

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

Working Group of the Parties

Twenty-second meeting

Geneva, 19-21 June 2018

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda:

Substantive issues: Thematic session on access to information

**NETWORKING FOR MATCHING COUNTRIES NEEDS WITH THE
OFFERS FOR SUPPORT**

Organization of Work

**Geneva, Palais des Nations, Salle XII
20 June 2018, 2 -3.15 p.m.**

1. Introduction

The effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Strategic Plan 2015-2020¹ could be greatly underpinned by sharing innovative approaches and good practices, addressing identified capacity-building needs and raising-awareness of public authorities, the public, NGOs and other stakeholders. The networking event will provide an excellent opportunity to facilitate peer learning through sharing good practices and finding solutions to address the capacity-building needs. The session will feature a discussion in break out groups (3 rounds) facilitated by the partner organizations on the following topics in the context of the Aarhus Convention: (a) access to information; (b) public participation; (c) access to justice and (d) e-learning and education. The session is aimed at building capacity of representatives of Parties. NGOs and representatives of other stakeholders are encouraged to participate as to offer the relevant experience.

The following material will provide a basis for discussion at the event:

- Report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2017/7); see section III. Available from: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html> in English, French and Russian.

- Presentation of the secretariat to 10th CBC meeting:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/CB/CBC10/10CBC_meeting_ACS.pdf

- Overview of offers for peer-learning and sharing good practices (as provided by national focal points)

¹ See decision V/5 adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/aarhus-convention/areas-of-work/current-work-programme-and-strategic-plan/strategic-plan-2015-2020.html>.

2. Major capacity building needs identified

The major capacity building needs outlined below were identified on the basis of information provided by Parties through surveys and relevant activities.²

(a) Access to information

The Parties in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia highlighted the needs to establish “one-stop-shop environmental information portals”, improving reliability of data and technical support for developing structured, computerized and publicly accessible environmental information databases compiled through standardized reporting. The need to further strengthen public access to environment-related product information and information was also highlighted by the Parties.

Strengthening countries’ capacities in active dissemination and reuse of environmental information as well as effective use of electronic information tools for the application of the Aarhus Convention remains a priority for the interested countries. Synergies with Open Government, Open Data, e-Government, SEIS, geospatial information management, Earth observation data and other similar initiatives that could make environmental information or data produced or commissioned by governments publicly available to access, reuse and redistribute could be further explored.

Question for the discussion: what are the key challenges to ensure effective access to information and what “know how” approaches and practical solutions can be offered to address these gaps?

(b) Public participation

Public participation on specific activities and plans, programmes and policies was reported in the survey as the most important capacity-building priority in the countries of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Public participation during the preparation of executive regulations and/or generally applicable legally binding normative instruments could be also further promoted through capacity-building activities. These activities could be implemented through pilot projects, trainings, improving the legal framework and developing tools that assist countries to promote effective and inclusive public participation in environmental decision-making.

Question for the discussion: what are the key challenges to ensure effective public participation and what “know how” approaches and practical solutions can be offered to address these gaps?

(c) Access to justice

Capacity development in the area of access to justice remains quite important due to the challenges in implementing the third pillar of the Convention and the need to enhance effective access to justice. The survey revealed the need of the countries in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to continue raising awareness and building capacities of judiciary, prosecutors, other review bodies, members of Bar associations, public interest lawyers, other legal professionals, non-governmental organizations and members of the public in ensuring effective public access to justice in environmental matters.

Greater involvement of public interest lawyers, bar associations, mediators, prosecutors and other legal professionals in capacity building activities remains crucial. Such activities should support a multi-

² See Report on capacity building (ECE/MP.PP/2017/7); see section III. Available from: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html> in English, French and Russian

stakeholder dialogue aiming at removing any barriers to access to justice and monitoring the effectiveness of domestic administrative and judicial review procedures in environmental matters.

Promotion of networking of the judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies in the pan-European region, subregional and national levels remains important to promote the exchange of experiences in access to justice and the enforcement of the rule of law in environmental matters.

Question for the discussion: what are the key challenges to ensure effective access to justice and what “know how” approaches and practical solutions can be offered to address these gaps?

(d) E-learning and education

Continuous opportunities for building capacities of different target groups in the target countries related to the Convention implementation could be supported through the development of an online self-paced or moderated online course based on the relevant material developed under the Convention (e.g. Implementation Guide, Maastricht Recommendations) that could be translated by each interested Party and that could include a module on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention at the national level. The opportunities for further cooperation with UNITAR and other partner organizations to develop such course could be further explored.

Question for the discussion: what key capacity-building needs can be addressed through e-learning and education and what best modalities can be offered to address these needs?

3. Structure of the event

The event will be introduced by the Chair of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention at the meeting (see also item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda). The duration of the event is 75 minutes featuring 3 rounds of break out groups discussion on the above topics for 25 minutes each. Moderators will briefly introduce the topic and will open tour-de-table by inviting each representative of Party to introduce the capacity-building need and/or to offer opportunity to help capacity-building, for up to 3 minutes per speaker. It is expected that participants will follow up bilaterally after the session on the relevant needs/offers identified through the tour-de-table. The discussion will be held in English and English-Russian-English consecutive interpretation will be provided. Moderators will present key outcomes of break-out group discussions to the plenary on Thursday, 21 June 2018, at 2.30 p.m.

The **break out group will be organized in the following way (25 minute each):**

- Brief introduction by the group moderator (3 minutes): key findings on the way forward in the report on capacity-building
- Tour-de-table (20 minutes): invite each interested representative of the Parties to indicate particular capacity-building needs, and interested participants to indicate offers for peer-learning support and possible solutions for the improvements (2-3 minutes per participants).
- Conclusions (2 minutes): invite participants to join next break out group of their choice