public access to information;

(b) Thanked the speakers and welcomed the exchange of experiences, good practices and challenges related to the coherent implementation of the respective provisions of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity with regard to access to information as presented by the speakers;

(c) Welcomed the long standing cooperation with the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the opportunities for further action to promote access to information on matters related to genetically-modified organisms;

(d) Reiterated the importance of the GMO Amendment to the Convention to enter into force as an effective tool supporting the countries in achieving relevant Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 15 (Life on Land) and Goal 16 (Inclusive Societies and Strong Institutions), and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework;

(e) Called on Parties to take the necessary legislative, regulatory and other measures to promote effective public access to information on genetically modified organisms meeting the needs of different users, including with regard to access to product-related information using labelling and other means;

(f) Encouraged Parties to promote further use of modern digital technologies and integration of collected data and information on GMO-related matters within the meaning of article 2 (3) of the Aarhus Convention to the nationwide environmental information digital system and the use of electronic information tools as to facilitate public access to such information and the required reporting and call on partner organizations and donors to support the respective initiatives;

(g) Encouraged Parties to include biosafety and GMO-related matters in the national state of the environment reporting;

(h) Encouraged the Parties to continue involving the Aarhus Centres, education entities, libraries and media in raising awareness about GMO-related matters and providing assistance to the public on how to obtain access to information;

(i) Invited Parties to provide further information on practical arrangements to promote access to information and public awareness on GMO-related matters in the 2021 Convention's national implementation reports and to continue submitting useful resources to the Biosafety Clearinghouse and the Aarhus Clearinghouse with a view of addressing this matter in the next intersessional period.

IV. Update of the Recommendations on electronic information tools

4. The Task Force:

(a) Thanked the speakers and noted the work undertaken for the update of the Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools and on the recent developments in dissemination of environmental information and the use of electronic information as presented by the speakers;

(b) Took note of the draft updated Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (AC/TF.AI-7/Inf.3 and Add.1) and of the comments to the document provided during the meeting;

(c) Invited Parties, Signatories, other interested States and stakeholders to provide further possible comments on the draft updated Recommendations (AC/TF.AI-7/Inf.3 and Add.1) by 18 December 2020;

(d) Requested the Chair with the assistance of the secretariat to finalize the draft updated Recommendations for their submission to the twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group for consideration and approval and subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration.

V. Stocktaking of recent and upcoming developments

5. The Task Force:

(a) Thanked the speakers and took note of the recent developments, challenges and lessons learned related to access to environmental information, including in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and with regard to internal communication, as presented by the speakers;

(b) Called on the Parties to take additional measures as needed to ensure that public access to environmental information upon request is provided effectively in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention during the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent economic recovery phase;

(c) Called on the Parties to improve the sustainability of the practical arrangements for public access to environmental information online and upon request in case of disasters and any other emergency situations and post-emergency recovery and involve the Aarhus Centres in this work as appropriate;

(d) Highlighted that access to internal communication underpins the transparency of decision-making procedure in environmental matters and promotes culture of open government;

(e) Encouraged the Parties to adopt necessary legislative and practical measures setting out clear definition of the scope of internal communication if the exception in its disclosure is provided in national law or customary practice;

(f) Encouraged Parties to take the necessary measures to raise awareness of public officials related to handling of internal communication and its disclosure in accordance with the Aarhus Convention.

VI. Activities under other international forums

6. The Task Force:

(a) Expressed its appreciation to the representative of UNESCO for informing about the relevant activities related to access to information and invited to explore the potential opportunities for synergies with the Aarhus Convention in promoting public access to environmental information;

(b) Welcomed the exchange of information on recent activities with regard to the implementation, measuring and monitoring progress towards Sustainable Development Goal target 16.10 as presented by the speakers;

(c) Highlighted that the measures adopted by the countries to implement Sustainable Development Goal target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms) can support the progress towards other environment-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets;

(d) Encouraged Parties to collect the relevant data and information regarding public access to environmental information (e.g. statistics available on the number of requests made, the number of refusals and the reasons for such refusals) and to provide the respective information in the national implementation reports (Question IX).

VII. Closing

7. The Task Force requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the meeting report and incorporate these outcomes.
