

Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

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Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters: Legal Framework

- **Adoption:** 25 June 1998, Aarhus, Denmark
- **Entry into force:** 30 October 2001
- **Parties:** 47 Parties in total: including from EU, North, Eastern, South Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia subregions (45 States) + EU + Guinea Bissau
- **Accession:** Open for accession by any UN Member State
- **Objective:** Contribute to the protection of the rights of every person of present and future generation to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well being (supports UNGA Res. 76/300 of 28.7.2022)
- **Three pillars:** Access to information, Public participation in decision-making, Access to justice
- **Amendment:** on genetically modified organisms (decision II/1; not yet into force)
- **Protocol on PRTRs:** independent instrument, but at the same time, it strengthens the first pillar of the Aarhus Convention

Aarhus Convention: support to green, circular and digital economy

- ❖ Guarantees public access to a wide range of environmental information (e.g., policies, legislation, plans and programs; costs and outcomes, other economic analysis and assumptions)
- ❖ Facilitates linkages to environmental indicators, statistics, geospatial data, and Earth observation data on environmental issues.
- ❖ Requires active dissemination of environmental information (e.g., information on best practices and guidelines to improve environmental management and sustainability) and promotes reuse of public sector environmental information.
- ❖ Incentivizes cleaner production and emission reductions by establishing pollutant release and transfer registers and making them publicly available (see PRTR Protocol)
- ❖ Encourages operators to disclose information on environmental impacts, including through voluntary ecolabeling or environmental auditing schemes or other means.
- ❖ Requires that sufficient product information be made available in such a way that consumers can make informed environmental choices.



Access to information and electronic information tools

SDG Target 16.10 – [MoP Decision VII/1](#)

- ❖ **Priorities:** active dissemination of environmental information routinely and in case of emergencies, digital transformation and use of modern digital technologies, transparency of public authorities and the application of restrictions, protection of whistle-blowers
- ❖ **Substantive focus on information related to**
 - ❖ Quality of the environment and emissions into the environment
 - ❖ Hazardous substances and wastes
 - ❖ Environment-related product information
 - ❖ Imminent threat to human health or the environment (e.g. multi-hazards early warning systems)
- ❖ **Activities' focus:**
 - ❖ Support modernization of environmental information system and reporting on the state of the environment and to MEAs, creating user-friendly single web access points
 - ❖ Promoting access to environmental information within e-government and open data initiatives
 - ❖ Supporting initiatives related to citizen science and crowdsourcing
 - ❖ Promoting the application of tools to inform consumers, such as eco-labelling, energy-labelling, product passports, product declarations and warning labelling, green public procurement mechanisms
 - ❖ Assistance in reviewing legislation
 - ❖ Assistance in trainings and multi-stakeholder dialogues

Aarhus Convention toolbox:

[Update Recommendations on Electronic Information Tools](#)

[Maastricht Recommendations](#)
Other Guidelines and Recommendations
([Implementation Guide](#), [Almaty](#), [EIT](#))

Sharing experiences by
taking part in the Aarhus
Convention's Task Forces
([AI](#), [PPDM](#), [AJ](#))

[Aarhus Good
Practice Database](#)

Aarhus Convention
[publications](#)

Relevant findings of
Aarhus Convention
[Compliance Committee](#)

[Synthesis and national
implementation reports](#)

[Aarhus Clearinghouse](#)
National nodes

[Analytical studies and
jurisprudence database](#)

Resources by the [Special
Rapporteur on
Environmental Defenders](#)



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Making information on pollution releases and waste transfers public, has led to companies reducing their pollution and identifying smarter production methods

Reporting tool for industry to provide data on their emissions (monitoring pollutant releases to water, air and land over time)

Database that facilitates data management

Data visualization tool that sets emissions in spatial and other context (e.g. health, infrastructure, demographic and economic data) and makes data accessible and more useful

Tool for fact-based decision making at multiple levels

Link with other MEAs and initiatives

- PRTRs are used for multiple reporting obligations and across sectors making best use of synergies
- PRTRs are used for the sound management of chemicals
- Strong linkage with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements and initiatives e.g.:
 - the Stockholm Convention and its reporting mechanism
 - Minamata Convention and UNFCCC Climate Change related reporting



Protocol on PRTRs

Scope of the Protocol



- 65 activities (capacity/employee thresholds)
- 86 substances/substance categories, such as greenhouse gases, acid rain pollutants, ozone-depleting substances, heavy metals, substances covered by POP's Convention and certain carcinogens such as dioxins
- Releases to air, soil, water.
- Parties choose the capacity threshold system or employee threshold system for determining which facilities report.
- Off-site transfers of waste / wastewater. A threshold system defines which waste transfers have to be reported.
- Progressively include available data on diffuse releases, core element of PRTRs.
- The Protocol sets minimum requirements. Parties developing PRTRs may go further, according to their national priorities and may include activities and substances that are additional to those listed in Annex I and Annex II).

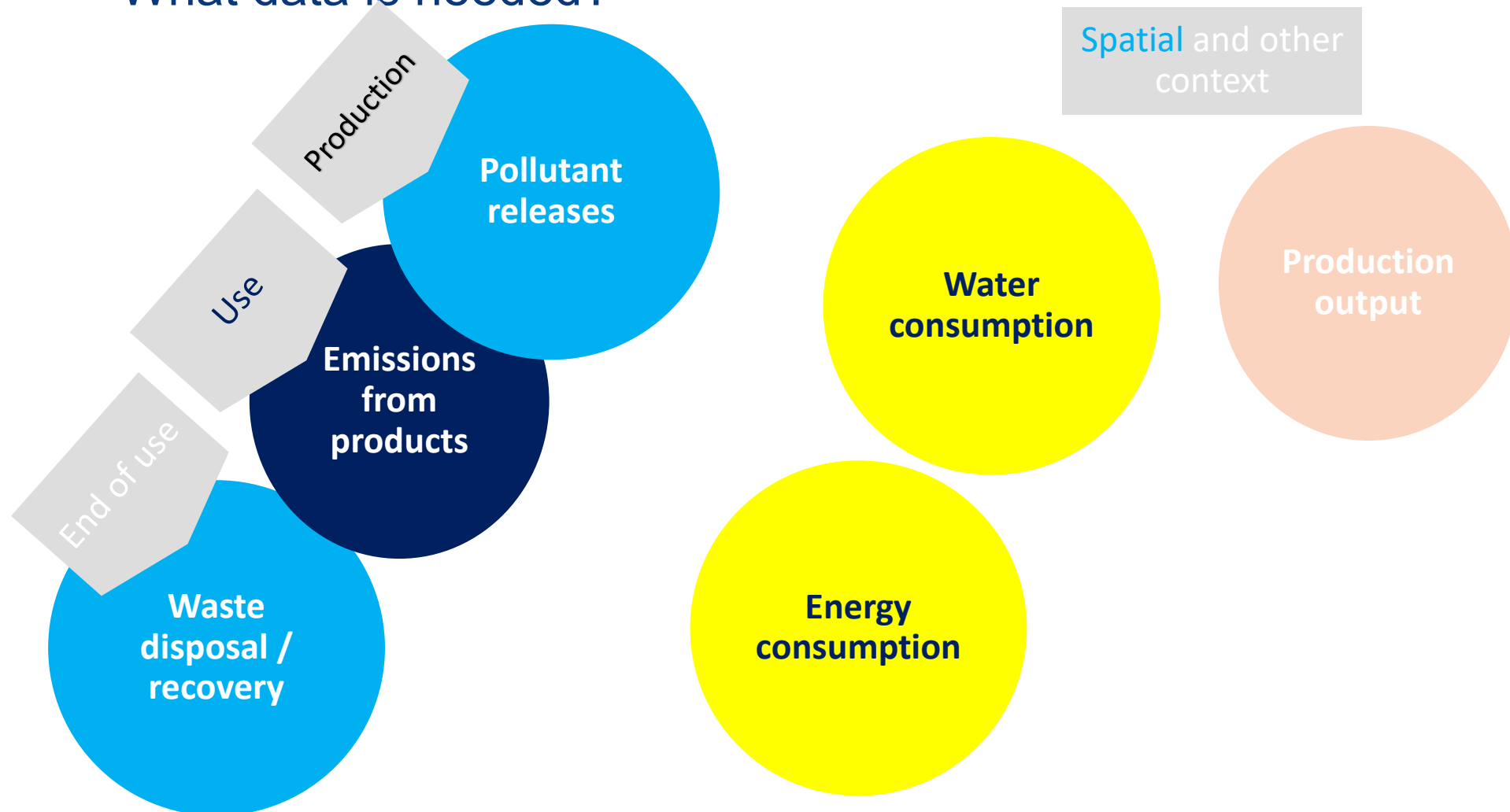
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Background

- Adopted at EfE Ministerial conference in Kyiv, 21 May 2003
 - Protocol open to all UN Member States
 - Only legally binding tool for access to environmental data with its own compliance mechanism
 - Entry into force on 8 October 2009
 - 38 Parties including EU
 - EU level: EPRTR Regulation was mostly based on the Protocol – now in the process of being up-dated
- 2008 Guidance on implementing the Protocol on PRTRs
 - 2014 Strategic Plan 2015-2020
 - 2014 Maastricht declaration
 - 2017 / 2021 Budva and Geneva declarations
- Considering elements linked to the shift to green and sustainable economies*

Green economy and circularity

What data is needed?





Examples for uses of PRTR data

EEA and Nature articles

Serbia
Chile

Put into practice polluters pay principle

Link pollutant releases with environmental and health costs

Use PRTR releases to mark policy goals : reduce releases by 30%

Survey 2020
ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2020/4

Improve monitoring of in- and output parameters for industrial activities

Climate crisis / Measure and control GHG emissions

Many
European CO2 emission trading (EU ETS)

USA
Share and scale pollution prevention techniques

Japan
Tools for local governments

Israel
Improved decision-making processes based on environmental and human health- related information

Prepare reports on specific issues

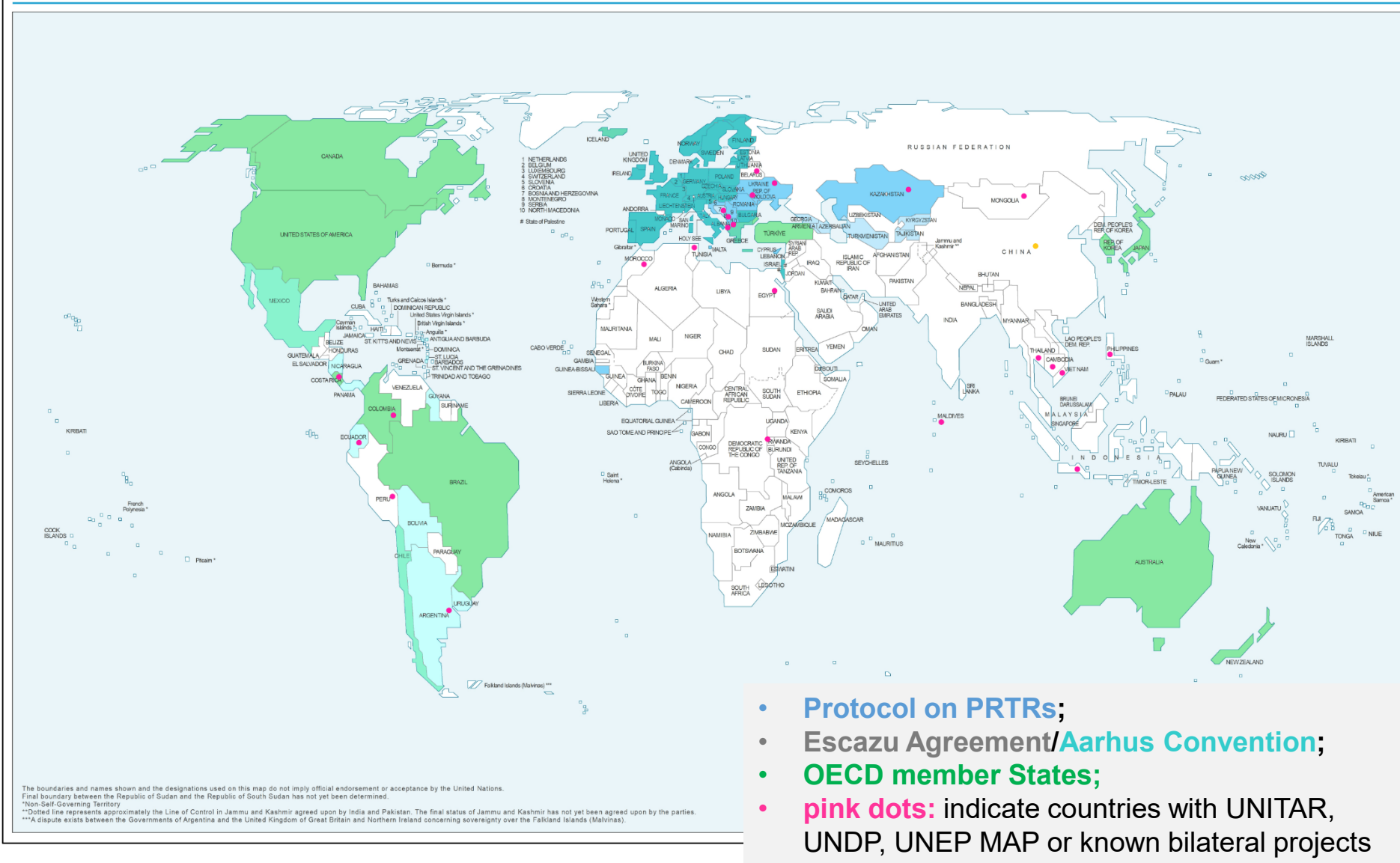
Facilitate policy analysis and policy adaptation

All countries



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STYLIZED MAP OF THE WORLD



Key developments – UNEA 5 resolutions

- **Resolution 7: Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste**
- **Resolution 8: Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution**
- **Resolution 11: Enhancing Circular Economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production**
- **Resolution 12: Environmental aspects of minerals and metals management**
- **Resolution 14: End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument**



*“Monitoring and reporting are fragmented at the global, regional and national levels, and are inadequate to track progress towards global goals and targets, requiring the development of globally agreed definitions to assist in harmonising these processes. **The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) provides an important model as it requires reporting on pollutant releases and transfers by operators and owners on the production facilities of plastics and some associated chemicals, as well as reporting on recovery and final disposal operations.**”*

Why the Protocol on PRTRs ?

- Developed also to serve other MEAs and initiatives that address pollution
- Harmonized reporting tool and source of pollution-related data
- Fact-based decision making tool, increasing transparency and encouraging improvements – producers, consumers, governments



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CONVENTIONS



MINAMATA
CONVENTION
ON MERCURY



**Mediterranean
Action Plan**
Barcelona
Convention



Aarhus Convention secretariat:
public.participation@un.org
<https://unece.org/environmental-policy-1/public-participation>



Aarhus Clearinghouse: <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/> <https://unece.org/env/pp/protocol-on-prtrs-introduction>

