



UNECE at UNEA-6



Side event at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6)

UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs): beating pollution in the pan-European region and beyond

29 February 2024 | 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM | Helipad | MEAs events Tent A

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has for over 50 years fostered environmental protection and sustainable development across Europe, North America, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Its unique multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) provide powerful tools to promote sustainable development and prevent, control and reduce pollution, in particular transboundary pollution. The expansion of many of them beyond the region provides an important opportunity to strengthen global environmental governance.

The 1979 [Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution](#) and its Protocols foster regional cooperation on clean air and establish emission reduction targets for key pollutants. In addition to benefits for climate and ecosystem, emission reductions have led to an increase in average life expectancy by 1 year and 600.000 saved lives annually in Europe.

The 1991 [Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context](#) and its 2003 [Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment](#) ensure that environmental considerations are integrated in the development of plans, programmes and projects at the earliest stages. They therefore guarantee that more sustainable practices and technologies are used to prevent and reduce pollution.

The 1992 [Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes](#) drives cooperation on transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwater resulting in improved water quality in shared water basins and enhanced biodiversity. Since 2016, the Convention is open for accession by all UN Member States and has already been joined by 11 countries from Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Its 1999 [Protocol on Water and Health](#) supports access to safe drinking water and sanitation to all, and helps reduce discharges of pollutants in water resources, coastal areas and other ecosystems.

The 1992 [Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents](#) strengthens industrial safety and reduces the risk and impact of accidental pollution, safeguarding populations, the environment and economic assets.

The 1998 [Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters](#) (Aarhus Convention) empowers the public with rights to participate in decision-making and to have access to information and justice regarding the environment. This leads to greater transparency and accountability in how environmental projects are planned and executed, with an important reduction of environmental impacts, including pollution. Its 2003 [Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers](#) enhances public access to information on pollution sources, which encourages pollution reduction, as no company will want to be identified as among the biggest polluters. Both these instruments are open for accession by all UN Member States. Guinea-Bissau joined the Aarhus Convention in 2022.

The side event will illustrate how these different instruments help to prevent, control and reduce pollution, both individually and in synergy. It will also explore the many benefits they deliver to governments, the public and investors through concrete examples illustrating the impacts of implementation. This will showcase the role that these instruments play in establishing legislative and institutional frameworks, fostering the science-policy interface, advancing cooperation, adopting best available technologies, encouraging innovation and investments in pollution prevention strategies, and supporting the green transition.

The event will also illustrate how the unique legal environmental framework provided by UNECE MEAs can be of use in countries worldwide.

PROGRAMME



Moderator: Ms. Francesca Bernardini, Chief, Transboundary Cooperation Section, Environment Division, UNECE

- 3.30 – 3.45 pm | **Introduction to the UNECE MEAs framework for reducing pollution**
- Ms. Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
- 3.45 – 4.35 pm | **How UNECE MEAs reduce pollution: Member States experience in implementation**
- Ms. Raminta Radavičienė, Vice-Minister of Environment, Republic of Lithuania *on the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers*
 - Mr. Uroš Vajgl, State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Energy, Slovenia *on the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment*
 - Ms. Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director-General of the Environment Department of the European Commission, European Union (TBC) *on UNECE MEAs and EU policies to tackle pollution within the European Union and beyond*
 - Dr. Peter Dery, Director for Environment, Ministry for Environment, Science Technology and Innovation, Ghana *on the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and its Protocol on Water and Health*
 - Ms. Elizabeth Nichols, Foreign Affairs Officer, United States Department of State *on the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution*
 - Representative of Serbia (TBC) *on the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents*
- 4.35 – 4.45 pm | **Stakeholders' perspectives: how UNECE MEAs support green investments and citizen's rights to a healthy environment, and what is the role of stakeholders in their implementation**
- Mr. Nicola Pochettino, Director for Environment and Natural Resources, European Investment Bank
 - Ms. Patrizia Heidegger, Deputy Secretary General and Director for European Governance, Sustainability and Global Policies, European Environmental Bureau
- 4.45 – 4.55 pm | Questions and answers
- 4.55 – 5.00 pm | Conclusions by the moderator