

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
Access to Information, Public Participation
in Decision-making and Access to Justice
in Environmental Matters

Task Force on Access to Information

Eighth meeting

Geneva, 9-10 November 2023

Information document 3

Key outcomes¹

as agreed by the Task Force on Access to Information at its eighth meeting

I. Opening and adoption of the agenda

1. The Task Force:

- (i) Adopted the agenda as set out in document AC/TF.AI-8/Inf.1;
- (ii) Took note of the statements by the Chair and the European ECO Forum.

II. International Workshop “Advancing Public Access to Environment-related Product Information: Challenges and Opportunities”

2. The Task Force:

- (i) Expressed appreciation to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), United Nations Environment Programme, ONE Planet Network, European Environment Agency and panellists;
- (ii) Took note of information shared through presentations and statements;
- (iii) Noted that the outcomes of the workshop would be summarized in the Chair’s summary and included in the meeting report.

III. Public access to environmental information:

(a) The scope of environmental information

3. The Task Force:

- (i) Thanked the speakers and took note of the developments, lessons learned and challenges as presented by the speakers;
- (ii) Highlighted the increased demand for environmental information, including for historical data, in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity protection, disaster risk reduction, and energy-related matters;

¹ This document was not formally edited.

(iii) Welcomed the initiatives of the Parties and stakeholders to widen open access to environmental information, including through greenhouse gas registers, other electronic public registers and other electronic information tools;

(iv) Called on Parties to identify and address the needs of different users, including children, youth and other groups in vulnerable situations, provide necessary guidance and adjustments to access to information procedures and establish effective user feedback mechanisms;

(v) Acknowledged the key role that access to environmental information in climate planning plays in building social consensus for just transition;

(vi) Called on Parties to take measures to improve timely access to environmental information in the context of decision-making procedures in environmental matters, in particular to draft decisions, plans, programs, policies and legislation in climate context, and to establish effective review mechanisms in case access to information is denied within these procedures;

(b) Access to information on emissions into the environment

4. The Task Force:

(i) Thanked the speakers and took note of the positive developments, lessons learned and challenges as presented by the speakers;

(ii) Highlighted the important role of pollutant release and transfer registers in promoting public access to environmental information on emissions and the regular update of the information and infrastructure of these registers;

(iii) Encouraged Parties to strengthen public access to environmental information regarding radioactive substances, biocides, lead, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and other chemicals of emerging concern, and carbon and ammonia emissions, also taking into account consistently the needs of children, youth and other groups in vulnerable situations in relation to such access and the needs for information on transboundary effects of the mentioned emissions;

(iv) Recalled the related obligations under the Aarhus Convention and encouraged cooperation on collection and dissemination of information on emissions to air and water in a transboundary context, acknowledging the challenges that can arise in this area, particularly in post-conflict societies;

(v) Welcomed initiatives undertaken by the Parties and stakeholders to promote public access to information on emissions using electronic information tools, capacity building and environmental education and encouraged other Parties to implement similar initiatives and partner organizations to support them.

(c) The provision of information to the public authorities by third parties

5. The Task Force:
- (i) Thanked the speakers and took note of challenges, lessons learned and good practices as presented by the speakers;
 - (ii) Highlighted the importance of effective mandatory information systems ensuring an adequate flow of information to public authorities about proposed and existing activities which may significantly affect the environment routinely and in case of imminent threat to human health and the environment;
 - (iii) Noted that such mandatory systems should be regularly reviewed to meet the needs of evidence-based decision-making and policy development relating to environmental matters; enhance early notification measures; support measuring and reporting of progress towards the achievement of relevant internationally and nationally agreed goals and targets; identify emerging environmental risks and vulnerabilities; support a multi-hazard early warning system; and promote environmental awareness among the public and other stakeholders;
 - (iv) Welcomed initiatives of Parties and stakeholders to promote effective public records systems and transparency and traceability of environment-related product information;
 - (v) Called on Parties to establish clear legal obligations on third parties, including foreign investors, to provide environmental information to public authorities, effective enforcement mechanisms and sanctions for non-compliance and incentives to inform public authorities and the public about environmental impacts of their activities and products throughout the life cycles;
 - (vi) Decided to continue the exchange of information regarding the developments in legislation and practice concerning the establishment of mandatory systems ensuring adequate flow of information to public authorities.

IV. Stocktaking of recent and upcoming developments

6. The Task Force:
- (i) Thanked the speakers and noted the work undertaken to implement the updated Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2);
 - (ii) Welcomed the initiatives by the Parties and stakeholders to modernize nationwide digital environmental information systems and the use of citizen science data in accordance with the above Recommendations;
 - (iii) Encouraged Parties to use and further develop existing schemes for the transfer of technology and expertise through bilateral and multilateral projects or partnerships to digitalize environmental

information systems and promote digital inclusion, especially in remote areas, and gender and intergenerational equality;

(iv) Thanked the Parties that designated national nodes for the Aarhus Clearinghouse² and requested other Parties to inform the secretariat about the designation of national nodes for the Aarhus Clearinghouse;

(v) Requested Parties to submit new and update existing case studies on electronic information tools³;

(vi) Decided to continue the exchange of information regarding the implementation of the updated Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools, and called on Parties to report the progress through the Convention's reporting mechanism and the Aarhus Clearinghouse.

V. Activities under other international forums

7. The Task Force:

(i) Expressed its appreciation to the representatives of UNESCO and OHCHR for informing about the relevant activities related to access to information and invited to explore the potential opportunities for synergies with the activities under the Aarhus Convention in promoting public access to environmental information;

(ii) Welcomed the exchange of information on recent and upcoming activities with regard to the implementation, measuring and monitoring progress towards Sustainable Development Goal target 16.10;

(iii) Highlighted that measures adopted by the countries to implement Sustainable Development Goal target 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms) can support the progress towards other environment-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets;

(iv) Welcomed the adoption of the General Comment N26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change (CRC/C/GC/26)⁴ by the Committee on the Rights of the Child under the Convention of the Rights of the Child;

(v) Encouraged Parties to develop a child-friendly version of the Aarhus Convention;

(vi) Encouraged Parties to ensure that access to environmental information, including health-related information on pollution, is guaranteed in child-friendly formats;

(vii) Invited Parties to consider the establishment of child- and youth advisory councils tied to national ministries or Aarhus Centres and urged all Parties to mandate the integration of information on

² See <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/national-nodes>

³ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/eit-case-studies>

⁴ Available from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights>

environmental rights, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into environmental education within school curricula;

(viii) Called on respective Parties, other interested States, Aarhus Centres and other stakeholders to take additional measures to promote environmental education and awareness-raising and advance the fulfilment of children's rights to access to environmental information in accordance with the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(ix) Encouraged Parties to collect the relevant data and information regarding public access to environmental information (e.g. statistics available on the number of requests made, the number of refusals and the reasons for such refusals) and to provide the respective information in the national implementation reports (Question IX) for 2025 reporting cycle.

VI. Closing

- 8 The Task Force requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the meeting report and incorporate the agreed outcomes as summarised by the Chair at the meeting.
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