

20 years of Aarhus Convention – EEA contribution

Since the establishment back in 1994, EEA has been a key European player in providing knowledge on environmental and climate topics through the provision of “relevant, reliable, targeted and timely” data, information and assessments.

Open, easy and structured access to data is one of the main driver determining the quality and depth of information we can provide and furthermore the reliability of our indicators and assessments we produce. Along the years, various activities and processes jointly with the member and cooperating countries in our Eionet network and with different institutional partners in Europe and beyond have been initiated and used to develop and improve an appropriate data ecosystem.

The Aarhus convention is one of the key facilitators in building this data ecosystem in Europe and as of now also globally. Our joint work with the countries across EU, EEA and pan-European region and in close dialogue with the convention covered a wide array of activities from production to dissemination of environmental data and information. Concretely, the work was covering among others the gradual identification of common indicator and data needs, projects to implement the basic infrastructure of a shared environmental information system, open data and environmental maturity reports and many others. The final goal was to improve data governance, maintain a continuous dialogue on evolving thematic priorities and on identifying and implementing a technical infrastructure as well as electronic tools to improve data access and exchange.

Once we started promoting metadata to identify our common data needs, we established and maintain regular data flows to the European and International levels. Streamlining environmental reporting has been also a task and a challenge over the past decades in order to better bridge the data demand and supply in a policy relevant manner. Over the past 15 years we used and systematically encouraged standardisation around geospatial data as a building block to improve data management and data interoperability. And all this in a systematic effort to translate into practice the idea of data and information sharing as jointly promoted in various forms and fora.

Lately, the technology has evolved dramatically and the policy priorities have evolved and matured. The landscape is constructed today around the European Green Deal and the ambitious European digitalisation agenda; both supported by a thorough European data strategy. This takes into account the global data revolution, leading to a growing volume and diversity of data coming from both traditional and new sources like Copernicus and citizen science. The data revolution is also pushing towards the usage of new methods and technologies (big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning - supported by a modernised IT infrastructure based on cloud and edge computing).

In response, EEA/Eionet through its new strategy (2021-2030) is embracing a systemic approach where thematic priorities, digitalisation, and access to information and cooperation interact and complement throughout all the key strategic areas.

Pushed by this wave the countries across Europe and beyond, are also encouraged to equally modernise their data and information provision; revise and update their regulatory frameworks to better promote the culture of open data and through this enable technical solutions to implement an improved data access.

EEA has taken the lead in providing Copernicus land and in-situ data; is fulfilling some of the European objectives by GEOSS on data sharing and management and is contributing to underpin the SDG indicators with quality data as part of the UNGGIM Europe initiative, alongside other substantial

contributions from EU and UN bodies. We will continue to work with UNECE and other national and international partners in implementing the goals of the Aarhus convention which complements and broadens the EEA work as defined by the new EEA/Eionet strategy. Green Deal priority topics like biodiversity, climate change, zero pollution, circular economy is fully addressed by that.

Last but not least, please allow us to congratulate UNECE and all the parties (old and new) to the Aarhus convention on the progress achieved over the past 20 years in improving access to data - a crucial asset to our work in addressing environment and climate change issues - and look forward to continue this cooperation in the years to come.