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Environmental performance reviews

Guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews

Note by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews

Summary

The Committee on Environmental Policy at its special session (Nicosia, 3–4 October 2022) took note of activities to prepare for the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environmental Performance Review Programme and invited the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews to prepare additional guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews for the consideration of the Committee at its twenty-eighth session in November 2023.

The Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews prepared the guidance document, including by running a survey and preparing an options paper, as well as consulting governmental representatives of environmental performance review beneficiary countries and the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The results of the survey (information paper No. 8) and the options paper (ECE/CEP/2023/7) are presented in separate documents.

The Committee is invited to consider the Guidance document with a view to its adoption.



I. Introduction

1. The fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews (EPRs) under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) EPR Programme was endorsed by ministers and launched at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/2).
2. The document presenting the fourth cycle of EPRs (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/12) was prepared by the Expert Group on EPRs and adopted by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-sixth session (Geneva, 9–10 November 2020). In September 2022, the Expert Group initiated a discussion aimed at boosting the implementation rate of EPR recommendations, which has an average of 68 per cent. The Expert Group's proposals included limiting the number of chapters per review and of recommendations per chapter, organizing thematic workshops, promoting bankable recommendations, and elaborating road maps for implementing recommendations. The Chair of the Expert Group on EPRs presented the results of these discussions at the special session of the Committee (Nicosia, 3–4 October 2022). The Committee mandated the Expert Group to prepare additional guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of EPRs for consideration by the Committee at its session in November 2023.¹
3. The Expert Group worked on fulfilling the mandate from the Committee by holding several meetings online in the period February–June 2023. The guidance document considers the results of a survey run in the period March–April 2023 (information paper No. 8) and an options paper (ECE/CEP/2023/7), as well as consultations with representatives of beneficiary countries during the meeting of the Expert Group on 23 May 2023.
4. The present document is submitted to the Committee for consideration and prospective adoption.

II. Rationale for additional guidance on environmental performance reviews

5. Considering the diverse situations of countries under review, their different political cultures and socioeconomic conditions, as well as the triple planetary crisis (climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, as well as pollution), the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the war in Ukraine, a flexible approach is proposed for the conduct of the fourth cycle of EPRs.
6. The rationale behind the additional guidance on EPRs includes:
 - (a) Customizing the EPR to the needs and priorities of the countries under review;
 - (b) Making the best use of limited resources in the countries and in the ECE secretariat;
 - (c) Considering the limited capacity in the Expert Group on EPRs to expertly review EPRs;
 - (d) Considering the capacity in the reviewed countries to implement the EPR recommendations during a period of 5–10 years from the time of publication of an EPR;
 - (e) Boosting the commitment of the countries to implement EPR recommendations, including through dedicated road maps for implementing EPR recommendations in a timely, coordinated and coherent manner.
7. The Expert Group on EPRs recommends that the provisions below be piloted for the fourth cycle of EPRs.

¹ ECE/CEP/S/2022/6, paras. 27 and 29 (j).

III. Conduct of the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews

A. Content and structure

8. The content and structure of fourth cycle EPRs are provided in the document entitled United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environmental Performance Review Programme: fourth cycle of reviews.² The document states that the decision on the substantive content of fourth cycle EPRs will continue to be taken in a flexible manner, guided by the specific needs of each reviewed country³ and contains a suggested structure of fourth cycle EPRs that includes optional parts IV. “Integration of environment into selected sectors/issues” and V. “Nexus”.⁴ As feasible, EPRs should help countries to respond to, recover from and prevent future pandemics.⁵

9. Further to the document’s provisions, in defining the context and structure of a fourth cycle EPR, it is proposed that the ECE secretariat, in consultation with the reviewed country and with the support of the Expert Group on EPRs, as needed, should identify the number of chapters taking into account available resources for each EPR. In an EPR, countries under review are encouraged to focus on their political priority issues and sectors for the next 5–7 years, as well as to consider emerging issues when selecting the chapters.

10. Reviewed countries are encouraged to consider a selection of the following priority chapters: Environmental monitoring and information; Greening the economy and financing environmental protection; Legal, policy and institutional framework; Waste and chemical management; Water management; Climate change; Biodiversity conservation and protected areas; Air protection; Implementation of international agreements and commitments; Soil conservation; Regulatory and compliance assurance mechanisms; Public participation; Education for sustainable development; and Human health and the environment.

11. The Expert Group on EPRs has examined the feasibility of a nexus approach for fourth cycle EPRs and recommends offering to interested countries, on a pilot basis, a more deeply integrated policy approach. This approach would look at interlinkages (i.e. synergies and trade-offs) between selected policy sectors (e.g., water, energy, agriculture and ecosystems) and would involve making integrated policy recommendations.

12. Subject to the availability of funding, as well as of expertise in the EPR team of experts, an appropriate methodology and pilot testing in a future EPR, countries under review could consider the inclusion in the country road maps, or requesting the inclusion in relevant chapters, of possible innovative activities for implementing their selected priorities.

13. The assessment section should be composed of brief summaries of key findings in the chapter, including positive developments and challenges to be addressed.

B. Environmental performance review recommendations

14. The document on the fourth cycle of EPRs contains provisions on implementing EPR recommendations, including enhancing ownership and the implementation rate by the reviewed countries, organizing national and regional workshops and other events, engaging United Nations country teams and helping reviewed countries to promote bankable recommendations.⁶

15. Recommendations in fourth cycle EPRs will be tailored to the political priorities and implementation capacity of the reviewed country. The content of the chapeau to the

² ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/12, paras. 16–29.

³ Ibid., para. 16.

⁴ Ibid., para. 29.

⁵ Ibid., para. 28.

⁶ Ibid., paras. 30–35.

recommendation should include a brief justification of the recommendation made and may include some details useful for the country for implementing the recommendation. An EPR chapter can make as many recommendations as necessary for the country to improve its performance on the theme(s) addressed in the chapter. The capacity in the reviewed countries to implement the EPR recommendations during a period of 5–10 years should be considered. Also, the countries under review should consider their capacity in terms of implementation of EPR recommendations.

16. Fourth cycle EPRs will continue to assess the implementation status of EPR recommendations from the previous EPR of the country under review. When relevant, the status of recommendations of the previous EPR should be assessed in the core text of an EPR chapter and a short summary table or matrix should be included in an annex to the EPR, as per current practice.

17. In addition, reviewed countries are encouraged to conduct regular self-assessments of the implementation status of each recommendation (see annex below). Furthermore, 3–5 years after the publication of the EPR, countries are encouraged to present a mid-term review of progress made in implementing EPR recommendations at regular sessions of the Committee on Environmental Policy, including sharing information on successes and challenges encountered.

18. In addition to the provisions made in the document on the fourth cycle of EPRs,⁷ and in line with the Ministerial Declaration of the Ninth Environment for Europe Conference,⁸ countries are encouraged to develop road maps on implementing EPR recommendations and to report to the Committee on Environmental Policy on progress in the implementation of the road map. The template of a road map could be structured to include, as a minimum, the following components: implementation measures; detailed actions; period of execution of each action; lead authority; other institutions and stakeholders; cost assessment; financial sources; and means of verification (see annex below).

19. The development of road maps could be initiated after the adoption by the Committee on Environmental Policy of the EPR recommendations of a given country. Ideally, the road map should be ready for the national launch of the EPR as a mechanism for timely, coordinated and coherent action to implement EPR recommendations. If this is not feasible, a road map should be ready within one year of publication of the EPR.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/2/Add.1, para. 18.

Annex

Proposed templates

1. Proposed template for a road map to support the process of coordinated implementation of environmental performance review recommendations structured as follows for each recommendation and, where relevant, each subrecommendation:¹

Title, chapeau and text of the environmental performance review recommendation/subrecommendation

Implementation measures	Detailed actions	Period of execution of each action	Lead authority	Other institutions and stakeholders	Cost assessment	Financial sources	Means of verification	Comments
<i>[Identify measures required to implement the recommendation]</i>	<i>[Plan concrete actions for each measure]</i>	<i>[Establish concrete deadline for each action]</i>	<i>[Assign lead authority]</i>	<i>[Assign other institutions and stakeholders]</i>	<i>[Provide a cost assessment per action (NCU, \$, €)]</i>	<i>[For example, IFI (World Bank, etc.), private sector, PPP, etc.]</i>	<i>[For example, public budget, law, programme, governmental Decision]</i>	<i>[Remarks regarding implementation of measures and actions]</i>

Abbreviations: IFI, international financial institution; NCU, national currency unit; PPP, public-private partnership.

2. Proposed template for the self-assessment of the status of implementation of each EPR recommendation and, where relevant, each subrecommendation:

Text of recommendation/sub-recommendation	Date of self-assessment	Not implemented	Partially implemented	In progress	Implemented	No longer relevant	Evidence of implementation/comments

¹ The merger of implementation measures and detailed actions is proposed, as well as specifying “Indicators” under the mean of verification.