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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Cross-sectoral activities

Cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau, meeting in an extended format (Geneva, 28 February 2018), requested the secretariat to prepare a briefing note as an official document on all cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the ECE Environment subprogramme. Documents under such a format (ECE/CEP/2019/11, ECE/CEP/2019/17 and ECE/CEP/2020/4) were previously considered by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-fourth (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019), twenty-fifth (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019) and twenty-sixth (Geneva and online, 9 and 10 November 2020) sessions respectively.

As per established practice the present document elaborates on recent developments, plans for the future and expected decisions by the Committee.



I. Education for sustainable development

A. Overview of recent developments

1. On 19 and 20 October 2020, the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development held its fifteenth meeting in Geneva in a hybrid mode, postponed from 7 and 8 May due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the ensuing international travel restrictions. The Steering Committee, *inter alia*:

(a) Elected a chair, vice-chair and the Bureau;

(b) Worked towards finalizing the fourth mandatory reporting cycle of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development;

(c) Took note of:

(i) The progress in the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Strategic Planning on the revision of the draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework;

(ii) The status of the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Indicators on the draft format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030;

(iii) The information on the work and the role of youth in the Committee and the next steps for youth involvement in the work of the Committee.

2. At its sixteenth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 10 and 11 May 2021), the Steering Committee, *inter alia*:

(a) Recognized the work undertaken by countries in submitting the national implementation reports for the fourth mandatory reporting cycle; expressed its gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for the additional in-kind contribution to the preparation of the synthesis report; and approved the final report (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2021/3);

(b) Took note of the reported outstanding good practices and informal reports;

(c) Expressed appreciation for the participation of the Steering Committee and its members in the side event “Education for sustainable development as a key driver for youth empowerment for confronting the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19”, organized virtually on 10 March 2021 in the framework of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region (Geneva, 17 and 18 March 2021);

(d) Took note of the information on the Swiss-funded capacity-building workshop (21 and 22 April 2021, Baku (hybrid)); welcomed the cooperation with the Governments of Azerbaijan and of Switzerland; invited member States to contribute further to capacity-building activities and asked the secretariat to continue cooperation with interested member States in that regard;

(e) Took note of the ongoing preparations for the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, to be held in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022), including the organizational issues, the host country preparations, resource requirements and the official documents to be considered at the meeting;

(f) Considered the pre-final draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework to be officially submitted to the seventeenth meeting of the Steering Committee (May 2022) for approval;

(g) Discussed the status of the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Indicators on the draft template for reporting on the future implementation of the Strategy (2021–2030);

(h) Took note of the nominations to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Steering Committee on ESD Youth Platform and approved the terms of reference of the Youth Platform.

B. Goals and challenges

3. At the Second High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Batumi, Georgia, 8 June 2016), the mandate for cooperation on education for sustainable development across the region was extended to 2030, with the timeline to be aligned with other global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals.¹

4. There is continuing interest among ECE member States in regional cooperation for the implementation of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development as part of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 4 and targets 4.7 and 12.8. With the activities of the Steering Committee intensifying, participation in both the process and the meetings of the Steering Committee has been increasing, and the work of the expert groups has begun to deliver practical results. However, some key challenges remain, including the achievement of more balanced subregional participation; the involvement of ministries of both education and environment; and the efficient involvement of stakeholder groups.

5. The challenges as outlined in the key findings of the preliminary report of the fourth mandatory reporting cycle include: efficient coordination at the national level of various policies in support of education for sustainable development; the involvement of various stakeholders; application of the whole institution approach in practice; the establishment of networks promoting cooperation on education for sustainable development at the national level; the establishment of quality control criteria for related tools and materials; and financial and time constraints in implementing national implementation plans.

6. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, a number of new challenges have been placed on the global agenda by the COVID-19 pandemic, entailing health, environmental, social, economic and other crises. As a result, the Steering Committee must rethink and reconsider not only the challenges, but also the opportunities and required changes when drafting the future implementation framework of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. This calls for the strengthening and enhancement of the role of education for sustainable development as a powerful tool for introducing the necessary changes and effectively contributing to a realistic transformation of the world to a healthier, more stable and peaceful and fairer place to live.

7. In addition, mobilization of stable and predictable extrabudgetary funding in support of the secretariat services for the Steering Committee remains a challenge; however, the trend is positive and the number of member States contributing financially and in-kind to the work of the Committee is increasing.

C. Planned activities

8. The seventeenth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development is to be held in Geneva, on 17 and 18 May 2022.

9. The Committee requested the secretariat to coordinate with the Chair and the Bureau the process of developing a short survey (before September 2021) on the identification of areas of interest for future capacity-building activities, as well as the potential interest of member States in being donors for these activities.

10. The Committee suggested: (a) that the ESD Youth Platform prepare a plan of activities of the Platform in the region for the period 2021–2025; and (b) activities and side events on “Youth and ESD” to be organized during the forthcoming Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

11. The Steering Committee will continue preparations for the Third High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries; in this regard, the Steering Committee will work in close cooperation with the Committee on Environmental Policy.

¹ See ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.2, paras. 7 and 10.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

12. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to take 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. The Committee on Environmental Policy is also invited to confirm its willingness to continue close cooperation with the Steering Committee in the framework of the preparations for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

II. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

A. Overview of the recent developments

13. The Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment was held on 17 and 18 May 2021 in Vienna and online because of persisting pandemic-related meeting and travel restrictions. Representatives of 42 ECE member States participated in the meeting. Among the speakers, 46 were ministers or State secretaries.

14. The High-level Meeting was preceded by a special session of the Steering Committee of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) on 17 May, to address pending issues relating to the official documents or programme of the Fifth High-level Meeting.

15. Discussions and deliberations were spread over four ministerial panel sessions. They considered, among other things, that a paradigm shift was needed, as people's behaviour could not return to how it had been before the pandemic. The role of THE PEP in leading the way towards landmark achievements and implementing workplans was underscored, as was the importance of taking comprehensive and decisive action.

16. Member States adopted the Vienna Declaration and its six annexes (forthcoming), as amended at the special session of the Steering Committee. The main aspects of the Declaration, with its vision of "clean, safe, healthy and inclusive mobility and transport for happiness and prosperity for all", include commitments to:

- (a) Develop a comprehensive pan-European strategy on transport, health and the environment;
- (b) Further develop and implement THE PEP to ensure that it helps to improve living conditions in urban, peri-urban, rural and mountainous areas;
- (c) Develop further synergies between THE PEP activities and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement;
- (d) Analyse different legal options to give effect to the vision and elaborate draft proposals for a possible legal instrument;
- (e) Accelerate the introduction of low- and zero-emission vehicles, electromobility and related infrastructure.

17. The Declaration also includes:

- (a) Recognition of the need to make transport and mobility systems more resilient to pandemics such as COVID-19;
- (b) The adoption of the first Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion;
- (c) The extension of the focus of the Partnership on Cycling Promotion to cover walking and other forms of active mobility, making it a Partnership on Active Mobility that should develop a pan-European master plan on active mobility;

(d) The establishment of a THE PEP Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility.

18. In the run-up to the Fifth High-level Meeting, 24 online webinars were held between 10 and 12 May 2021. The cross-cutting subjects covered: the promotion of walking and cycling; the promotion of sustainable and safe transport through different angles (such as eco-driving, speed limits, spatial planning and tourism); the promotion of mobility for health and the inclusion of a social dimension, with special attention to youth and women.

19. The Deputy Minister for Transport of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vasily Desyatkov, announced that his Government wished to host the Sixth High-level Meeting.

B. Goals and challenges

20. The Steering Committee of THE PEP needs to plan the implementation of the Vienna Declaration, with particular attention to the:

(a) Preparation of plans for the new Partnerships on: Sustainable Tourism Mobility; Active Mobility; and Child- and Youth-friendly Mobility — established after the presentation of a youth position paper on transport, health and environment during the High-level Meeting;

(b) Establishment of two working groups: one to work on options for a possible legal instrument and the second to develop a strategy.

21. The need for sustainable financial resources to support member States in implementing the ambitious Declaration and workplan remains a challenge for THE PEP. More sustainable resources would allow for a more tailored approach to supporting member States, particularly those with economies in transition.

C. Planned activities

22. The Russian Federation announced that it was ready to organize the first relay race after the High-level Meeting. The event would take place in October 2021, in St. Petersburg (Russian Federation) and it would cover the integration of transport and urban planning.

23. The Steering Committee decided to hold its nineteenth meeting in autumn 2021, to start implementing the Vienna Declaration.

24. The representative of France indicated that his Government wished to host a meeting in Paris in 2022 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of THE PEP.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

25. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to take note of the information provided and to welcome the work under THE PEP. Furthermore, it is invited to support THE PEP and encourage the participation of experts in the working groups that are to be established.

III. European Environment and Health Process

A. Overview of recent developments

26. The seventh meeting of the European Environment and Health Task Force Bureau took place virtually on 15 June 2021. The main aim was to prepare for the annual meeting of the Task Force and start preliminary preparations for the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health.

27. Bureau members received updates on the activities implemented since the tenth meeting of the Task Force (17 and 18 February 2021) and on the activities under the working groups established by the Task Force. Special emphasis was given to:

(a) The Working Group on Health in Climate Change, under which a background paper entitled “Zero regrets: Scaling up action on climate mitigation and adaptation for health in the WHO European Region” was being prepared for presentation on the occasion of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–12 November 2021);

(b) The Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities;

(c) The Environment and Health Process Communications Network.

28. Bureau members considered a timeline towards the preparation of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, tentatively scheduled to take place in 2023, recalling that the Task Force, at its tenth meeting, had decided not to organize a mid-term review and had adopted an “accelerated road map”.

B. Goals and challenges

29. In preparation for the Seventh Ministerial Conference, a series of high-level public events, known as “Bonn Dialogues”, will be organized to map the timeline and contribute to the identification of commitments to be submitted to the next ministerial conference. The Bonn Dialogues will be complemented by a “Campaign for Resilience and Building Forward Better”. Within the Campaign, member States will showcase their initiatives in the recovery from the pandemic.

30. The organization of activities and events is subject to the availability of resources.

C. Planned activities

31. The Bureau decided that the eleventh meeting of the Task Force would take place in the first half of December 2021. The format was still to be identified, because of uncertainties due to the pandemic.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

32. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to note the information provided with respect to the European Environment and Health Process and to reconfirm its commitment to contribute thereto.

IV. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities

A. Overview of recent developments

33. Like other Divisions, the Environment Division participated in the preparation of the ECE Gender Action Plan 2020,² and reported on the implementation of activities in 2020. Key results of this reporting were included in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Following up on the 2020 ECE Gender Action Plan, an ECE Gender Action Plan for 2021–2022 was developed to implement the ECE Gender Policy. The strategic actions of the Gender Action Plan include raising the importance of taking a gender perspective into account in different activities and events under the Environment subprogramme, as appropriate. The Environment Division provided its

² Available at https://unece.org/DAM/Gender/UNECE_GAP_2020_final.pdf.

inputs to the Gender Action Plan for 2021–2022 by including activities on gender mainstreaming implemented by the secretariat.

34. The Environment Division provided its inputs to the progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the [gender mainstreaming evaluation](#)³ of ECE performed in 2019. Following the recommendations of the gender mainstreaming evaluation, three gender co-focal points (one P-5 and two P-4 regular budget staff members) were nominated in 2019 and they continue to work as gender focal points.

35. During the reporting period, the Environment Division continued to advance mainstreaming gender in environmental policies by hosting a series of training sessions for the integration of gender aspects into environmental policies. The gender focal points led the organization of a webinar on gender mainstreaming in environmental policies and strategies⁴ on 9 September 2020, with a view to facilitating experience sharing by member States, namely Germany, on the integration of gender aspects into environmental policy with reference to specific examples of measures on climate change programmes and projects. In all, 72 persons, including 50 from member States and 20 ECE staff members, participated in the webinar.

36. Following the above-mentioned webinar, the Environment Division received a request from the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia to provide support in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry's staff in gender mainstreaming and developing a package of relevant gender mainstreaming tools for environmental policies. Consequently, an online refresher training session presenting examples and different approaches of integrating gender aspects into environmental policies⁵ was organized on 27 November 2020 for the staff of the Ministry and other relevant stakeholders in Serbia. With a view to providing concrete tools on gender mainstreaming, a second webinar⁶ was organized on 28 January 2021 in collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia, UN- Women and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Serbia. The webinar focused on methods and tools for integration of gender aspects into environmental policies. An ECE consultant presented, from a gender mainstreaming perspective, the findings of an analysis of two national programmes: the National Waste Prevention Programme for the period 2020–2025; and the Road Map for Circular Economy in Serbia. In particular, she reported on initial gender screening, followed by a gender impact assessment of each of the two strategic documents. Based on the analysis, a document entitled “Toolbox: How to Mainstream Gender in Environmental Policy”⁷ has been developed to provide a practical and workable approach to gender mainstreaming.

37. With a view to disseminating information on activities related to gender mainstreaming in environmental policies under multilateral environmental agreements and policy programmes, the Environment Division has created and regularly updates a web page⁸ entitled “Environment and Gender”.

38. During the reporting period, the secretariat continuously promoted a gender balance in the governing bodies of the multilateral environmental processes that it services. In the period 2019–2020, the majority of the chairs of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements were women. In the same period, the Chairs of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators were women, whereas the Chairs of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews and the Steering Committee of THE PEP were men. The secretariat also strove to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in terms of participation in meetings, capacity-building seminars,

³ See https://unece.org/DAM/OPEN_UNECE/03_Evaluation_and_Audit/Evaluation_Reports-with_SPs/Programme-wide_docs/FINAL_UNECE_GENDER_EVALUATION.pdf.

⁴ See <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environment-and-Gender/events/350747>.

⁵ See <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environment-and-Gender/events/350748>.

⁶ See <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environment-and-Gender/events/351920>.

⁷ Available at <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environment-and-Gender/pub/354299>.

⁸ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/environment-and-gender>.

workshops and training sessions organized under the auspices of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and programmes.

39. Under THE PEP, a side event to the Fifth High-Level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment,⁹ organized on 10 May by ECE, explored issues regarding gender and transport. Ms. Olga Algayerova, ECE Executive Secretary, opened the side event.

40. A gender perspective was mainstreamed in the activities on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The gender dimension was reflected in the country self-assessment report on equitable access to water and sanitation from Belarus analysing the situation on equity in Vilejka and Mosty Districts, which was finalized in 2020. The gender dimension is also mainstreamed in the new publication *The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in Practice: Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region* finalized at the end of 2019.¹⁰ Gender disparities were further addressed in the guidance document *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A practical guide for joint implementation*,¹¹ which emphasizes the gender dimension of water and health issues in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The gender dimension was also reflected during the discussions of the sixth meeting of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation held virtually on 23 and 24 March 2021.¹²

B. Goals and challenges

41. Major challenges in mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities include: the lack of national policies addressing gender and the environment; and the absence of gender-disaggregated data on environmental issues, such as access to water and sanitation, access to energy, access to land and coverage by waste collection in the countries of the region. With regard to the availability of gender-disaggregated data, the situation is slightly improving as countries start to collect and disclose gender-disaggregated data on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

42. Among the areas where improvements are feasible and desired are the mandatory elements in the template forms provided by donor countries when applying for funding for projects focused on capacity development and awareness-raising in relation to environmental issues. In many cases, such template forms do not include gender aspects as necessary elements for the development of project proposals. The donor countries are encouraged to expand their template forms accordingly.

C. Planned activities

43. The Environment Division will continue to support gender mainstreaming work in Serbia through capacity development and awareness-raising events focusing on the local level. These events will be organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia and will involve participants from regional development agencies, municipalities and managers of programmes and projects implemented at the local level.

⁹ See <https://thepep.unece.org/events/fifth-high-level-meeting-transport-health-and-environment-0>.

¹⁰ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.12.

¹¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.E.15.

¹² See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/sixth-meeting-expert-group-equitable-access-water-and-sanitation>.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

44. The Committee is invited to note the information provided with respect to gender mainstreaming across ECE activities and in environmental activities carried out by the Environment Division since the Committee's last session and to:

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

(b) Support international initiatives to promote gender equality and welcome continued cooperation and coordination with the United Nations bodies and other relevant international forums and actors to that end;

(c) Agree to continue to mainstream a gender perspective in its activities.
