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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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**Meeting with the Chair of the  
Committee on Environmental Policy  
Report by the Chair**

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# Report by the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy\*

## I. Introduction

1. In the reporting period, the Environment subprogramme under the general governance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy and the other governing and subsidiary bodies under the Environment subprogramme continued to support countries to enhance their environmental governance and transboundary cooperation as well as strengthen implementation of the ECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region.

## II. Achievements over the past twelve months

### Advancing sustainable development and environmental governance in the region

2. The twenty-eighth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy was held in Geneva on 1–3 November 2023. Agenda items included sustainable development in the region; a number of issues related to outcomes of and follow up to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022); work related to environmental monitoring and assessment, including the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators; work related to environmental performance reviews (EPRs), including peer review of the environmental performance of Kyrgyzstan and Mauritania; cross-sectoral activities; regional advisory services and collaboration activities; presentation and exchange of views on the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme; and procedural matters of the work of the Committee, including election of officers.

3. The Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the recommendations contained in the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan and in the EPR of Mauritania; adopted the Guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of EPRs; approved the new mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2024–2028 and requested the secretariat to submit the decision on extension to the ECE Executive Committee for approval. The Committee also extended the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until end-2025; adopted the draft programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024 and recommended that it be approved by the Executive Committee; and took note of the “Outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2025”.

4. Ministers at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference adopted a declaration recognizing the need to assess the environmental consequences of the Russian invasion on Ukraine and the surrounding region and to provide support to Ukraine in its reconstruction. International organizations were invited to assess the most urgent environmental needs in Ukraine and to make recommendations to promote the sustainable reconstruction of the country. An informal inter-agency coordination group on environmental assessments for Ukraine was established in late 2022 and organized a first *Seminar on Assessments of the Environmental Damage Resulting from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine* on 16 February 2023. The seminar provided a platform for different actors – including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources and the State Environmental Inspectorate of Ukraine; The World Bank; Conflict and Environment Observatory and the Centre for Environmental Initiatives, “Ecoaction” (both NGOs); the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; and the Finnish Meteorological Institute – to share insights on findings and approaches taken so far by them to track environmental damage. Participants focused on the substantive results of their assessments and the methodological approaches applied in carrying them out. Discussions underscored that strengthening coordination and fostering coherence between

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\* This document was not formally edited.

assessment approaches will be crucial to obtain a meaningful overall picture of environmental impacts. The group organized its second *Seminar on Assessments of the Environmental Damage Resulting from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: The Use of Earth Observations and Remote Sensing* in May 2023. The seminar focused on remote sensing using satellite imagery and their analysis, other Earth observations methods as well as the links between remote and ground-based analysis. Experts from various organizations presented the methods already applied in Ukraine and those that could be used, focusing on their potential and limitations. Ongoing initiatives and opportunities for collaboration were also considered. To provide a comprehensive overview of the existing, ongoing and planned assessments on environmental damage in Ukraine and a preliminary identification of critical areas for remediation, the group (through a consultant hired by UNEP) undertook a preliminary mapping of the assessments of environmental damage in Ukraine that have been undertaken or are underway; a preliminary identification of gaps and overlaps in the assessments and the identification of areas where further assessments may be required; and the identification of planned environmental recovery and remediation processes and plans, with the view to identify possible follow-up support by the group. The consultant presented interim results to the group and representatives of Ukraine in October 2023, with final results due at the end of 2023.

5. At its eighteenth session held on 25–26 May 2023, the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) reviewed the progress in implementing the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (The Strategy) since the previous meeting held in 2022. At the meeting, the Steering Committee also considered the following: the outcomes of the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries organised in Nicosia on 5 October 2022 in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial; 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 Steering Committee in the framework of the Forum; contribution to and participation 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 (18–19 April 2023); the outcomes of the work of the ad hoc groups on strategic planning and indicators. The Steering Committee adopted the final version of the workplan for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2025 and approved the proposed plan of activities and outputs along the four strands, as outlined in the workplan. The Steering Committee also considered the preparations for the next mandatory reporting cycle (2021–2025) under the Strategy and approved the establishment of the “Support Group for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy’s implementation” and also 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 on 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)”. The Committee approved also the proposed outline of activities for implementing the second strand on the whole institution (school) approach outlined in the draft workplan and the draft concept note and planning of the first capacity-building activity to be organized in 2023 or 2024 under the Swiss project (2023–2025) on implementing the 4th strand on “Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD” of the implementation framework. The Committee was also updated on the activities of the UNECE ESD Youth Platform held since the previous meeting including the involvement of youth in the Nicosia Ministerial Conference organized during the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Committee agreed in principle to establish the UNECE Youth Task Force on ESD that is an expert body drawn from youth representatives under its supervision and approved the plan for proposed activities in 2023. In addition, the Committee considered the recent activities to promote ESD in other international forums and other current issues according to the agenda.

6. The capacity building workshop on implementing the UNECE Strategy for ESD on the national level was held on 30-31 October 2023 in Tbilisi, Georgia which helped to strengthen the national capacity of Georgia in implementing the fourth priority area on ‘Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD’ of the implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030, as a tool for green transformation and

resilience. The main objective of the project was to encourage all UNECE member States to use education for sustainable development for stimulating entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets among learners in order to accelerate transformations towards sustainable development and increase the employability of youth in existing or emerging new jobs, as well as address disparities related to technological advances, and contribute to a sustainable, fair and resilient future.

7. The first capacity building workshop for facilitating national reporting on implementing the new implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD (2021–2030) along the four priority strands, was held virtually on Tuesday, 12 December 2023, which was designed primarily for the national focal points and looked at the timing, principles and practice of reporting. In 2023, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme continued to serve as the knowledge sharing platform in the ECE region to advance the monitoring and assessment of environmental conditions and trends, the production, harmonization and sharing of environmental data, statistics, indicators and information for reporting to policymakers, international forums and the public. It also continued to support policy development and its implementation, including the monitoring of relevant SDGs. Under an EU-funded project named “EU4 Environment - Water Resources and Environmental Data”, a regional training on air quality and emissions to air statistics and indicators was organized on 4-5 May 2023 in cooperation with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), the Environment Agency Austria and Statistics Luxembourg. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators both met in Geneva and online in 2023. The Working Group focused among others on the continued implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System, the strengthening of environmental monitoring including through the promotion of the use of new technologies such as earth observation to complement traditional monitoring and support to national and international reporting by countries. The Working Group also followed up on relevant decisions and outcomes from the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference within the framework of the twenty-fifth session of the Working Group and the twentieth session of the Joint Task Force and through capacity development activities. Topics stemming from the Nicosia Declaration that were discussed and addressed include to rely on open data, big data and state-of-the-art digital technologies, to apply common pan-European methods and systems for monitoring and information management, monitoring of air pollution, to continue efforts to implement all pillars of the Shared Environmental Information System and to keep the pan-European region under regular review. The Joint Task Force finalized in 2023 the revision of the Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators. Both bodies submitted new mandates and terms of reference beyond 2023 to the Committee on Environmental Policy for approval. The Committee approved the new mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group and extended the one for the Joint Task Force for two years. A possible conversion of the Joint Task Force, into a Joint Working Group will be further discussed in 2024. In 2023, the programme has also provided support to the finalization of a national state-of-the-environment report for Uzbekistan, which is planned to be launched at the Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (COP14) which will be hosted by the Government of Uzbekistan, in Samarkand from 12–17 February 2024.

8. In 2023, the ECE EPR Programme kicked off the fourth cycle of reviews, in the ECE region, with the fourth EPR of Tajikistan. The country review mission took place from 6 to 15 November. Also, in 2023, the expert and peer reviews of the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan and the EPR of Mauritania took place, culminating with the adoption by the Committee on Environmental Policy of the recommendations made in these EPRs. The Committee encouraged the two countries to develop roadmaps to implement the EPR recommendations. Furthermore, in 2023, the Guidance on the conduct of the fourth cycle of EPRs, as presented in document ECE/CEP/2023/6, was prepared by the Expert Group on EPRs and adopted by the Committee on Environmental Policy.<sup>1</sup> Eligible countries were invited to benefit from an EPR while considering the provisions of the Guidance, as much as feasible considering the national context of each country under review. Moreover, in 2023, the work continued on the reviews of Armenia and Azerbaijan preparing them for publishing. EPR activities in 2023 include the organization of three workshops based on EPRs recommendations related to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Committee-on-Environmental-Policy/events/379785>

waste management<sup>2</sup>, climate change<sup>3</sup>, and disaster risk reduction<sup>4</sup>, respectively, hosted by the Government of North Macedonia with financial support from Germany and in-kind support from North Macedonia. The workshops had a good participation rate totalling up to 44 participants from 18 target countries. In each workshop, participants valued the exchange of international good practices and of national experiences and made a set of recommendations to advance the topics under discussion.

9. The twenty-first session of the Steering Committee of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), organized on 23 – 25 October 2023. The Committee was updated on the meetings of the open-ended, ad hoc working group to work on a draft THE PEP strategy and was able to discuss the first draft of the strategy<sup>5</sup>. Member States were able to provide feedback on the draft and a way forward towards the adoption of the document in autumn 2024. The Committee also discussed an informal document regarding the review of the possible options for legal instruments on THE PEP. The work on legal instruments should be initiated after the current Steering Committee session with a view to finalizing it in 2025, based on the decision made by the Steering Committee at its past session.<sup>6</sup> The Chair called for nominations of national experts to be part of the open-ended Working Group. She also called for expressions of interest from member States to provide one or more consultants as in-kind contribution, or to provide financial contributions to cover the cost of one or two consultants to support the work of the Working Group on developing legal instruments. The Committee noted that wider consultations on possible legal instruments might follow, involving the permanent missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

10. The Steering Committee included a session in the form of seminar on “Transport Planning for the Future”. Among others, the following elements were touched upon during the seminar:

(a) The impact of the urban environment on individuals’ decisions regarding their transport choices, particularly on how it encouraged walking and its synergy in terms of promoting the use of public transport;

(b) The importance of intersectoral cooperation in support of healthier and more sustainable transport and mobility;

(c) Emerging micromobility options as an alternative to cars, and the substitution effect micromobility had on car journeys, as well as active mobility options.

11. The Steering Committee was informed about the meetings under THE PEP Partnerships. In particular, THE PEP Partnership on Active Mobility met back-to-back with the Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility at the invitation of the Government of the Netherlands. The “Partnership week” started on 23–25 January with the Partnership on Active Mobility. The Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility met on 25–26 January. Other meetings under the Partnerships have been hosted by Germany, Slovenia, Spain and Portugal. The work contributes to reaching the goals established by the Paris Agreement and those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee took note that the Partnership was extended and renamed Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility, currently jointly of THE PEP and the European Environment and Health Process. It also welcomed the Netherlands as new co-lead of the Partnership.

12. The Committee was also updated on relay races workshops under THE PEP. In 2023, 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. Back-to-back to the relay-race workshop, Austria hosted meetings of the Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility (24–25 April) and (simultaneously on

<sup>2</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Performance-Reviews/events/383530>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Performance-Reviews/events/383532>

<sup>4</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Performance-Reviews/events/383533>

<sup>5</sup> Please see document ECE/AC.21/SC/2023/5–EUHP2219536/1.1/5

<sup>6</sup> ECE/AC.21/SC/2022/2–EUHP2219536/1.1/2, para. 24 (b).

27 April) 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. The work contributes to reaching the goals established by the Paris Agreement and those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Steering Committee also welcomed the announcement of the representative of Serbia that a relay-race workshop, back-to-back with meetings of the Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility, was to be held in Belgrade on 24–25 April 2024.

### **ECE multilateral environmental agreements – highlights**

13. The ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) continued their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meetings of the governing bodies under three MEAs were organized in 2023 namely the forty-third session of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) (Geneva, 11–14 December 2023), the Ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and the Fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on SEA (Geneva, 12–15 December 2023).

#### *Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention)*

14. At the forty-third session of the Executive Body, Parties launched the process of revision of the Protocol to Abate Acidification Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, as amended in 2012, as a result of follow-up discussions on policy options to address the findings of the review of the Protocol. The review, concluded in 2022, found that, despite the emission reductions achieved, adverse effects on human health, ecosystems and materials continued to occur throughout the ECE region. As on-going efforts would not be sufficient to avoid these harmful effects, further targeted emission reduction measures across sectors including agriculture, energy, transport and shipping, and wide-ranging societal changes in areas such as diet and heating, were needed. At its forty-third session, the Executive Body agreed to include in the revision process consideration of the following issues:

- (a) new emission reduction commitments for the pollutants currently covered by the Protocol;
- (b) potential revisions of technical annexes including with regard to their level of ambition and scope;
- (c) how to deliver further reductions of black carbon emissions;
- (d) whether and how to address methane emissions;
- (e) how to achieve additional ammonia emission reductions;
- (f) new flexibilities, and other approaches for non-Parties to facilitate ratification and subsequent implementation of the Protocol;
- (g) overarching, collective risk-based target(s) to reduce risk to health and ecosystems in the region; and
- (h) how to achieve integrated approaches among climate, energy and air policies.

15. At the same session of the Executive Body, Parties adopted the Guidance document on technical measures for reduction of methane emissions from landfill, the natural gas grid and biogas facilities, the Guidance document on technical measures for reduction of air pollutant emissions from shipping, and a document on co-mitigation of methane and ammonia emissions from agricultural sources. Parties also decided to designate the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana as the new host of the Meteorological Synthesizing Centre-East, the international centre of the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP).

16. As a result of continued capacity-building activities, Parties in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia improved their emissions reporting in 2023. In March, the secretariat launched an e-learning course on How to report emissions under the Convention, which aims to explain the importance of emission inventories for clean air policy development, the requirements for emission inventory reporting and methods for emission

estimation. The Russian version of the course on How to report emissions was launched in September. The course was used to prepare national experts for in-depth emission inventory workshops that were held in Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan. A sub-regional workshop on the Greenhouse Gas Air Pollution Interactions and Synergies (GAINS) Model assisted EECCA countries in developing emission calculations in GAINS and in better understanding emission scenario development. The secretariat also worked on a project to assist the Republic of Moldova to develop emission reduction commitments and projections as this is one of the preconditions to accede to the Gothenburg Protocol.

*Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)*

17. 2023 brought a great momentum to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) from outside the Pan-European region, with five new accessions from three different continents, namely Nigeria, Iraq, Namibia, Panama and the Gambia,- The Convention now counts eleven Parties from beyond the ECE region (in total 52 Parties). Côte d'Ivoire is at final stages in the accession process, Sierra Leone is also advanced, and more than 20 countries are in the process of accession. In 2024, the provision of tailored guidance to the numerous countries in the process of accession, as well as support to regional and basins dialogues, will be continued, with the support of relevant partners.

18. In the course of 2023 took place the third reporting exercise on the Sustainable Development Goals indicator 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention. 128 countries have so far submitted their replies, i.e., more than 80% of those countries sharing waters, demonstrating the importance attributed to transboundary water cooperation worldwide. Data validation is ongoing and the third progress reports on the Convention (for Parties only) and on SDG indicator 6.5.2 are currently being prepared.

19. In 2023, the Convention organized more than 30 events (most of them in-person or hybrid) at national, basin, regional and global levels. Experience was exchanged and new partnerships built at several global workshops including during the Global Workshop on Conjunctive Management of Surface Water and Groundwater (October 2023), the Global Workshop on the Development of Transboundary Water Cooperation Agreements or other Arrangements (November 2023) and the Global Workshop on Funding and Financing Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development (December 2023). In addition, meetings of the Implementation Committee (February and December 2023), Working Groups on Integrated Water Resources Management and on Monitoring and Assessment (June 2023), Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (October 2023) and the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (December 2023) took place. Support to on-the-ground projects continued. For example, the Implementation Committee under the Water Convention is assisting Albania and Montenegro in the framework of an advisory procedure to facilitate the development of data exchange on the shared Cijevna/Cem River.

20. The Convention secretariat has significantly contributed to the preparatory process and the running of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028, or the "United Nations 2023 Water Conference" (New York, 22 to 24 March), including by contributing to the interactive dialogue 4 on water for cooperation, with the organisation of a side event dedicated to the Water Convention and in many other ways. Great recognition of the importance of transboundary water cooperation has been given during the Conference, with more the 70 countries mentioning it during their plenary statements and more than 20 countries referring to the Water Convention.

21. Finally, the Convention contributed to other global processes and events, such as the World Water Week 2023 and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28, Dubai, 30 November – 12 December 2023).

*Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention*

22. In 2023, the Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by ECE and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), has continued to provide a

platform for steering the regional agenda on water, sanitation, hygiene and health by promoting action and exchange of experience between countries and across sectors. The Protocol community has also welcomed a new Party, North Macedonia, which has deposited its instrument of accession on 28 September 2023 and is about to become the 28th Party to the Protocol.

23. This year was important to increase the Protocol's visibility and reach within the global and regional communities working on water, sanitation, hygiene and health. In this respect, a side event was co-organized at the margins of the UN 2023 Water Conference (New York, 22–24 March 2023) by Germany, Hungary and Portugal. A side event was also co-organized by France, Hungary and the Republic of Moldova at the margins of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, 5–7 July 2023). Both events were widely attended and with active participation.

24. Furthermore, progress was achieved in the technical area of work on increasing resilience to climate change under the Protocol. Following the adoption of a new programme of work for 2023–2025, as well as the beginning of a dedicated project on equity and climate change funded by the United Nations Development Account (UNDA), the following activities were carried out:

a) Organization of a webinar on financing climate adaptation (15 June 2023), aimed at introducing key issues and concepts on climate finance, as well as resources available on the topic and some country experience;

b) Organization of the Strategic Roundtable on increasing resilience to climate change in the water and sanitation sector (Geneva, 13–14 June 2023), attended by over 100 participants. The Roundtable was key in discussing strategic priorities and laying the ground for future work.

25. Significant progress was also achieved in the area of equitable access to water and sanitation with the initial revision of the Equitable Access Score-card. The Equitable Access Score-card, outlined in the publication to reflect the lessons learnt in its ten-year application, the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging challenges to better capture the emergency responsiveness of water and sanitation service providers. The draft revised Scorecard was published after several revision rounds such as during the Regional Workshop on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation (Geneva, 13–14 June 2022) involving Parties, non-Parties, civil society and independent experts. In line with this, Montenegro was the first country to pilot the draft revised Scorecard to assess its capability to capture the new parameters- The findings of the assessment were presented at the Findings Workshop on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation in Montenegro (Podgorica, 16 May 2023), which also feed into the further revision of the Score-card- The findings also allow Montenegro to develop policy actions to address the identified gaps. Following Montenegro, Albania is the second country to pilot the draft Scorecard following the inception workshop of the project in October 2023 with expected results in Q1 2024

26. The Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting held its thirteenth meeting on 14 November 2023, to review progress with setting, revising and implementing targets under the Protocol.

27. The Compliance Committee, elected in its new composition at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2022, held its twenty-fourth meeting on 5 June 2023 and it discussed future work, including in the area of facilitating compliance with the Protocol's provisions on public health.

*Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention)*

28. The United Nations Environment Programme invited the Convention's secretariat to cooperate on the implementation of the United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 5/12 on the environmental aspects of minerals and metals management, particularly to provide information and knowledge on tailings safety that has been generated under the Convention. The secretariat, in cooperation with the Aarhus Convention secretariat and the Sustainable Energy Division, presented at and shared information on the Convention, the



*UNECE Safety Guidelines and Good Practices on Tailings Management Facilities* and related tools and roadmaps at all five regional consultations and the global consultation. The meeting documentation<sup>7</sup> expressed the importance of cooperating with the Convention's secretariat and building on the existing ECE guidelines and tools.

29. The small group on mine tailings safety, comprised of some members of the Convention's Bureau, Working Group on Implementation and the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents, convened over the course of 2023 to assess whether there is a need to update the Guidelines to facilitate the identification of hazardous activities for the purposes of the Convention (decision 2018/1 in ECE/CP.TEIA/38/Add.1) for the Convention to more comprehensively cover the hazards and risks of tailings management facilities. As mandated by the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting, the group will submit an official document on this matter for the Conference's thirteenth meeting in 2024.

30. The secretariat participated in the drafting group and steering committee of the OECD on the development of joint OECD/UN/EU Joint Research Centre guidance titled *Managing Natech Accident Risk: A Guide for Senior Leaders in Industry and Public Authorities*. The guidance, which has also been reviewed by the Convention's Bureau, is planned to be finalized and published in 2024.

31. The secretariat prepared the United Nations publication titled *Risk Assessment for Industrial Accident Prevention: An Overview of Risk Assessment Methods, Selected Case Studies and Available Software*, on the basis of two reports reviewed by the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth meeting. The publication provides an introduction to risk assessment methodologies for industrial accident prevention and eighteen case studies on methodologies applied at selected industrial facilities in the ECE region, including with five of those industrial facilities having potential to cause transboundary effects if an accident were to occur. The publication will be issued in 2024 in English, French and Russian.

32. The Working Group on Implementation, with the support of the secretariat, finalized the reporting format for national implementation reports for the tenth round of reporting (2019–2022) and accompanying guidelines. The secretariat circulated the reporting format and guidelines and received submissions from 30 Parties and one non-Party by the deadline. Over the course of 2024, the Working Group, with the support of the secretariat, will evaluate the national implementation reports and prepare the tenth report on implementation for the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. 36. The secretariat continued providing support to Serbia under the process of National Policy Dialogue (NPD) on Industrial Safety notably by helping it develop its National Programme on Industrial Safety and hold a stakeholder consultation (Belgrade, 20 September 2023) with the engagement of state and local authorities, industry, academia and international partners, to review and discuss the Programme. The text of the Programme is being finalized in late 2023 and an action plan for its implementation will be prepared in the course of 2024.

33. A mission to support the accession of Georgia to the ECE Convention on Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents was organized on 7-9 November 2023 (Tbilisi) to raise awareness of the Industrial Accidents Convention and benefits of accession. Accessing to the Convention would support Georgia's accession and law approximation efforts as an EU candidate in multiple areas, including the Seveso III Directive and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. The work on supporting Georgia's accession is expected to continue in 2024.

34. A ECE-EIB Project on *Strengthening industrial safety in Ukraine through enhanced implementation of and alignment with the Industrial Accidents Convention* was launched on 13 December 2023. Under the Project, Ukraine will receive assistance to increase its capacity to enhance the prevention of, preparedness and response to industrial accidents by strengthening the implementation of the ECE Industrial Accidents Convention. The scope of the Project, which will last from December 2023 to December 2024, consists of the drafting, revising and finalizing a report with analysis of the Ukrainian industrial safety legislation

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<sup>7</sup> Report-UNEA 512 Global Intergovernmental Meeting ([greenpolicyplatform.org](https://greenpolicyplatform.org))

with recommendations on its alignment with the main requirements of the Convention and a roadmap for full implementation.

*The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assistance (Protocol on SEA)*

35. For the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment the year 2023 culminated in the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 12–15 December 2023) which brought together some 50 countries, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders to discuss how to strengthen the treaties' role in accelerating energy transition, promoting circular economy and enabling the uptake of green financing. The discussions built on a discussion paper prepared with funding from Italy.

36. The Parties adopted decisions on the workplan and the budget and other key decisions prepared by the treaty bodies in the course of 2023 that will shape the treaties' implementation in the next period 2024–2026, including in view of the expected opening of the Convention for any future accession of countries beyond the ECE region, and covering subregional cooperation in six marine regions, with a focus on the Mediterranean Sea, based on the assessment report on synergies and cooperation activities finalized in 2023 in cooperation with 6 regional sea conventions and bodies.

37. Parties also adopted 12 country specific compliance decisions, prepared by the Implementation Committee on Parties' compliance with their treaty obligations, including regarding the lifetime-extension of several nuclear power plants in the ECE region, as well as hydro power plants or mining activities with potential adverse environmental impact across the ECE. Due to time constraints, decisions on the Geneva Declaration and one compliance decision will be taken at an intermediate/extraordinary session to be organized in 2024 in consultation with the Bureau.

38. The year 2023 was further marked by the following highlights:

(a) The secretariat continued to assist Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in the treaties' effective implementation, with funding from the EU4Environment programme due to end in April 2024.

(i) On 15 July 2023, the Agreement on the Implementation of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context between Ukraine and Romania entered into force. The drafting and negotiation of the Agreement was supported by the secretariat and legal experts to ECE to help the countries put into action recommendations from the Meeting of the Parties (concerning compliance by Ukraine with treaty obligations in respect of the Bystroe Canal Project).

(ii) In June - November 2023, the Republic of Moldova was supported in drafting secondary implementing legislation on environmental assessment: regulations for two technical/expert-level commissions that the Republic of Moldova is establishing for quality control of SEA documentation and of EIA documentation respectively. The two draft regulations were finalized in November 2023.

(iii) On 30-31 October and on 24–23 November 2023, Armenia was supported in the more effective practical application of SEA through two inter-linked training events in Yerevan to help representatives of sectoral ministries and local authorities better understand requirements of the Protocol on SEA and of recently amended environmental assessment legislation.

(iv) On 25–26 May 2023, over 500 representatives of local and regional authorities from across Ukraine were trained – at two online training events - on the practical application of SEA in urban planning, as spatial and urban plans are likely to make the bulk of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction plans.

(b) The treaties' Implementation Committee considered 45 compliance issues during and in-between its three annual sessions, including regarding the lifetime-extension of many nuclear power plants within the region, building on guidance on that topic adopted in December 2020. The Committee held several formal hearings and informal consultations

with the Parties concerned, and prepared findings and recommendations to assist them in the treaties' effective implementation for adoption by the Meetings of the Parties.

(c) The third, and last, joint technical meeting on synergies and possible cooperation activities in marine regions, was organized (Geneva (online), 16 May 2023), bringing together representatives of the regional sea conventions and commissions and interested focal points under the Espoo Convention and the Protocol. The meeting report and other information presented at the third joint technical meeting, including the good practice case studies on the application by Estonia of the Convention to the Saare offshore wind farm and the application of the Protocol by Italy to its maritime spatial plans can be found on the meeting webpage.<sup>8</sup> The Meetings of the Parties reviewed and agreed on draft decision X/3–V/3 on cooperation in marine regions and the draft report on synergies and possible cooperation activities in marine regions (ECE/MP.EIA/2023/3–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2023/3). There are several recommended cooperation activities that have been included in the workplan for 2024–2026.

(d) At their meetings, the Bureau and the Working Group on EIA and SEA finalized the preparations for the sessions of the Meetings of the Parties based on the documentation prepared by the secretariat.

*Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs)*

39. Due to their cross-cutting nature and wide substantive scopes, the Convention and its Protocol continued supporting Parties' efforts for furthering a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16 and also SDGs 3, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 17, and well as other international commitments such as UNFCCC, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Global Framework on Chemicals.

40. The Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention held its twenty-seventh meeting (Geneva, 26–28 June 2023) to address a range of pressing issues. Reflecting on the major milestones achieved during 25 years since the Convention's adoption, Parties to the Convention together with the representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and other key stakeholders, such as child and youth defenders, welcomed accession to the Convention of Guinea-Bissau in April 2023 opening new horizons for environmental democracy in Africa and worldwide. A number of commitments were taken, including with regard to protection of environmental defenders; advancing public participation in decision-making on large-scale infrastructure; promotion of transparency and public participation in international forums dealing with environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context and trade; and on the issue of balanced and equitable participation and different modalities for engaging stakeholders in international decision-making. Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine following the invasion by the Russian Federation, Ukraine reported its significant efforts to implement the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs. In particular, progress has been made in the area of public access to environmental information and its digitalization through the newly created EcoSystem digital platform, which will also include National Pollutant Release and Transfer Register. To promote transparency and public participation in decision-making on environmental matters, the EcoZagroza system for controlling and monitoring the environmental situation was also introduced to provide up-to-date information on environmental damage and on air quality and radiation. A special procedure has also been developed to facilitate public access to information on environmental matters, whilst addressing security considerations. Public discussions are also being held online in view of the lack of suitable safe shelters.

41. The Convention's Task Force on Access to Justice held its meeting and the Judicial Colloquium (Geneva, 3-5 April 2023), focusing on e.g., cases related to climate change and biodiversity protection; and energy-related and pollution from chemicals and waste-related

<sup>8</sup> See <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Environmental-Impact-Assessment/events/376908>.

cases; and on measures removing barriers related to costs, access to assistance mechanisms and timeliness of the review procedures. The secretariat also supported organization of the International high-level judges conferment on environmental justice to foster collaboration among judicial communities in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus in addressing global environmental justice issues (Bishkek, 14–16 September 2023).

42. The Convention's Task Force on Access to Information at its meeting featured an international workshop entitled "Advancing public access to environment-related product information: Challenges and opportunities". Both events aimed at promoting digital access to information in support of green and circular economy and focused on e.g., transparency in the environmental performance of economic activities; effective public access to environmental information on products, on emissions into the environment; and the provision of information to public authorities by third parties, both routinely and in case of an imminent threat to human health or the environment.

43. An international round table "Aarhus Convention: Effective public participation for good governance, healthy environment and sustainable development" was held to assist Uzbekistan in its efforts towards the accession to the Aarhus Convention (Tashkent, 1–2 June 2023); the event provided an opportunity to share experiences in the effective dissemination of environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making at the national and international levels, access to justice and the functioning of Aarhus Centres in different countries.

44. Aarhus Centres, with support of OSCE and other partner organizations, continued to play an important role in raising awareness of the public and public authorities through disseminating information and carrying out numerous educational and training activities to assist in implementing the Aarhus Convention. They provide a platform where members public authorities and a wide range of stakeholders, including NGOs, academia, private sector and media can meet to discuss different pressing issues. This year Annual Aarhus Centres' meeting (Dushanbe, 17 and 18 October 2023), which was also supported by the secretariat, focused on such critical topics as public participation in environmental decision-making, transition towards green economy and sustainable management of chemicals.

45. Through the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016–2025 countries of the Mediterranean region decided that, by 2025, two thirds of Mediterranean countries will have acceded to the Aarhus Convention. To assist Member States in achieving this goal, a dedicated Training session to promote the Aarhus Convention in the Mediterranean region (Athens, 14–15 November 2023), co-organized by the secretariat, gathered officials from ministries of environment, water, foreign affairs and justice from the countries in the region, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Several participants also followed the meeting online. The main purpose of the training session was to strengthen the expert capacity of representatives of public authorities with regard to access to information, public participation in decision-making in national and international contexts, and access to justice in environmental matters.

46. The tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (Geneva, 27–28 November 2023) focused on the need for PRTR databases to become interoperable and integrated with other sources of data; and the role of PRTRs in promoting synergy among different international reporting obligations and in breaking down silos across sectors – one of the main requirements for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the transition to green and circular economies. Delegations also started deliberations on the next session of the Meeting of the Parties. The meeting allowed to further coordination and cooperation with other MEAs and processes dealing with pollution, chemicals and waste, including the recently agreed Global Framework on Chemicals.

47. The Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention undertook a wide range of activities to assist Parties and interested Member States to ensure the safety of environmental defenders. This included in-person visits to a number of countries, the consideration of complaints concerning the persecution, harassment and penalization of environmental defenders, providing input on the development of new

instruments and guidance to protect environmental defenders, consultations with vulnerable environmental defenders, speaking engagements, awareness raising and promotional activities. On the occasion of the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28, Dubai, 30 November – 12 December 2023), the Special Rapporteur issued a statement making clear that the triple environmental crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss is a major human rights challenge and it cannot be addressed if those who are fighting against it are not heard.<sup>9</sup>

48. The Convention's and Protocol's Compliance Committees held several meetings during the year. In addition to receiving communications directly from the public, the Committees also provided advice and assistance to Parties. In 2023, the advisory role of the Committees continued to grow. This included a request from Ukraine for the Aarhus Committee's advice on how to apply the Convention in the context of the ongoing military aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation and for the Protocol's Committee's advice with regard to its legislation on PRTRs.

49. The Fourth Joint Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity Roundtable on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding Living Modified Organisms/Genetically Modified Organisms was held in Geneva on 11–12 December 2023 under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention and of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The event built countries' capacities through sharing knowledge, experiences and lessons learned regarding these subjects and put forward suggestions for future action at the national and international levels. The meeting featured a training session on procedures and practice on access to justice related to LMOs/GMOs.

### III. Major activities planned for 2024 and beyond

50. The Environment subprogramme will continue its work to support countries to enhance their environmental governance and transboundary cooperation as well as strengthen implementation of the ECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region. An overview of planned activities is contained in the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024 (ECE/CEP/2023/5<sup>10</sup>). The twenty-ninth session of the Committee will be held in Geneva from 6 to 8 November 2024.

51. In 2024, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme will continue to support member States in advancing the environmental knowledge base for effective reporting to policymakers, international forums and the public and continue to support policy development and its implementation, including the implementation of SDGs related to environmental monitoring and assessment. Within the framework of the EU funded project "EU4Environment Water Resources Environmental Data" support to environmental monitoring, reporting and assessment in the countries of the EU Eastern Neighbourhood region will be provided. A Regional training on the production and use of waste and circular economy statistics and indicators is planned in the first half of 2024. Furthermore, support may be provided to the launching of the national State of the Environment Report in Uzbekistan and the possible development of other national state of the environment reports in Central Asia. The twenty-sixth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will be held on 18–19 April 2024 and the twenty-first session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators in October 2024.

52. In 2024, the EPR Programme will work on finalising the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan and the EPR of Mauritania for publication and national launches. The Second EPR of Armenia and the Third EPR of Azerbaijan will be published and launched at national level.

<sup>9</sup> Statement by Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention, on the occasion of COP28, 2 December 2022, available at: [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/SR\\_EnvDefenders\\_Aarhus\\_Statement\\_COP28\\_02.12.2023.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/SR_EnvDefenders_Aarhus_Statement_COP28_02.12.2023.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://unece.org/environment/documents/2023/09/working-documents/draft-programme-work-environment-subprogramme-2024>

The Fourth EPR of Tajikistan will be prepared for expert and peer review. The Committee on Environmental Policy expressed appreciation to countries and organizations providing support to the Expert Group on EPRs (Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Romania, Switzerland and UNEP) and invited other countries to nominate their representatives to the Expert Group on EPRs with a view to facilitate the expert review of EPRs. The EPR country review preparatory mission for the fourth EPRs of Montenegro and of the Republic of Moldova will be carried out. Also, in 2024 the country review mission for the fourth EPR of Montenegro will take place. Subject to availability of resources regional or sub-regional workshops might be organized to support reviewed countries efforts to exchange experience in implementing EPR recommendations. The Committee thanked countries and organizations providing financial (Austria, Germany, Switzerland) and in-kind expert (France, Germany, Italy, North Macedonia, Portugal, UNEP, UNECA) and substantive and logistical (UNCT, UNDP) support enabling the operation of EPR activities and encouraged delegations to provide in-kind (expert) and financial support to the ECE EPR Programme.

53. The Bureau of THE PEP will meet at the beginning of 2024 to operationalize decisions of the Steering Committee. Further, the eighth meeting of the ad hoc working group to develop a THE PEP strategy will meet early in 2024 to start the preparation of the final draft of the strategy to be presented for approval at the twenty-second session of THE PEP Steering Committee, in autumn. The working group will further meet to discuss the preparation of proposals for possible legal instruments. The Partnerships will continue their work in view of preparing, among others, a master plan on active mobility. The Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility is to meet in Belgrade in April 2024, at the invitation of Serbia, back-to-back with a relay race workshop.

54. Since 5 October 2022, the implementation of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) continues in accordance with the “Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030” (adopted at the Third High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, organized in the Framework of the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference). In 2024, the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD will continue monitoring the implementation of the Strategy in the region along the four priority areas/strands outlined in the Nicosia Framework, i.e.: (a) quality education and ESD; (b) whole institution approach and ESD; (c) digital education, information and communications technology and ESD; and (d) 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. In the course of 2024, a series of activities will be organised and deliverables provided in the course of implementation of the planned activities along the four priority strands, as outlined in the adopted workplan and the concept notes for developing an outline of activities for implementing the second strand on the whole institution (school) approach and the fourth strand on “Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD” of the 2030 implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD.

55. In the framework of preparations for the next mandatory reporting cycle (2021–2025) under the Strategy to be launched in 2024, including organising of capacity-building activities for facilitating national reporting on implementing the new implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD, the second capacity building workshop will be held virtually on 24 January 2024 with the focus on specific issues and stakeholder participation in the process of reporting.

56. The ECE MEAs will continue their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meeting of the governing bodies under MEAs take place in 2024, namely, the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention (Geneva, 27–29 November 2024), the forty-fourth session of the Executive Body to the Air Convention (Geneva, 9–12 December 2024, tentatively).

57. In 2024, work under the Water Convention will focus on the preparation of the new programme of work for 2025–2027 and in the organisation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Ljubljana, 23–25 October 2024). In addition, the Water Convention will continue activities aimed at supporting accession processes in interested countries. A

global workshops on droughts in transboundary basins and a number of regional and national workshops on transboundary water cooperation and the Water Convention will be organised. Work on promoting a source-to-sea approach in the management of transboundary waters will continue with the development of guidance note on the implementation of the source-to-sea approach. In addition, the third report on the Sustainable Development Goals indicator 6.5.2 and progress report on implementation of the Water Convention will be published. Finally, the Convention secretariat will provide input to the preparatory process and take active part in the 10<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum (Bali, 18–24 May 2024).

58. In 2024, work under the Protocol on Water and Health will focus on the implementation of the programme of work for 2023–2025, including meetings of intergovernmental and expert bodies such as the Working Group on Water and Health, the Bureau, the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting and the Compliance Committee. A set of regional and sub-regional meetings is also foreseen in the technical areas of increasing resilience to climate change and equitable access to water and sanitation, such as the sub-regional workshop on target setting for the Mediterranean region, with a focus on climate (tentatively scheduled to be held in Lisbon, in June 2024) and the regional workshop on equitable access to water and sanitation (tentatively scheduled to be held in Budapest, in September 2024).

59. The year of 2024 also foresees the implementation of national activities on water, sanitation, hygiene and health in countries such as Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan under several projects funded by the UNDA and other donors (for more details see section on technical cooperation).

60. In 2024, the secretariat to the Industrial Accidents Convention will issue the publication *Risk Assessment for Industrial Accident Prevention: An Overview of Risk Assessment Methods, Selected Case Studies and Available Software* and jointly finalize and issue the OECD/UN/European Union Joint Research Center guidance on *Managing Natech Accident Risk: A Guide for Senior Leaders in Industry and Public Authorities*. It will work with the Working Group on implementation to analyze national implementation reports for the tenth reporting round and to draw up the tenth report on implementation of the Convention in 2024. The secretariat will also work with the small group on mine tailings safety to prepare an official document for the Conference of the Parties on its assessment of the need to update the *Guidelines to facilitate the identification of hazardous activities for the purposes of the Convention* to more comprehensively cover tailings management facilities. The secretariat will also kick-off a three-year project supported by the European Commission on *Strengthening the Safe and Secure Management of Hazardous Substances to Prevent and Mitigate Industrial Accidents Worldwide*, which will build on the results of the 2021 UN/OECD seminar in follow-up to the 2020 Beirut port explosion and expand the Convention's partnerships with the EU, EIB, ILO, IMO, UNDRR, UNEP, UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit, WHO, WMO and OECD.

61. The secretariat will further support countries in strengthening mine tailings safety under the Convention through their implementation of the *Road map for action to strengthen mine tailings safety within and beyond the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region* (ECE/CP.TEIA/2022/7). In this regard, a particular focus will be placed on supporting Central Asian countries to strengthen policy and governance at the national level, and in a transboundary context.

62. Projects under the ECE Industrial Accidents Convention's Assistance and Cooperation programme will continue, with a focus on strengthening governance and policy. ECE will continue supporting Serbia in the implementation of the National Policy Dialogue on industrial safety and the development of a national programme, and Central Asian countries in strengthening inter-institutional coordination and mine tailings safety. The secretariat will also, in close cooperation with the Working Group on Implementation continue to support beneficiary countries in implementing the Convention's Strategic Approach, in lead up to the Assistance and Cooperation Programme's 20th anniversary in 2024.

63. The Industrial Accidents Convention's secretariat will service the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) planned to take place on 27–29 November 2024. It is

expected that the COP would, *inter alia*, carry out the midterm review of the implementation of the Convention's Long-term Strategy, discuss the role of the Convention in view of the emerging trends and challenges for industrial safety and take decisions informed by the work of the Small Group on the Industrial Safety of Energy Transition established as per the Bureau's decision at its fifty-third meeting (Helsinki, 11–12 October 2023).

64. In 2024, Parties to the Air Convention will develop a detailed plan for revision of the Gothenburg Protocol, as amended in 2012. They are furthermore expected to consider proposals for revision of the rules of procedure for sessions of the Executive Body and for a potential update of the mandate of the Convention's Implementation Committee.

65. The secretariat will continue its capacity-building activities in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia through the organization of policy-oriented and technical sub-regional and national workshops to promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention and its key protocols in the sub-region.

66. For the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, an intermediate session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol will be organized in 2024 in consultation with the Bureau, to adopt two outstanding decisions that due to time constraints were not taken in December 2023.

67. In April 2024, the EU4Environment funding for technical assistance and capacity-building activities under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol will come to an end. As a result of the decade-long assistance by the secretariat to the countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the beneficiary countries have developed and aligned their legislative frameworks with the two treaties, and enhanced their capacity to implement them, through multiple national and subregional capacity-building activities. Capacity-building under the work plan for 2024 – 2026 is envisioned to be provided bilaterally by Parties to the treaties and partner organizations, rather than by the secretariat.

68. In 2023, the work under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol will continue assisting countries in achieving environmental dimension of SDG 16 and other Goals and international commitments. A number of multilateral activities are planned in this regard.

69. The twenty-eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to Convention is planned for July 2024. The Working Group will review implementation of the current work programme and will start preparations for the next session of the Meetings of the Parties. In addition, thematic sessions on promoting effective access to justice and on promoting the Convention's principles in other international forums will be held.

70. The Task Force on Access to Information will hold its ninth meeting in November 2023 to consider experience in advancing effective access to information as to assist Parties and interested Member States in this area.

71. The eleventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers will take place back-to-back with the fourth Global Round Table on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in November 2024. Both events are aimed at strengthening capacities of Parties and other interested Member States to develop or improve their PRTR systems. The Round Table will be organized in cooperation with OECD, UNITAR and UNEP.

72. The Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making will hold its eleventh meeting in December 2024 to consider policies and practical measures to assist Parties and interested Member States in effective implementation of the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention.

73. Compliance Committees under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will hold several meetings aimed to assist Parties in improving their compliance with these treaties.



#### **IV. Any proposed change to the subsidiary structure of the Committee**

74. The Committee on Environmental Policy held its twenty-eighth session on 1–3 November 2023. The report of the session is contained in document ECE/CEP/2023/2. As part of its deliberations, the Committee adopted the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024, as contained in document ECE/CEP/2023/5. Further, the Committee approved the new mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2024–2028 as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/2/Add.1. and extended the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, as contained in the annex to document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/3, until end of December 2025. The Executive Committee is invited to approve these decisions.

#### **V. Follow-up to the 2023 session of the Economic Commission for Europe**

75. At its twenty-eighth session the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy was briefed on the outcomes of the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva, 18–19 April 2023). The Committee:

- Welcomed the information provided on the outcomes of the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe, including on strategic foresight and its possible application in ECE and CEP activities.
- Acknowledged the need for continuous efforts in order to gain bigger relevance for the ECE Member States and better complementarity with other activities within the ECE with the aim to enhance its contribution into the work of the Commission as a whole in assisting countries of the region in implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Asked the secretariat to further reflect on how to develop/implement strategic foresight at the subprogramme level and prepare a proposal to be discussed by the Committee at its twenty-ninth session (Geneva, 6–8 November 2024).

76. The EPRs carried out in 2022–2023 contain substance pertinent to circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources helping reviewed countries to advance in these areas. The reviews measure progress made, and consider challenges encountered, in the areas of air quality, water management, biodiversity and protected areas, soil protection, waste and chemicals management and greening the economy. The reviews also examine countries' environmental data, information and observation systems, the extent to which international environmental agreements and commitments are implemented, and activities regarding climate change. Public access to environmental information, participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice on environmental matters is reviewed, as is the integration of education for sustainable development into the education system's curriculum, institutions and society. The reviews are also looking at countries' environmental legal, policy and institutional framework and regulatory and compliance assurance mechanisms. In addition, the reviews cover the integration of environmental considerations into agriculture, energy, industry and transport, as well as issues related to human health and the environment. Furthermore, the reviews look into the national developments to achieve the SDG targets relevant to the content of each EPR.

#### **VI. Intersectoral activities: new activities and/or progress in existing intersectoral activities**

77. The Environment subprogramme is supporting the cross-sectoral work under the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), the Protocol on Water and Health, the Programme on EPRs and the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme. Under the Water Convention the work is on-going on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus. Under the

Environment for Europe (EfE) process together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), OECD and other partners, the Environment subprogramme is supporting the implementation of the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy. Furthermore, the subprogramme is also actively participating in the activities under the European Environment and Health Process.

78. The Protocol on Water and Health is an intersectoral instrument by nature, requiring the health, environment and water communities to cooperate to improve human health and protect the environment. The implementation of key provisions under the Protocol, such as the setting and implementation of intersectoral targets on water, sanitation, hygiene and health, requires the responsible ministries to collaborate closely, also promoting the development of institutional structures such as inter-ministerial working groups, which allow for regular exchange. New work under the Protocol will continue to promote intersectoral activities: for instance, the development of climate-sensitive targets in Montenegro and the Republic of Moldova under the UNDA-funded project will bring together experts from water, sanitation, climate, health, environment and finance sectors.

79. In the reporting period, the work under the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) continued to be focused on the promotion of SDG 4 and its target 4.7 in the region, via the implementation of the ECE Strategy for ESD. The Committee supports the continuation and stepping up of efforts for the Strategy's implementation until 2030 at the regional (ECE) level, in synergy with relevant efforts undertaken at the global and subregional levels (e.g., by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Union/European Economic Area) and at the national level.

80. THE PEP is intrinsically an intersectoral activity. The secretariat is a collaboration between ECE (Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. Furthermore, THE PEP continued its cooperation with non-governmental organizations in preparing its work in the Partnerships; especially for the Partnerships on: Active Mobility; Sustainable Tourism Mobility; and Child- and Youth-Friendly Mobility.

81. National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management funded by the European Union served as platforms for intersectoral cooperation and water reform in 10 countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In 2023, six meetings of the NPD high-level Steering Committees were held in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia. In 2024, NPDs will continue supporting the countries with strengthening the national water governance, including intersectoral cooperation and international cooperation, and advancing the implementation of the water and health agenda. Work under the NPDs will contribute to country-level implementation of the SDG6, the Water Convention, the Protocol on Water and Health, and will further promote water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus.

82. The secretariat continued servicing a region-wide inter-agency capacity-building coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and a global international coordinating Group for the Protocol and providing inputs to the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework.

83. The ECE Environment Division (Environmental Monitoring and Assessment programme) and ECE Statistical Division co-serve the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators. The Joint Task Force continues to assist countries with economies in transition to understand indicator methodologies and supports them in applying the methodologies to produce and share specific environmental indicators and statistics. In 2023 further progress was achieved in revising the ECE Environmental Indicators and to align them with the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics to better meet the needs for monitoring and measuring progress of recent and emerging policy developments including a circular economy and to fill gaps identified in the seventh pan-European environmental assessment. The Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators – Edition 2023 were finalized.

84. The ECE Programme on EPRs cooperates with other units within ECE and with other organizations (UNEP, UNECA, WHO, OECD, EIB) in preparing EPR intersectoral chapters,

looking at how environmental concerns are mainstreamed into priority sectors, such as energy and the environment, transport and the environment, industry and the environment, agriculture and the environment, and human settlements and the environment, as well as assessing the impact of the environment on human health. In addition, cross-sectoral capacity development activities are carried out upon demand from countries, such as on-line workshops on strengthening national capacities in applying economic sectors' policies and practices, based on EPR recommendations, which are organized jointly with relevant ECE sub-programmes and organizations.

## VII. Technical cooperation activities

85. Technical cooperation activities in the Environment subprogramme include activities carried out by the ECE Regional Adviser on Environment as well as a number of other activities undertaken under MEAs and policy programmes.

86. The Regional Adviser supports the implementation of the technical cooperation activities, contributes to fund raising efforts and provides policy advisory services to the countries in close collaboration with the secretariats of the ECE MEAs. The work aims at supporting ratification and implementation of the MEAs and strengthening cooperation on common environmental problems in the countries of Central Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

87. The following activities were implemented in 2023 with the Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC) fund, as complementary to other funds, to strengthen the capacity of member States to accede to, and implement ECE MEAS in response to the requests received from governments and to implement ECE guidelines. These include:

- Support to the development of a National State of the Environment Report, development of a methodology for such reports and for strengthening national capacities for its regular production based on international good practices and guidelines.
- Round table on the Aarhus Convention: Effective public participation for good governance, healthy environment and sustainable development in Uzbekistan
- Support to the development of a National Programme for Industrial Safety and organization of the Stakeholders Consultation under the National Policy Dialogue for Industrial Safety in Serbia
- Supporting the accession to the ECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health: sub-regional workshop for Central Asian countries to exchange experiences and learn good practices from Serbia and capacity development for the ratification process
- Organization of a subregional workshop in Tajikistan on mine tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution in Central Asia to strengthen implementation of and accession to the Industrial Accidents and Water Conventions.

88. To strengthen the engagement of ECE at the country level and to introduce overall ECE work at the country level, the Regional Adviser continued to work closely with the RCs, their offices and UNCTs in Uzbekistan, Serbia and Ukraine (since May 2023) by informing RCs and UNCTs of relevant ECE guidelines and products, participating in and contributing to UNCT and Results Group (RG) discussions and identifying potential joint activities with UNCT member agencies. The Regional Adviser continues co-chairing the RGs on environment and climate change in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan together with UNESCO and UNDP respectively.

89. Technical cooperation projects were implemented in more than 15 countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

90. In 2023, with the help of the funds provided under the ECE Steering Committee on ESD organised a capacity building workshop on "Strengthening national capacity of Georgia in implementing the fourth priority area on 'Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and education for sustainable development' of the implementation framework of the UNECE

Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 as a tool for green transformation and resilience” (30–31 October 2023, Tbilisi). The project aims to encourage all ECE member States to use education for sustainable development for stimulating entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets among learners in order to accelerate transformations towards sustainable development and increase the employability of youth in existing or emerging new jobs, as well as address disparities related to technological advances, and contribute to a sustainable, fair and resilient future.

91. The ECE secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health provides technical assistance to Protocol Parties and other states active in its framework, particularly by supporting self-assessments aimed at establishing a baseline measure of the situation with equitable access to water and sanitation. In 2023, such self-assessments took place in Montenegro and Albania (ongoing) and in 2024 they a self-assessment is planned to be carried out in Kazakhstan.

92. In the 2023–2025 triennium, the Protocol on Water and Health will also be home to a set of technical cooperation/assistance activities, namely:

(a) Support for the development of climate-sensitive targets in Montenegro and the Republic of Moldova under a project funded by the UNDA;<sup>11</sup>

(b) Support to water and sanitation governance in Uzbekistan, including by facilitating the setting of national targets under the Protocol through a project funded by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency;

(c) Support to setting targets and developing sanitation policies in the countries of Central Asia under a project funded by the Russian Federation.

93. ECE implemented several projects under the Assistance and Cooperation Programme set up under the Industrial Accidents Convention, seeking to strengthen policymaking and governance for industrial safety and technological disaster risk reduction, nationally and in a transboundary context. The Convention’s secretariat supported Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in holding the second meetings of their Inter-Institutional Working Groups on tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution in Astana, 15 March 2023, and Dushanbe, 4 April 2023, respectively. It also organized a subregional workshop on tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution (Dushanbe, 25–26 May 2023). Furthermore, ECE, under the auspices of the Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions, supported the four riparian countries of the Syr Darya river basin in mapping their tailings management facilities and other hazardous activities in the Basin, as well as in analysing gaps in national legislation related to joint contingency planning, information exchange and emergency preparedness and response in case of an accident. In addition, ECE supported, through a joint ECE-UNDRR Project Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in integrating elements of industrial accident risk and transboundary considerations into their national strategic documents prepared under the umbrella of the Sendai Framework.

## VIII. Cooperation with other organizations

94. The Environment subprogramme is working with a number of organizations in and outside the United Nations system with the aim of combining efforts, ensuring mutual benefits and avoiding overlap and duplication. Cooperation takes place through information and communication technology tools, internal coordination meetings and the organization of joint events, as well as involving relevant partner organizations in various activities. Among the many organizations involved in the work of the Committee and of other governing bodies under the Environment subprogramme, the following activities mark highlights of cooperation during the reporting period.

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<sup>11</sup> Project entitled “Equitable Access to water and sanitation services for all and in all settings and climate-resilience in the water and sanitation sector”, for details see <https://unece.org/equitable-access-water-and-sanitation-services-all-and-all-settings-and-strengthened-climate-0>

*United Nations Regional Collaborative Platform*

95. A Regional Collaborative Platform has been established for Europe and Central Asia as part of the reform of the UN Development System. The Platform brings together more than 20 UN organizations in the region. Issue-based coalitions coordinate the UN response to cross-cutting challenges in the region. ECE, UNEP and UNESCO jointly lead the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change, which brings together 18 UN agencies, funds and programmes. Through its co-chairing and leading some of the activities and major products developed by the Coalition, ECE collaborated and provided support to Resident Coordinators, Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) and relevant UN country team (UNCT) agencies in the region on the environmental dimension of country level work. Through its activities, the Coalition increases awareness and integration of the triple planetary crisis into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and UN cooperative delivery.

96. Following up on the Coalition's 2022 green transition training programme, delivered in response to requests by UNCTs, an overview of the programme was produced in February 2023. In June 2023, the Coalition delivered a webinar on "Together for the nature-positive transition: Incorporating the Global Biodiversity Framework into UNSDCF processes". The webinar built the capacity of UNCTs to support countries to deliver on the targets of Global Biodiversity Framework, including through incorporation into UNSDCF processes. Also in June, within the Coalition, ECE organized two narrowly thematic webinars in response to requests by individual UNCTs: on the nexus of climate action and leaving no-one behind (requested by UNCT Georgia); and on disability-inclusive climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction educational materials, and innovative "green schools" solutions (UNCT Turkmenistan). Each of the two webinars engaged five UN entities as presenters and was recorded; the recordings have been viewed widely.

97. The experiences of the green transition training programme, and further requests by UNCTs, led to the preparation of an in-person regional workshop on environment and climate change issues in the implementation of UNSDCF. The workshop strengthened the capacities of RCOs and UNCTs in effectively integrating climate change, pollution, biodiversity, water management and a just green transition in UNSDCF. During the workshop, the UNCT and RCO members developed ideas for future collaboration at the country and regional levels. The participants identified ways to jointly prepare for the Climate COPs and to implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, among other key environmental goals. It served as a platform to share and discuss global and regional outlooks and good practices that can guide the planning of future work of and among UNCTs. The topics discussed were: coordinated UN Action to address environment and climate change issues; climate and energy; air pollution; water, including transboundary cooperation; Early Warning Systems for All; biodiversity; and just transitions towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. The two-and-a-half-day workshop was organized by the Coalition in close cooperation with the UN Development Cooperation Office (DCO) and strongly supported through inputs from six UN Resident Coordinators in the region. It gathered over 100 UN staff from 12 agencies across 15 countries and territories.

98. In addition, a major theme of the Coalition's work in 2023, was on water cooperation with ECE taking a leading role. This began with an informal discussion on water cooperation with Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in Central Asia, which resulted in increased awareness of available platforms at global and regional level that provide reliable data and evidence for country level work and in further commitments to work at subregional level on water issues. Furthermore, the initial discussion led to the establishment of an interagency subgroup on water management in Kazakhstan led by RCO and an informal inter-agency discussion on achieving the water-related SDGs in Kazakhstan, in August. A mapping of water-related activities of UN agencies implemented in Central Asia was released in the same month.

*United Nations Regional Commissions*

99. The Aarhus secretariat is providing continuous advisory support to United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) with regard to the implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation

and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazu Agreement) and cooperates on the establishment of PRTRs. It also cooperates with ESCAP on promoting environmental rights in Asia-Pacific region.

100. ECE and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) cooperated in preparing the Second EPR of Morocco and the EPR of Mauritania. In addition, UNECA provided expertise for the EPR of Mauritania.

#### *United Nations Environment Programme*

101. The Environment subprogramme has long-standing cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through many joint activities and partnerships. The work of ECE and UNEP is complementary: ECE provides the regional political platform, expert and intergovernmental bodies and policy expertise; UNEP brings its global policy leadership, specific technical expertise and country and regional policy and programmatic engagement. Such a symbiosis enables the two organizations to address in an effective way the existing and emerging environmental concerns across the ECE region.

102. At its twenty-eighth session in November 2023, the Committee welcomed the information provided by UNEP on the preparatory work for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP to be held in Nairobi from 26 February to 1 March 2024 and invited UNEP to continue to inform the Committee of relevant developments under the Assembly.

103. United Nations Environment Programme is a key partner in the Environment for Europe process and participated actively in the preparatory process for and in the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. In particular, ECE and UNEP worked jointly to develop substantive background documents for the two themes of the Conference and some other official and information documents. UNEP is actively involved in the activities of ECE Steering Committee on ESD,

104. UNEP is actively involved in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including, but not limited, to the monitoring of SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia. In addition, UNEP is engaged, as part of a common approach between ECE, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and UNEP, in supporting national, regional and global reporting on the state of the environment. Representatives of the three organizations meet at senior and operational levels as relevant. UNEP and ECE also cooperate in supporting Uzbekistan in the development of a national State of the Environment report.

105. UNEP provided expertise for the Second EPR of Armenia and the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan, authoring chapters on environmental monitoring and assessment and public participation, and expert reviewing chapter related to environmental monitoring and information.

106. UNEP is also actively contributing to the implementation of many ECE MEAs.

107. In 2023, the secretariat, together with UNEP organized an event for the annual celebration of the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.

108. The secretariat of the Air Convention together with WHO co-leads the task team on air pollution in the framework of the Issue-Based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia.

#### *World Health Organization (WHO)*

109. ECE and WHO/Europe continue to jointly provide secretariat services for the Protocol on Water and Health and THE PEP. The ECE and WHO/Europe secretariats are in constant communication to coordinate the activities. ECE is also represented in the Bureau of the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF), serviced by WHO under the European Environment and Health Process.

110. The secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health is hosted by ECE and the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH). Under the Protocol, WHO/Europe leads technical work on the prevention and reduction of water-related diseases; provision of

WASH services in institutional settings and public places; small-scale water supply and sanitation, and safe management of water supply and sanitation systems. ECE and WHO/Europe also cooperate closely in activities relating to increasing resilience to climate change, safe sanitation, and generally in the servicing governing bodies and implementation of the programme of work of the Protocol.

111. The ECE Environment subprogramme is also actively working with WHO/Europe in the European Environment and Health Process.

112. WHO contributed to the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators in 2023.

*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*

113. The ECE Strategy for ESD is implemented in close cooperation with UNESCO, the lead agency for ESD for 2030 education programme, as a key partner in the Partnership Network for its implementation, including the joint activities carried out in the framework of the first priority action area on advancing policy. For the reporting period UNESCO also continued to participate in the work of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD and its Bureau.

114. ECE and UNESCO are the custodian agencies for SDG indicator 6.5.2.

115. UNESCO also contributed to the work under the Aarhus Convention to promote access to environmental information and cooperation with judiciary and other review bodies on these matters.

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

116. UNDP offices and Resident Representatives in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania and Tajikistan supported the EPR Programme in substantive and logistics matters, including for the country review missions in these countries.

117. ECE also cooperates with UNDP, for promoting the implementation of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, with funding from the EU4Environment programme.

118. Several activities supported by UNDP in different countries aimed to advance the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs.

119. UNDP was a particularly active partner in the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change, led by ECE, UNEP and UNESCO.

*United Nations Country Teams (UNCT)*

120. UNCT and Resident Coordinators in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania and Tajikistan supported the EPR Programme in substantive and logistics matters, including for the country review missions in these countries.

*United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD)*

121. Cooperation with the UNSD continues on the monitoring and reporting of SDG indicator 6.5.2 for which ECE acts as co-custodian agency, together with UNESCO.

122. UNSD participates routinely in the activities and meetings of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment.

*Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*

123. The Industrial Accidents Convention continues its cooperation with OSCE and OECD in capacity-development to strengthen industrial and tailings safety in Central Asia.

124. The Aarhus Convention secretariat also maintained close cooperation with OSCE that supported the work of the Aarhus Centres and other capacity-building activities under the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register.

*Other partners*

125. In follow-up to the invitation by Ministers at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022), an informal inter-agency group on environmental assessments for Ukraine was established by ECE, UNEP and OECD, and joined by UNIDO, UNDP, the World Bank, OSCE, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and the RCO in Ukraine. The group has operated throughout 2023 and expects to continue its work in 2024 with an increased focus on promoting a green recovery in Ukraine.

126. ECE closely cooperated with OECD Programme on Chemical Accidents in the organization of the Stakeholder Consultation under the Serbian National Policy Dialogue on Industrial Safety (Belgrade, 20 September 2023), as well as in the review of the Serbian National Programme for Industrial Safety.

127. Furthermore, ECE cooperates closely with the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR), including through its contributions to the Regional Forum of the Heads of National Disaster Risk Management Authorities of Central Asia (Almaty, 10 November 2023).

128. The European Environment Agency (EEA) is involved in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including, but not limited, in the implementation of SEIS in Europe and Central Asia. EEA is engaged, as part of a common approach between the ECE, EEA and UNEP, in supporting national, regional and global reporting on the state of the environment. EEA has also provided financial support to the Working Group and Joint Task Force in the past. The cooperation with the EEA also focuses on promoting effective implementation of the access to information pillar of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs.

129. Other important partners outside the United Nations system are OECD (for the Protocol on PRTRs, the EfE process, and in conjunction with the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI)), the European Commission and the Regional Environmental Centres (RECs). OECD participates in the activities of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment on green growth-related work. ECE is represented in the Bureau of the GREEN Action Programme Task Force, serviced by OECD under the Environment for Europe process. The Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA secretariat also cooperates with the Nuclear Energy Agency of OECD.

130. The European ECO Forum and its members are active partners in the work of the Committee, MEAs, ESD, and in the EfE process.

131. The Air Convention cooperates, among others, with WMO, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), and the Instrument for Strengthening the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET).

132. The Water Convention is cooperating, among others, with UN-Water, WHO and its Regional Office for Europe, the European Investment Bank, Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO, international river basins commissions, such as the Rhine, Danube, Okavango (OKACOM), Chu Talas, Niger, Senegal, Volta commissions, the International Network of Basin Organizations, OSCE, OECD, the Global Water Partnership, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the African Network of Basin Organizations, the Economic Communities of Central African and West African States, the Southern African Development Community, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Stockholm International Water Institute, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Organization of American States (OAS), the World Bank, the World Wildlife Fund, Green Cross International, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special



Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

133. As part of the Water Action Agenda, the ECE secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health submitted a joint commitment with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on supporting the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation at national, regional and global levels. Expected impacts include the identification of baseline measures on equal and non-discriminatory access to WASH, amendment of national laws, regulations and codes and infrastructural measures.

134. The Protocol is also cooperating with the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency, the World Meteorological Organization, the International Federation of Private Water Operators, and others.

135. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention continuously pursues a close cooperation with a number of partner organizations, including OSCE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP, OHCHR, including Special Rapporteur on the environment; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; EEA, CBD secretariat, secretariat of UNEP MAP and Barcelona Convention and secretariats of other MEAs; international financial institutions such as the World Bank Group, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank, and the European ECO Forum.

136. ECE has worked with UNEP, OSCE, UNDP, OHCHR and other partner organizations in supporting cooperation of judiciary, judicial training institutions and other independent review bodies in the pan-European region (in support of target 16.3 of SDG 16).

137. Furthermore, the secretariat also pursued cooperation with UNEP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Council of Europe on environmental defenders and cooperated with partners within the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals to assist Governments to implement different international obligations related to chemicals management.

138. Secretariat cooperates closely with OECD, UNEP, GEF and UNITAR as to build capacities of Governments in the area of chemicals management.

139. Since 2016 ECE has been an observer to the Inter-State Council on Industrial Safety under Commonwealth of Independent States and has regularly attended the meetings of the Council.

140. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) participates in the activities of the Water Convention and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, when relevant.

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