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Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Cross-sectoral activities

Cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau, meeting in an extended format (Geneva, 28 February 2018), requested the secretariat to prepare a briefing note as an official document on all cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme. The documents in such a format (ECE/CEP/2019/11, ECE/CEP/2019/17, ECE/CEP/2020/4 and ECE/CEP/2021/4) were considered by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-fourth (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019), twenty-fifth (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), twenty-sixth (Geneva (hybrid), 9–11 November 2020) and twenty-seventh (Geneva (hybrid), 3–5 November 2021) sessions respectively.

As per established practice, the present document elaborates on the recent developments, plans for the future and the expected decisions by the Committee.

*Late submission

I. Education for sustainable development

A. Overview of the recent developments

1. On 30 and 31 May 2022, the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) held its seventeenth meeting in Geneva in a hybrid mode. The Steering Committee, *inter alia*:

(a) Approved the proposed document Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (UNECE-ESD) from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/3) for its further submission to the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia, 5 October 2022) for subsequent adoption;

(b) Agreed to include the finalized document entitled Draft activity plan for the UNECE ESD Youth Platform for the period 2021–2025 in the draft workplan for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2025;

(c) Agreed to launch a 2022–2023 nomination process for the membership of the Youth Platform that would include refining terms of references for the youth focal points, and asked the secretariat to circulate a message to the Committee;

(d) Endorsed the organization of the side event on “Youth and ESD” by the UNECE ESD Youth Platform during the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022);¹

2. Took note of:

(a) The presentations made by the secretariat and the country representatives on the progress made in implementing the Strategy since the previous meeting;

(b) The presentation made by the secretariat about the results of the survey on the focus of capacity-building activities and the information that the Governments of Cyprus and the Netherlands planned to support the capacity-building activities related to the workplan activities aimed at implementing strand 2 (Whole institution approach/institutions as communities of transformational learning) in the form of an in-kind contribution by funding a series of said activities;

(c) The information about the outcomes of the International Conference on the Whole School Approach (Lunteren, Netherlands, 28–30 March 2022), organized as an in-kind contribution of the Government of the Netherlands in the framework of capacity-building activities for implementing priority action areas of the newly drafted implementation framework;

(d) The secretariat’s update on the relevant Committee on Environmental Policy decisions, including regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and the proposed framework for preparing the Conference;

(e) The information about the decisions of the special session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva (hybrid), 9–12 May 2022) of relevance to the Steering Committee on ESD;

(f) The update on the preparations for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries and the information provided by the host country about organization of side events, exhibitions and bilateral/multilateral meetings, as well as resource requirements;

(g) The announcements of Cyprus and the Netherlands about their intention to support the implementation of the workplan activities in the form of in-kind contributions for strand 2 “Whole institution approach and ESD” (Cyprus and the Netherlands) and for strand 1 “Quality education and ESD” on competencies (the Netherlands);

¹ ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/2, paras. 75–76, 106 and 113.

(h) The update of the Chair of the Ad Hoc Group on Indicators on the outcomes of the Group's work and on the status of the draft template for reporting "Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)", and agreed that the document (draft template for reporting) would be finalized in the course of 2022 – with the possibility of organizing a meeting of experts during the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference – and prepared for further submission as an official document for the eighteenth meeting of the Steering Committee on ESD (Geneva (hybrid), 25–26 May 2023);

(i) Information about the proposed outline of the draft activity plan for the UNECE ESD Youth Platform for the period 2021–2025;

(j) Information about the status of the two publications *Progress report on the implementation of the fourth mandatory reporting cycle of the Strategy* and *Good practices on the engagement of youth in education for sustainable development in the ECE region*, to be published in 2022, and about the in-kind contribution made by the Government of Cyprus for the preparation of the publications (€15,000 and €4,000 respectively).²

3. On 4 October 2022, the Steering Committee on ESD held its special session in Nicosia back-to-back with the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries. The Steering Committee, inter alia:

(a) Agreed to include in the draft Ministerial Statement the amendments and additions proposed in the meeting;³ owing to the fact that the comments had been received less than 24 hours before the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, and for procedural reasons, it was not possible to include them in the final text of the Ministerial Statement in the absence of negotiations at the ministerial level;

(b) Considered and adopted the agendas of the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries and the High-level Meeting of the Ministers for Education on Education for Sustainable Development (Nicosia, 6 October 2022);

4. Took note of:

(a) The information about the two official documents to be presented for consideration at the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries – the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/3, ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10) and the draft Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2022/7, ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/11);

(b) The information about other documents prepared by the Steering Committee and submitted as information documents for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Fourth evaluation report of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/INF/7), which had also laid the foundations for the publication *Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD across the ECE Region (2015–2018)*,¹ prepared by the Steering Committee and published in 2022;⁴

(c) The information about the side events to be organized in the framework of the Nicosia Ministerial Conference and also the bilateral and/or multilateral meetings to be held between Governments, international and regional organizations, as well as the exhibitions;

(d) The information about the publishing of the two planned publications elaborated by the Committee during the past three years: *Implementation of the UNECE Strategy* and *Engaging Young People in the Implementation of ESD in the UNECE*

² Ibid., paras. 7–18, 43, 45–60, 88, 91–107 and 135.

³ ECE/CEP/AC.13/S/2022/2, paras. 11–14.

⁴ Ibid., para. 8.

*Region: Good Practices in the Engagement of Youth in Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/197), for distribution during the Nicosia Conference.*⁵

5. On 25 and 26 May 2023, the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development held its eighteenth meeting in Geneva in a hybrid mode, The Steering Committee, inter alia:

(a) Approved the proposed documents “Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2025)” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/4), and the guidance for working with indicators “Guidelines for the process of reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/5);

(b) Agreed to postpone the launch of the fifth mandatory reporting cycle to 2024, immediately after the nineteenth meeting of the Steering Committee (to be held in April or May 2024) and approved the proposed steps of the new timeline;

(c) Approved the establishment of the support group for monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy’s implementation, comprised of the proposed Steering Committee members and experts, and asked the Committee members to inform the secretariat as soon as possible should they be interested in working in the support group;

(d) Approved the proposed schedule of assistance activities to be organized by the support group that would include assistance to national focal points in monitoring and evaluating the Strategy’s implementation at the national level, including development of their respective national implementation reports and completion of the template for reporting provided in the document “Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2025)”;

(e) Approved the adoption of the Workplan for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2025 (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2023/3) with the amendments (as in the revised version of 23 May 2023);

(f) Approved the proposed plan of activities and outputs along the four strands, as outlined in the workplan (as in the revised version of 23 May 2023);

(g) Approved the proposed outline of practical steps for implementing the workplan activities/outputs on strand 2 (Whole institution approach and ESD);

(h) Agreed to organize a capacity-building workshop on implementing strand 4 (Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD) of the implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030 in Tbilisi, in December 2023 (subject to availability of complementary funds);

(i) Agreed in principle to establish the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Youth Task Force on Education for Sustainable Development, and requested the Bureau to review the documents for its establishment with a view to finalizing them;

6. Took note of:

(a) The presentations made by the secretariat and the country representatives on the progress made in implementing the Strategy since the previous meeting;

(b) The information about the outcomes of the 2023 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and of the side event “Unleashing the power of youth through education: Sustainable solutions for a better future” (28 March 2023), organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD in the framework of the Forum and in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);

⁵ Ibid., paras. 33–36.

(c) The information about the participation of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD in the online side event “The future of regulation in the pan-European region: horizon-scanning for a sustainable and equitable future” (5 April 2023) leading up to the seventieth session of the Commission: Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva, 18–19 April 2023);

(d) The information about the involvement of youth (side events, declaration, other meetings) during the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

(e) The information about the reported initiatives and plans regarding the Youth Platform, and approved the proposed activity plan for the Youth Platform in the region for 2023.

B. Goals and challenges

7. At the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, the ministers responsible for education and the environment adopted the Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/11). In the statement, taking into account the continued challenges and needs identified by the member States in their national implementation reports related to the strengthening of regulatory frameworks, educator competences on ESD, quality learning outcome assessment mechanisms, enhancement of the whole school/whole institution approach to sustainable development, support to research on ESD, empowerment of youth participation in decision-making, speeding up of the transition towards green and digital economy and society, based on transformative learning environments, acknowledging also that some countries, particularly countries with economies in transition, may continue to need support for carrying out relevant activities, the ministers expressed strong support for the continuation and stepping up of efforts for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD until 2030 at the regional level, in synergy with relevant efforts undertaken at the global and subregional levels (e.g., UNESCO, the European Union/European Economic Area, Central and Eastern Europe, Mediterranean, Central Asia) and at the national level.

8. The ministers recognized the great importance of the issues elaborated in the adopted Framework for Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 and the need to, as a matter of urgency, mobilize political and financial resources for strengthening the education for sustainable development contribution to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in order to fully benefit from its potential to effectively contribute to addressing the multiple crises and challenges related to the achievement of sustainable development.

9. The ministers committed to focus their efforts, promote and achieve concrete progress on the four priority areas/strands of policy identified by the Steering Committee (Quality education and ESD; Whole institution approach/Institutions as communities of transformational learning; Digital education, information and communications technology and ESD; Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD) and on strengthening the role of youth within these strands to ensure that youth are more active in planning and integrating ESD policies and actions at the national and regional levels.

10. The ministers requested the Executive Secretary of ECE to catalyse efforts for resource mobilization, including financial support, by member States, for strengthening and scaling up ESD actions [in partnership with UNESCO and UNEP] and to mainstream ESD activities, partnerships and initiatives in all programmes.

C. Planned activities

11. The nineteenth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development is to be held in Geneva, on 29–31 May 2024 (or, alternatively, on 23–25 April 2024, should Conference Services be unable to accommodate the meeting on the proposed dates in May).

12. The Committee requested the secretariat to provide the necessary secretarial support in organizing the proposed assistance activities aimed at building member States' capacity in organizing the process of national reporting on progress in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD.

13. The Committee requested the secretariat to provide the necessary secretarial support in organizing (subject to approval of complementary funds) the capacity-building workshop on implementing strand 4 (Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD) of the implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030 in Tbilisi, in mid-December 2023.

14. The Committee requested the secretariat to undertake the required steps for establishing the UNECE Youth Task Force on ESD under the supervision of the Steering Committee.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

15. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to take note of the information provided on the work of the Steering Committee on ESD and to encourage its members from the countries participating in the Strategy for ESD to remain informed of the process at the national level by establishing and maintaining working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

II. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

A. Overview of recent developments

16. The activities under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) focused on the implementation of the Vienna Declaration adopted at the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (Vienna, 17–18 May 2021).

17. The Partnership on Active Mobility, created at the High-level Meeting by including “walking” in the previous Partnership on Cycling Promotion, established two subgroups: on walking and on cycling. On walking, the main task was to create a pan-European master plan on walking. On cycling, the Partnership focused on the implementation of the Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion (adopted in Vienna in 2021). Together with the ECE Sustainable Transport Division, the Partnership established a group of experts in charge of the “infrastructure module” of the master plan.

18. Following the implementation of a project on Danube cycling plans, nine Partnership countries in the Danube region adopted or updated their national cycling plans. On the occasion of the Velocity meeting from 14–17 June 2022 in Ljubljana, members of the Partnership cycled from Vienna to the Slovenian capital, meeting local authorities to raise awareness of cycling as a means of transport.

19. In January 2023, the Partnership met back-to-back with the Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility at the invitation of the Government of the Netherlands. The “Partnership week” was held from 23–25 January with the Partnership on Active Mobility in Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht (Netherlands). The aims of the meeting were to experience examples from the Netherlands of cycling and walking promotion; discuss challenges encountered in developing policies on walking and cycling; get inspiration for the development of the pan-European master plan on walking; and provide inputs to the development of a strategy for THE PEP.

20. The Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility was established in Vienna by extending the existing Transdanube Partnership to support national authorities in integrating the promotion of sustainable mobility in tourism into their strategies and actions. The

Partnership met on 25–26 January in Utrecht and The Hague (Netherlands). Participants experienced solutions applied in the two cities to facilitate sustainable tourism mobility. The Partnership is preparing guidelines on sustainable tourism mobility for adoption at the next high-level meeting.

21. The Partnership on Child- and Youth-friendly Mobility was established by the Fifth High-level Meeting in Vienna. The aim was, together with raising awareness on the need to make mobility more child- and youth-friendly, to create a pan-European master plan to guide member States to establish national plans, facilitate sharing of good practice and develop measures, guidelines and tools.

22. The Government of France provided to the ECE THE PEP trust fund a grant to develop a new study under the Partnership on Jobs in Green and Healthy Transport. The topic of the new study is “Sustainable urban logistics for green jobs”.

23. The Fifth High-level Meeting decided to develop a comprehensive pan-European Strategy on transport, health and the environment. The Steering Committee in 2021 established an open-ended, Ad hoc Working Group on Strategy and Possible Legal Instruments, to be supported by a consultant. The Working Group has met seven times since its establishment at the beginning of 2022.

24. THE PEP organized a side event on the margins of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference on 6 October 2022 on “Sustainable Mobility for Sustainable Tourism”. The event was organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism of Cyprus, the Ministry of the Environment of Czechia and the Federal Department of Economic Affairs of Switzerland.

25. The Government of Austria hosted a relay-race workshop on “Boosting active mobility and mobility management for climate-friendly, healthy and energy-saving mobility in Europe” (Vienna, 25–27 April 2023). Topics discussed included: promotion of active mobility; mobility management; considering children and young people to accomplish a mobility transition; and eco-driving. Back-to-back with the relay-race workshop, Austria hosted meetings of the Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility (24–25 April 2023) and (simultaneously on 27 April 2023) the Ad hoc Working Group on Strategy and Possible Legal Instruments, the Partnership on Active Mobility and the Partnership on Child- and Youth-friendly Mobility.

B. Goals and challenges

26. In the Vienna Declaration, member States decided to “establish an ad hoc working group to analyse different legal options to give effect to our vision and strategy, and elaborate draft proposals for possible legal instruments”. The Steering Committee decided that the same group responsible for the strategy would deal with this topic, starting in autumn 2023. The Steering Committee is expected to adopt the strategy in autumn 2024; a possible legal instrument is to be proposed in 2025.⁶

27. It was important that discussions on the strategy and on a possible legal framework represented as much as possible the wider composition of the ECE region and were supported by predictable funding.

28. The Partnership on Jobs in Green and Healthy Transport is to deliver the first results of its new study by the end of 2023.

C. Planned activities

29. A side event “Leveraging THE PEP Partnerships to accelerate the transition to healthy, low carbon and sustainable mobility in the pan-European region” will take place on 5 July 2023, on the margins of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and

⁶ ECE/AC.21/SC/2022/2–EUCHP2219536/1.1/2, para. 24 (b) and (f).

Health (Budapest, 5–7 July 2023). A meeting of the Partnership on Jobs in Green and Healthy Transport is to take place in summer 2023.

30. Meetings under the other Partnerships will continue to share experiences and good practices and finalize their work that will be presented for adoption at the Sixth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (planned for 2025). Meetings of the Working Group will continue with a view to finalizing the strategy by 2024 and preparing a proposal on a possible legal instrument for consideration by the Sixth High-level Meeting.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

31. The Committee could consider inviting its members to identify additional participants in the work on THE PEP strategy and on a possible legal instrument. In addition, members of the Committee could be invited to contact THE PEP secretariat should they wish their country to be involved in any of the activities under THE PEP, especially the Partnerships, or to contribute financially.

III. European Environment and Health Process

A. Overview of recent developments

32. In the period under review, the main activities under the European Environment and Health Process were aimed at the preparation and organization of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health.

33. Member States in the European Environment and Health Process decided to focus the Ministerial Conference on the impact on health of the triple crisis of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss. The Conference aims to achieve political commitment to accelerate progress in addressing health challenges arising from the triple crisis.

34. The main aims of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health are to:

(a) Take stock of the most recent developments in understanding the health impact of the triple environmental crisis;

(b) Enhance the commitment of the health sector to tackle the impacts of climate change, including by making health systems more environmentally sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient;

(c) Accelerate actions and collaboration across borders and sectors to tackle the health effects of pollution, addressing both established and emerging environmental risk factors;

(d) Integrate nature, biodiversity and health considerations into environment and health policies;

35. The European Environment and Health Task Force and its Bureau were the driving bodies for the preparation of the Conference, providing also an opportunity for countries and stakeholders to discuss and exchange experiences on challenges in the implementation of the commitments made at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Ostrava, Czechia, 13–15 June 2017). The Bonn Dialogues on Environment and Health (a series of high-level public events addressing advances in science, policy and practice held in Bonn, Germany, on 14 October and 8 December 2021, 3 June and 14 October 2022, and 21 February 2023) were also organized to contribute to the preparation of the Ministerial Conference.

36. To support the monitoring of commitments in the Ostrava Declaration, member States decided to use Sustainable Development Goal indicators. A few supplementary indicators were suggested in cases where there were no Sustainable Development Goal indicators that matched the Ostrava commitments. A database was created for the indicators as a tool for supporting a review of progress.

B. Goals and challenges

37. Among the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference are:

- (a) Adoption of the negotiated Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Health;
- (b) A review of the commitments made at the previous Ministerial Conference in 2017;
- (c) Accelerated progress in addressing challenges for health coming from the triple environmental crisis, while promoting a healthy recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic;
- (d) The launch of concrete initiatives, such as the European Environment and Health Process Partnerships, led by member States and/or stakeholders, and engaging those interested in working together on specific issues.

C. Planned activities

38. The Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health will be held under the patronage of the President of Hungary. It will be preceded by a meeting of the European Environment and Health Task Force, on 4 July 2023, to finalize the draft declaration with a view to its adoption at the Conference.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

39. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to note the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference and to reconfirm its commitment to contribute to the European Environment and Health Process.

IV. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities

A. Overview of recent developments

40. The Environment Division participated in the preparation of the ECE Gender Action Plan 2021–2022, and reported on the implementation of activities in 2021 and 2022 by including activities on gender mainstreaming implemented by the secretariat, which were included in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

41. During the reporting period, following the recommendations of the [gender mainstreaming evaluation](#), three gender co-focal points (one P-5 and two P-4 regular budget staff members) continued to work as gender focal points until June 2022, when one of the focal points was due to retire. Currently, one P-5 female staff member and one P-4 male staff member are working as gender focal points.

42. The Environment Division continued to advance mainstreaming gender in environmental policies by hosting events for the integration of gender aspects into environmental policies.

43. Following a series of training sessions organized by the Environment Division in the previous years, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia expressed a need for assistance in raising the awareness of local authorities on the integration of gender aspects into environmental policies and activities. In response, ECE in collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Women in Serbia organized [a training session](#) (Fruške Terme Resort, National Park Fruška Gora, Serbia (hybrid), 30 September 2021). Participants were introduced to several approaches to help design, implement and develop further gender-responsive

environmental policies, such as programme screening, gender impact assessment, gender responsive budgeting and gender monitoring. To support participants in using different approaches in gender mainstreaming at the local level, a [guidance document](#) was developed. The need to continue capacity-building on gender mainstreaming in environmental policy at the local level was evident, and further support was requested from the national and international levels. In total, 71 individuals representing 38 municipalities, five cities, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and regional development agencies participated in the training.

44. On 9 February 2022, an [experience-sharing workshop](#) on the integration of gender aspects into environmental policies in the Western Balkans region was held online, with participation from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. In total, 33 participants from environment ministries from four countries, UN-Women, UNDP Serbia, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Serbia attended the workshop. While the situation in the different countries varies in terms of legal provision and adequate institutional settings for gender mainstreaming, the participants' awareness of the importance of integrating gender into environmental policies was evident, as well as their motivation to make progress on these issues. Participants expressed their interest in further support on capacity-building at the practical level, for example, gender analysis of an existing sectoral plan, sharing experience and defining potential joint cross-border projects on energy efficiency, transport plans, climate change adaptation plans or waste management strategies.

45. With a view to disseminating information on activities, the Environment Division regularly updates a web page⁷ entitled "Environment and Gender".

46. During the reporting period, the secretariat continuously promoted a gender balance in the governing bodies of the multilateral environmental processes that it services. In the period 2021–2023, the gender balance for the chairs of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements was 45.5 per cent women and 54.5 per cent men. In the same period, the Chairs of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Chair re-elected in May 2023), the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Steering Committee of THE PEP were women, whereas the Chair of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews was a man. The secretariat also strove to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in terms of participation in meetings, capacity-building seminars, workshops and training sessions organized under the auspices of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and programmes.

47. Under THE PEP, a workshop on "Transport, Health and Environment: including a gender perspective" was organized during the twentieth session of the Steering Committee of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (Geneva, 17–19 October 2022). The workshop allowed participants to discuss the relevance of a gender perspective related to transport, health and environment issues. The outcomes of the discussions contributed to the preparation of the comprehensive pan-European strategy on transport, health and environment. Members of the Steering Committee also decided to include questions on gender and transport in the THE PEP survey to be carried out every two years.

48. Under the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme and in particular during the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 11–12 April 2022), discussions took place on the importance of integrating gender aspects and the need to support data disaggregation in the new mandate and terms of reference of the Group. Two presentations during the twenty-fourth session focused on the relevance of gender mainstreaming and data disaggregation, and participants were informed about the recent report *Gender and environment statistics: Unlocking*

⁷ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/environment-and-gender>.

information for action and measuring the SDGs,⁸ which provides guidance on priority areas and recommendations.

49. The environmental performance reviews (EPRs) generate knowledge through the assessment of progress made by countries in reconciling their environmental and economic targets. The third EPR of Azerbaijan reported that gender equality is guaranteed by the Constitution of Azerbaijan. This is reflected in the 2019 UNDP Gender Inequality Index. However, the third voluntary national review of Azerbaijan reported that “the available data [have] not been disaggregated by gender, age group ... which partially constrains the scope of analysis, assessment and findings”.⁹ The second EPR of Armenia integrates the status of implementation of Sustainable Development Goal targets 5.6 (chapter on health and the environment) and 5.a (chapter on agriculture and the environment). The report also provides some initiatives on gender carried out in agriculture, health and waste management. Gender was also in the focus of the chapters on climate change, health and the environment, agriculture and the environment, and transport and the environment. Both reports are expected to be published in the second half of 2023.

50. A gender perspective was mainstreamed in the activities on equitable access to water and sanitation under the ECE-World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health through promoting the reflection of the gender dimension in the equitable self-assessment exercises undertaken in several countries of the pan-European region. The gender dimension is also mainstreamed in the new policy brief *Making Water and Sanitation Affordable for All: Policy Options and Good Practices to Ensure the Affordability of Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation Services in the Pan-European Region*.¹⁰ Gender disparities will be further addressed in the ongoing revision of the self-assessment methodology contained in the document *The Equitable Access Score-card: Supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation*¹¹ in order to capture the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergency situations and the impacts of such situations on different vulnerable groups.

51. A gender perspective was mainstreamed in the activities under the programme of work of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). On 28 September 2021, a side event “Women, Water and Peace” was organized at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Geneva, 29 September–1 October 2021) in cooperation with Geneva Water Hub and Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean. An interactive thematic session on public participation in river basin management in transboundary basins, including integration of gender aspects, took place in the framework of the eighteenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (Geneva, 19–21 June 2023). The template for the third reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and the Water Convention integrates a gender perspective, paving the way for gathering data on gender aspects in transboundary water cooperation during the third reporting round in 2023.

52. All activities under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers carried out in 2022 and 2023 provided equal opportunities for the participation of women and men. The following events that addressed challenges related to women empowerment can be noted in particular:

- The Convention’s Working Group of the Parties, at its twenty-sixth meeting (Geneva, 22–23 June 2022), urged Parties to implement the updated Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools and

⁸ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Nairobi, 2018).

⁹ *Third Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Azerbaijan: 2021*, p. 17.

¹⁰ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/20.

¹¹ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/8.

support effective participation of groups in vulnerable situations, including women, in decision-making on environmental matters.¹²

- The Convention’s Meeting of the Parties, at its third extraordinary session (Geneva, 23–24 June 2022), noted the increased number of attacks against women in the field of environmental journalism.¹³
- The Convention’s Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making at its tenth meeting (Geneva, 10–11 October 2022), highlighted that more should be done to engage different target groups, in particular, those in vulnerable situations, such as women, the elderly and Indigenous communities, in decision-making in environmental matters. In this regard, the secretariat was requested to conduct a survey to identify good practices, possible challenges and lessons learned in relation to participation of groups in vulnerable situations in decision-making and encouraged Parties, other interested States and stakeholders to participate in the survey and to submit the related good practices to the Aarhus Clearinghouse and its good practice database. A number of specific calls on Parties and stakeholders were also made, including: to continue improving public participation in decision-making on health-related issues linked to air pollution by ensuring effective and inclusive public involvement, including of vulnerable and marginalized groups exposed to air pollution; to strengthen the capacity of the public, in particular vulnerable and marginalized groups, to participate in decision-making procedures; and, to continue improving public participation in decision-making on urban development/cities by ensuring effective and inclusive public involvement, including of local communities and vulnerable and marginalized groups.¹⁴
- The Convention’s Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders at his meeting (online, 23 November 2022) announced his commitment to a gender-sensitive approach by recognizing in his [vision for the mandate](#) “the significance of gender in the protection of defenders and apply an intersectionality approach to the assessment of risks and to the design of protection initiatives”.¹⁵
- The Convention’s Task Force on Access to Justice at its [fourteenth](#) (27–28 April 2022) and [fifteenth](#) (4–5 April 2023) meetings provided a platform to Governments, judiciary, NGOs and a wide range of other stakeholder for exchanging challenges and good practices with regard to key recent developments and measures to remove barriers to access to justice for all, also addressing the specific needs of individuals and groups in vulnerable situations, including women.

B. Goals and challenges

53. The discussions during the capacity-building and experience-sharing workshops showed that equal gender representation is a big issue in environmental policy. Yet, it seems to be more difficult to go beyond issues of gender balance and find adequate responses to the substance of environmental policies and their impacts on gender equality. One of the main challenges is a lack of local gender-disaggregated data.

C. Planned activities

54. The Environment Division will continue to support gender mainstreaming work in countries through capacity development and awareness-raising events on request by Governments.

¹² ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/2, paras. 22 (e) and 24.

¹³ ECE/MP.PP/2022/2 (advance version), para. 41.

¹⁴ ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2023/3, paras. 16 (b) (iii), 36 (d), 45 (c) and 48.

¹⁵ Vision for the Mandate: Statement by the Aarhus Convention’s Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders, p. 1. Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/meeting-aarhus-convention-special-rapporteur-environmental-defenders>

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

55 The Committee is invited to note the information provided with respect to gender mainstreaming across ECE activities and in environmental activities carried out by the Environment Division since the Committee's last session and to:

(a) Recognize the importance of gender mainstreaming in environmental activities, particularly in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, and to emphasize that gender equality is both a goal in itself and a means of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development;

(b) Support international initiatives to promote gender equality and welcome continued cooperation and coordination with the United Nations bodies and other relevant international forums and actors to that end;

(c) Agree to continue to mainstream a gender perspective in its activities.
