



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Twenty-eighth session**

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Environmental performance reviews**Options for 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 Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its meeting on 8 March 2023, agreed that, based on an inclusive consultation process (including through a survey of the Committee's delegates and dedicated discussions with countries that had been subject to environmental performance reviews), an option paper would be prepared to support decisions by the Committee on the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews (ECE/CEP/2023/3, para. 14).

The secretariat, in consultation with the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, ran a survey in March–April 2023 to collect views on the conduct of the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews to inform discussions by the Expert Group on the options paper and the additional guidance. The results of the survey are presented in a separate paper (information paper No. 8). The Guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews is presented in document ECE/CEP/2023/6.

To support the Committee's deliberations on the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews, the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews prepared the present options paper, including by considering the results of the survey and consulting interested representatives from environmental performance review beneficiary countries.



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).¹ 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 2023.²
3. The Expert Group worked on fulfilling the mandate from the Committee by holding several meetings online in the period February–June 2023. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its meeting on 8 March 2023, considered progress in preparing the additional guidance by the Expert Group on EPRs, and agreed that, based on an inclusive consultation process (including through a survey of the Committee’s delegates and dedicated discussions with countries that had been subject to EPRs), an option paper would be prepared to support decisions by the Committee on the fourth cycle of EPRs.³
4. The present document, containing possible options for conducting the fourth cycle of EPRs, was prepared by the Expert Group on EPRs by considering the results of the EPR survey (information paper No. 8) and consulting interested representatives from EPR beneficiary countries during the meeting of the Expert Group on 23 May 2023. The Expert Group prepared the guidance document (ECE/CEP/2023/6) based on a flexible approach to EPRs. The document is submitted to the Committee to support its deliberations on the fourth cycle of EPRs.

II. Possible options for approaches to an environmental performance review

5. The Expert Group on EPRs has prepared several possible options for approaches to an EPR based on the results of the EPR survey, consultations with the representatives of EPR beneficiary countries and as a result of deliberations among the members of the Expert Group. The Expert Group recommends using option D “flexible approach”, which can be enhanced with innovative features, as applicable for each country under review.

A. Mandatory approach

6. The mandatory approach (see table 1 below) is based on the results of the EPR survey considering the views of 44 governmental representatives from 21 countries, including 12 EPR beneficiary countries, namely from: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Morocco, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan.

¹ ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 50 (b).

² ECE/CEP/S/2022/6, paras. 27 and 29 (j).

³ ECE/CEP/2023/3, para. 14.

Table 1
Mandatory approach

<i>Description of approach</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<p>Some themes mandatory for EPR:</p> <p>The following 14 themes might be mandatory: Legislation; Water; Climate change; Air; Monitoring; Policies; Biodiversity; Waste; Institutions; Financing; Green economy; International commitments; Public participation; and Soil</p>	<p>Similar structure for all EPRs</p> <p>Easy to implement</p> <p>Rigorous</p> <p>Proven approach</p>	<p>Prescriptive structure that does not allow consultation with reviewed country on its priorities and needs at time of EPR</p>
<p>Some chapters mandatory for EPR:</p> <p>The following 13 chapters might be mandatory: 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; and Education for sustainable development</p>		<p>Mandatory themes and chapters might not correspond to priorities of each country under review</p> <p>May miss some key challenges</p> <p>Emerging issues would not be addressed</p>
<p>EPR assessment, conclusions and recommendations:</p> <p>Assessment should be composed of brief summaries of key findings in chapter, including positive developments and challenges to be addressed</p> <p>Content of chapeau to recommendation should include brief justification of recommendation made and may include some details useful for country for implementing recommendation</p> <p>An EPR chapter can make as many recommendations as necessary for country to improve its performance on theme(s) addressed in chapter</p>		<p>Strict one-size-fits-all</p> <p>Potential high cost depending on availability of in-kind expertise for EPR</p>
<p>Implementation of EPR recommendations:</p> <p>Status of recommendations of previous EPR should be assessed in core text of an EPR chapter and short summary table or matrix should be included in annex to EPR, as per current practice</p> <p>3–5 years after EPR’s publication, reviewed countries should consider undertaking mid-term review of progress in implementing EPR recommendations by reporting to ECE Committee on Environmental Policy</p>		

B. Country-driven approach

7. The country-driven approach (see table 2 below) is based on the results of the EPR survey considering the views expressed by 26 governmental representatives from 12 EPR beneficiary countries, namely from: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Morocco, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Table 2
Country-driven approach

<i>Description of approach</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
EPR includes themes requested by country under review	Needs driven Tailor-made	Could be lengthy
EPR includes chapters requested by country under review		Could require significant financial and staff resources
Should be no limit on number of chapters in an EPR		
EPR assessment, conclusions and recommendations:		Potential high cost
Assessment should be composed of brief summaries of key findings in the chapter, including positive developments and challenges to be addressed		depending on availability of in-kind expertise for EPR
Content of chapeau to recommendation should include brief justification of recommendation made and may include some details useful for country for implementing recommendation		Implementation deficits likely
An EPR chapter can make as many recommendations as necessary for country to improve its performance on theme(s) addressed in chapter		May miss some key challenges
Implementation of EPR recommendations:		
Depending on request from country under review, status of recommendations of previous EPR should be assessed either in core text of an EPR chapter with short summary table, or in matrix in annex to EPR, as per current practice, or in separate annex to EPR		
3–5 years after EPR’s publication, reviewed countries should consider undertaking mid-term review of progress in implementing EPR recommendations by reporting to ECE Committee on Environmental Policy		

C. Streamlined approach

8. The streamlined approach (see table 3 below) is based on views of members of the Expert Group on EPRs, with the aim being to streamline and consolidate the conduct of fourth cycle EPRs. It takes into account the discussions at the thirty-fifth session of the Expert Group (Tbilisi, 12–16 September 2022) and considers the limited human and financial resources available in the reviewed countries, the ECE secretariat and the Expert Group on EPRs.

Table 3
Streamlined approach

<i>Description of approach</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
No themes mandatory for EPR	Efficient	Gaps in policy recommendations
No chapters mandatory for EPR	Manageable	
Number of chapters in EPR limited to 12	Flexible	Less depth
EPR assessment, conclusions and recommendations:	Lower cost	Untested
Assessment should be composed of brief summaries of key findings in the chapter, including positive developments and challenges to be addressed	Quicker	May miss some key challenges
Content of chapeau to recommendation should include brief justification of recommendation made and may include some details useful for country for implementing recommendation	Shorter document	
Number of recommendations per chapter limited to 3		Potential high cost depending on availability of in-kind expertise for EPR
Implementation of EPR recommendations:		
Status of implementing recommendations of previous EPR should be assessed in separate annex to EPR		
3–5 years after EPR’s publication, reviewed countries should consider undertaking mid-term review of progress in implementing EPR recommendations by reporting to ECE Committee on Environmental Policy		

D. Flexible approach

9. The flexible approach (see table 4 below) is based on the views of the Expert Group on EPR and is recommended to be used as a basis for the Guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of EPRs. It builds on the results of the survey and the evaluation (advantages and disadvantages) of the three options described above.

10. In an EPR, countries under review are encouraged to focus on their political priority issues and sectors for the next 5–7 years. The flexible approach is tailored to the needs and priorities of the countries under review. This approach should consider the limited resources available in the ECE secretariat, as well as the limited capacity in the Expert Group on EPRs to expertly review EPRs. It should also consider the capacity in the reviewed countries to implement EPR recommendations during a period of 5–10 years. This approach may be combined with or complement innovative features identified in section E below (e.g., nexus approach, possible innovative activities).

Table 4
Flexible approach

<i>Description of approach</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<p>No themes are mandatory for an EPR</p> <p>Countries are encouraged to consider a selection of the following priority themes: Legislation; Water; Climate change; Air; Monitoring; Policies; Biodiversity; Waste; Institutions; Financing; Green economy; International commitments; Public participation; and Soil</p>	Flexible	Potential high cost depending on availability of in-kind expertise for EPR
<p>No chapters mandatory for EPR</p> <p>Countries should consider emerging issues when selecting chapters</p> <p>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</p>		
<p>EPR assessment, conclusions and recommendations:</p> <p>Assessment should be composed of brief summaries of key findings in the chapter, including positive developments and challenges to be addressed</p> <p>Content of chapeau to recommendation should include brief justification of recommendation made and may include some details useful for country for implementing recommendation</p> <p>Recommendations will be tailored to political priorities and implementation capacity of reviewed country</p> <p>An EPR chapter can make as many recommendations as necessary for country to improve its performance on theme(s) addressed in the chapter</p>		
<p>Implementation of EPR recommendations:</p> <p>Status of recommendations of previous EPR should be assessed in core text of an EPR chapter and short summary table or matrix</p>		

<i>Description of approach</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<p>should be included in annex to EPR, as per current practice</p> <p>Reviewed countries are encouraged to develop road map on implementing EPR recommendations and to report to Committee on Environmental Policy on progress of its implementation</p> <p>3–5 years after EPR’s publication, reviewed countries should consider undertaking mid-term review of progress in implementing EPR recommendations by reporting to ECE Committee on Environmental Policy</p>		

E. Innovative features

11. The Expert Group on EPR recommends that countries under review consider several innovative features of EPRs (see table 5 below) with a view to enhancing their EPRs. Several of these features require additional work from the Expert Group to examine their feasibility in an EPR, develop them and agree on their methodology for pilot testing in interested countries.

Table 5
Innovative features

<i>Description of feature</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<p>Countries can choose a more deeply integrated policy approach for EPR, which would look at interlinkages (i.e. synergies and trade-offs) between selected policy sectors (e.g., water, energy, agriculture and ecosystems) and involve making integrated policy recommendations</p> <p>Countries under review can consider requesting inclusion in relevant chapters of possible innovative activities for implementing their selected priorities</p> <p>Implementation of EPR recommendations:</p> <p>Reviewed country expected to develop road map on implementing EPR recommendations and to report to Committee on Environmental Policy on progress of its implementation</p> <p>Reviewed country can identify bankable or fundable EPR recommendations with a view to co-financing their implementation through project-based activities</p>	<p>More integrated, less siloed</p> <p>Based on lessons learned from 25 years of experiences with EPRs</p> <p>Leads to policy innovation</p>	<p>Additional value uncertain</p> <p>Potential high cost depending on availability of in-kind expertise for EPR</p> <p>Methodology for a more deeply integrated policy approach for EPR and for including possible innovative activities still under development</p>