



International PRTR Coordinating Group
Thirteenth meeting
Wednesday, 27 January 2021, Geneva (online)

REPORT¹

1. The meeting of the International Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers Coordinating Group (ICG) was attended by representatives of the following countries and organizations: Canada, Czechia, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), European Environment Agency (EEA), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Guta Environmental Law Association, National Institute for Environmental Studies, Ukrainian Scientific Research Institute of Ecological Problems, EX Research Institute Ltd. and Eastern Research Group. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Iñigo de Vicente-Mingarro (Spain), and serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

I. Opening and adoption of the agenda

2. The Chair opened the meeting with an introduction to the work of ICG and presented the provisional agenda.² The agenda was then adopted by the participants.

II. Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR)-related activities

A. PRTR-global-map

3. The Chair presented the current version of the PRTR-global-map and invited the ICG participants and other stakeholders to provide the secretariat with possible up-dates to the map.

B. *Tour de Table* on activities

4. Participants shared information on ongoing and planned PRTR-related activities, with a focus on the following subjects:

¹ This document was not formally edited.

² Available at <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/international-prtr-coordinating-group>.

- Reviewing and revising PRTRs, including the scope of activities, substances and reporting modalities, and initial research on the topic of additional reporting on production volumes together with the regular PRTR reporting;
- Putting the issue of climate change more to the centre of PRTR-related activities;
- Integrating PRTRs in activities aimed at reducing pollutant releases to water from land-based sources of pollution;
- Organizing multi-stakeholder workshops on uses of PRTR data for economic, health and pollution prevention methods;
- Improving national PRTR systems, including through:
 - Reforming administrative processes;
 - Up-dating legislation and adding substances, such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), as well as benzopran and other pollutants covered by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants;
 - Up-dating data collection and reporting components, including by streamlining existing reporting tools and implementing a single tool for reporting from facilities;
 - Adding and improving PRTR components for data dissemination to the public, including by facilitating access to information on permits and making data available through a website with other environmental information;
 - Making data more accessible and useful, for example, by using interactive components in PRTR reports through different digital tools;
 - Promoting cooperation with environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by engaging them in discussions on the analysis of data prior to publishing PRTR reports; this allows to learn what aspects are the most important for NGOs and what are their views on possible new directions for data analysis;
- Improving international cooperation and harmonizing different PRTRs:
 - Adapting PRTR systems to different national and international reporting obligations, for example, the related latest changes in the European PRTR on e.g., making available data faster and incorporating different industrial reporting obligations in a single portal;
 - Further development of the Protocol on PRTRs;
 - Promoting interoperability/complementarity of different PRTR systems for improving the data collection- and data quality- related components of PRTR-systems;
- Providing support to industry and competent authorities in interested countries.

C. PRTR-related websites

5. The Chair recalled that the issue of how to improve leverage of the existing online sources of information related to PRTR, including PRTR.net,³ the OECD resource centre,⁴ the OECD Centre for PRTR data,⁵ the UNITAR and IOMC platforms,⁶ had been considered by the ICG in previous meetings on the

³ Available at <https://prtr.unece.org>.

⁴ Available at www.prtr-rc.fi.

⁵ Available at http://www.oecd.org/env_prtr_data/.

⁶ Available at <http://prtr.unitar.org/site/home> and <https://iomctoolbox.oecd.org>, respectively.

basis of a note prepared by the Chair.⁷ The secretariat had received no further substantial comments on the document prior to the meeting.

6. During the ensuing discussion on the topic, participants noted the importance of making available PRTR related information in different languages and suggested to consider, where possible, to work on translation of guidance material and to identify possibilities of financial support for translating guidance material. This was in particular relevant with regard to the current development of PRTR systems in the regions of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, where the translation of existing material into Russian and Spanish languages was needed. A representative from OECD informed participants that, in line with recommendations made in the document, OECD was planning to refine PRTR-related websites with a view to achieve clearer and more user-friendly products.

III. Terms of reference of the ICG

7. The Chair invited the secretariat to introduce the revised draft Terms of Reference of the ICG.⁸ The revised draft had been prepared on the basis of the lessons learnt through servicing the Group. The major revisions included the following: updating the section on policy background and mandate as to reflect main legal and policy instruments relevant for the Group's work; reflecting the established practice of the Group's functioning (e.g. no formal nominations are required by countries and organizations; abolishing the Bureau as the Group is relatively small and takes all decisions jointly anyway, but suggesting an additional Vice-Chair to better reflect diverse geographical representation in the chairmanship; reflecting correctly the secretariat's functions; enhancing the Group's objectives; and streamlining the terminology used in the text). The participants considered the revised draft noting the importance of preserving an informal format of the ICG's in the final text as this was the key strength of the Group's work.

IV. PRTR HOT-TOPICS

8. The Group then discussed several "hot-topics" that received a priority in the implementation of PRTRs:

(a) Collection, comparability and management of PRTR data, including with regard to the scope of PRTRs in the context of new developments linked to the use of chemical substances; further harmonization of different PRTR systems and issues of data equivalence; and

(b) Dissemination of available PRTR data, including good practices for a successful awareness campaign and for interactive data visualization options for communicating/presenting PRTR information.

9. A representative of the United States of America presented the country's recent initiative on Global PRTR analysis. The analysis is using the Qlik software to compile and analyse release data for 14 pollutants including data from Australia, Canada, European-PRTR, Japan, Mexico, Norway and United States of America. The work was mainly aiming to facilitate PRTR data uses for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 12. A substantial part of the initiative's efforts went into the application of good practices for interactive, data visualization options for communicating/presenting PRTR information. The project also helped to greatly advance the practical knowledge related to the further harmonization of different PRTR systems together with issues of data equivalence.

⁷ The Draft International PRTR Coordinating Group note on Improving leverage of existing Global PRTR portal websites is available under the tab "presentations" at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/seventh-meeting-working-group-parties-protocol-prtrs>.

⁸ Terms of Reference are available at www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/Intl_PRTR_CG/Documents/PRTRCG_2009_IV_4.pdf.

10. In the ensuing discussion, the ICG addressed the potential as well as the challenges that came with such a global project, which included issues related to the use of language, e.g., that different PRTR systems used disparate definitions of PRTR related terms. The Group agreed that it will be interesting to consider options for adding to the Global PRTR analysis more and also newer PRTRs with a view to better share utility of PRTR data. This led to questions on how the public and policy makers where to best access global PRTR data and related resources and where to possibly house a global PRTR analysis webpage and how this would fit within the network of existing PRTR portals and networks. In addition, the development of a Global PRTR analysis that would include more pollutants and data from other PRTRs and from other regions would benefit from and be in fact an incentive to make use of the existing guidance materials and work on harmonized lists of pollutants and activities. Currently, such lists existed in the form of the annexes to the Protocol on PRTRs,⁹ as the only global legally binding treaty on PRTRs, and respective documents developed by the OECD Working Party on PRTRs.¹⁰

11. Turning to the second presentation under the item, a representative of the United States of America introduced the idea to actively support using PRTRs for environmental justice issues. It had become clear that some communities carry a larger burden from pollution and the United States were now focusing to correcting these environmental injustices. Indeed, PRTRs were a tool well designed to, in conjunction with using other data, first identify possible communities that may be concerned of the issue and secondly, to empowering those communities and drive change.

12. In the following discussion, the representative of Israel mentioned that during discussions with NGO representatives on PRTR related issues and challenges, similar questions were brought up. Israel started to look into the correlation between pollutant releases and social parameters and where developing methodology on the topic. Another related example from Israel was that in its recent PRTR-related report, the external costs of air emissions had been highlighted. For the first time, PRTR emissions to air were not only presented as pollutant releases in kg per year per facility but as costs and damage to the environment and society. The document, for example, included information on the ten largest emitters of air pollutants and the percentage of such costs that was linked to their respective pollutant releases.

13. Other examples from participants for the use of PRTR data in such a context included:

(a) Studying external costs of industrial air pollution, which was an update to an earlier report on the topic from 2014, as reported by the representative of EEA (European union) who added that once finalized after consultations, the report will be made available to the ICG;¹¹ and

(b) Using PRTR data to analyse birth outcomes in certain populations¹² and other uses of data linked to vulnerable populations,¹³ as introduced by the representative of CEC.

⁹ See <http://unece.org/env/pp/protocol-on-prtrs-introduction>.

¹⁰ See the guidance materials on Proposals for a Harmonised List or Reporting Sectors ENV/JM/MONO(2013)5 and Proposal For A Harmonised List Of Pollutants ENV/JM/MONO(2014)32, available at www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/pollutant-release-transfer-register/publicationsintheseriesonpollutantreleaseandtransferregisters.htm.

¹¹ See www.eea.europa.eu/publications/costs-of-air-pollution-2008-2012.

¹² Available at www.cec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/session-5-exploring-co-location-of-adverse-birth-outcomes-nielsen_eng.pdf.

¹³ For further information see www.cec.org/events/public-meeting-of-the-north-american-prtr-initiative/.

V. Next meeting

14. The secretariat informed participants that the next meeting of ICG would be organized considering preparations for the fifth meeting of the Working Party on PRTRs under OECD to take place in January 2022 in Paris.

VI. Outcomes

15. The participants reiterated their commitment to coordination and synergies in relation to the work on PRTRs. Pursuant to consideration of the revised draft Terms of Reference of the ICG, the participants agreed to send possible additional comments on the draft to the secretariat before 1 April 2021. The Group requested the secretariat to prepare the final draft prior to the Group's next 14th meeting taking into account comments made at and after the meeting with a view to the possible adoption of the document at 14th meeting.

16. The participants took note of the experiences shared by Israel, the United States of America, European Union and CEC and welcomed the opportunity to learn about such interesting examples. They decided that in addition to the current "hot topics", the topic of environmental justice shall be discussed at the next meeting, and participants were requested to present relevant experiences in this regard. In addition, noting the variety of possible uses of PRTR data, the participants were encouraged to share other possible topics on the use of PRTR data at the next meeting.

17. In the context of the topic of Global PRTR analysis, presented by the representative of the United States of America, the Group invited the United States and OECD to consider how the related Global PRTR analysis website could fit in the structure of existing international portals on PRTRs.

18. On the issue of how to improve leverage of the existing online PRTR-related websites under the auspices of ECE, OECD and UNITAR, the Group concluded that the Note on Improving leverage of existing Global PRTR portal websites¹⁴ has been finalised now and requested the secretariat to make it available online. The Group also requested organizations to take into account the document's conclusions and recommendations when working on PRTR-related websites under their auspices. It also requested stakeholders with websites that link to international PRTR websites to consider providing a brief information on what is available on the international websites, i.e. PRTR.net and other more specialized PRTR related websites.

19. Finally, interested participants were invited to inform the secretariat about possible candidates for election as the Group's Chair and Vice-Chairs in advance of the Group's next meeting.

¹⁴ Available at <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/international-prtr-coordinating-group>.