

Self-evaluation of the activities serviced by
UNECE under the Convention on Access to
Information, Public Participation in
Decision-making, and Access to Justice in
Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)
and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and
Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs)
(2018-2021)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEA	European Environmental Agency
ENI SEIS II	phase II of the project on Shared Environmental Information System principles in Eastern Partnership countries
ENP	Eastern Partnership countries
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EQs	Evaluation Questions
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GMOs	Genetically modified organisms
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
HRBA	Human-Rights Based Approach
IOMC	Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals
MEAs	Multilateral environmental agreements
MOP	Meeting of the Parties
NFPs	National focal points
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OES	Office of the UNECE Executive Secretary
OHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OIOS	UN Office of Internal Oversight Services
Protocol on PRTRs	Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers
PMU	Programme Management Unit of UNECE
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEIS	Shared Environmental Information System
TF	Task Force
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP/MAP	UNEP Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
WECF	Women Engaged for a Common Future
WGP	Working Group of the Parties
WGEMA	Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2001. As a model for other regions, the Aarhus Convention elaborates on the norms, standards, and rights derived from Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Parties to the Convention are required to comply with the three pillars of the Convention: access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters, which are universally accepted and beneficial for all countries. The Convention presently has 46 Parties¹, including countries all along the economic spectrum, from some of the world's wealthiest economies to countries with some of the world's lowest gross domestic products. The Convention is also recognised to bring value to all its Parties, wherever they stand on the political or economic spectrum. The main institutional arrangements for the Convention currently include the Meeting of the Parties (MOP), the Working Group of the Parties (WGP), the Bureau, the Compliance Committee, and three thematic task forces.² Over the years, task forces evolved as they received specific mandates related to priority substantive issues and can progress once their mandates have been fulfilled. In addition, the objectives and functions of these bodies vary, addressing different aspects associated with implementing the Convention. The legal regime of the Convention has also been substantively advanced by an amendment concerning genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in 2005 and by the adoption of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol) in 2003. The entering into force of the Protocol in 2009 established a new legally binding international benchmark for reporting on emissions of pollutants from a wide range of potentially harmful activities. The Protocol now has 38 Parties. The Protocol is regarded as a cross-cutting tool for addressing climate change, heavy metals, and eco-toxic chemicals management, as well as for facilitating the development of compatible PRTR systems in different countries. It is the only legally binding international instrument on pollutant release and transfer registers. The main institutional arrangements for the Protocol currently include the MOP, the WGP, the Bureau, and the Compliance Committee.

2. The Convention and the Protocol are open for accession by any UN Member State. Both treaties offer well-established frameworks for reporting, exchanging information and experience, preparing guidance materials and recommendations, laying the groundwork for decision-making, taking joint commitments, and building capacity in different areas. The permanent Secretariat hosted by ECE services both treaties. Through numerous meetings' reports, Governments and a wide range of stakeholders participated in the meetings and continuously praised the Secretariat for its highly professional work.

3. The present self-evaluation report was commissioned under the same procedure to support this objective. It is the responsibility of the Executive Secretary and the Programme Management Unit (PMU) to ensure the consistent application of evaluation norms and standards throughout UNECE, as well as ensuring that the key results of evaluations are applied to the future planning of the UNECE programme.

4. The evaluation aimed to assess whether activities serviced by UNECE under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs were implemented in a coherent, effective, and efficient way and whether these activities were relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts in the three areas: 1) access to information, 2) public participation in decision-making, and 3) access to justice in environmental matters.

5. The scope of the evaluation covered the activities under the WGP to the Aarhus Convention; the WGP to the Protocol on PRTRs; and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: Task Force on Access to

¹ See status of ratifications, available from <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/status-ratification>

² Task forces have been established to facilitate progress on practical implementation of the three pillars of the Convention.

Information, Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making and Task Force on Access to Justice; in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. The evaluation also covers the sixth session of the MOP to the Aarhus Convention and the third session of the MOP to the Protocol on PRTRs with the Joint High-level segment held in 2017, which are laying the ground for all activities in this period.

6. Evaluation commenced in September 2022 and was finalised in January 2023. The evaluation was managed by UNECE PMU, which among others, provided guidance on the evaluation design and methodology and quality assurance on the draft report. The Secretary to the Aarhus Convention provided access to all relevant information and contacts of stakeholders.

7. The evaluation methodology was based on diverse techniques and tools, such as desk review, evaluation questions, and key informants' interviews. The evaluation used primary and secondary data sources to answer evaluation questions (EQs) and ascertain the efficacy of activities and interventions. The information collected from the different sources was aggregated and analysed. Finally, a synthesis of the findings was prepared and presented in the chapter on Conclusions. Triangulation design was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from multiple sources (e.g., documents, Parties, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and staff of UNECE). The evaluation was guided by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria³ as a point of departure for analysing and assessing, focusing on relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and coherence.

8. A key informant interview was conducted with nine informants (six women and three men). The interview process included two representatives from the NGOs, one from the Aarhus Centre, and two from the Parties. Participants in the study represented national environmental agencies in participating Parties, academic institutions, and international organisations. In addition, 30 questionnaires were completed, and 32 respondents participated in the survey since two individuals completed two questionnaires (for instance, by the focal points for the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs). Twenty females and twelve males responded. Among the 32 participants, nine are national focal points (NFPs) for the Aarhus Convention, while nine are national focal points for the Protocol. In addition, three respondents indicated they were national focal points for both the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol.

9. Most respondents (23) are government employees, primarily from national environmental ministries, agencies, and institutions. Additionally, there are representatives of international non-governmental organisations, local non-governmental organisations, judiciary, and intergovernmental organisations. Unfortunately, no response to the EQs was received from the Aarhus centres.⁴

10. There was a considerable share of respondents from the European Union (EU) member states in the survey, and two responses were received from countries that are not Parties to the Convention or its Protocol. Only a few questionnaires have been completed by representatives of the Eastern European (non-EU), Central Asian, and Caucasian countries.

11. Even though numerous risks were identified during the Inception process, limitations were not always mitigated during the evaluation process. The low turnout may be attributed to a combination of factors, including the general high workload among government and stakeholders and the regular opportunities to express their opinions and influence decisions under the Convention's and Protocol's activities. In addition, a lack of exposure to monitoring and evaluation practices may also be a contributing factor.

³ See:

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm#:~:text=The%20OECD%20DAC%20Network%20on,two%20principles%20for%20their%20use.>

⁴ See <https://aarhus.osce.org/about/aarhus-centers>

12. Due to limited resources, the evaluation was conducted remotely. A limitation of this method prevented the evaluator from observing the interaction between the Parties and NGOs and from assessing the quality of the services provided to them. This shortcoming was addressed by studying a number of meeting reports and watching several video recordings.

13. A significant limitation of the exercise was the large number of documents that had to be reviewed by the evaluator within the allotted timeframe, budget, and human resources allocated.

14. The number of participants who accepted to participate was low, especially among the representatives of the NGOs. Many informants opted to answer the EQs in written form. Despite sending structured questionnaires in English and Russian to 30 representatives of Aarhus Centres, no response to the survey was received.

15. Below is a matrix summarizing the key conclusions and recommendations of the present evaluation:

SUMMARY MATRIX OF FINDINGS, EVIDENCE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Conclusion 1. The UN ECE provided a wide range of relevant activities.</i></p> <p>Between 2018 and 2021, UNECE has serviced more than 50 meetings under the Convention and the Protocol. These activities were relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts in access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. These activities were implemented within the UNECE’s three interrelated core functions - policy dialogue, normative work, and technical cooperation with the member countries it supports.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Conclusion 2. The needed consensus and lessons learned were developed and exchanged through the activities.</i></p> <p>Activities allowed Parties, other member states, and NGOs to assess compliance, share experiences, and discuss policy issues. As a result, a wide variety of expertise was represented, and a consensus emerged on a large body of normative products. Despite this, it is not possible to quantify the extent of outreach achieved by these activities within the current evaluation, as a more strategic, targeted evaluation and greater resources are necessary to conduct such an evaluation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Conclusion 3. In the face of Pandemic-related restrictions, the UNECE performed well, adapted quickly, and accomplished the activities as planned. Even so, it remains essential to ensure that individuals with disabilities can participate in meetings equally.</i></p> <p>As a result of the transformation to remote and hybrid implementation, UNECE was able to implement its activities creatively and effectively, with participants' costs and carbon footprint significantly reduced. At the same time, other challenges, such as the need for additional substantive and technical staff and their training and addressing many technical issues, posed additional difficulties in organising those meetings. As a result, the number of participants attending the online and hybrid meetings and the number of sessions were unprecedented. All those activities were overseen by the Secretariat, ensuring effective participation by Parties, NGOs, and others during the pandemic. However, access to digitalised platforms should be provided to people with disabilities based on their specific needs.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Conclusion 4. A number of significant achievements were achieved in the reporting period of 2018-2021</i></p> <p>The most significant outcomes of the successfully implemented activities include, among others: a) the first international mechanism specifically safeguarding environmental defenders established within a legally binding framework; b) 20 decisions on compliance with the Aarhus Convention adopted to assist individual Parties to improve their legislation and practice in oil and gas extraction, gold mining, nuclear power plants,</p>

renewable energy, power lines, urban and spatial planning, access to justice, litter, forestry and the safety of environmental defenders; c) the Recommendations to promote the use of electronic information tools to support the implementation of the Convention in light of countries' transition to digitalisation. The major effects of the activities include implementing good practices and adopting the laws and regulations in Parties that would harmonise the national legislation with the provisions of the Convention and Protocol.

Conclusion 5. The participation of the NGOs was instrumental; however, not balanced across the Pan-European region.

The quality of the outcomes has improved due to the participation of NGOs and led not only to better outcomes for specific Convention and Protocol bodies but also to regular consultations by Parties, contributing greatly to compliance and implementation by Parties and States that have not yet acceded to the Convention and Protocol but are interested in learning. The NGO environment, however, is shrinking in Central Asian countries as a result of restrictive and controlling reforms. Therefore, the NGO-based Aarhus Centres have difficulty sustaining their existence. In addition, the downsizing of the main development organisations' funds further aggravates the situation. Without institutional support, Centres will be unable to fulfil their core mandate, which is to promote the Convention, raise awareness, and build the capacity of vulnerable communities to pursue their rights under the Aarhus Convention.

Conclusion 6. The budget must be adjusted to support strategic evaluation studies, joint regional projects, and the newly established Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders

The inherent limitation of resources is coupled with extraordinary demands made on the Secretariat (on average, it services one activity per month in addition to other ongoing work). This was mainly attributed to limited regular budget resources. However, it is necessary to allocate a reasonable budget for the effective implementation of the strategic evaluation (impact, thematic, case study, and ex-ante). Furthermore, the ongoing war in Ukraine necessitates that UNECE strengthens its technical, financial, and human resources to respond to environmental, economic, and humanitarian challenges resulting from these conflicts in the future.

Key Recommendations	Target
1. Continue to encourage a participatory approach by engaging Parties, NGOs, and other stakeholders in activities and preparing work programmes containing budgets and other documents for decision-making to maximize the commitments and possibility of mobilizing adequate resources. (In relation to Conclusion 5)	Aarhus Secretariat
2. Liaise with OSCE to explore its possible interest in designing a regional program to support Aarhus Centres that have been left behind in fulfilling their responsibilities. Communicate this issue to Parties, other interested Members States, relevant UN organisations, and their regional and development partners with similar agendas and interests. (In relation to Conclusion 5)	Aarhus Secretariat
3. Encourage Member States to allocate an adequate budget to: a) Adjust the organisation's human, technical, and financial resources to address the ongoing political and economic demands. b) Support newly established mechanisms for environmental defenders. c) Adjust the organisation's culture to support evaluation, including a greater awareness of the benefits and importance of accountability. (In relation to Conclusion 6)	UNECE and Aarhus Secretariats
4. Subject to resources, plan and budget for impact evaluation to assess the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention in the region. ECE may also consider the possibility of assessing the effectiveness and impact of the Compliance Committees and Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders. (In relation to Conclusion 2)	UNECE Secretariat

5. Continue enhancing synergies among relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes, including those related to the issue of environmental defenders.	Aarhus secretariat
6. Continue encouraging gender considerations and a human rights-based approach in the activities under the two treaties and monitor the participation of women and people with disability in the Parties' and stakeholders' delegations and in senior management positions in governing and subsidiary bodies. (In relation to cross-cutting issues)	Aarhus secretariat
7. Strive to ensure that the UNECE Secretariat's activities conform to the accessibility standards for people with disabilities, as well as that the outputs are produced and generated in an appropriate manner (e.g., sign language, etc.) and strive to allocate the required budget and technical assistance for this purpose. Report on the extent to which gender equality is being streamlined and monitor it periodically. As opposed to focusing on gender-disaggregated participation data, it is more appropriate to focus on gender representation in decision-making roles within the Party's delegations. (In relation to cross-cutting issues)	UNECE secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and context

16. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2001. As a model for other regions, the Aarhus Convention elaborates on the norms, standards, and rights derived from Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Parties to the Convention are required to comply with the three pillars of the Convention: access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters.

17. The principles enshrined in the Convention are universally accepted and beneficial for all countries; this is why it did not become an exclusive agreement of “rich countries”. On the contrary, the Convention presently has 46 Parties⁵, including countries all along the economic spectrum, from some of the world’s wealthiest economies to countries with some of the world’s lowest gross domestic products. The Convention is also recognized to bring value to all its Parties, wherever they stand on the political or economic spectrum. The Convention also has led the way in expanding the rights and opportunities of the public to participate in international processes. Thus, the Convention is a hallmark of international cooperation as well as a precursor to international efforts to resolve problems of common concern by expanding public participation rights and opportunities. Furthermore, by promoting the application of the Convention's three pillars, non-Parties, including those outside the UNECE region, are demonstrating its effectiveness and relevance for improving environmental governance.

18. For years, the protection of the environment and promotion of human rights were considered through different processes at international and national levels. The adoption of the Convention was a major step forward in bringing the two streams together. For the first time, the interlinked rights of access to information, public participation, and access to justice were addressed comprehensively in a single international treaty. Thus, combining elements of traditional multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and human rights-based instruments, with the multilateral institutional framework for its

⁵ See status of ratifications, available from <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/status-ratification>

implementation, the Convention is a unique instrument.

19. The main institutional arrangements for the Convention currently include the MOP, the WGP, the Bureau, the Compliance Committee, and three thematic task forces⁶. Over the years, task forces evolved as they received specific mandates related to priority substantive issues and can progress once their mandates have been fulfilled. In addition, the objectives and functions of these bodies vary, addressing different aspects associated with implementing the Convention. Furthermore, in 2021, the MOP adopted decision VII/9 establishing a rapid response mechanism for the protection of environmental defenders. This is the first international mechanism to safeguard environmental defenders within a legally binding framework under the United Nations system or other intergovernmental structures. This is a big achievement of Parties, NGOs, and the work of the UNECE.

20. The legal regime of the Convention has also been substantively advanced by an amendment concerning genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in 2005 and by the adoption of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol) in 2003. The entering into force of the Protocol in 2009 established a new legally binding international benchmark for reporting on emissions of pollutants from a wide range of potentially harmful activities. The Protocol now has 38 Parties. The Protocol is regarded as a cross-cutting tool for addressing climate change, heavy metals, and eco-toxic chemicals management, as well as for facilitating the development of compatible PRTR systems in different countries. It is the only legally binding international instrument on pollutant release and transfer registers. The main institutional arrangements for the Protocol currently include the MOP, the WGP, the Bureau, and the Compliance Committee.

21. The Convention and the Protocol are open for accession by any UN Member State. Both treaties offer well-established frameworks for reporting, exchanging information and experience, preparing guidance materials and recommendations, laying the groundwork for decision-making, taking joint commitments and building capacity in different areas. There has been considerable progress since the Convention and Protocol were adopted, and not only has the number of Parties grown but also, their reach has expanded. In parallel, there is a growing emphasis on deepening the level of understanding of the Convention's and Protocol's provisions and their implementation among the Parties.

22. A rather unique feature of the work under the two treaties is that all documents, subject to decision-making, are made available online well in advance prior to their adoption for comments by Parties, other interested Member States, NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, academia, and other stakeholders. Also, along with Parties, interested Member States and all the above stakeholders can participate and speak at meetings of the treaties' governing and subsidiary bodies.⁷ Such practice ensures a truly participatory approach and provides an effective opportunity to engage a wide range of stakeholders in work under the treaties.

23. It is undeniable that the implementation of the treaties remains ultimately the responsibility of each Party, with the necessary human and financial resources to be provided by the respective Parties within their jurisdictions. However, the multilateral framework provides opportunities through the work programmes for the achievement of implementation goals by means of various activities to address challenges, share successful experiences, and decide on common priorities for future work. These activities naturally also require the dedication of human and financial resources. Therefore, at the national and multilateral levels, the treaties' functioning and implementation depend on the availability of such resources.

⁶ Task Forces have been established to facilitate progress on practical implementation of the three pillars of the Convention.

⁷ See, for example, documents for decision-making and reports of governing and subsidiary bodies:
<https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation>

24. Both treaties are serviced by a permanent secretariat hosted by ECE. Through numerous meetings reports, Governments and a wide range of stakeholders participated in the meetings and continuously praised the secretariat for its highly professional work. At the same time, the most common concern expressed through the reports was the inherent limitation of resources. This was mainly attributed to a lack of steady financing, which made it difficult to do long-term planning, particularly with regard to staff.⁸ Since the financial schemes under both treaties are based on voluntary contributions and provide no guidance on their amount, the level of contributions fluctuates, making the funding of activities and extrabudgetary posts unpredictable and far from secure.⁹ This is coupled with limited regular budgetary resources allocated for the secretariat's work, which comprises only two professional staff and one part-time administrative assistant.

1.2 Mandate, Rationale, Purpose and Methodology

25. Based on the UNECE Evaluation Policy, the Secretariat conducts evaluations to promote organizational learning, improve program or project performance, and demonstrate accountability to member States and stakeholders. To achieve this goal, all programmes shall be evaluated over a fixed period of time, including periodic self-evaluation of activities as well as ad hoc in-depth evaluation of selected programme areas or topics. The present self-evaluation report was commissioned under the same procedure to support this objective. It is the responsibility of the Executive Secretary and the PMU to ensure the consistent application of evaluation norms and standards throughout UNECE, as well as ensuring that the key results of evaluations are applied to the future planning of the UNECE programme.

The purpose (objective), scope (coverage), reason, and use of the evaluation

26. The evaluation aimed to assess whether activities serviced by UNECE under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs were implemented in a coherent, effective, and efficient way and whether these activities were relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts in the three areas: 1) access to information, 2) public participation in decision-making, and 3) access to justice, in environmental matters.

The temporal, contextual, and geographic scope of the evaluation

27. The scope of the evaluation covered the activities under the WGP to the Aarhus Convention; the WGP to the Protocol on PRTRs; and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: Task Force on Access to Information, Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making and Task Force on Access to Justice; in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. The evaluation also covers the sixth session of the MOP to the Aarhus Convention and the third session of the MOP to the Protocol on PRTRs with the Joint High-level segment held in 2017, which are laying the ground for all activities in this period.

Phases of evaluation

28. *The inception Phase* was completed on 20 September with the delivery of the evaluation matrix, which included the agreed evaluation questions, strengthening the evaluation tools (questionnaires and online surveys), and finalizing the work plan.

⁸ See for example, Report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Convention's work programme for 2018–2021, ECE/MP.PP/2021/4: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/ECE_MP.PP_2021_4_E.pdf and report of the 25th meeting of the Convention's Working Group of the Parties: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/ECE_MP.PP_WG.1_2021_2_E.pdf

⁹ See decisions on financial arrangements:

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/English/ECE_MP.PP_2017_2_Add.1_E.pdf and

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/MOPP3/English/ECE_MP.PRTR_2017_6_Add.1_E.pdf

The Interim phase was completed in mid-October and included desk activities such as reviewing documentation, conducting interviews with key stakeholders, and collecting initial data using various tools, such as surveys.

The synthesis Phase was completed in November In this phase, the evaluator analyzed the feedback provided by the respondents to the EQs and key informant interviews. On 5 December, the first draft report was submitted to the reference group.

Evaluation Management

29. The evaluation was managed by UNECE PMU, which among others, provided guidance on the evaluation design and methodology and quality assurance on the draft report. The Secretary to the Aarhus Convention provided access to all relevant information and stakeholders' contacts.

Evaluation methodology

30. The evaluation methodology was based on diverse techniques and tools, such as desk review, evaluation questions, and key informants' interviews. The evaluation used primary and secondary data sources to answer EQs and ascertain the efficacy of activities and interventions. The information collected from the different sources was aggregated and analysed. Finally, a synthesis of the findings was prepared and presented in the chapter on Conclusions. Triangulation design was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from multiple sources (e.g., documents, Parties, NGOs, and staff of UNECE). The evaluation was guided by the UNEG norms and standards and the OECD DAC evaluation criteria as a point of departure for analysing and assessing, focusing on relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and coherence.

Application of Human-Rights-Based Approach and Gender Equality principles in the evaluation

31. Human Rights and Gender Equality principles were mainstreamed by ensuring equal opportunities for the participation of relevant duty-bearers and rights holders in the evaluation. During the inception phase, the expert assessed the extent of the Human-Rights Based Approach (HRBA) both in the design and in the implementation of activities by measuring the relevant outcomes in strengthening government institutions through technical partnerships (expert advice), creating platforms for grassroots voices to reach policymakers, good practices, policy advocacy, and research support. The relevant methodologies of UNEG's Guidance for Gender-Sensitive evaluations were adopted. This report presents relevant findings and recommendations from NGOs representing vulnerable groups.

Data collection Tool

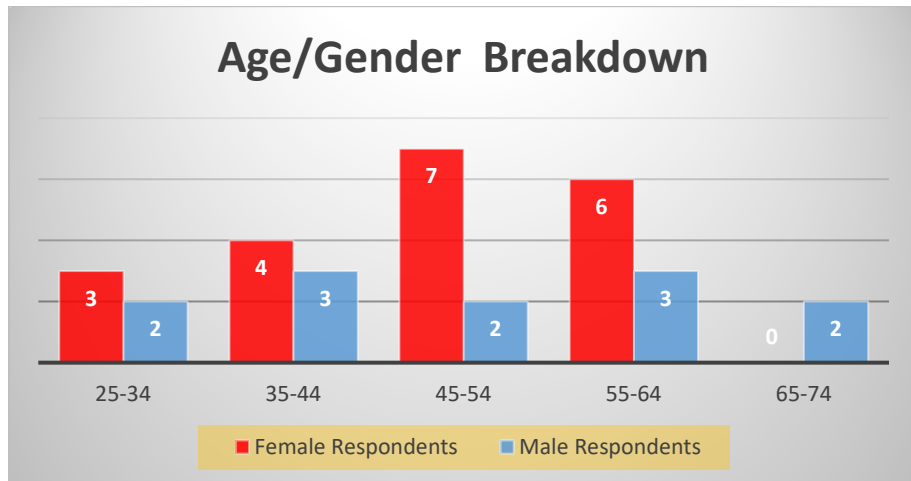
32. A number of data collection tools were used, including 1) an Evaluation Matrix with ten EQs, judgment criteria, indicators, and data collection tools; 2) EQs per the category of informants (judiciary, academia, and Aarhus Centres); Evaluation Questionnaire. In addition, there were rounds of online interviews with participating entities.

The statistics of the data collection process

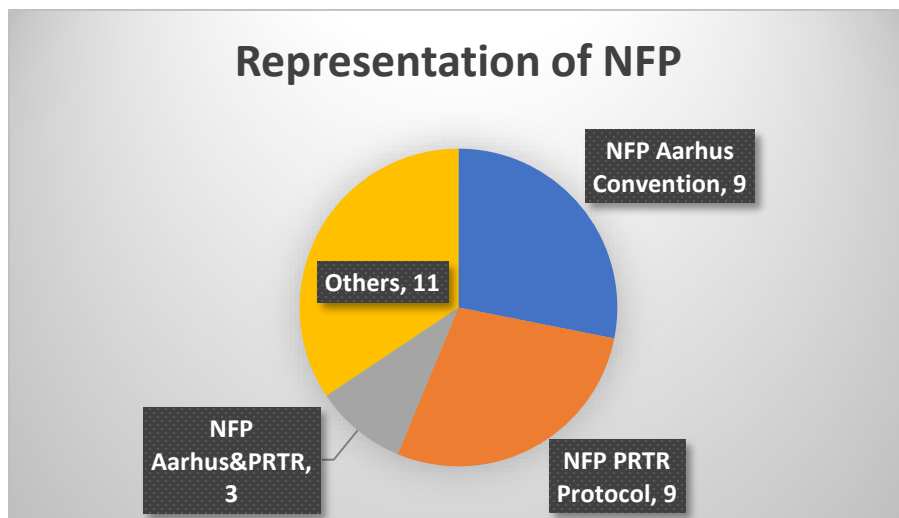
33. A key informant interview was conducted with nine informants (six women and three men). The interview process included two representatives from the NGOs, one representative from the Aarhus Centre, and two participants in the study represented environmental agencies in participating Parties, academic institutions, as well as international organizations.

34. In addition, 30 questionnaires were completed, and 32 informants participated in the survey since two individuals completed two questionnaires (for instance, by the focal points for the Aarhus Convention and

the Protocol on PRTRs). Twenty females and twelve males responded, with the following age breakdown as presented in the chart hereunder:

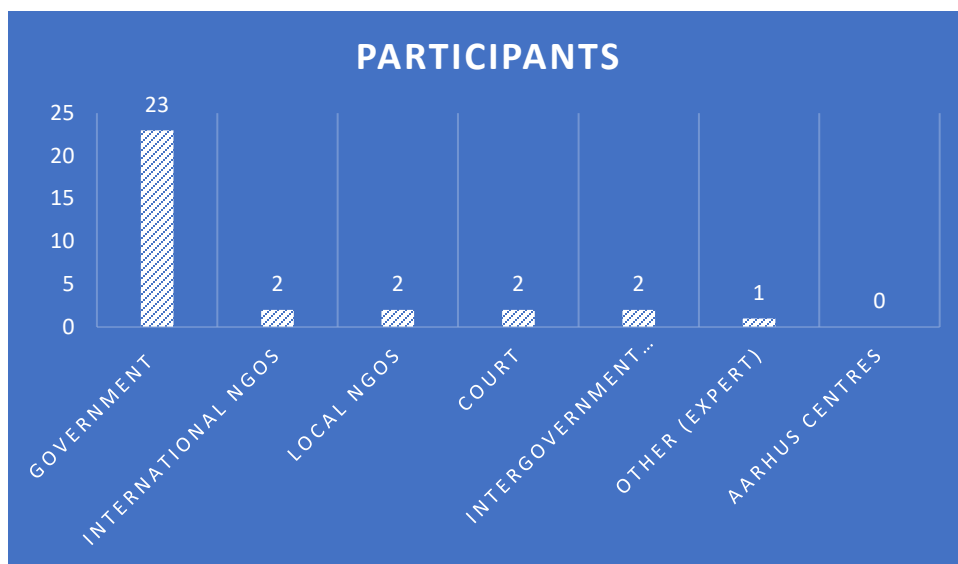


35. Of the 32 participants, nine are NFPs for the Aarhus Convention, and nine are national focal points for the Protocol. Additionally, 3 respondents indicated they were national focal points for both the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol.



36. The majority of respondents (23) are government employees, primarily from national environmental ministries, agencies, and institutions. Additionally, there are representatives of international NGOs, local NGOs, judiciary, and intergovernmental organizations. Unfortunately, no response to the survey was received from the Aarhus centres.¹⁰

¹⁰ See <https://aarhus.osce.org/about/aarhus-centers>



37. There is a considerable share of respondents from the EU member states in the survey, and two responses have been received from countries that are not Parties to the Convention or its Protocol. Only a few questionnaires have been completed by representatives of the Eastern European (non-EU), Central Asian, and Caucasian countries. The evaluator, who designed the questionnaire in Russian and offered to conduct the interview in Russian, Tajik, or Uzbek when English was a barrier to conducting the interview, was unable to mitigate this shortfall of data from the Central Asian countries and Aarhus centres located there.

Limitations to the evaluation

38. Despite the identification of numerous risks during the Inception process, there were a number of limitations during the evaluation process that could not always be mitigated. The low turnout of respondents to interviews may be attributed to different reasons, such as the high workload of Governments and stakeholders (on average 1 meeting per month is organized under the treaties), general satisfaction with the work under the treaties and regular opportunities to express their views and influence decisions at different meetings under the treaties. Other possible reasons may include a lack of such exposure to monitoring and evaluation practices. Otherwise, beneficiaries and stakeholders could possibly have been more proactive and would seize the opportunity to contribute lessons learned, identify potential risks and offer mitigations, and contribute to recommendations that would improve UNECE work.

39. Considering the limited resources allocated for the evaluation, the assignment was conducted remotely. Due to this limitation, the evaluator was unable to observe the level of interaction between the Parties to the Convention and NGOs, as well as to assess the quality of the services provided to the Parties and speak directly to people on the spot. As a means of addressing this shortcoming, a number of meetings' reports were studied, and several video recordings of the meetings were reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the environment of the meeting.

40. A significant limitation of the exercise was the large number of documents that had to be reviewed by the evaluator within the allotted timeframe, budget, and human resources allocated.

41. Key Informants' interviews with Parties and Aarhus Centres were limited, despite being offered by the Secretariat. A number of attempts were made to engage academia in this evaluation, but none were successful. Many informants opted to answer the EQs in written form. Despite sending structured questionnaires in English and Russian to 30 representatives of Aarhus Centres, no response to the survey was received.

II. EVALUATION FINDINGS

2.1 Relevance

Evaluation Question 1. Are the activities serviced by UNECE under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol relevant to nationally identified needs to advance efforts towards improved a) access to information, b) public participation in decision-making and c) access to justice?

Relevance of the activities toward the needs of the Party or stakeholders

42. The majority of the interviewees and respondents to the survey found the 17 activities of the UNECE relevant, while a very small percentage of respondents find these activities “somehow” relevant. When asked to provide an example to understand how far-reaching the relevance of the subject, format, and timelines of these activities, several respondents noted that thematic sessions at the meetings were relevant to their needs in terms of information sharing and exposure to best practices, exchange experience, and transfer knowledge. Moreover, these activities were relevant and greatly contributed to strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation at the national level. Another respondent noted that although not every topic in a varied program may be directly applicable to all Parties, they are crucial to understanding the broader context of the interventions within the UNECE region. A number of presentations and discussions with colleagues in other Parties and NGOs contributed to a deeper understanding of the Convention’s and Protocol's broader scope.

43. Respondents praised the Working Groups of the Parties format as relevant and an effective tool for delegations to make policy decisions, monitor their performance and establish professional networks. The following pertinent benefits were added to the meetings of the Protocol WGP: lectures and presentations on new developments within the PRTRs, information on innovations and new directions going beyond the Protocol for data access, PRTR.net Portal, Global Round Table on PRTRs, capacity building, a network of experts and NFPs for possible sharing of information and knowledge, facilitating reporting to international obligations, harmonizing pollution data standards across borders.

44. Furthermore, the OECD Working Party on PRTRs has been collaborating with the Protocol’s WGP for many years to support countries in establishing and implementing PRTRs. A country that hosted some high-level meetings noted that this was an opportunity to promote the application of the Aarhus Convention on a national level as well.

“The activities were relevant to the needs of the Parties to exchange information on how to follow up on their obligations under the Convention and Protocol, as well as how to carry out those obligations in an effective manner.”

(Party representative)

45. Following is a list of activities that respondents mentioned as being particularly relevant and effective:

- Agenda point on the “development of the Protocol” at Protocol’s WGPs; discussions at Convention 25th meeting of WGP referring to the rapid response mechanism for environmental defenders.
- The Aarhus Convention sixth session of MOP, where ten decisions concerning compliance by Parties were adopted. Moreover, a MOP request was made regarding the compliance of the EU, which prompted several countries to take significant steps to become compliant.

- Protocol third session of MOP is becoming increasingly relevant and helpful also for other processes. For example, at the 26th WGP of the Aarhus Convention, there was a thematic session on access to information with an emphasis on product information, which, including interventions from the floor regarding citizen science, indicate that the Protocol MOP 3 served as a major impetus for further action.

- In particular, NGO representatives appreciated the emphasis on civil society's role in supporting decision-making on implementing Sustainable Development Goals during the high-level segment of MOPs.
- One of the respondents stated that, in general, the WGs serve a crucial role in keeping the work and decision-making moving between MOPs, as well as providing a valuable forum for highlighting key thematic issues. For example, the 22nd meeting of the Convention's WGP was a significant event with many developments critical to the 2030 Agenda.

Evaluation Question 2. How relevant have the activities of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol been to attaining major UN global commitments, inter alia, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement?

46. Most respondents are confident that the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol promotes cross-cutting principles of environmental democracy and contributes directly or indirectly to the attainment of the major UN global commitments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. In thematic sessions under the Working Groups of the Parties, participants regularly address how the Aarhus principles can be applied to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate action in international forums dealing with environmental issues.

47. As stated by the respondents, there has been a significant emphasis on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the various Aarhus Convention and Protocol meetings. For instance, the Joint High-level Segment under the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs held in 2017 focused on the role of these unique instruments in furthering environmental democracy through implementing the SDGs. Furthermore, during the Joint High-level Segment, the Meetings of Parties adopted the Budva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Our Sustainable Future. The Declaration emphasizes the role of access to information, transparency, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters as key to achieving the SDG targets. To support deliberations of delegations, a comprehensive background report was also prepared on this subject matter.¹¹

48. Some respondents mentioned a specific role of the Protocol in promoting sustainable development by ensuring transparency. For example, in collaboration with the WGP to the Protocol on PRTRs, the OECD Working Party on PRTRs has explored the use of PRTR information to assess progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In addition to supporting the Paris Agreement¹², the Protocol also provides a crucial tool for encouraging developed countries to enhance their support for capacity-building activities related to climate change. A number of countries have established carbon neutrality targets as a result of these new collaborations, and trends reported to pollutant release, and transfer registers will be used to determine the effectiveness of these new initiatives.

49. Finally, the Aarhus Convention and Protocol provide an open forum for Parties and NGOs to communicate, promote, and advance a greater understanding of pressing environmental issues worldwide. Through the implementation of the Convention and Protocol in Parties and its application by other member States and organizations, as well as the oversight provided by the compliance committees and the rapid response mechanism, a more conducive environment is created for civil society to participate in the process of finding solutions to the environmental crisis.

2.2 Efficiency

Evaluation Question 3. Were provided resources sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes promptly and adequately?

¹¹ See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/joint-high-level-segment-under-meetings-parties-aarhus-convention-and>

¹² See: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

50. Based on the response to the evaluation question, approximately 10 to 13 participants per activity did not consider this question to be relevant to them. The evaluator notes, however, that regular annual reports containing a detailed overview of activities and of expenditures per work area are produced by the secretariat, made available online, translated into three UNECE languages and submitted for consideration, including the possibility to provide feedback, by Parties and wide range of stakeholders at the meetings of WGs and MOPs.¹³

51. As per the activity survey, between 11 and 16 respondents indicated that resources were adequate to perform all activities and monitor the implementation of outcomes by the Parties. In contrast, approximately four to five participants per activity indicated they believed resources were sufficient to carry out some activities but not all. The interviewees noted that the secretariat performed well in terms of the quality and timeliness of the information provided, the responsiveness of the staff, and the facilitation of these meetings. Respondents emphasized that in spite of limited resources, the Secretariat provides timely and effective services to all bodies and processes established under the treaties. The UNECE Environment Division services five environmental conventions with their protocols, also known as multilateral environmental agreements. The Division performs a number of tasks in this regard, e.g., it organizes and services meetings and other events, prepares numerous documents, liaises with Member States and stakeholders and collects and disseminates information among them.¹⁴

52. For the Aarhus Centres in Central Asia to effectively participate in the activities, however, a separate budget for their support will be necessary, according to the representative of the Aarhus Centre.

53. Insufficient budget and weak evaluation culture. The desk review of the past evaluation of UNECE concludes that the treaties' Secretariat operates on a limited budget. This factor came out during the interview with the stakeholders and was noted by the respondents to the survey. Additionally, there is a weak evaluation culture that has resulted in low interest in participating in interviews both by the Parties and the NGOs. In the present evaluation, oftentimes, the evaluation process and its benefits were unappreciated or misunderstood by the respondents. The revision of the most recent evaluation reports validated this factor.¹⁵

54. In order to understand what hinders a participatory evaluation, a deeper assessment of the evaluation policy may be necessary. When the determinants of evaluation are addressed, awareness of the benefits of evaluation may increase, and internal evaluations may be more credible and independent.

55. The scarce financial resources from the regular budget to evaluate activities funded through the regular budget has been a concern raised by ECE, for example, in the comments to the 2021 Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on Strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives¹⁶ and in the ECE 2021 Annual Report on evaluation¹⁷. Although the demand and expectations for the evaluation of ECE activities funded through the regular budget have increased, the resources have remained the same to address those demands.

¹³ See reports on the implementation of the work programmes and on contributions and expenditures submitted to the Working Groups of the Parties and to the Meetings of the Parties.

¹⁴ These include Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its protocols, Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Protocol on Water and Health, Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, Protocol on Civil Liability, Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.

¹⁵ p.23, par.47. Strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery, and policy directives, OIOS (March 2023)

¹⁶ A/76/69 page 38

¹⁷ p.9.par.37, Annual report on evaluation 2021. Informal Document No. 2022/16.UNECE

56. Furthermore, as mentioned by some of the respondents in this evaluation, as the office of the first Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under a new work area on the rapid response mechanism was established in 2021¹⁸, additional human and financial resources will be required to assist this institution in effectively functioning.

57. The organization's resources are insufficient to regularly conduct different types of evaluations that could measure the organization's effectiveness in all three pillars of the Convention, generate the data, and showcase the impact of the Convention on the three specific rights that it promotes and protects. This is particularly the case for the activities funded through the regular budget, as described above.

58. One way to address the issue of limited resources for evaluations of the activities of the MEAs would be to subject the projects implemented under the MEAs to the same evaluation policy applied to projects with a budget at or above USD 250,000, funded by the UN Development Account and extrabudgetary projects, i.e. subject them to mandatory internal evaluations.

Evaluation Question 4. In what ways did the organization adapt to COVID-19-related challenges?

59. In the period covering this evaluation, more than 50 meetings were organized under the Convention and the Protocol.¹⁹ At least 25 were affected by the pandemic-related restrictions that prevented the physical participation of many delegates. However, the secretariat quickly adapted its activities to respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its consequences, switched to online or hybrid mode, and succeeded in continuing its work without interruptions. Thanks to such a swift reaction, all meetings took place, and some important activities materialized to raise the issue of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public participation procedures. For example, the Convention's Compliance Committee prepared Recommendations with regard to holding public hearings through videoconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic²⁰ and issued a statement on the application of the Aarhus Convention during the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recovery phase.²¹ It was also noted that the introduction of online participation during and post the COVID-19 pandemic had proven a very useful tool, as meetings allowed for wider participation and the cost and carbon footprint of participants were also significantly reduced. However, the organization of such meetings required providing additional training for the staff to manage different information technology infrastructures and spending more time on the preparatory phase of activities to ensure proper consultations with delegations, the chairs of the respective subsidiary bodies and partner organizations, as well as liaising with conference services on numerous practical arrangements. Thus, arranging and servicing complex meetings in a hybrid or online format requires a high level of support from substantive and technical staff. In addition, there are a number of challenges associated with organizing such meetings. First, the unpredictability of the quality of the Internet connection and availability of the required equipment on the participants' side, and other technical issues may have an impact on substantive discussions and procedures. Furthermore, the limited number of meeting rooms at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, that are equipped for servicing online or hybrid meetings posed an additional challenge in organizing those meetings. In the future, it would be advisable to make decisions on holding such meetings based on the meetings' purpose. For example, meetings of small expert groups or the Bureau are less challenging to organize in such formats than complex meetings requiring interpretation, negotiations and decision-making. Moreover, the required quality of information technology infrastructure and, when needed, the availability of interpretation for remote participation, are key preconditions for organizing meetings in a hybrid or online format.

¹⁸ See: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Aarhus_MoP7_Decision_on_RRM_E.pdf

¹⁹ See: <https://unece.org/info/events/unece-meetings-and-events/environmental-policy/public-participation>

²⁰ See https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ece_mp_pp_c.1_2021_6_eng.pdf

²¹ See: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/ece.mp_pp_c.1.2020.5.add.1_acc.pdf

2.3 Coherence

Evaluation Question 5. How coherent is the collaboration with other entities (United Nations, other international organizations, civil society, academia, etc.) in delivering the activities?

60. Internal coordination and coherence. According to the analysis of the collected data, the majority of respondents are satisfied with the degree of coordination among the Convention's and Protocol's bodies and other organizations. Furthermore, many respondents reiterated their appreciation of the Secretariat's role in coordinating and ensuring coherence. To this end, the interviewed Parties considered that the work of the Secretariat is conducted with mutual coordination and logically connected agendas are clearly expressed and consistent. Further, regular engagements between the Convention and Protocol have contributed to the level of coherence and collaboration.

61. Respondents particularly appreciated the initiative of the Aarhus Secretariat to invite experts from other UN multilateral agreements to the treaties' meetings, particularly Task Forces, and suggested that it should be reinforced. According to one respondent, non-restricted and horizontal access to experts in relevant matters from the Member States is one factor that contributes to a sense of coherence in collaboration. Further, more frequent and regular meetings between the OECD and UNECE are necessary to enhance their cohesion and synergy.

62. Participants also suggested that greater collaboration with activities linked to negotiations of the Paris Agreement would have contributed to enhancing coherence in relevant areas. In the early days of a new treaty's negotiation, each group works in isolation, without communicating with other organizations. This results in duplication of efforts and pressure on countries and organizations to provide information that has not yet been made available. Since many organizations potentially possess information specified in the Protocol on PRTRs, developing mechanisms to prevent duplicate activities is also highly relevant.

63. Coherence, synergies, and complementarities are needed to promote synergies among relevant organizations by means of incorporating the principles of the Aarhus Convention in their activities. In addition, other bodies should cooperate more actively with the Secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol and allow adequate time for responses. The purpose of this would be to provide time to engage with the NGO community and give them an opportunity to provide input. According to a single respondent, the UN, its local partners, and the Government do not coordinate enough to avoid duplication of efforts on environmental projects at the national level. The evaluator notes at the same time that the secretariat is pursuing effective coordination and promotes synergy with numerous partners, also through coordination frameworks²² and online portals²³ under the Convention and the Protocol.

64. External coherence. The respondents' level of awareness of the coherence of the UNECE activities with other UN bodies and agencies is rather low despite the numerous information made available by the Secretariat.²⁴ The evaluator finds this due to the fact that no one mentioned the regional or joint work of the UNECE or, for example, the collaboration and the work of 6 Special Rapporteurs appointed by the Human Rights Council: Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment thematic reports, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change or the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) concerning environmental justice. On the contrary, the review of the documents provided that the secretariat cooperates with other UN agencies and regional commissions. Such examples are the Multilateral Environmental Agreements Information and Knowledge Management Initiative coordinated by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);

²² See <https://unece.org/env/pp/aarhus-convention-capacity-building> and <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/international-prtr-coordinating-group>

²³ <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/> and <https://prtr.unece.org/>

²⁴ See https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECE_MP.PP_2021_3_E.pdf

environmental performance reviews of countries; the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management policy framework; working with other United Nations bodies (in particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the UNDP, UNEP, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) and the UNEP Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean (UNEP/MAP) Coordinating Unit), other environmental treaty bodies (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes) and other international organizations (e.g., the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Court of Human Rights, the European Investment Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the Group on Earth Observations and the World Bank). Moreover, within the United Nations Environment Management Group, the secretariat acted as a focal point for ECE in the Issue Management Group on Human Rights and the Environment. The secretariat also continued to promote the use of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in the context of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

65. An example of a collaboration with the European Environmental Agency (EEA) on e-governance and open data was also provided during data collection. To this end, EEA implemented phase II of the project on Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) principles in Eastern Partnership countries (ENI SEIS II) that included access to information components.²⁵ One of the result areas of the mentioned project aims at raising awareness on the benefits of sharing environmental information and knowledge in close cooperation with the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA), Aarhus Secretariat, OSCE/Aarhus Centres, Regional Environmental Centers. This joint collaboration with the Parties resulted in many synergies, with the responsible ministries, the public and other stakeholders having access to regularly updated information. Through the joint UNECE-EEA workshop in Geneva and national round tables organised in 2019, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine received information on good practices for fostering environmental information sharing and dissemination, open data maturity reports, and roadmaps for these countries to improve their dissemination and sharing of environmental data through e-governance and open data initiatives.²⁶ As an outcome, the event promoted synergy by linking relevant initiatives of governments, partner organisations and other stakeholders to widen and improve the sharing and public accessibility of environmental information, including through electronic information tools and e-government, open government data, the SEIS in the pan-European region and other similar initiatives.²⁷

²⁵ <https://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east/areas-of-work/access-to-environmental-information>

²⁶ <https://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east/areas-of-work/communication/events/project-related-events/joint-unece-eea-workshop-on-open-data-for-the-environment>

²⁷ Ibid.

2.4 Effectiveness

Evaluation Question 6. What outcomes have been achieved through the collaboration with partners (expected/unexpected, positive/negative) in implementing the activities?

66. Perhaps, one of the most significant achievements mentioned by the respondent and verified through the desk review of the provided documents is the establishment under the Aarhus Convention of a rapid response mechanism for protecting environmental defenders in the form of a Special Rapporteur. The outcome of this historical moment is far-reaching as it may significantly advance environmental democracy and uphold the universal right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Importantly, the Special Rapporteur can also consider complaints concerning the alleged penalisation, persecution, and harassment of environmental defenders in countries that are not currently Party to the Aarhus Convention, including in Africa, Asia, and the Americas if the acts complained of are related to the operations of international companies based in a Party to the Aarhus Convention.²⁸

67. Other important observation is that the outcomes of the activities under the treaties assisted Parties and other interested States in their efforts to achieve a number of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), with its targets of 16.3 (the rule of law and equal access to justice for all), 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) and 16.10 (protection of fundamental freedoms), as well as Goal 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

68. NGOs. According to the interviewed stakeholders, synergies between international instruments and, in particular, in the context of Article 3(7) of the Convention regarding the promotion of the application of the Convention in international forums were effective. These actions were implemented by the Secretariat and bodies of the Convention in a meaningful way, notably in one of the thematic sessions of the 26th meeting of WGP, which had stimulating presentations and interventions. NGOs may, however, require additional guidance to determine when they should intervene or support the agenda to be most effective. Nevertheless, as a result of allowing NGOs and other members of the public to participate and comment, the quality of outcomes has improved. This has not only resulted in better outcomes for specific bodies of the Convention but also in regular consultations by Parties as a result of seeing NGOs contributions in that context, resulting in significant contributions to support compliance and implementation in these Parties as well as States that have not yet acceded to the Convention but are interested in learning from its Parties.

“The work of the Task Forces on Access to Information and Public Participation in Decision-Making in Environmental matters is a “wake-up call” in my country a number of reforms have been undertaken and others are still in progress, particularly in the legislative chapter and other practices that promote access to information and public participation.”

(Non-UNECE State representative)

69. Aarhus Centres. UNECE works with the OSCE on a range of economic, trade, energy, and environmental development issues. In turn, the OSCE’s network of 60 Aarhus Centres in 14 countries²⁹ supports the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol. According to one informant, the UNECE and OSCE supported adapting all three pillars of the Convention into the national legislation in Turkmenistan. The Aarhus Centre in Turkmenistan is fully sustained, and thanks to the received support,

²⁸ See: <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/mandate-and-functions-special-rapporteur> and https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Vision_for_mandate.pdf

²⁹ See <https://aarhus.osce.org/>

the Centre's employees can participate in important meetings in Geneva. By utilizing the best practices introduced in the activities between 2018 to 2021, the Centre prepared a draft law on ecological information in 2020, which was eventually adopted. Nevertheless, the evaluation revealed that while Aarhus Centres, funded and supported by the State, are performing well, those based on NGOs are in dire need of assistance. To be more specific, for a considerable period, the OSCE provided institutional support to Aarhus Centres in Central Asian countries. As a consequence of ongoing budget cuts within the OSCE, the amount of support for these centres will significantly decrease. As well as a lack of resources, the normative environment in which NGOs operate in Central Asia has also undergone reforms that adversely affect their work. At the grassroots level, the work of the centres is essential to increase awareness of the Aarhus Convention, capacity building and monitoring of rights.

70. Judiciary. A member of the judiciary stated that the number of cases had increased in their jurisdiction following the abandonment of high court fees in administrative proceedings. This was achieved after the NGOs raised this obstacle in the meetings under the Convention.

71. A respondent commented that the work of the Task Forces on Access to Information and Public Participation in Decision-Making in environmental matters is a “wake-up call” in his country as it relates to adhering to the Aarhus Convention. To this end, a number of reforms have been undertaken, and others are still in progress, particularly in the legislative chapter and other practices that promote access to information and public participation.

72. Other respondents emphasized that the country already maintains a well-established system of engaging the public on environmental issues and complies with most of the provisions and objectives of the Convention and Protocol. Nevertheless, the country participated in the Protocol on PRTRs negotiations to encourage international collaboration in developing effective PRTR regimes and reinforce the country's cooperative relationship with the UNECE.

Evaluation Question 7. To what extent do the activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol contribute to member States' attainment of their commitments under the 2030 Agenda and Paris agreement? How effective was the support of the Secretariat in servicing the activities?

73. The Aarhus Convention, the Protocol on PRTRs and the 2030 Agenda share a common concern of ensuring the health and well-being of present and future generations.³⁰ The human rights approach offered by the Convention and the Protocol to sustainable development provides a useful tool for breaking the silos and for an integrative perspective on sustainable development. The Convention seeks to achieve this objective through the promotion of access to information, public participation and access to justice. The Protocol offers an integrative approach to the provision of information on pollutants in order to “achieve a high level of protection for the environment as a whole, to move towards sustainable and environmentally sound development”.³¹

74. The overwhelming majority of respondents rated the effectiveness of the Secretariat's support in this area as “effective.” The Secretariat provided a very efficient and professional service and the required logistical support that enabled effective participation, ensuring timely and clear access to documents as well as assistance in any matters related to the meetings to facilitate smooth and active participation.

³⁰ See article 1 of the Aarhus Convention, the preamble to the Protocol on PRTRs and the preamble of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1). The full text of the Convention is available from <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/text>. The text of the Protocol on PRTRs is available from <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/prtrs-protocol-text>

³¹ See preamble to the Protocol on PRTRs.

75. The interviewed stakeholders provided concrete examples in response to these EQs stating that the bodies of the Convention and its Protocol have been instrumental to achieving the 2030 Agenda: the Budva Declaration, adopted by the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and to the Protocol at their Joint High-level Segment³², highlighted the critical importance of effective access to information, public participation and access to justice in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and demonstrated joint commitments of Parties in these areas; the 23rd meeting of WGP created a conducive environment for the NGO Women Engaged for a Common Future (WECF) to elaborate more on the relevance of the SDGs and principles of the Aarhus Convention and the Maastricht Recommendations³³. Furthermore, the event was important to address the shrinking civil space already identified in the Convention's MOP decision VI/2 and the need to engage disadvantaged populations and the youth in public participation matters. As a result, this work has led directly to better engagement. In particular, youth organizations have made their voices heard in recent events under the Convention and its Protocol and other international fora. Moreover, this work has contributed to new efforts to investigate the impact of environmental racism and how it may disproportionately affect women.

76. The respondents mentioned a number of SDGs had been positively impacted by the activities. The stocktaking of the collected data provided that almost all respondents cited SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) as the main target of activities. Furthermore, a number of respondents stated that the activities under the Aarhus Convention and Protocol contribute to effectively promoting and implementing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Other SDGs mentioned explicitly by several respondents:

SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being.

SDG 5 Gender equality.

SDG 6 Clean water and Sanitation.

SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy.

SDG 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.

SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities.

SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production.

SDG 13 Climate Action.

SDG 14 Life below water.

SDG 15 Life on land.

77. In general, desk review demonstrated that the issue of SDGs is addressed effectively and regularly at different meetings under the Convention and Protocol.

Evaluation Question 8. What were the challenges/obstacles to implementing the activities and expected accomplishments?

78. According to the interviewed Parties and stakeholders, time and financial resources are always limiting factors in implementing the activities. However, despite these challenges, the Secretariat and bodies responsible for delivering the activities were able to overcome them, especially during the difficult time of the pandemic restrictions.

79. The response from the respondent of the evaluation survey was a bit diverted to the challenges of implementations in their respective countries. It has been widely understood by participants in the present evaluation that the question on challenges encountered during the implementation refers to the challenges encountered in their respective countries. The following challenges were identified as relevant to the evaluated activities as well as being faced at the national level:

³² See https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/HLS/ECE_MP.PP_2017_16_Add.1-ECE_MP.PRTR_2017_2_Add.1_E.pdf

³³ See: <https://unece.org/environment-policy/publications/maastricht-recommendations-public-participation-decision-making>

- a) Efforts were made to ensure all the resources necessary to fulfil the obligations under the Protocol in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.
- b) The recent and ongoing economic hardships have affected the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol, especially the price increase.
- c) The need to find additional financing for the rapid response mechanism in the form of a Special Rapporteur for environmental defenders, as this is a new workflow.
- d) The coordination between the provinces and the federal state at the national level on issues relevant to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol.
- e) Lack of specialists' capacities, as well as a lack of financial resources for better implementation of PRTRs-related activities. For instance, as was specified by one respondent, countries lack the instruments/technology and technicians to measure and record the level of pollution being emitted.
- f) How to modernize the information system for collecting information for the PRTR.
- g) How to support citizen science and other means to collect and make environmental information accessible (understandable) to the public.
- h) How to promote more proactive rather than retroactive participation of the public society in decision-making.
- i) Lack of early engagement of NGOs and scientists/experts.
- j) Difficulties in access to justice (courts) in the EU because the EU directives do not generally contain specific rules on access to national tribunals and the claims to be submitted. For the time being, the most used way to ensure access to national courts for the EU law (and national measures implementing EU law) is through interpreting the Court of Justice.
- k) Access to the court statistics on environmental disputes.

2.5 Cross-Cutting issues

Evaluation Question 9. How did UNECE ensure that women and men had equal opportunities to gain from the process (specific strategies put in place to ensure right-based and gender-equal participation)?

80. Equal opportunities. Most of the respondents who answered the question on the extent of the outcomes contributed to the empowerment of vulnerable groups provided “a satisfactory” answer, followed by “very satisfactory.” Based on the respondents’ observations, the involvement and participation of women in all activities and meetings were adequate. Women comprise a large percentage (sometimes even the majority) of the participants - the Aarhus family.

81. By promoting inclusive and effective public participation, the Aarhus Convention safeguards without discrimination the rights of every person with regard to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. The same is true for the Convention’s

Protocol on PRTRs with regard to PRTRs. The secretariat takes gender aspects into account in all activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol. Throughout the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and Protocol Work Programmes for 2018-2021, equal opportunities were provided for women and men to participate. There is a great benefit to the Convention and the Protocol and their processes, particularly the strong involvement of women from NGOs, which facilitates not only equal participation but also the crucial perspective it confers. In one survey response, an individual noted that women appear to contribute much of the work in promoting the principles of the Aarhus Convention and carry a greater burden than the male half of society. Moreover, through the Budva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Our Sustainable Future, Parties to both treaties recognised the special needs of persons and groups in vulnerable situations. In addition, several guidance materials, such as [Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools](#)³⁴ and the [Maastricht Recommendations on Public Participation in Decision-making](#)³⁵, devote special attention to the public in vulnerable situations (e.g., vulnerable and/or marginalized groups such as children, older people, women in some societies, migrants, people with disabilities, those with low literacy or language barriers, ethnic or religious minorities, economically disadvantaged groups, those without access to the Internet, television or radio, etc.). The [Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums](#)³⁶, in their turn, State that where members of the public have differentiated capacity, resources, socio-cultural circumstances or economic or political influence, special measures should be taken to ensure a balanced and equitable process. Processes and mechanisms for international access should be designed to promote transparency, minimize inequality, avoid the exercise of undue economic or political influence, and facilitate the participation of those constituencies that are most directly affected and might not have the means for participation without encouragement and support.

82. The Environment Division also encourages a gender-balanced delegation of delegates to all UNECE meetings to ensure equal participation by male and female representatives.

83. However, the respondents to the present evaluation provided that, at the same time situation is not balanced across all bodies of the Convention and Protocol, and there could be multiple reasons that can hinder the equal participation of women in these bodies. It is primarily due to the fact that women still frequently serve as environmental, gender, and minority advocates at the local level. When taking on the role of defender at the local level, there is a tremendous amount of work and commitment involved that leaves little time for involvement in the international work of these organizations. In addition, there are cultural practices in some countries that do not allow women to participate in decision-making processes, which also negatively impacts their representation in national and international bodies. UNECE should consider these factors when fine-tuning its current mechanisms to ensure equal participation of women in all aspects of the processes within the organization.

*“The Convention and its bodies have created a remarkably enabling environment for women. If anything, women have been and remain the drivers of the Convention, its Protocol, and activities taken thereunder.
(NGO Representative)”*

84. The evaluator notes that possible approaches to gathering gender-and vulnerability disaggregated data would have enriched the content of the UNECE Annual Reports, especially how diverse, vulnerable groups have benefited from direct participation and representation in these activities (ethnic, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, indigenous people, labour migrants, children, and youth).

85. Rights-based approach. A major objective of the activities serviced by the secretariat is to promote the rights of the people since these activities are structured around specific rights based on the three main pillars of the Convention and its Protocol. Platforms, forums, exchanges of opinions and practices, policy

³⁴ See <https://unece.org/environment/documents/2022/02/updated-recommendations-more-effective-use-electronic-information>

³⁵ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/publications/maastricht-recommendations-public-participation-decision-making>

³⁶ See <https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2005/pp/ece/ece.mp.pp.2005.2.add.5.e.pdf>

dialogues, decision-making and negotiations result from interactions between duty-bearers and rights-holders. In this environment, the work of the Secretariat was vital to provide efficient and effective support across all state and non-state actors. For example, in 2020 Secretariat prepared an information note on the situation regarding environmental defenders in Parties to the Aarhus Convention from 2017 to 2020. Reports, decisions, and reports of harassment and persecution of environmental defenders are compiled in this note. There were 14 Parties included in the document, and it was widely circulated. The interviewed stakeholders provided that the organization's work is appreciated in connection with the Youth organizations that have made their voices increasingly heard not only in recent events under the Convention and its Protocol but also at the “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference and other international fora.

86. Nonetheless, respondents indicated that a better outreach to marginalized groups (for example, Santi and Roma populations) who frequently encounter environmental discrimination would be beneficial, while established NGOs can serve as a bridge. This could be an interesting thematic topic at an upcoming Task Force meeting or thematic session or supported through other means. In the other part of the survey, the NGO representative also mentioned the need to address the shrinking civil space already identified in Convention’s MOP decision VI/2 and the need to engage disadvantaged populations and the youth in public participation matters. This work has led directly to better engagement. Additionally, the evaluation revealed that UNECE still needs to enhance its facilities and platforms so that people with impaired reading and listening abilities have an adequate means of accessing information.

87. Lastly, many informants in this evaluation agree that the work leading up to the election of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders in 2022 will leverage the response to the injustices related to vulnerable groups and minorities rights to information, participation and environmental justice and further enhance the ECE’s further efforts to address the rights and interests of vulnerable groups.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

88. Between 2018 and 2021, UNECE has serviced more than 50 meetings under the Convention and the Protocol. These activities were relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts in three areas: 1) access to information, including PRTRs, 2) public participation in decision-making, and 3) access to justice in environmental matters. These activities were implemented within the UNECE’s three interrelated core functions - policy dialogue, normative work, and technical cooperation with the member countries it supports.

89. The activities provided a neutral platform for assessing compliance, sharing experiences, policy dialogue and decision-making among Parties, other Member States, NGOs and other stakeholders, where a plethora of delegates with different expertise was effectively convened to advance the implementation of the Convention and Protocol, and a consensus on a large and varied body of normative products was facilitated.

90. COVID-19-related restrictions have also caused UNECE to change, and it adapted quickly. Nevertheless, UNECE accomplished the activities according to plan and creatively and effectively conducted online and hybrid meetings and other activities. Thus, meetings continued effectively, with participants' costs and carbon footprint significantly reduced, while other challenges, such as the need for additional substantive and technical staff and their training and addressing many technical issues posed additional difficulties in organizing those meetings. The number of participants attending the online and hybrid meetings and the number of sessions were unprecedented. In all those activities, the Secretariat was a key actor in ensuring the effective participation of the Parties, NGOs, and other stakeholders during the pandemic.

91. Thanks to the level of transparency ensured through timely updates and distribution of agendas and other documents, the activities were implemented coherently, effectively, and efficiently. People with disabilities, however, should have access to digitalized platforms in accordance with their needs.

92. The most significant outcomes of the successfully implemented activities include, among others, established under the Aarhus Convention, the first international mechanism specifically safeguarding environmental defenders established within a legally binding framework either under the United Nations system or other intergovernmental structure that may significantly advance environmental democracy, uphold the universal right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Furthermore, 20 decisions on compliance with the Aarhus Convention were adopted in 2021 to assist individual Parties in improving their legislation and practice in such areas as oil and gas extraction, gold mining, nuclear power plants, renewable energy, power lines, urban and spatial planning, access to justice, litter, forestry and the safety of environmental defenders; and the Recommendations to promote the use of electronic information tools were adopted to support the implementation of the Convention in light of countries' transition to digitalisation. A decision on developing the Protocol was adopted by the treaty's MOP to make PRTRs a useful tool for decision-making in various areas, such as public health, resource consumption, urban planning, and emissions reduction. Moreover, joint commitments were made to further sustainable development goals and promote sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning.³⁷ The major effects of the activities include the implementation of good practices and adopting the laws and regulations in Parties that would harmonise the national legislation with the provisions of the Convention and Protocol. Furthermore, the activities have a wider effect on enhancing public rights in other interested members States and on promoting transparency and public engagement in the work of many international organisations and processes across.

93. By providing NGOs and other members of the public with the opportunity to participate and provide comments, the quality of the outcomes has improved. NGO contributions in that context have led not only to better outcomes for specific Convention and Protocol bodies but also to regular consultations by Parties, contributing greatly to compliance and implementation by Parties and States that have not yet acceded to the Convention and Protocol but are interested in learning. The NGO environment, however, is shrinking in Central Asian countries as a result of restrictive and controlling reforms. Therefore, the NGO-based Aarhus Centres have difficulty sustaining their existence. The situation is being exacerbated by the main development organisations downsizing their budgets.

94. The secretariat takes gender aspects into account in all activities under Aarhus Convention and its Protocol. Throughout the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and Protocol Work Programmes for 2018-2021, equal opportunities were provided for women and men to participate. There is, however, a need to promote an equitable distribution of opportunities among all bodies of the Convention and Protocol. This applies to encouraging the participation of vulnerable individuals and groups and encouraging them to intervene at meetings held under the Convention and its Protocol.

95. Both from the survey and from the interviews, the secretariat was praised for its support. At the same time, the inherent limitation of resources is coupled with extraordinary demands made on the secretariat (on average, it services one activity per month in addition to other ongoing work). This was mainly attributed to limited regular budget resources.

96. Furthermore, because of the ongoing war in Ukraine, UNECE requires adequate financial, human and technical capacities in order to meet environmental and economic challenges as well as humanitarian needs arising from this protracted conflict.

Conclusions

³⁷ See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/MoP7-MoPP4-JHLS>

Conclusion 1. The UN ECE provided a wide range of relevant activities.

Between 2018 and 2021, UNECE has serviced more than 50 meetings under the Convention and the Protocol. These activities were relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts in access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. These activities were implemented within the UNECE's three interrelated core functions - policy dialogue, normative work, and technical cooperation with the member countries it supports.

Conclusion 2. The needed consensus and lessons learned were developed and exchanged through the activities.

Activities allowed Parties, other member states, and NGOs to assess compliance, share experiences, and discuss policy issues. As a result, a wide variety of expertise was represented, and a consensus emerged on a large body of normative products. Despite this, it is not possible to quantify the extent of outreach achieved by these activities within the current evaluation, as a more strategic, targeted evaluation and greater resources are necessary to conduct such an evaluation.

Conclusion 3. In the face of Pandemic-related restrictions, the UNECE performed well, adapted quickly, and accomplished the activities as planned. Even so, it remains essential to ensure that individuals with disabilities can participate in meetings equally.

As a result of the transformation to remote and hybrid implementation, UNECE was able to implement its activities creatively and effectively, with participants' costs and carbon footprint significantly reduced. At the same time, other challenges, such as the need for additional substantive and technical staff and their training and addressing many technical issues, posed additional difficulties in organising those meetings. As a result, the number of participants attending the online and hybrid meetings and the number of sessions were unprecedented. All those activities were overseen by the Secretariat, ensuring effective participation by Parties, NGOs, and others during the pandemic. However, access to digitalised platforms should be provided to people with disabilities based on their specific needs.

Conclusion 4. A number of significant achievements were attained in the reporting period of 2018-2021

The most significant outcomes of the successfully implemented activities include, among others: a) the first international mechanism specifically safeguarding environmental defenders established within a legally binding framework; b) 20 decisions on compliance with the Aarhus Convention adopted to assist individual Parties to improve their legislation and practice in oil and gas extraction, gold mining, nuclear power plants, renewable energy, power lines, urban and spatial planning, access to justice, litter, forestry and the safety of environmental defenders; c) the Recommendations to promote the use of electronic information tools to support the implementation of the Convention in light of countries' transition to digitalisation. The major effects of the activities include implementing good practices and adopting the laws and regulations in Parties that would harmonise the national legislation with the provisions of the Convention and Protocol.

Conclusion 5. The participation of the NGOs was instrumental; however, not balanced across the Pan-European region.

The quality of the outcomes has improved due to the participation of NGOs and led not only to better outcomes for specific Convention and Protocol bodies but also to regular consultations by Parties, contributing greatly to compliance and implementation by Parties and States that have not yet acceded to the Convention and Protocol but are interested in learning. The NGO environment, however, is shrinking in Central Asian countries as a result of restrictive and controlling reforms. Therefore, the NGO-based Aarhus Centres have difficulty sustaining their existence. In addition, the downsizing of the main development organisations' funds further aggravates the situation. Without institutional support, Centres will be unable to fulfil their core mandate, which is to promote the Convention, raise awareness, and build the capacity of vulnerable communities to pursue their rights under the Aarhus Convention.

Conclusion 6. The budget must be adjusted to support strategic evaluation studies, joint regional projects, and the newly established Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders	
The inherent limitation of resources is coupled with extraordinary demands made on the Secretariat (on average, it services one activity per month in addition to other ongoing work). This was mainly attributed to limited regular budget resources. However, it is necessary to allocate a reasonable budget for the effective implementation of the strategic evaluation (impact, thematic, case study, and ex-ante). Furthermore, the ongoing war in Ukraine necessitates that UNECE strengthens its technical, financial, and human resources to respond to environmental, economic, and humanitarian challenges resulting from these conflicts in the future.	
Key Recommendations	Target
1. Continue to encourage a participatory approach by engaging Parties, NGOs, and other stakeholders in activities and preparing work programmes containing budgets and other documents for decision-making to maximize the commitments and possibility of mobilizing adequate resources. (In relation to Conclusion 5)	Aarhus Secretariat
2. Liaise with OSCE to explore its possible interest in designing a regional program to support Aarhus Centres that have been left behind in fulfilling their responsibilities. Communicate this issue to Parties, other interested Members States, relevant UN organisations, and their regional and development partners with similar agendas and interests. (In relation to Conclusion 5)	Aarhus Secretariat
3. Encourage Member States to allocate an adequate budget to: a) Adjust the organisation's human, technical, and financial resources to address the ongoing political and economic demands. b) Support newly established mechanisms for environmental defenders. c) Adjust the organisation's culture to support evaluation, including a greater awareness of the benefits and importance of accountability. (In relation to Conclusion 6)	UNECE and Aarhus Secretariats
4. Subject to resources, plan and budget for impact evaluation to assess the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention in the region. ECE may also consider the possibility of assessing the effectiveness and impact of the Compliance Committees and Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders. (In relation to Conclusion 2)	UNECE Secretariat
5. Continue enhancing synergies among relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes, including those related to the issue of environmental defenders.	Aarhus secretariat
6. Continue encouraging gender considerations and a human rights-based approach in the activities under the two treaties and monitor the participation of women and people with disability in the Parties' and stakeholders' delegations and in senior management positions in governing and subsidiary bodies. (In relation to cross-cutting issues)	Aarhus secretariat
7. Strive to ensure that the UNECE Secretariat's activities conform to the accessibility standards for people with disabilities, as well as that the outputs are produced and generated in an appropriate manner (e.g., sign language, etc.) and strive to allocate the required budget and technical assistance for this purpose. Report on the extent to which gender equality is being streamlined and monitor it periodically. As opposed to focusing on gender-disaggregated participation data, it is more appropriate to focus on gender representation in decision-making roles within the Party's delegations. (In relation to cross-cutting issues)	UNECE secretariat

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Self-evaluation on the activities serviced by UNECE under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) (2018-2021)

I. Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess whether activities serviced by ECE under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) were implemented in a coherent, effective and efficient way and whether these activities were relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts towards improved public participation in decision-making and access to information and to justice in environmental matters.

The results of the evaluation are expected to contribute to a longer-term vision for the intergovernmental work under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol and to raise awareness of these activities. The outcomes of the evaluation can be used to enhance outreach to policymakers and other major stakeholders to strengthen their engagement in intergovernmental processes and to improve the methods and processes of intergovernmental work that support the Aarhus Convention and Protocol on PRTRs objectives.

II. Scope of activities for evaluation

The evaluation will explore the activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in line with their adopted work programmes during the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2021. The activities are serviced by the secretariat within the ECE Environment sub-programme.

The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality need to be integrated into all stages of the evaluation in compliance with the United Nations Evaluation Group's revised gender-related norms and standards. Therefore, the evaluation will assess how the activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realization of human rights, with an emphasis on 'leaving no one behind' and, if needed, it will make recommendations on how these considerations can be better addressed in future activities.

III. Background

The [Aarhus Convention](#) and its [Protocol on PRTRs](#) aim to empower the public with the right to access information, participate in decision-making in environmental matters and seek justice. They are the only legally binding global instruments on environmental democracy open for accession by any UN Member State. Their powerful twin protections for the environment and human rights can help us respond to many challenges facing our world: from climate change and the loss of biodiversity and air and water pollution to poverty eradication and security. They provide a solid framework for governments to engage the public effectively in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs.

In its role as the secretariat, its services activities under the Convention and its Protocol are in line with the adopted work programmes.

The Secretariat cooperates and coordinates the activities with other United Nations agencies and international governmental and non-governmental organizations active in the fields of public participation, human rights and the environment to promote synergy and avoid duplication.

IV. Issues

The evaluation will answer the following questions:

Relevance

1. Are the activities serviced by UNECE under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol relevant for advancing intergovernmental efforts towards improved public participation in decision-making and access to information and to justice in environmental matters?
2. How relevant have the activities of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol been to attaining major UN global commitments, inter alia, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement?
3. To what extent have the activities of the Aarhus Convention, and its Protocol contributed to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the realization of human rights, with an emphasis on "leaving no one behind"?

Coherence

4. How coherent is the collaboration with other entities (United Nations, other international organizations, civil society, academia, etc.) in delivering the activities?
5. To what extent has the collaboration with other entities allowed identifying synergies and avoiding duplications?
6. What outcomes have been achieved through the collaboration with partners (expected/unexpected, positive/negative) in the implementation of the activities? Could this engagement with partners and various stakeholder groups be improved?

Effectiveness

7. To what extent do the activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol contribute to member States' attainment of their commitments under the 2030 Agenda and Paris agreement?
8. How effective was the support of the secretariat in servicing the activities?
9. What were the challenges/obstacles to implementing the activities and expected accomplishments set forth?

Efficiency

10. Were there sufficient resources to achieve the intended outcomes, including in a timely manner?
11. Have the available resources been used efficiently to deliver expected outputs?

V. Methodology

The evaluation will adopt a theory-driven, utilization-focused and gender and human rights-responsive approach. The evaluator is required to use a mixed-method approach, including qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis as the basis for a triangulation exercise of all available data to draw conclusions and findings.

The evaluation will be conducted on the basis of the following:

1. A desk review of all relevant documents over the period, including:

- All relevant documents, including materials developed in support of the activities (agendas, plans, participant lists, background documents, final reports and publications)
 - Reports prepared under the Convention/Protocol and its Bureau; Reports on annual work programme implementation
 - Proposed programme budgets covering the evaluation period
 - Relevant UN and ECE resolutions on the matter.
2. A tailored questionnaire will be developed by the evaluator in consultation with ECE to assess the views of stakeholders: Parties, experts, staff from ECE, other regional commissions and relevant counterparts in the United Nations System and other international organizations.
 3. The questionnaire will be followed by interviews of selected stakeholders (methodology to be determined by the evaluator in consultation with ECE). These will be carried out via phone or other electronic means of communication. The results of the survey will be disaggregated by gender.

The report will summarize the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation. An executive summary (max. two pages) will sum up the methodology of the evaluation, key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

All material needed for the evaluation, will be provided to the consultant. In addition to the documents mentioned above in 1), the Programme Manager will provide the list of persons to be interviewed by telephone. ECE will provide support and further explanation to the evaluator as needed.

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the [ECE Evaluation Policy](#). A gender-responsive methodology, methods and tools, and data techniques will be selected. The evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations will reflect a gender analysis.

VI. Evaluation schedule³⁸

April 2022	ToR finalized
July 2022	Evaluator selected
August 2022	Contract signed. Evaluator starts the desk review
end-August 2022	Evaluator submits inception report including survey design
September 2022	Launch of data gathering and conduct of interviews, as needed
October 2022	Evaluator submits draft report
November 2022	Evaluator submits final report

VII. Resources

The Programme Management Unit (PMU) will manage the evaluation and will be involved in the following steps: Selection of the evaluator; Preparation and clearance of the Terms of Reference; Provision of guidance to the Secretary, Aarhus Convention and to the evaluator as needed on the evaluation design and methodology; Clearance of the final report after quality assurance of the draft report.

The Secretary, Aarhus Convention, in consultation with the Division Director, will be involved in the following steps: Provide all documentation needed for desk review, contact details, support and guidance to the evaluation consultant as needed throughout the timeline of the evaluation; Advise the evaluator on

³⁸ Final timetable to be agreed following engagement of the evaluator

the recipients for the questionnaire and for follow-up interviews; Process and manage the consultancy contract of the evaluator, along the key milestones agreed with PMU.

VIII. Intended use / Next steps

The evaluation will be consistent with the UNECE Evaluation Policy. The results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future activities of the Environment subprogramme in support of the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris agreement.

Following the issuance of the final report, the Secretary Aarhus Convention, in consultation with the Division Director, will develop a management response for addressing the recommendations made by the evaluator. The final evaluation report, the management response and the progress on the implementation of recommendations will be publicly available on the UNECE website.

IX. Criteria for evaluation

The evaluator should have:

- An advanced university degree or equivalent background in relevant disciplines, with specialized training in areas such as evaluation, project management and social statistics.
- Knowledge of and experience in working with intergovernmental processes, environmental policy and/or human rights.
- Relevant professional experience in the design and management of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, project planning, monitoring and management, gender mainstreaming and human rights due diligence.
- Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations.
- Fluency in written and spoken English. Knowledge of another language may be an advantage.

Evaluators should declare any conflict of interest to ECE before embarking on an evaluation project and at any point where such conflict occurs.

Questionnaire

Self-evaluation of the activities serviced by UNECE under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

(2018-2021)

Please accept our sincere thanks for taking part in this survey. The feedback you provide will help shape our work going forward. Please send your response before 15 November 2022 to: aarhus.survey@un.org

This Questionnaire is distributed to Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, other interested States and major stakeholders involved in the activities under the two agreements. The Questionnaire was designed to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of activities under the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. The Questionnaire also covers the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017, which are laying the ground for all activities in this period.

Among the objectives of this Questionnaire are:

Collect information about how Parties and stakeholders perceive activities' relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Examine potential barriers to smooth implementation and smooth functioning.

Assess the overall impact of the conducted activities on the promotion of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters in Parties. In addition, assess the level of gender mainstreaming within the implemented activities and the overall impact of the conducted activities on the promotion of gender equality and human rights.

Collect relevant recommendations

Important: The evaluation is conducted by an independent evaluator bound by the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the United Nations. Evaluators shall respect people's right to provide information in confidence, the scope and limits of confidentiality of the present document are limited to the evaluator, and sensitive information cannot be traced to its source.

CONTACT INFORMATION (Note, this information will not be made public)

Please provide the name and contact data of the person who filled in the Questionnaire:

A national focal point for the Aarhus Convention Yes No

A national focal point for the Protocol on PRTRs Yes No

First Name:

Last Name:

Position:

Name of the Organization:

Type of organization: Government Intergovernmental organization Non-governmental organization Other (please specify)

Address:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Part I. Relevance – Extend the relevance of the activities towards the needs of the Party or stakeholders

EQ 1. How relevant were the below activities towards the needs of the country or organization you represent (policy or legislative change and reforms)?

Please consider any of the following aspects in considering the relevance of the activity:

Whether the activities are responding to a well-identified problem.

Whether activities were targeted and took into account the various priorities and expectations or perceptions expressed by the target groups and final beneficiaries.

Whether activities are focused and feasible in the given context.

Whether the activity is well aligned with the country's relevant policies and international frameworks and strengthens the national implementation and accountability systems.

Whether activity design was gender-sensitive, namely, provided equal opportunities for all genders to participate.

What difference and added value (perhaps innovative) did the activity bring to final beneficiaries, target groups and institutional set-ups?

Please, identify the gaps you will most probably address in the recommendations.

Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very relevant							
Relevant							
Somehow relevant							
Not relevant							
Don't know							
Not applicable to me							

Please, provide examples (optional) of relevant activities:

EQ 2. How relevant have the below-mentioned activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol been to attaining major UN global commitments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement? Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and

three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very relevant							
Relevant							
Somehow relevant							
Not relevant							
Don't know							
Not applicable to me							

What is the reason for your score above?

Answer:

EQ 3. What is your satisfaction level with the extent of activities promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as promoting human rights and an emphasis on "leaving no one behind"? Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking: Please indicate with	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus	Meeting of the Parties to	Working Group of the Parties	Working Group of the Parties	Task Force on Access to	Task Force on Public	Task Force on Access to
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X in the relevant cell.	Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very Satisfied							
Satisfied							
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied							
Dissatisfied							
Very dissatisfied							
Not applicable to me							

Part II. Coherence: Degree of internal and external cohesion and coordination among Convention’s and Protocol’s bodies and other organizations.

E.Q. 4. What is the degree of cohesion through promoting synergies and avoiding duplication of efforts between relevant organizations (United Nations, other international organizations)? Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking: Please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very Satisfied							
Satisfied							
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied							

Dissatisfied							
Very dissatisfied							
Not applicable to me							

Are there any factors that contribute to or hinder coherence in collaboration?

Part III. Effectiveness: The extent to which the activities achieved/or are expected to achieve their objectives and results, including any differential results across groups.

EQ 5: How do these activities contribute to relevant commitments of member States towards the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement? Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking: Please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very Satisfied							
Satisfied							
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied							
Dissatisfied							
Very dissatisfied							
Not applicable to me							

Did the secretariat support the activities effectively (e.g. provided the required logistical support that enabled effective participation; ensured timely and clear access to documents)? **Please consult the following sources:** the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking: Please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Effective							
Somehow effectively							
Not Effectively							
Don't Know							
Not applicable to me							

Any additional comments

Through the implementation of activities, what challenges did you face?

Identify specific Sustainable Development Goals that were positively affected by the activities:

Part IV. Efficiency: The extent to which the activities delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economical and timely way.

E.Q. 6. Did the resources provided achieve the intended results on time and adequately? For reference, see: [For Aarhus Convention](#):

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ECE_MP.PP_2021_6_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECE_MP.PP_2021_3_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/AC_MOP-7_Inf.6-PRTR_MOP-4_Inf.4_Note_cont_and_pledges_recvd_after_31082021.pdf

For the Protocol on PRTRs:

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/ECE_MP.PRTR_2021_8_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/ECE_MP.PRTR_2021_9_acc.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/AC_MOP-7_Inf.6-PRTR_MOP-4_Inf.4_Note_cont_and_pledges_recvd_after_31082021.pdf

Ranking: Please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Yes, there were sufficient resources for activity and monitoring the implementation of results by the Parties							
Resources were sufficient to implement some but not all activities.							
The resources							

used to achieve results are unknown to me							
Not applicable to me							

Part V: Cross-cutting issues: The extension of a rights-based approach, gender equality and leaving no one behind

E.Q. 7. The participation of the public (e.g. NGOs) in the work of the above bodies (Meetings of the Parties and the Working Groups of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol and three Task Forces under the Convention) has been adequately facilitated (e.g. had the opportunity to participate in the discussions and comment on the documents) and proved useful for the quality of the outcomes.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain:

E.Q. 8. To what extent the outcomes of activities contributed to the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and others? Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking: Please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very satisfactory							

Satisfactory							
Not satisfactory							
I don't know							
Not applicable to me							

If your answer is “not satisfactory”, please explain how ECE could enhance or leverage its activities to better address the rights and interests of vulnerable groups.

Q.9 What is your perception of equal participation of women in the implementation of activities? Please consult the following sources: the [Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#); the [Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#); and three task forces under the Aarhus Convention: [Task Force on Access to Information](#), [Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-Making](#) and [Task Force on Access to Justice](#); in the period 1 January 2018 to 31 December of 2021. As well as the [sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) and the [third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) with the [Joint High-level segment](#) held in 2017.

Ranking: Please indicate with X in the relevant cell.	Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (sixth session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (third session, including High-level Segment, 2017)	Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (2018-2021)	Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM) (2018-2021)	Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ) (2018-2021)
Very Satisfied							
Satisfied							
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied							
Dissatisfied							
Very dissatisfied							
Not applicable to me							

Could you please explain what promotes, or hinders the equal participation of women in the work of these bodies?

Part VII. Future implementation of the Convention

Please identify the three most significant barriers to the effective implementation of the Convention and Protocol on PRTRs in your country or your organization's geographical focus area and provide suggestions as to how these might be overcome, with particular attention to actors and responsibilities.

Access to information

Obstacle 1 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 2 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 3 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Public Participation in Decision-making

Obstacle 1 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 2 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 3 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Access to Justice

Obstacle 1 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 2 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 3 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

Obstacle 1 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 2 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Obstacle 3 (title: _____).

Solution: _____

Which of the following best describes your age?

18–24

25–34

35–44

45–54

55–64

65–74

75+

What best describes you?

Female

Male

Non-Binary

Other (please specify - optional)

Prefer not to say

Background material

List of documents, relevant links, publications and meetings

General information about Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs

- Brochure about Aarhus Convention: <https://unece.org/info/Environment-Policy/Public-participation/pub/2288>
- Brochure about Protocol on PRTRs: <https://unece.org/info/Environment-Policy/Public-participation/pub/2281>
- Welcome page: <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation>

Previous evaluation of the Aarhus Convention

- Evaluation of the current functioning and implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2013/8) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/wgp/WGP_16/ece.mp.pp.wg.1.2013.8.e_as_submitted.pdf
- Accompanying document 1 to the Evaluation of the current functioning and implementation of the Convention – *Survey Results* (AC/WGP-16/Inf.8) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/wgp/WGP_16/Inf.8_ACEvaluation.Document1.pdf
- Accompanying document 2 to the Evaluation of the current functioning and implementation of the Convention – *Meetings of the Aarhus Convention bodies* (AC/WGP-16/Inf.9) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/wgp/WGP_16/Inf.9_ACEvaluation.Document2.pdf
- Assessment of the current interim scheme of contributions (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2013/9) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/wgp/WGP_16/ECE.MP.PP.WG.1.2013.9.Eng_as_submitted.pdf
- Accompanying document to the Assessment of the current interim scheme of contributions (AC/WGP-16/Inf.10) http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/wgp/WGP_16/FinAssessment.Accompanying_document_-_Inf.10.pdf

Aarhus Convention, its Protocol on PRTRs and SDGs

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/HLS/ECE_MP.PP_2017_18-ECE_MP.PRTR_2017_4_E.pdf
https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/HLS/ECE_MP.PP_2017_16_Add.1-ECE_MP.PRTR_2017_2_Add.1_E.pdf
<https://unece.org/info/Environment-Policy/Public-participation/pub/2285>

Aarhus Convention, its Protocol on PRTRs and vulnerable groups

[Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools](#) and the [Maastricht Recommendations on Public Participation in Decision-making](#), devote special attention to the public in vulnerable situations (e.g., vulnerable and/or marginalized groups such as children, older people, and women in some societies, migrants, people with disabilities, those with low literacy or language barriers, ethnic or religious minorities, economically disadvantaged groups, those without access to the Internet, television or radio, etc.). The [Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums](#) state that where members of the public have differentiated capacity, resources, socio-cultural circumstances or economic or political influence, special measures should be taken to ensure a balanced and equitable process. Processes and mechanisms for international access should be designed to promote transparency, minimize inequality, avoid the exercise of undue economic or political influence, and facilitate the participation of those constituencies that are most directly affected and might not have the means for participation without encouragement and support.

Work programmes and decisions on financial arrangements

For Aarhus Convention, see

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/English/ECE_MP.PP_2017_2_Add.1_E.pdf

- VI/5. Work programme for 2018–2021
 - Annex I: Work programme for 2018–2021
 - Annexe II: Estimated costs of activities of the work areas proposed in the work programme for 2018–2021
 - Annex III: Example of the possible distribution of different meetings under the Convention for the period 2018–2021
- VI/6. Financial arrangements under the Convention

For the Protocol on PRTRs, see:

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/MOPP3/English/ECE_MP.PRTR_2017_6_Add.1_E.pdf

- III/2. Work programme for 2018–2021 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers
 - Annexe: Work programme for 2018–2021
- III/3. Financial arrangements under the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers – *this decision on financial arrangements provides framework for contributions to finance the implementation of activities*

Implementation and finance reports

For Aarhus Convention, see:

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ECE_MP.PP_2021_6_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/ECE_MP.PP_2021_3_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/AC_MOP-7_Inf.6-PRTR_MOP-4_Inf.4_Note_cont_and_pledges_recvd_after_31082021.pdf

Report of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/ECE_MP.PP_2021_2_E.pdf

Statements by the Chairs of different bodies/work areas on the implementation of activities made at *the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties*:

Statement by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information (agenda item 6 (a))

[PDF](#)

Statement by the Chair of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (agenda item 6 (b))

[PDF](#)

Statement by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice (agenda item 6 (c)) [PDF](#)

Statement by the Chair to the third global joint Round Table on GMOs/LMOs (agenda item 6 (d)) [PDF](#)

Presentation by the Chair of the Compliance Committee (agenda item 7 (b)) [PDF](#)

Statement by the Chair of the thematic session on Public Participation in International Forums (agenda item 8 (b)) [PDF](#)

For the Protocol on PRTRs, see:

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/ECE_MP.PRTR_2021_8_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/ECE_MP.PRTR_2021_9_aec.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/AC_MOP-7_Inf.6-PRTR_MOP-4_Inf.4_Note_cont_and_pledges_recvd_after_31082021.pdf

Report of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties, which reviewed implementation of the work programme for 2018-2021 and took new decisions for the next period of 2022-2025: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/ECE_MP.PRTR_2021_6_E.pdf

Decisions on substantive work areas for the Aarhus Convention

See: https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/English/ECE_MP.PP_2017_2_Add.1_E.pdf

- VI/1. Promoting effective access to information (AI), see also [background information, including on meetings on AI](#)

- VI/2. Promoting effective public participation in decision-making (PPDM), see also [background information, including on meetings on PPDM](#)
- VI/3. Promoting effective access to justice (AJ), see also [background information, including on meetings on AJ](#)
- VI/4. Promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums (PPIF), see also [background information, including on meetings on PPIF](#)
- See also [background information, including on meetings on GMOs](#)

Compliance and reporting mechanisms

For Aarhus Convention, see:

Compliance mechanism

<https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/compliance-committee>

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/ECE.MP_PP_2021.44_ac.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ECE.MP_PP_2021.45_ac.pdf

Reporting mechanism

<https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/reporting-mechanism>

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ECE_MP_PP_2021_6_E.pdf

For the Protocol on PRTRs, see:

Compliance mechanism

<https://unece.org/environmental-policy/public-participation/prtr-compliance-committee>

Reporting mechanism

<https://unece.org/reporting-mechanism-protocol-prtrs>

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ECE_MP.PRTR_2021_10_E.pdf

Coordination, synergy and capacity building

For Aarhus Convention, see:

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/ECE_MP_PP_2021_7_E.pdf

https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/AC_MOP_7_Inf3_CBC_report_final.pdf

<https://unece.org/env/pp/aarhus-convention-capacity-building>

<https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>

For the Protocol on PRTRs, see:

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

<https://prtr.unece.org/>

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/WGP-7/ODS/ECE_MP.PRTR_WG.1_2019_3_E.pdf

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/WGP-7/ODS/ECE_MP.PRTR_WG.1_2019_6_E.pdf

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/WGP-8/ODS/ECE_MP.PRTR_WG.1_2020_4_E.pdf

Reports of subsidiary bodies

For Aarhus Convention, see:

https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7

Tab: Intersessional documents relevant to the Agenda (Category II pre-session documents)

For the Protocol on PRTRs, see:

https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Protocol_PRTRs_MoPP4

Tab: Intersessional documents relevant to the Agenda (Category II pre-session documents)

Strategic Plans

For Aarhus Convention, see:

- V/5. Strategic Plan for 2015–2020
- Annex: Strategic Plan for 2015–2020

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop5/Documents/Post_session_docs/ece_mp.pp_2014_2_add.1_eng.pdf

- [II/2. Strategic plan for 2015–2020 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers](#)
- [Annex: Strategic plan for 2015–2020](#)
https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/MOPP2/Postsession_documents/ECE.MP.PRTR.2014.4.Add.1_e.pdf

List of meetings of subsidiary bodies

Aarhus Convention

- Meeting of the Parties
[Sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, 11-13 October 2017](#) and [Joint High-level Segment, 14 October 2017](#)
[Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, 18-21 October 2021](#)
- Working Group of the Parties (WGP)
[Twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) 3 May and 7-8 June 2021
[Twenty-fourth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) 1- 3 July 2020 and 28 - 29 October 2020
[Twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) 26 - 28 June 2019
[Twenty-second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) 19 - 21 June 2018
- Bureau
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention \(48th meeting\)](#) 13 October 2021
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention \(47th meeting\)](#) 06 November 2020
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention \(46th meeting\)](#) 25 - 26 February 2020
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention, 45th meeting \(virtual meeting\)](#) 26 September 2019
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention, 44th meeting](#) 28 June 2019
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention \(43rd meeting\)](#) 26 February 2019
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention \(42nd meeting\)](#) 21 June 2018
[Bureau of the Aarhus Convention \(41st meeting\)](#) 22 February 2018
- Compliance Committee
[Seventy-third meeting \(13-16 December 2021\)](#)
[Seventy-second meeting \(18-21 October 2021\)](#)
[Seventy-first meeting \(7, 8 and 9 July 2021\)](#)
[Seventieth meeting \(12-16 April 2021\)](#)
[Sixty-ninth meeting \(25-29 January 2021\)](#)
[Sixty-eighth meeting \(23-27 November 2020\)](#)
[Sixty-seventh meeting \(6-10 July 2020\)](#)
[Sixty-sixth meeting \(9-13 March 2020\)](#)
[Sixty-fifth meeting \(4-8 November 2019\)](#)
[Sixty-fourth meeting \(1-5 July 2019\)](#)
[Sixty-third meeting \(11-15 March 2019\)](#)
[Sixty-second meeting \(5-9 November 2018\)](#)
[Sixty-first meeting \(2-6 July 2018\)](#)
[Sixtieth meeting \(12-16 March 2018\)](#)
- Task Force on Access to Information (TF AI)
[Seventh meeting \(16-17 November 2020\)](#)
[Sixth meeting \(2-4 October 2019\)](#)
[WGP-22 thematic session on access to information \(19-21 June 2018\)](#)

- Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (TF PPDM)
[The eighth meeting of the Task Force](#) 8-9 October 2018
[WGP-23 thematic session on Public Participation in Decision-making](#) 26 June 2019

[The ninth meeting of the Task Force](#) 1-2 March 2021
- Task Force on Access to Justice (TF AJ)
[Thirteenth meeting](#) 15-16 February 2021
[WGP-24 thematic session on access to justice \(28 October 2020\)](#)
[Twelfth meeting](#) (Geneva, 28 February-1 March 2019)
[Eleventh meeting](#) (Geneva, 27-28 February 2018)
- Protocol on PRTRs
- Meeting of the Parties
[Third session of the Meeting of the Parties, 15 October 2017](#) and [Joint High-level Segment, 14 October 2017](#)
[Fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties, 21-22 October 2021](#)
- Working Group of the Parties
[Eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) 16 - 18 December 2020
[Seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) 28 - 29 November 2019
[Sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) 09 November 2018
- Bureau
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(21st meeting\)](#) 14 October 2021
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(20th meeting\)](#) 29 June 2021
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(19th meeting\)](#) 17 December 2020
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(18th meeting\)](#) 19 November 2020
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(17th meeting\)](#) 16 June 2020
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(16th meeting\)](#) 29 - 30 November 2019
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(15th meeting\)](#) 22 - 23 May 2019
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(14th meeting\)](#) 09 November 2018
[Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs \(13th meeting\)](#) 23 - 24 May 2018
- Compliance Committee
[Eleventh meeting](#) - 22 October 2021
[Tenth Meeting](#) - 31 May and 1 June 2021
[Ninth Meeting](#) - 28 and 29 April 2021
[Eight Meeting](#) - 30 and 31 March 2020
[Seventh Meeting](#) - 1 and 2 April 2019

ANNEX IV. RESPONDENTS CONTACTED DURING THE EVALUATION

Representatives of
Key Informant Interviews
Aarhus Convention Bureau
European Commission, Directorate General for Environment
European Environment Agency
Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
Court of Rijeca, Croatia
State University of Moldova
Aarhus Centre Turkmenistan
NGO European ECO Forum
UNECE staff
Respondents to the Evaluation Questionnaire
Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, Austria
Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ministry of Environment and Water, Bulgaria
Environment and Climate Change, Canada
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Croatia
Ministry of the Environment, Czechia
Ministry of Environment and Environmental Protection Agency, Denmark
Ministry of Environment, Estonia
Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Georgia
Ministry of Environment and Biodiversity, Guinea-Bissau
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Ireland
Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia
Environmental Protection Agency, Lithuania
Environment and Resources Authority, Malta
Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism, Montenegro
Environment Agency, Portugal
Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests, Romania
Ministry of Environmental Protection, Serbia
Environment Agency, Slovakia
Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Slovenia
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, United Kingdom
European Commission, Directorate General for Environment
European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment
Supreme Court of the Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina
Supreme court of the Kyrgyz Republic
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
NGO Terra 1530
NGO Justice and Environment
Private expert
