



International PRTR Coordinating Group

Fourteenth meeting

Wednesday, 26 January 2022, Paris (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: Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czechia, Estonia, European Union, Finland, Israel, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, 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), European Environmental Bureau, National Institute for Environmental Studies, Mecie Environment, Eastern Research Group and EX Research Institute Limited. 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 with colour codes for different degrees of PRTR implementation and invited the ICG participants and other stakeholders to provide the secretariat with possible up-dates to the map. The Group further considered establishing a set of criteria for the colour codes used in the map. In that context, the representative of OECD informed the Group that an ongoing OECD survey could inform both the discussion on setting more discrete criteria for the current colour codes for different degrees of PRTR implementation and the up-date of the map prior to the Group's next meeting.

¹ This document was not formally edited.

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

B. *Tour de Table on activities*

4. Participants shared information on ongoing and planned PRTR-related activities, including on the impact of COVID-19 on changes to reporting deadlines and on the number of facilities actively operating during the pandemic. The discussion focused on the following subjects:

- Conducting capacity-building activities, such as webinars and multi-stakeholder workshops on uses of PRTR data for economic, health and pollution prevention methods, etc.;
- Upscaling outreach to different population groups and researchers;
- Exploring how to better meet stakeholders' needs in future, also user needs for PRTR reporting and dissemination, including by organizing multi-stakeholder workshops on uses of PRTR data for economic, health and pollution prevention methods;
- Putting PRTR data to use, including through:
 - Identifying hot spots of industrial pollution;
 - Using PRTR data for sustainable and circular economy related activities, including through conducting benchmarking exercises and evaluating progress in preventing and reducing pollution, improving resource efficiency, furthering decarbonisation, etc.;
 - Analysing data on emissions to air together with contextual data, such as socio-economic data for environmental justice issues;
 - Data integration such as for calculating externalities of the cost of industrial air pollution;
 - Using PRTR data for thematic reports such as on transfers to disposal and recovery operations;
 - Initiating for stakeholders a “pollution prevention challenge”;
- Improving national PRTR systems, including through:
 - Reviewing and revising PRTR-related legislation and regulation, including on reporting modalities and the scope of PRTRs (activities and substances covered, combining PRTR reporting with reporting on useful contextual data);
 - Conducting pilot projects such as on the use of satellite data to estimate the potential for integrating remote sensing data sources for industrial emissions;
 - Increasing the scope of new PRTR systems, by adding new economic sectors gradually;
 - Reforming administrative processes and streamlining existing reporting obligations and tools and implementing a single tool for reporting from facilities;
 - Up-dating guidance documents, including for reporting and methodology for calculation of releases;
 - Addressing data quality issues by developing automated data screening protocols, and improving data management and data flow;
 - Responding to specific data needs of users, such as by adding contextual data, such as socio-economic data for environmental justice related use of PRTR data, or for improving PRTR data usefulness across sectors and for example to better meet circular economy-related data needs;
 - Improving PRTR data integration with other national data sets and sources, such as the national statistics plan, as a milestone in terms of quality of data collected in PRTR systems and its improved use by government authorities;
 - Building new and upgrading existing digital tools, including for easy use by industrial operators;
 - Improving data and knowledge sharing processes through online data access tools for drilling the data, such as power dashboards;
 - Adding new languages to the PRTR system;
 - Providing PRTR data analysis for users through annual reports on specific topics and analysing trends etc.;
- Improving international cooperation and harmonizing different PRTRs:

- Further development of the Protocol on PRTRs; including by improving national PRTR regulation and practical measures, e.g., continue to work on reporting of releases below the current quantification limits by comparing data from different systems which apply no, or lower, reporting thresholds;
- Update data for the OECD centre for PRTR data;
- Develop online modules for capacity building on PRTRs; addressing topics common for PRTR systems in different countries, including on what are the key objectives, selected approaches that fit national needs and on how to evaluate progress.

III. Terms of reference of the ICG

5. The Chair invited the secretariat to introduce the revised draft Terms of Reference of the ICG.³ The draft had been prepared pursuant to the outcomes of the twelfth meeting of ICG held in Paris on 15 October 2019. The draft thereafter was considered by the Group at and after its thirteenth meeting (27 January 2021). Substantial comments received at the time were with regard to strengthening text on sustainable development goals in para. 7 and this paragraph was revised accordingly. The document was also formally edited. The participants considered and adopted the revised Terms of Reference as amended.⁴ In the following discussion, it was noted that cooperation could extend, as appropriate, to joint promotion activities, such as the organization of side-events at relevant international fora or the identification of funding opportunities for joint projects.

IV. PRTR HOT-TOPICS

6. 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;

(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;

(c) Using PRTRs for issues related to environmental justice.

7. A representative of the European Union presented plans regarding the reporting of production volume under the European PRTR. He mentioned aspects related to the units and metrics used in the reporting and the uses of reporting on production volume. For example, it is the European Commission’s intention to use such data to normalise releases and transfer data in benchmarking exercises and in facilitating the identification of best performers. He also pointed out that with regard to confidentiality of data on production volumes that the data will not be made public as individual data points but in anonymized or aggregated format. The measure will first apply for the reporting year 2023.

³ Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/PRTR_ICG_ToR_v15%20Dec.docx.

⁴ Terms of Reference are available at: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/PRTR_ICG_ToR_2022.pdf.

8. A representative of the European Environment Agency presented work on the Cost of externalities of industrial air pollution in Europe.⁵ The work fits within the context of the European Green Deal, because one of the strategies is to achieve zero pollution in Europe. The work aimed to translate what pollution means in monetary terms. The presented case study therefore addressed key issues of PRTR data use and tools for effective dissemination of environmental data, including with relevance to environmental justice issues and on how to make PRTR data accessible to a wider public. After addressing scope and methodology of the study, he also highlighted one of the results of the study, namely that 50 per cent of the costs associated with industrial air pollution were caused by the emissions from a relatively small number of facilities, 211 facilities, which is useful information for policy makers, managers and the public.

9. The ICG in its subsequent discussion then focused on data accessibility to a wider public. It was emphasised that when PRTR data and related information were presented in terms that users can understand and relate to more easily, then the attention given to pollution data was indeed increasing. For instance, the work on costs linked to industrial air pollution received a lot of media coverage⁶ as monetary value was something that people understand.

10. A representative of the United States of America presented on Pursuing Environmental Justice through Toxics Release Inventory Program Data. The underlying policy was based on that the United States Environmental Protection Agency defines Environmental Justice (EJ) as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of the population group and with respect to respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

11. This goal would be achieved when everyone enjoyed the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process on having a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work. Several examples for proofs of concept showed the use of combining PRTR data on the location of sources of pollutant releases with other data, such as demographic information by census and socioeconomic indicator scores. It was clear for the performed studies that there were communities that were underserved and overburdened. As a result, it was possible to reach out to management of individual facilities in the area of concern to improve the situation and in parallel to provide information to public in a way that was useful and easy to access in the local context.

12. A representative of Israel then presented the work in progress on the correlation between emissions locations and socio-economic status of municipalities. For the study, PRTR data, e.g. from electricity production and industry was brought into context of other emissions and socio-economic clusters and population groups. This had the potential of showing population groups most affected by pollution releases and therefore in informing an effective policy response.

13. In the following discussion, the group noted the high socio-economic value of understanding better PRTR data in the context of issues related to environmental justice. In that context, it was also noted that the digital divide - where people of some population groups had limited access to digital sources of information - was a big issue and mobile friendly access to PRTR information was not yet ready. However, the divide could be bridged to some extent by e.g. ensuring printer-friendly versions of the information and data and provide printed information to community meetings. It was also a good means to try and find people who can be the multipliers and, in that way, foster access to information to the community.

⁵ For information on the report see www.eea.europa.eu/publications/counting-the-costs-of-industrial-pollution/counting-the-costs-of-industrial-pollution and www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-atni/products/etc-atni-reports/etc-atni-report-04-2020-costs-of-air-pollution-from-european-industrial-facilities-200820132017.

⁶ See for example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiehailstone/2021/10/01/industrial-air-pollution-costs-europe-2-3-of-gdp/?sh=7a3503e62d88>; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/air-pollution/news/europes-industrial-air-pollution-costing-hundreds-of-billions-eea/>; <https://www.airclim.org/acidnews/eu-industrial-air-pollution-cost-%E2%82%AC433-billion-year> and <https://environmentjournal.online/articles/industrial-air-pollution-costs-europe-2-3-of-the-total-gdp/>.

Approaching media outlets directly was another possibility to help digest the meaning of the data to the public. Where digital access was available, increasing outreach through webinars was also a tool that had proven effective in building awareness on PRTR and pollution related issues.

14. Currently, the work focused on spatially defining “environmental justice communities” and then look into facilities there or vice-versa. Language availability of data and information was another factor that impacted access to PRTR data and needed to be addressed to overcome issues related to environmental justice. In the future, and in addition to the currently used socio-economic data, environmental justice activities would likely also benefit from the integration of health-related data, such as asthma index data.

V. Election of officers

15. The Group elected Iñigo de Vicente-Mingarro (Spain) as the Chair and Jorge Ocaña (UNITAR) as the Vice-Chair of the Group.

VI. Calendar of meetings

16. The Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat that the next meeting of ICG would be organized considering preparations for the sixth meeting of the Working Party on PRTRs under OECD tentatively planned to take place in November 2022 or at a later date yet to be determined.

VII. Key outcomes

17. The participants reiterated their commitment to coordination and synergies in relation to the work on PRTRs. Pursuant to consideration and adoption of the revised draft Terms of Reference of the ICG, the participants agreed that the discussions on the role of the ICG and on how to improve cooperation and coordination among the Group’s participants should continue at the next meeting.

18. In the context of the topic of the PRTR global map, the Group requested the Chair with the support of the secretariat to prepare a proposal on criteria for the colour coding for PRTR activities of the map.

19. Furthermore, the participants welcomed good practices and innovative approaches shared by Israel, the United States of America and the European Union, and by other participants during the *tour de table* and “hot-topic” sessions. The participants requested the secretariat to liaise with the potential speakers on PRTR related topics for the next meeting.

20. Finally, the Group elected Chair and one Vice-Chair. Pursuant to the adopted revised Terms of Reference, the Group decided to elect a second Vice-Chair at its next meeting bearing in mind the diverse geographic representation of the officers of the Group.
