

Aarhus Convention – 26th Working Group of the Parties, 22 June 2022

Agenda item 3a – European ECO Forum opening statement

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On behalf of the European ECO Forum and the European Environmental Bureau I would like to highlight a window of opportunity for parties which is coming apparent from listening to the panel and the delegates' interventions.

How do you compare the environmental impact of the laptop you are using here in this room today with the impact of the clothes you are wearing?

As already elaborated by my ECO Forum colleague Emma on the panel, these sort of questions on product information are an integral part of the Aarhus Convention's work programme via Decision 7/1 of the 7th Meeting of the Parties.

In one region of the convention, the European Union is currently revolutionising legislation on product information and passports. Once implemented, these environmental information obligations will extend far beyond the EU via obligations on importers to the European market. The political momentum on developing product passports is high right now and the UNECE region and the Aarhus Convention should use this window of opportunity to further its commitments on public access to environmental-related product information.

The European Union's Green Deal, circular economy action plan, and Ecodesign initiative are set to create a product passport and labelling system which could create a one-stop-shop for environmental information on a vast variety of products. These efforts are commendable, especially if the result will be standardized, machine readable, and comparable formats.

These new EU obligations will impact all manufacturers and importers who want to sell on the EU market. Already now, product passport initiatives beyond the EU at global and regional level are taking shape – for example at the OECD level. However, the level of ambition of the Aarhus Convention forum has so far been lagging behind and parties will inevitably find themselves bound by obligations they did not take the opportunity to shape together. Now is the time to reinvigorate access to environmental information at Aarhus level and product passports are the tool to do so.

The Working group of the parties should:

- Firstly, empower the Taskforce on access to information to focus more intensely on product information and passports
- Secondly, prepare the ground for legally binding rules on product passports at the level of the Aarhus Convention by evaluating synergies with the work of the PRTR protocol.