

UNECE Protocol on PRTRs promotes coordination and cooperation in environmental reporting supporting a green and circular economy

The UNECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) continues to lead and inspire actions to promote transparency in environmental matters across the globe. It drives the development of national legislation and practice towards a common set of international standards, bringing about positive changes that would otherwise not occur. Given the prevalence of global production and supply chains, adherence to such standards for PRTR registers is the key to the reduction of pollutants across countries and to the promotion of a green and circular economy.



At the eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (Geneva, 16 and 18 December 2020), chaired by Sweden, Parties, other countries and stakeholders shared their experiences in establishing PRTRs, in particular focusing on countries' achievements and challenges; and the development of the Protocol, aimed at aligning its implementation with ongoing trends and technological possibilities related to PRTRs in order to respond to the increased demand for easy-to-access information. Furthermore, delegations considered several key documents in preparation for the upcoming fourth session of the Protocol's Meeting of the Parties (October 2021), including the future work programme and a Draft Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development.

The European Union, Spain and the secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury showcased ways to optimize existing PRTRs and to design new PRTRs to achieve coherent and integrated systems in an efficient manner. Such ways included: the integration of PRTRs with other existing reporting; PRTRs' relevance for the promotion of the European Green Deal; the use of PRTRs to fulfil requirements under the Minamata Convention, an example also applicable to reporting obligations under other international instruments; and the value of cooperation and coordination with regard to PRTRs between the Minamata Convention and the Protocol.

Speakers also highlighted the vast potential for PRTRs to serve as carefully crafted systems that would make information easily accessible to users with different needs, including public authorities, the general population, industry, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. For example, PRTRs could inform impact assessment of policy measures or evaluation of the effectiveness of some multilateral environmental agreements and other similar instruments.



Representatives of Albania, Belarus, Colombia, Tajikistan and Turkey shared their countries' experiences in establishing PRTRs, including legislative steps towards accession to the Protocol, establishing pilot PRTR systems and gathering stakeholder feedback on PRTRs. Elements highlighted by speakers as fundamental for successful PRTRs included: building PRTRs as a stepping stone for

other national and international reporting; integrating PRTRs into planned e-government systems; and foreseeing a role for PRTRs in informing governmental decision-making processes. It was also important to train stakeholders right from the start in the use of the system, its data and functions and to address false impressions of PRTRs as being costly or complicated to comply with. Countries also outlined several remaining challenges, including: the need to align legislation and institutional frameworks with the Protocol's requirements; establishing a comprehensive list of polluting facilities; and coping with delayed progress due to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on implementation activities.

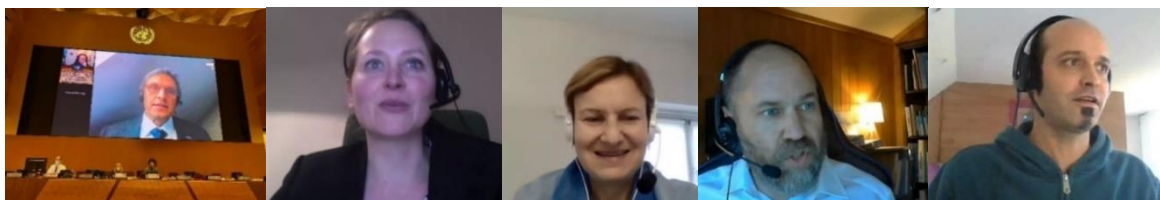


Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/Mediterranean Action Plan and the Minamata Convention secretariat presented opportunities for capacity-building, including through a variety of general and specific guidance materials and financial mechanisms and projects. In that regard, the representatives referred to methodologies for reporting requirements similar to those under PRTRs and to several expert groups and bodies that, for example, prepare guidance and other capacity-building materials, including on estimation techniques for releases from agriculture, aquaculture or catchment run-off, and on releases and emissions of mercury to environmental media. The representatives of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) presented their PRTR-related activities, including the development of guidance material and other activities in support of countries developing PRTRs.



Furthermore, delegations noted major outcomes of the work of the International PRTR Coordinating Group, a body led by Spain, which offers a transversal perspective on coordinated global promotion.

The experiences shared at the meeting and its outcomes are expected to: assist Parties and interested Governments in the region and beyond in establishing and modernizing their PRTR systems; and promote PRTRs as a tool for environmental reporting supporting a green and circular economy.



The meeting report, along with the presentations and other related documents, will be made available on the meeting web page (<https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eighth-meeting-working-group-parties-protocol-prtrs>).

Background

By enhancing transparency and accountability, PRTRs can play a central role in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and good governance (Sustainable Development Goal 16) across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. PRTRs can also make an important contribution to achieving specific Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production). The UNECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) has been used across the globe as a prototype for establishing reporting by industry on pollutant releases and waste transfers and for providing public access to related information.

The Protocol on PRTRs is the only global legally binding treaty on this subject, with the work under this instrument being led by Sweden. Together with partner organizations – OECD, UNITAR, UNEP and the European Environment Agency – UNECE is helping countries to establish effective PRTR systems that meet common international standards.