



Economic Commission for Europe
Committee on Environmental Policy
Twenty-sixth session

Geneva, 9 and 10 November 2020

**Report of the Committee on Environmental Policy on its
 twenty-sixth session**
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I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy held its twenty-sixth session in Geneva and online, on 9 and 10 November 2020. The present report is based on a summary of the session's outcomes and the decisions taken, as adopted by the silence procedure completed on 19 November 2020.¹

A. Attendance²

2. Delegations from the following 39 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) attended the meeting: Armenia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Belgium; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Croatia; Cyprus; Czechia; Estonia; Finland; France; Georgia; Germany; Hungary; Israel; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Monaco; Montenegro; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Russian Federation; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Turkey; Ukraine; United States of America; and Uzbekistan.

3. Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Europe and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe were also present.

4. Other national, regional and international organizations and bodies were represented at the meeting, including: the European Union, represented by the European Commission, the European Environment Agency, the European Investment Bank and the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus.

5. Representatives of the following civil society organizations and academia participated in the session: Children and Youth International; the Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development "Eco-Accord"; the European ECO-Forum; the National Research University - Higher School of Economics (Russian Federation); and Zoï Environment Network.

B. Opening of the session and organizational matters

6. The Director of the ECE Environment Division made welcoming remarks. The Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy welcomed participants and recalled the main objectives of the session.

7. The Chair informed the Committee that the Bureau, at its online meeting on 23 September 2020, had taken note of the information provided by the secretariat on the situation regarding conference facility operation at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, in the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and had agreed to:

(a) Organize the twenty-sixth session of the Committee as an official meeting in hybrid mode with simultaneous interpretation in three languages, noting that, in that format, the length of the sessions would be reduced from three to two hours;

(b) Reduce the length of the meeting from five 3-hour sessions to four 2-hour sessions, with the meeting to be conducted on 9 and 10 November 2020 (the morning session of November 11 thereby being cancelled), and rework the draft agenda and timetable accordingly;

¹ Meeting documents and other information, including the summary of decisions, are available on the session web page: <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-sixth-session-committee-environmental-policy>.

² Due to the hybrid format of the meeting, the final list of participants (available at www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2020/ECE/CEP/CEP-26_List_of_participants_for_web.pdf) is based on online registration.

(c) Accept a proposal by UNEP to organize, on the first day of the session (9 November 2020), a side event on sustainable tourism, in cooperation with OECD and ECE.

8. The Chair further informed the Committee that the ECE Executive Committee at its 111th meeting (Geneva, 5 October 2020) had adopted a special procedure on decision-making for formal meetings with remote participation.³ The procedure applied to sectoral committees (including the Committee on Environmental Policy), bodies reporting directly to the Executive Committee and working parties, with immediate effect until 31 December 2020. That meant that the procedure was to be applied to the decisions of the current session of the Committee on Environmental Policy and that, in practice:

(a) During the current meeting, the Committee on Environmental Policy, as usual, would agree on the decisions;

(b) Subsequently, those decisions would be circulated to all Geneva Permanent Representations for approval by silence procedure of 72 hours (through the Executive Committee web page);⁴

(c) If the silence was not broken through an objection, the decisions would be deemed adopted. However, if the silence was broken for a given decision, it would be referred back to the Committee on Environmental Policy;

(d) The possibility of raising an objection was limited, being understood as a safeguard measure in case a registered participant was unable to participate remotely in the meeting because of technical reasons. In other words, the possibility of raising an objection was limited to rare cases in which a delegation that had properly registered for, and participated in, a given meeting had experienced technical problems during said meeting.

9. The Committee adopted the agenda of its twenty-sixth session (ECE/CEP/2020/1), taking into account the proposed time schedule as presented in information paper No. 1.

II. Outcomes of the work of the Bureau

10. The Chair reported that, during the intersessional period, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bureau had worked by means of electronic consultations – including online consultations on 15 April and online meetings on 4 June, 23 September and 27 October 2020 – to prepare the current session of the Committee. The outcomes of the Bureau's work were presented in document ECE/CEP/2020/3. The Chair invited the Committee to consider the outcomes of the Bureau's work under the respective agenda items.

11. The Committee expressed appreciation to the Bureau for its good work in fulfilling the mandates assigned to it by the Committee, especially for the excellent work undertaken with regard to preparation of draft outlines of two background thematic documents on the themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

III. Sustainable development in the region

12. The Principal Adviser to the ECE Executive Secretary, in her capacity as ECE focal point for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, presented developments related to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region, including the key outcomes of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (virtual meeting, 19 March 2020), submitted as the contribution of the ECE region to the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (New York, 7–16 July 2020), and the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change.

³ Chair's conclusions (EXCOM/CONCLU/111), para. 19. Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/EXCOM_112_14_Dec_2020/EXCOM-Conclu-111_.pdf.

⁴ See <https://unece.org/silence-procedure>.

13. The Committee was informed that the next ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and action and delivery on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region” would tentatively take place as virtual peer-learning round tables from 10 to 16 March 2021 and as hybrid high-level and plenary segments on 17 and 18 March 2021. The outcomes of the 2021 session of the Regional Forum would constitute the contribution of the ECE region to the 2021 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (New York, 6–15 July 2021).

14. A representative of the ECE secretariat informed the Committee of recent ECE activities on accelerating action for sustainable and circular value chains for the garment and footwear industry.

15. The Committee took note of the information on developments in the ECE region linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and:

(a) Called for active participation in the preparation and conduct of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region (March 2021).

(b) Noted with interest the information provided by the secretariat on enhancing transparency and traceability for sustainable and circular value chains in the garment and footwear industry.

IV. Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

A. Dates for the Conference

16. The Chair recalled that the currently agreed dates for the Conference (3–5 November 2021) overlapped with the new dates for the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1–12 November 2021). It was recalled that the Bureau, at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020, had agreed to recommend that the Committee consider rescheduling the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference for 2022. The Bureau had also agreed that, when doing so, the host country ought to be consulted and its preferences taken into account.

17. The Committee was informed that the Bureau, at its virtual meeting on 23 September 2020, had further discussed the issue of possible rescheduling of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. Taking into account pandemic-related developments, the opinion of the host country (Cyprus), information paper No. 8 “Calendar of events and holidays in 2022” and additional information provided by representatives of partner organizations (UNEP and OECD), the Bureau had agreed to recommend that the Committee on Environmental Policy reschedule the Ministerial Conference for 5–7 October 2022. That recommendation had been communicated to the Committee on 6 October 2020.

18. In the ensuing discussion, representatives of Cyprus, Switzerland, the European Union and Children and Youth International took the floor.

19. The Committee:

(a) Decided to reschedule the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia), for 5–7 October 2022;

(b) Expressed its gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for its continued commitment to host the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Cyprus;

(c) Encouraged the member States, partner organizations and all interested stakeholders to actively participate in the preparation and conduct of the Conference;

(d) Asked the secretariat to follow up on the present decision and to keep the Committee and the Bureau informed of progress regarding all necessary preparations.

B. Draft agenda of the Conference

20. The Chair recalled that, in accordance with the Reform of the “Environment for Europe” process: Reform plan,⁵ a decision on the agenda of the Conference should be taken at the regular meeting of the Committee approximately 12 months prior to the Conference, and further preparatory work would then commence. It was further recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the Committee had mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to prepare a first draft of the provisional annotated agenda for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.⁶

21. The Committee was informed that the Bureau, at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020, had agreed to come back to drafting the agenda of the Conference in due time, pending the discussion and possible decision on the dates of the Conference by the Committee at its twenty-sixth session.

22. The Committee asked the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to prepare for the next session of the Committee a first draft of the provisional annotated agenda for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

C. Background thematic documents

23. The Chair recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to prepare the first drafts of the two background thematic documents.⁷

24. The Committee was informed that, during its online consultations on 15 April 2020, the Bureau had discussed the relevance of the two themes for the Ministerial Conference taking into account the impact of the pandemic on the ECE member States and their economies. The Bureau had recommended that the first theme “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure” be kept unchanged. With regard to the second theme “Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism”, the Bureau recommended that sustainable tourism be kept, but that the focus be changed to make it more relevant to countries taking into consideration the current situation regarding the pandemic and its heavy impact on the tourism sector.

25. The Committee was further informed that, during its online meetings on 4 June and 23 September 2020, the Bureau had discussed the first draft outlines of the two background thematic documents. The Bureau had:

(a) Agreed that the secretariat would submit the draft outlines to the current meeting as information papers Nos. 5 and 6;

(b) Agreed that the impact of the pandemic could be addressed in all relevant chapters in both documents (no dedicated chapters needed);

(c) Recommended the secretariat to start drafting in 2021, to gather all relevant information on the two themes and to prepare the very first drafts of the background thematic documents for discussion at the Bureau meeting (2 and 3 June 2021).

26. The Committee:

(a) Expressed appreciation for the work undertaken by the Bureau, with the assistance of the secretariat, OECD and UNEP, to prepare draft outlines of two background thematic documents on the themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

⁵ See ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, para. 12 (a).

⁶ See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 21 (c) (ii).

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 21 (c) (i).

(b) Asked the Committee to make concrete suggestions and proposals on draft outlines of two background thematic documents on the themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and send them to the secretariat by the end of 2020;

(c) Asked the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to continue working to prepare, for the next regular session of the Committee, the first drafts of the two background thematic documents.

D. Organizational issues

27. The Chair recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had considered the document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2019/19) and recommended reducing the maximum size of delegations for the Conference by 20 per cent.⁸

28. The Committee was informed that, pending the Committee's discussion at its twenty-sixth session and possible decision on the dates of the Conference, the Bureau at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020 had agreed to put on hold the preparation of the new document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference as it should be based on the dates of the Conference.

29. The Committee asked the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare for the next session of the Committee a new document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

E. Resource requirements

30. The Chair recalled that the Environment for Europe reform plan stipulated that, for the preparatory process of the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and the Conference itself, the necessary extrabudgetary financial resources would have to continue to be provided to ECE to supplement the United Nations core budget resources. The plan also stated that the host country should assume relevant financial commitments.⁹ It was further recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had welcomed information paper No. 19 on estimated resource requirements for preparing the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, and invited interested countries and organizations to make contributions (in cash and in kind) for the preparation of the Conference.¹⁰

31. The Committee was informed that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Netherlands, having taken into account the decisions of the Committee at its twenty-fifth session, had decided to contribute €40,000 to the preparation of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

32. The Committee expressed gratitude to the countries for their pledges to contribute financially to the preparation of the Conference and invited interested countries and organizations to make contributions (in cash and in kind) for the preparation of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

F. Host country preparations

33. The Chair recalled that the Committee at its previous session had expressed its gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for the proposal to host the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Cyprus.¹¹

⁸ See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 27 (d).

⁹ See ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, para. 12 (g) and (h).

¹⁰ See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 27.

34. The representative of Cyprus informed the Committee about the ongoing preparations for the hosting of the Conference.

35. The Committee expressed appreciation to Cyprus, as the host of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, for the information provided.

V. Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

36. The Chair of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators reported on the seventeenth session of the Joint Task Force (Geneva (hybrid), 26 October 2020).

37. Two Vice-Chairs of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment presented the discussions of the Working Group at its twenty-second session (Geneva, 27 October 2020), in particular on its annual timetable of activities and its terms of reference. References were made to document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/3/Rev.1, which set out the timetable of activities for 2021, and information paper No. 7, which took into account the postponement of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference until 2022. A request from the Working Group to extend its current mandate and terms of reference to at least 2022 was also brought to the attention of the Committee.

38. The Committee:

(a) Took note of the information provided and welcomed the activities of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, especially regarding the review of the ECE set of environmental indicators and how the Joint Task Force sought to address environmental and health information together;

(b) Took note of the modified timetable of activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in 2021 as set out in information paper No. 7;

(c) Decided to extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group to mid-2023 to allow the Working Group to prepare a new draft mandate and terms of reference after the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, and requested the secretariat to submit that decision on extension to the ECE Executive Committee for approval;

(d) Took note of the information provided and welcomed the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, especially in support of the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System;

(e) Encouraged all member States to submit by 15 December 2020 their self-assessments on progress made in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System by using the online tool for reporting on the System;

(f) Expressed its appreciation to those member States that had provided financial contributions to support preparation of the next pan-European environmental assessment, encouraged member States to provide further support in terms of expertise and funding, and requested the secretariat to continue to inform the Bureau of progress made.

VI. Environmental performance reviews

39. The Committee proceeded with the peer review of the environmental performance of Romania. The review's 11 chapters and associated recommendations (information paper No. 2/Rev.1) had earlier been examined by the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews together with Romanian experts virtually from 20 to 23 October 2020.

40. The Secretary of State of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests of Romania, highlighted the main priorities for the country in terms of advancing environmental governance, including the codification of numerous environmental legislative acts in order to ensure their consolidation, the improvement of interministerial cooperation to ensure continuity and coherence in environmental policy, the strengthening of regulatory and compliance assurance mechanisms, the boosting of strategic planning and implementation

efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss, and the guarantee of public participation in decision-making on environmental matters. Romania was also seeking to strengthen its activities to protect the Carpathian Mountains by enhancing institutional coordination and administrative capacity for the implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians and its Protocols.

41. The Chair of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (Estonia) informed the Committee on Environmental Policy of the main outcomes of the Expert Group's work in 2020, highlighting the richness of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Romania, with its 61 recommendations and addressing 52 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. He also emphasized the constraints of virtual meetings, while recognizing the positive aspect of enabling a broader participation of experts from the reviewed country.

42. Sharing key findings in selected areas of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Romania, the rapporteur designated by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (Italy) drew attention to priority issues that needed to be tackled by the country, including the promotion of sustainable development and support of the cross-cutting work of the Department for Sustainable Development, the streamlining and stabilization of the environmental legal framework, and the enhancement of open access to environmental information by upgrading and further developing the country's integrated environmental information system. The rapporteur also highlighted the need for more strategic management of water resources in Romania, the expansion of the solid waste integrated management system to cover the entire country, the greening of the economy through green public procurement and private sector participation, the building of resilience to climate change and support for the path to a low-carbon economy and society. Lastly, in relation to the pandemic, the Review recommended the improvement of air quality and the raising of awareness about the negative health impacts of air pollution as a critical factor in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and other future possible airborne threats, as well as adapting the public participation procedure to ensure effective public participation in decision-making on environmental matters in times of pandemic.

43. The Committee proceeded with the consideration of the fourth cycle of reviews under the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme prepared by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (ECE/CEP/2020/6).

44. In his presentation of the fourth cycle of reviews, the Chair of the Expert Group highlighted the content of future reviews, which was largely similar to the third cycle of reviews, although selected chapters would be strengthened. He drew attention to a new element, which was a nexus option available for interested countries to examine the water-food-energy-ecosystems, air-transport-health, or water-soil-waste nexus. The fourth cycle would continue to address Sustainable Development Goals and issues related to human rights and the environment and to make recommendations that considered the needs of vulnerable groups. To support countries' efforts to respond to, recover from and prevent future pandemics, the fourth cycle would address issues identified in the reviewed countries as being of concern during the pandemic and how countries responded to the pandemic with policy packages increasing resilience and supporting a green economic recovery.

45. The secretary to the Expert Group gave an overview of activities in 2020. In 2020, the third environmental performance review of Uzbekistan¹² had been published and promoted widely through mass media and social media platforms. The country review mission for the third environmental performance review of Azerbaijan had been postponed until 2021, with the dates to be determined based on the international and national situation in terms of COVID-19. The preparatory mission for the second environmental performance review of Morocco had taken place by virtual means during August–September 2020 and the country review mission was planned to be organized using a hybrid approach, consisting of virtual meetings and interviews in the second half of November 2020 and possible in-person field visits in January–February 2021, pandemic permitting. Two assessments had been carried

¹² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.26.

out in 2020: on biodiversity and protected areas and on green economy. Both assessments aimed at taking stock of developments in those areas and supporting informed reflection on whether any adjustments were needed in the fourth cycle of reviews. With the support of funds from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, North Macedonia and Uzbekistan were developing road maps for implementing their environmental performance reviews recommendations. Progress made in that regard would be presented at the next session of the Committee in 2021.

46. The secretary to the Expert Group presented ongoing activities under the United Nations Development Account project on “Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe (2018–2021)” with several revisions due to pandemic-related restrictions on travel and events, resulting in fewer workshops and more policy packages developed in each country. One concluding workshop was still planned in 2021 for all the five countries concerned.

47. The Committee was further informed that the experience of gender mainstreaming in environmental performance reviews had been shared through a webinar organized in September, and on a new web page developed on the ECE website.¹³

48. The Committee was also informed that, following a recommendation of the “External independent evaluation of Environmental Performance Review process based on reviews carried out in the period 2015–2019”,¹⁴ the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews had considered the issue of the integration of human rights into the reviews at a virtual meeting in August 2020. To facilitate the discussion, the secretariat had prepared a video presentation.¹⁵ The Expert Group agreed that reviews would continue to address issues related to human rights and the environment as per current practice.

49. Presenting planned activities for 2021, the secretary to the Expert Group said that requests for environmental performance reviews received from Armenia and Ukraine would be followed up on in the period 2021–2022. In addition, he drew the Committee’s attention to a list of eligible ECE countries for a review carried out under the Environmental Performance Review Programme.¹⁶ From outside the ECE region, the Economic Commission for Africa had approached the Environmental Performance Review Programme secretariat to explore the possibility of conducting other reviews in the Africa region (for example, Mauritania) in line with the approved procedures for such reviews by the Committee on Environmental Policy.

50. The Committee:

(a) Adopted the recommendations contained in the Third Environmental Performance Review of Romania: recommendations (Information paper No. 2/Rev.1);

(b) Adopted the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environmental Performance Review Programme: fourth cycle of reviews (ECE/CEP/2020/6) and submitted it for endorsement to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022);

(c) Expressed great appreciation for the work of the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews in 2020;

(d) Welcomed the information provided on the activities of the Environmental Performance Review Programme, and expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for the excellent work in support of the Programme;

(e) Welcomed the commencement of the second environmental performance review of Morocco;

¹³ See <https://unece.org/gender-mainstreaming-environmental-performance-reviews>.

¹⁴ Dusan Zupka, Final report (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, September 2019).

¹⁵ Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s6IA3cB91w&feature=youtu.be.

¹⁶ See ECE/CEP/2020/6, annex II.

(f) Welcomed the commencement of the third environmental performance review of Azerbaijan and took note of the postponement of the review country mission until 2021 due to the international situation in terms of the pandemic;

(g) Took note of the pending requests made by Armenia and Ukraine to undertake their next environmental performance reviews;

(h) Welcomed the wide promotion of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Uzbekistan;

(i) Welcomed the activity to support the implementation of recommendations made in recent environmental performance reviews of North Macedonia and Uzbekistan through the development of road maps by the two Governments, initiated with ECE Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation funds;

(j) Invited members of the Committee to nominate their representatives to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews;

(k) Took note of the information provided by the secretariat on resource mobilization for the Environmental Performance Review Programme in 2019–2020 and, in particular, thanked:

(i) Austria, Germany, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland for their financial support;

(ii) Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden, UNEP, WHO, OECD and the European Investment Bank for providing expertise;

(iii) Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Romania, Switzerland and UNEP for having delegated their experts to serve in the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews;

(iv) The United Nations Development Programme for logistical support;

(l) Expressed appreciation for the close cooperation of the ECE Environment, Forests, Land and Housing, Statistical, Sustainable Energy and Sustainable Transport Divisions and the United Nations country teams with the Environmental Performance Review Programme;

(m) Encouraged delegations to provide in-kind (expert) and financial support to the Environmental Performance Review Programme.

VII. Cross-sectoral activities

51. The Chair informed the Committee that, as per established practice, the secretariat had prepared a briefing note entitled Cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the ECE Environment subprogramme, for the Committee's consideration at its twenty-sixth session (ECE/CEP/2020/4). The note presented the recent developments and plans for the future related to those activities and contained recommendations to the Committee concerning future work under its auspices.

52. The Committee was further informed that, in relation to the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP):

(a) The Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment had been postponed and was currently tentatively scheduled to be held in a hybrid format, based in Vienna, from 30 March to 1 April 2021;¹⁷

(b) A special online event had been organized on 22 April 2020 to look at the impact of the pandemic on transport, health and environment issues;

(c) A task force has been set up to develop principles or recommendations on green and healthy sustainable transport.

¹⁷ The meeting was subsequently rescheduled for 17 and 18 May 2021.

53. The Committee was also informed that, on 9 September 2020, ECE had hosted a webinar on gender mainstreaming in environmental policies and strategies. The webinar had included presentations by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the ECE gender focal point, as well as presentations on activities under the Protocol on Water and Health and the Environmental Performance Review Programme.

54. The Committee took note of the information provided in the document on Cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the ECE Environment subprogramme (ECE/CEP/2020/4), and:

(a) Took note of the information provided on the work of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development and to encourage its members from the countries participating in the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development to remain informed of the process at the national level by establishing and maintaining working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations;

(b) Confirmed its willingness to continue close cooperation with the Steering Committee in the framework of the preparations for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

(c) Welcomed the work under THE PEP and encouraged the nomination of national focal points for the programme from the environment side;

(d) Took note of the change of date of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment and encourage the participation of experts in the preparatory process for the Meeting;

(e) Took note of the information provided with respect to the European Environment and Health Process;

(f) Took note of the information provided with respect to the Environment and Security Initiative;

(g) Recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming in environmental activities, particularly in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, and emphasized that gender equality was both a goal in itself and a means of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development;

(h) Agreed to continue to mainstream a gender perspective into its activities.

VIII. Criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events

55. The Chair recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had approved the revised criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events and requested the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to periodically verify the availability of data for 2018 and, if available, for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support for approval by the Committee at its next session.¹⁸

56. Furthermore, the Chair informed the Committee that the Bureau at its meeting on 23 September 2020 had discussed that issue and agreed to recommend that the Committee continue using the current criteria for another year.

57. The Committee decided to continue using the criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events approved at its twenty-fifth session for another year, and requested the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to periodically verify the availability of data for 2019 and, if available for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support for approval by the Committee at its next session.

¹⁸ See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 50.

IX. Annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2021

58. The Chair recalled that, in December 2017, at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly (New York, 12 September–24 December 2017), the States Members of the United Nations had approved the change from a biennial to an annual budget period on a trial basis from 2020 onwards.¹⁹

59. Furthermore, the Chair informed the delegates that the draft programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2021 (ECE/CEP/2020/5) followed the annual format introduced from 2020 onwards, with enrichments reflecting General Assembly resolution 74/251 on programme planning.²⁰

60. The Committee:

(a) Adopted the draft programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2021 (ECE/CEP/2020/5) and recommended that it be approved by the Executive Committee;

(b) Requested the Bureau to address the issue of timing in the definition of the programme of work and to oversee the appropriate balance with regard to its activities.

X. Presentation and exchange of views on the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

61. The Chair recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had welcomed the information provided by UNEP on the outcomes of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019) and the ongoing preparations for the fifth session, and invited UNEP to continue to inform the Committee of relevant developments under the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP.²¹

62. The representative of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe informed the Committee of the ongoing preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (Nairobi, 22–26 February 2021).

63. The Committee welcomed the information provided by UNEP on the ongoing preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, and invited UNEP to continue to inform the Committee of relevant developments under the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP.

64. The Committee congratulated UNEP on the success of the webinar “Transforming tourism for a resilient and sustainable post-COVID world” (9 November 2020).

XI. Calendar of meetings

65. The Chair recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had approved the proposed schedule of Committee and Bureau meetings until 2022.²² She informed the Committee that the proposed schedule of meetings of the Committee and its Bureau for the period 2021–2023 was presented in information paper No. 3.

66. The Committee approved the proposed schedule of Committee and Bureau meetings for the period 2021–2023 (information paper No. 3).

67. The Committee decided to organize the Committee’s twenty-seventh session in Geneva, from 3 to 5 November 2021.

¹⁹ See A/RES/72/266, General Assembly resolution 72/266 on shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations, para. 6.

²⁰ See A/RES/74/251.

²¹ See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 57.

²² *Ibid.*, para. 60.

XII. Election of officers

68. The Chair informed the Committee that, based on the recent replacements and new nominations received, the secretariat had prepared an information paper presenting the list of candidates for the Bureau to be elected by the Committee (information paper No. 4).

69. The Committee decided to elect the Bureau of the Committee, as stated in information paper No. 4.

70. The Committee expressed appreciation to the outgoing members of the Bureau, Ms. Ekaterina Kouznetsova (Belarus), Ms. Megan E. McPhee (United States of America) and Ms. Aliya Shalabekova (Kazakhstan), for their work.

XIII. Impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including on the Environment for Europe process

71. The Chair informed the Committee that the Bureau, at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020, had considered the possibility of including on the agenda of the twenty-sixth session a specific item on sharing ideas and reflections on how the Committee anticipated the effects that the current pandemic context would have on environmental policy, in terms of its priorities and instruments and possible needs to adapt the ECE member States' actions.

72. Furthermore, the Chair informed the delegates that the ECE Executive Committee, at its 110th meeting on 10 July 2020, had invited relevant subsidiary bodies of the ECE Commission to discuss how to reflect a COVID-19 response that supported further progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their Programmes of Work²³ based on the following three items:

(a) The context of the overall COVID-19 response that supported further progress towards the 2030 Agenda, including the following aspects:

- (i) What was the goal of the overall response? Why was it necessary?
- (ii) How was it being implemented (new/repurposed/refocused activities, partnerships, working methods...)?
- (iii) How could increased operational risk/uncertainty be dealt with?
- (iv) What were the channels through which the COVID-19 response proposed could support Sustainable Development Goal acceleration?

(b) Specific adjustments proposed to the Programme of Work;

(c) Recommendations on how to reflect the COVID-19 response in the programme of the 2021 ECE Commission session.

73. The representative of the WHO Regional Office for Europe shared his thoughts on how the pandemic could be used as an opportunity to reset the world's environmental future and how a COVID-19 response could better support further progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

74. The Committee:

(a) Welcomed the information provided by the WHO Regional Office for Europe;

(b) Agreed to seek inputs from the Committee members and observers on how to better reflect a COVID-19 response that supported further progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Programme of Work of the Environment Subprogramme, and mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare the Committee's input for the information for the ECE Executive Committee;

²³ See Chairs's conclusions (EXCOM/CONCLU/110), para. 18. Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/EXCOM_111_05_Oct/EXCOM-Conclu-110_.pdf.

(c) Agreed to further discuss the impact of the pandemic, including on the Environment for Europe process, at its next regular session.

XIV. Other business

XV. List of decisions

75. Supported by the secretariat, the Chair compiled and presented a summary of the outcomes of the twenty-sixth session and the decisions taken. Following a discussion, the draft list was finalized and approved.

76. The Chair informed the Committee that the list of decisions would be circulated through all Geneva Permanent Representations for approval by silence procedure of 72 hours (through the Executive Committee web page). If the silence was not broken through an objection, the decisions would be deemed adopted and the approved list of decisions would be uploaded to the session web page. If the silence was broken for a given decision, it would be referred back to the Committee.

XVI. Closure of the meeting

77. The Committee requested the Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the Committee's decisions, including by preparing the documents and reports necessary for the Committee's work at its next session.

78. The Committee expressed appreciation for the work of the ECE secretariat in preparation of the current meeting.

79. The Committee expressed gratitude for the work of the Interpretify technical team in servicing the current meeting.

80. The Committee expressed appreciation for the work of the interpreters in servicing the current meeting.

81. The Chair thanked the participants and closed the meeting.
