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

Working Group of the Parties

Eighth meeting

Geneva, 16-18 December 2020

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021, including financial matters

Report on the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021*

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report was prepared by the secretariat pursuant to decision III/2 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (see ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/6/Add.1, decision III/2, para. 2). It provides an overview of the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2018–2021 from 16 July 2019 to 1 October 2020.

* This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



I. Introduction

1. The present document provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/3, annex) for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) from 16 July 2019 to 1 October 2020, focusing on operational and organizational aspects. Owing to the cross-cutting nature of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, implementation of different work programme areas contributed to furthering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals across the whole 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Goals 3, 6, 9, 12 and 16. An overview of contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme is provided in the report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/6). The present report also provides information on the linkages between the activities of the work programme and focal areas and objectives laid down in the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex). In that context, it should be noted that, while the report on implementation is centred around activities carried out by the secretariat and the Protocol's bodies, the strategic plan includes objectives that are intended to be implemented not only by the secretariat and the Protocol bodies, but also by the Parties, civil society organizations and other partners.

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat made strenuous efforts to avoid duplication of work and inefficient use of resources by:

- (a) Pursuing synergies with activities under other partner organizations;
- (b) Conducting specific thematic surveys prior to activities in order to better respond to the needs of Parties and stakeholders;
- (c) Continuously increasing the use and development of electronic tools for Protocol activities (for example, email consultations, telephone conferences, online databases, the online reporting tool for national implementation reports, the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and the PRTR.net global portal).

II. Overview of implementation of the work programme

A. Compliance mechanism

3. During the reporting period (16 July 2019 to 1 October 2020), the Protocol Compliance Committee held its eighth meeting (virtual format, 30 and 31 March 2020).¹ The Committee, among other issues, considered the issue of whether European Union member States that were Parties to the Protocol were required under the Protocol to introduce their own national pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) to supplement what was done at the European Union level. The Committee agreed that it required more information in order to further explore the issue. To this end, taking into consideration the related information provided by Finland in its 2017 national implementation report, the Committee agreed to send questions to Finland in order to clarify the matter further (ECE/MP.PRTR/C.1/2020/2, para. 7). The questions and the accompanying letter were sent by the Committee's Chair on behalf of the Committee to the Party's national focal point. The Chair's letter and the response from the Party concerned were made available on the Committee's website.

4. The Committee has not, to date, received any submissions by Parties concerning compliance by other Parties, or any submissions by Parties concerning their own compliance. Neither has it received any referrals by the secretariat. The Committee received one

¹ Meeting documents and other information on the work of the Compliance Committee are available at www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-cc.html.

communication from the public regarding compliance with the Protocol, which is available on the Committee's website.

5. The work under the Protocol's compliance mechanism is relevant for the achievement of objectives I.1 and I.3–I.6 under focal area I and for all the objectives of focal area III of the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex).

B. Technical assistance

6. Technical assistance activities may involve specific projects in countries needing assistance, including training workshops, guidance materials and expert assistance related to pollutant release and transfer registers. Such assistance is mainly relevant for the achievement of focal areas I and II of the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex). At the request of Tajikistan, the secretariat engaged consultants to assist the country in reviewing its legal framework vis-à-vis the Protocol's requirements.

1. Workshops and country-specific projects

7. At the seventh meeting of the Working Group (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019) dedicated sessions were held on the development of the Protocol and on subregional and national activities: needs and challenges for capacity-building.² Examples of modernization of pollutant release and transfer registers were shared by the European Union, Sweden and Serbia. Representatives of Georgia, Kazakhstan, Morocco, North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova shared their countries' achievements in establishing PRTRs and outlined several remaining challenges. The representatives of the European Environment Agency, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) presented opportunities for capacity-building, including through a variety of general and specific guidance materials. Furthermore, the Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group presented an updated map illustrating the development of PRTRs around the world and stressed the importance of coordinating PRTR activities at the global level, including through greater leverage of existing online sources of PRTR-related information, such as PRTR.net. A similar session is planned for the eighth meeting of the Working Group.

2. Technical assistance through electronic tools

8. The secretariat has continued to manage the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy³ and PRTR.net,⁴ a global portal used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to pollutant release and transfer registers. The secretariat maintained and updated PRTR.net in cooperation with UNITAR and OECD, and continues to pursue close cooperation with UNITAR in order to ensure the effective use of PRTR.net and PRTR:Learn⁵ by national focal points and stakeholders. The secretariat completed the upgrade of PRTR.net to ensure its compliance with security standards and to improve its functionality and content.

9. The secretariat also continues to manage a database on capacity-building activities,⁶ which provides information on past, future and ongoing pollutant release and transfer register capacity-building activities.

² Presentations by participants and related documents, including the meeting report, are available at www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events/public-participation/2019/seventh-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs/seventh-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs.html.

³ See <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

⁴ See <https://prtr.unece.org/>.

⁵ See <https://prtr.unitar.org/>.

⁶ See <https://apps.unece.org/ehlm/pp/NIR/RLsearch.asp>.

10. The Protocol section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)⁷ website was regularly updated during the intersessional period. In addition, section D below includes information regarding the online reporting tool.

3. Thematic surveys

11. Pursuant to a request regarding the development of the Protocol made by the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol at its seventh meeting, the secretariat assisted the Bureau in carrying out an exchange on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in the form of a survey among Parties and stakeholders. The outcomes of the survey were used to prepare the report by the Bureau for the eighth meeting of the Working Group.

C. Information exchange on a technical level

12. The objective of information exchange on a technical level is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol. The method of work for information exchange consists of: meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol; ad hoc meetings; and the use of electronic tools. Information exchange on a technical level is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan and, specifically, for the achievement of objectives I.1, I.2, II.1, II.3 and III.1.

13. In addition, section B above and section E below describe training workshops, surveys, subregional workshops, electronic tools and other activities that enable information exchange on a technical level. Sections D and F below include information on the reporting mechanism and the meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol.

D. Reporting mechanism

14. The objective of the reporting mechanism is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol, the review of compliance and the exchange of experience. The method of work consists of meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol; the use of the online national implementation reports database; preparation and processing of national implementation reports; analysis of reports and preparation of a synthesis report. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of focal area I of the strategic plan.

15. Following the failure of Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia and Ukraine to submit their national implementation reports for the 2017 reporting cycle before the third session of the Meeting of the Parties (Budva, Montenegro, 15 September 2017), those Parties were called on to report by 1 October 2017. As at 1 October 2020, Slovenia had still not submitted its report for the 2014 and 2017 reporting cycles and the signed copy of the report of Malta was pending for the 2017 reporting cycle. The secretariat has launched a call to prepare national implementation reports for the 2021 reporting cycle.⁸

E. Awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes

16. The objective of awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes is to: (a) expand knowledge of the Protocol throughout the ECE region and beyond; (b) increase the number of Parties to the Protocol; and (c) further the application of the Protocol in the context of other multilateral environmental agreements and related processes (for example, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management under the International Conference on Chemicals Management). The activity is pursued through: participation in key regional and international events and processes; the

⁷ See <https://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr.html>.

⁸ See www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/protocol-on-prtrs/areas-of-work/implementation-and-compliance/envpprtrreporting/2021-reporting-cycle.html.

provision of support to workshops organized by others; the preparation of leaflets, publications, news bulletins and other materials on the Protocol; updating the website; and writing and reviewing articles on the Protocol. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan, and specifically for the achievement of objectives I.1, II.2–4 and III.1.

17. During the reporting period, upon request, the secretariat also provided ongoing advisory support, including by engaging relevant experts, to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the negotiation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which also addresses the issue of pollutant release and transfer registers.

18. The secretariat promoted the Protocol through the activities under the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals⁹ and various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. In addition, the secretariat promoted synergy within the Multilateral Environmental Agreement Information and Knowledge Management Initiative coordinated by UNEP and took part in relevant meetings.

19. Moreover, the secretariat carried out this work programme activity through the participation of, or arranging for the participation of, representatives of Convention and Protocol bodies at a number of relevant workshops and other events in various countries. Notably, the secretariat promoted the work under the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes, among others, at the following events:

(a) The third meeting of the OECD Working Group on PRTRs (Paris, 16 and 17 October 2019);

(b) The fifty-third meeting of the Inter-Organization Coordinating Committee under the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (Geneva, 21 and 22 April 2020);

(c) The fifth Inter-agency Meeting on Sound Chemicals Management (Geneva, 18 October 2019), organized by the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals to facilitate exchange of experience between agencies and organizations and to consider collaboration in the context of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management intersessional process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(d) The second online meeting (after the third Conference of the Parties) of the Group of Technical Experts on Mercury Releases under the Minamata Convention on Mercury (online, 30 June 2020).

20. Furthermore, to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, the secretariat serviced the twelfth meeting of the International PRTR Coordinating Group (Paris, 15 October 2019),¹⁰ which was held back-to-back with the third meeting of the OECD Working Group on PRTRs. The next meeting of the Coordinating Group is scheduled to take place in Paris in January 2021.

21. In addition, the secretariat liaised continuously with partner organizations, potential donors and interested countries and stakeholders and handled a number of consultations regarding capacity-building activities through electronic means, providing advisory support as required.

22. Some partner organizations discontinued or changed their approach to operations. Notably, the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework¹¹ was

⁹ See www.who.int/iomc/en/.

¹⁰ See United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, “International PRTR Coordinating Group”, Meetings and Documents tab (accessed on 1 September 2020). Available at www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcmimages/about.html.

¹¹ See <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/cooperation-framework>.

rolled out in 16 countries.¹² The Framework can provide an opportunity for multi-partner capacity-building activities related to the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in those countries, which will require close cooperation between the governance and environmental clusters of the Framework. The current preparatory work covers 2021–2025. It will be crucially important for the long-term sustainability of activities that Parties provide support to such an approach to capacity-building.

23. Furthermore, the secretariat contributed information on electronic tools used for Convention and Protocol activities to the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels (A/75/62–E/2020/11). It also contributed to the draft framework manual on green and sustainable chemistry. The draft manual had been developed pursuant to a mandate received from the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session (March 2019) through resolution 4/9 on Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste, which requests the United Nations Environment Programme, in cooperation with the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, among others, to synthesize the United Nations Environment Programme analysis of best practices in sustainable chemistry into manuals on green and sustainable chemistry (see UNEP/EA.4/L.9). Its main purpose is to facilitate a better understanding and provide guidance to countries and stakeholders relevant for advancing green and sustainable chemistry.

24. Lastly, during the reporting period, the secretariat continued an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials on the Convention and the Protocol to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions in the ECE region.

F. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

25. The coordination and oversight of intersessional activities under the Protocol are carried out at meetings of the Working Group of the Parties, meetings of the Bureau, as necessary, and by consultations among Bureau members using email. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan.

26. The secretariat serviced the seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019) and the sixteenth and seventeenth meetings of the Bureau (Geneva, 29 November 2019, and 16 June 2020 respectively),¹³ as well as coordinating a number of email consultations and a teleconference (9 January 2020) among the Bureau members.

27. Accession to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers by Kazakhstan on 24 January 2020 raised the number of Parties to the instrument. As at 1 October 2020, the Protocol had 37 Parties.

28. The secretariat has started the preparations for the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, to be held back-to-back with the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, which expected to take place in Tbilisi from 17 to 22 October 2021.

G. Technical assessment of provisions of the Protocol

29. The technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol involves the drafting of recommendations on technical issues for the Meeting of the Parties, based on the assessment reports. The method of work for this activity includes meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, electronic consultation and drafting of assessment reports on experience gained in the development of national pollutant release and transfer registers, in

¹² Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

¹³ For more information, see www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-bureau.html.

line with article 6 (2) of the Protocol. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan, and more specifically objectives I.1–6, II.1 and III.1–4.

30. At its first meeting (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2011), the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol agreed that no amendments to the provisions of the Protocol were needed at that time, and that experience needed to be gathered before such a review could take place. The 2014 and 2017 synthesis reports on the implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/5 and ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/10) presented to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its second session (Maastricht, the Netherlands, 3 and 4 July 2014) and its third session (Budva, Montenegro, 15 September 2017), respectively, and the individual national implementation reports¹⁴ on which the syntheses were based, provide insight into some of the issues related to the technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol. In addition, an assessment concerning the implementation of the Protocol's provisions and its strategic plan is provided in the following documents: Systemic issues concerning the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and recommendations on how to address them (ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/6/Add.2); Progress in implementing the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2018/5); and Development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2018/6). Pursuant to the decisions of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties made at its sixth (Geneva, 9 November 2018) and seventh (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019) meetings in relation to the development of the Protocol, the Bureau has prepared a report on the outcomes of the survey on the experiences in implementing the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/4), which addresses the issue of technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol.

H. Horizontal support areas

31. During the period 2018–2021, the objective of horizontal support activities was to provide overall support that covered multiple substantive areas of the work programme, among other things, through secretarial support and staff training. These activities are relevant for the achievement of all focal areas of the strategic plan.

¹⁴ Available at www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/reporting.html.