



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General

6 May 2024

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

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

Working Group of the Parties

Tenth meeting

Geneva, 27 and 28 November 2023

Report of the Working Group of the Parties on its tenth meeting

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	2
A. Attendance	2
B. Organizational matters	2
II. Status of ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers	3
III. Promotion and coordination	3
IV. Reporting and compliance mechanisms	7
V. Subregional and national activities: achievements, needs and challenges for capacity-building	7
VI. Fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol	12
A. Substantive preparations	12
B. Hosting and preparatory timeline	13
VII. Implementation of the work programme for 2022–2025, including financial matters	13
VIII. Calendar of meetings	14
IX. Adoption of the decisions and outcomes of the meeting	14

I. Introduction

1. The tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was held in Geneva, on 27 and 28 November 2023.¹

A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended² by delegations from the following Parties to the Protocol: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. Representatives of Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, signatories to the Protocol, attended the meeting.

4. Delegations from Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Japan also participated.

5. Also in attendance were representatives of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the secretariats of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the secretariat of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC), the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

6. Representatives of Aarhus Centres and professional organizations were also present, as were representatives of international, regional and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many of whom coordinated their input within the framework of the European ECO-Forum.

B. Organizational matters

7. Ms. Enkeleda Shkurta (Albania), Vice-Chair of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, opened the meeting. She informed the Working Group that Mr. Tone Kvasič, (Slovenia), Chair of the Working Group, was unable to participate in the meeting. Therefore, pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/1, annex), she would act as Chair. She informed the Working Group that, with a view to ensuring equal opportunities for English-, French- and Russian-speaking delegations, the meeting would result in a list of decisions and outcomes that would be distributed by email to meeting participants before the close of the meeting and that would be presented orally by the Acting Chair for adoption, thereby allowing for interpretation. The adopted list of decisions and outcomes would be distributed to participants by email after the meeting and would be incorporated into the meeting report.

¹ Documents for the meeting and other information, including a list of participants and statements and presentations delivered at the meeting and made available to the secretariat, are available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/tenth-meeting-working-group-parties-protocol-prtrs>.

² See list of participants available on the meeting's web page. Only in-person presence of Parties' representatives was counted for decision-making.

8. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Acting Chair and of statements by participants. The Working Group then adopted the agenda for the meeting as set out in document ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/1.

II. Status of ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

9. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Protocol on PRTRs. The Protocol, which currently had 38 Parties, had been adopted in 2003 and had entered into force on 8 October 2009. Since the ninth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 24–25 November 2022) no new Parties had joined the Protocol.³

10. A representative of Cambodia emphasized the increasing recognition of public access to environmental information as a human right and as a key factor for sustainable development. While Cambodia was not yet a Party to the Protocol on PRTRs, the country acknowledged the Protocol's significance and was considering ratification in the near future. Cambodia had developed a national strategy for public access to environmental information and incorporated PRTR into its environmental and natural resources code. The representative thanked partners for their support and highlighted challenges such as increasing reporting responsibility, lack of regulations, institutional capacity limitations and the need for enhanced public awareness and industry participation. Cambodia aimed to address those challenges through harmonized reporting mechanisms, regulatory development, capacity-building and awareness-raising.

11. A representative of Guinea-Bissau expressed the country's interest in joining the Protocol on PRTRs. Guinea-Bissau currently lacked a PRTR system, and the accession process would begin with the establishment of such a system. He outlined that Guinea-Bissau was currently improving its relevant legal and regulatory framework and that, facing financial and technical limitations, the country sought partnerships to develop a PRTR system promptly.

12. The Working Group took note of the report by the secretariat on the status of ratification of the Protocol and welcomed the intention of Cambodia and Guinea-Bissau to accede to the Protocol. The Working Group also encouraged signatories and other interested States to proceed with accession thereto as soon as possible.

III. Promotion and coordination

13. The Acting Chair highlighted the relevant sections of the Report on the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/3), specifically sections B (technical assistance) and E (awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes). The Acting Chair also informed the delegations that, at the request of the Working Group, the secretariat had prepared a note on Comparative analysis of different international reporting obligations related to annexes I, II and III of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR/WG.1/2023/Inf.3).

14. The Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group⁴ reported on the Group's activities. The Group facilitated information exchange on ongoing and planned PRTR-related activities with its annual meetings. Key outcomes of its fifteenth meeting (Paris, 25 January 2023) included a commitment to coordination of PRTR activities and exploring innovative ways to collect, manage and disseminate PRTR data. Among the challenges the Group had discussed were measures to ensure comparability of PRTR data and ways of improving its accessibility for the public. The Group had also agreed to continue discussing how to improve

³ Information on the status of ratifications is available at https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-13-a&chapter=27&clang=_en.

⁴ See www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html.

the mapping of PRTR implementation around the globe. The latter activity included, for example, the continued updating of a “PRTR global map” to reflect new experiences in different countries and make it more understandable for all.⁵

15. A representative of UNITAR briefed the Working Group on the proposal for a PRTR partnership, aiming to consolidate information, identify financial and technical support, develop capacity-building strategies and enhance their global coordination. Inspired by successful models such as the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals-partnership, the PRTR partnership proposal would seek to replicate such effective approaches for PRTR initiatives. The proposed PRTR partnership aimed to provide a central platform for countries needing support in PRTR development, implement a multi-year global capacity-building strategy, create materials including guidance documents and interactive resources, contribute substantively to International PRTR Coordinating Group discussions, and raise awareness on PRTRs globally. While the partnership could build on existing work, including the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals toolbox, with its centralized resource hub with documents, materials and resources to support PRTR initiatives globally, the speaker highlighted that ongoing efforts to secure much-needed funding had been unsuccessful thus far. He expressed the hope that the international community, including participants in the current meeting, would show interest in and support for the partnership.

16. A representative of OECD outlined the OECD PRTR-related activities, emphasizing efforts to improve PRTRs, enhance PRTR data use, and harmonize practices in different PRTR systems. She presented the 2018 OECD Council Act on PRTRs, together with the respective ongoing implementation efforts by countries and the OECD Working Party on PRTRs. There was a focus especially in activities related to data use and international data comparability. For instance, OECD had published a new document in conjunction with an online database that showcased good practices of PRTR data use and associated tools. Turning to OECD efforts to establish a global inventory of pollutant releases, she proposed that non-OECD countries be invited to participate and provide PRTR data to the inventory. The aim was to increase the inventory’s global comprehensiveness and thereby its usefulness for providing indicators on pollution-related issues of global concern. In that context, she highlighted the possible use of the inventory also for activities under the new Global Framework on Chemicals.

17. A representative of UNEP/MAP shared information on the development of guidelines focusing on sustainable wastewater treatment, the respective industrial pre-treatment standards, regulations for discharges from desalination plants, as well as forthcoming guidelines on microplastic monitoring in wastewater. The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) aimed to collect data using the estimation guidelines for reporting by contracting Parties for the 2026 reporting cycle, with more information on the topic available from the UNEP/MAP web page. He informed participants about the ongoing work in estimating pollutant releases from agriculture and efforts to align related data with PRTR systems. He also proposed cooperating globally on the topic of estimating releases from non-point sources, particularly regarding nitrogen from agriculture and aquaculture.

18. A representative of UNEP/GFC presented the outcomes of the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (Bonn, Germany, 25–29 September 2023), at which countries had adopted the Global Framework on Chemicals for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste.⁶ The Global Framework covered the life cycle of chemicals, promoted initiatives for sound chemicals management, and was flexible in accommodating new instruments. The speaker highlighted that among the Framework’s five strategic objectives and 28 targets, several seemed relevant to the work under the Protocol on PRTRs. They focused on legal frameworks, institutional capacities, data generation, risk assessments and innovation for sustainable chemistry. As examples he introduced targets A1, A2, B3, B4 and D1. Target B3, for example, was set to, by 2035, generate and make publicly

⁵ See PRTRCG(2023)XV/2, available at https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/international-prtr-coordinating-group#accordion_1.

⁶ See www.chemicalsframework.org/.

accessible data on the production of chemicals, including the use of chemicals in materials and products, in addition to emissions and releases of chemicals and waste. Based on resolutions on international cooperation and coordination, programme of work and budget adopted at the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, he further encouraged Parties and the Protocol's secretariat to consider the Framework's strategic objectives and targets in their actions to implement the Protocol on PRTRs. He called on the secretariat to continue and enhance its cooperation and coordination with the secretariat of the Framework, ensuring mutual support for the implementation of both the Framework and the Protocol.

19. A representative of the secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions provided the Working Group with updates from the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention, the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention and the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention (Geneva, 1–12 May 2023), and summarized the strong linkages between those instruments and PRTRs, namely the respective provisions on public information, reporting and national registers. He informed participants about various issues addressed at the above-mentioned sessions of the Conferences of the Parties, including the environmentally sound management of plastic waste, guidelines for waste containing or contaminated with persistent organic pollutants, and the listing of new pesticides and persistent organic pollutants. Parties to the Stockholm Convention had agreed to list in annex A thereto three additional substances (dechlorane plus, UV-328 and methoxychlor). The speaker also highlighted the intersection of listed persistent organic pollutants with ongoing negotiations for a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution, as many of the substances were used in the production of plastic.

20. A representative of the secretariat of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution spoke about the Convention's background and recent developments. She summarized the results of the 2019–2022 Report on the review of the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, as amended 2012 (Gothenburg Protocol) (ECE/EB.AIR/150/Add.2). The review had revealed a decrease in emissions of the air pollutants covered under the Protocol but had also identified areas for improvement and the need for additional action. As part of a follow-up process in 2023, a group of experts had analysed options to address the findings of the review. They had recommended a comprehensive revision of the Gothenburg Protocol, including, for example, updating emission reduction commitments, considering new specific requirements for black carbon, and addressing ammonia emissions and methane as an ozone precursor.⁷ The Working Group on Strategies and Review, a subsidiary body under the Convention, had forwarded a recommendation for the Gothenburg Protocol's revision to the Executive Body for its decision in December 2023.⁸ Such a potential revision aimed to enhance the effectiveness of the Gothenburg Protocol and align it with evolving environmental challenges.

21. A representative of the secretariat of the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) highlighted key initiatives that aimed at enhancing environmental monitoring and assessment efforts within the ECE region. The work aimed at supporting member States in traditional and emerging areas of environmental monitoring, such as land, soil, water, air, circular economy and sustainable infrastructure-related topics. Through intergovernmental bodies such as the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, the Programme facilitated knowledge-sharing, the closing of monitoring gaps, the revision of outdated guidelines, and support for reporting obligations and state-of-the-environment reports. Additionally, she identified opportunities for collaboration with the Protocol on PRTRs, which included synergizing with shared environmental information systems, revising monitoring and reporting guidelines to incorporate PRTR data, joint capacity development, and utilizing PRTR data in pan-European environmental assessments to measure progress in circular economy and resource

⁷ See ECE/EB.AIR/2023/9.

⁸ ECE/EB.AIR/WG.5/130, para. 18 (e).

efficiency. She concluded by proposing further cooperation and joint activities to be explored in future meetings.

22. A former ECE consultant supporting the preparation of the Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools⁹ under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention gave a presentation on creating a sustainable framework for advanced public access to environmental information, with a focus on interoperability between databases, openness and effective data management principles. She addressed elements such as the importance of digital systems that enabled the sharing, discoverability and accessibility of diverse types of data relevant to environmental matters and the formal framework supporting data-sharing between databases. She referred to the Group on Earth Observations and its data management principles, which were available through the Group on Earth Observations Knowledge Hub.¹⁰ Those principles, including open access by default, minimum restrictions on data use, and considerations for discoverability and provenance, were key for effective data-sharing among different databases and facilitated the respective integration.

23. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the report by the Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group and welcomed the Group's important role in promoting awareness of PRTRs and synergy and coordination on that important topic at the global level;

(b) Also took note of the information presented by panellists representing UNITAR, OECD, UNEP/MAP, UNEP/GFC, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution, the ECE Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme and a former ECE consultant supporting the preparation of the Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention;

(c) Expressed appreciation to the speakers and other partner organizations for the support provided to furthering synergy and the implementation of PRTR systems, thereby strengthening countries' capacities to accede to the Protocol on PRTRs;

(d) Called upon relevant partner organizations and multilateral environmental agreements to cooperate closely and, where possible, to create synergies to further the implementation of PRTR-related activities;

(e) Reiterated its call upon Governments to strengthen cooperation between experts dealing with the Protocol on PRTRs and those dealing with the Aarhus Convention, the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention), the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), UNEP/MAP and the UNEP Conventions on Chemicals (the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the Minamata Convention on Mercury), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, GFC (successor to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management), the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and other relevant agreements and programmes, as well as experts involved in projects carried out by international organizations, so as to ensure coordination at the national level;

(f) Reiterated its call upon Parties and stakeholders to consider implementing the Protocol and the pan-European Shared Environmental Information System in synergy.

24. Furthermore, the Working Group:

(a) Requested the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to explore opportunities for future cooperation with other treaties and processes, including on the update of the Comparative analysis of different international reporting obligations related to annexes

⁹ Available at <https://unece.org/environment/documents/2022/02/updated-recommendations-more-effective-use-electronic-information>.

¹⁰ See <https://gkhub.earthobservations.org/>.

I, II and III to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR/WG.1/2023/Inf.3);

(b) Called upon Parties, other interested States and organizations to continue the global promotion of the Protocol, including by making relevant guidance material available in all the official languages of the United Nations;

(c) Reiterated its call upon the secretariat and interested States to translate the text of the Protocol into other official languages of the United Nations;

(d) Reiterated its call upon Parties, other interested countries and organizations to promote PRTRs as a reporting tool for multilateral environmental agreements dealing with chemicals and for other relevant multilateral environmental agreements;

(e) Encouraged in that regard the Protocol's national focal points to engage with national focal points of other relevant instruments and to jointly promote the use of PRTRs for reporting on international agreements and processes, recalling in that context: Sustainable Development Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production; the related OECD activities; the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities to the Barcelona Convention and the amendment to said Protocol; the PRTR-related provisions of the Stockholm Convention and of the Minamata Convention; and the future treaty to end plastic pollution;

(f) Encouraged the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs to consider promoting the inclusion of provisions on PRTRs in relevant future treaties, including a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment,¹¹ thereby promoting synergy and avoiding duplication of work.

IV. Reporting and compliance mechanisms

25. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Acting Chair and the secretariat on the preparation of the 2025 reporting cycle.¹²

26. The Working Group also took note of the report of the Compliance Committee on its thirteenth meeting (Geneva, 7–8 March 2023; ECE/MP.PRTR/C.1/2023/2) and statements by participants.

V. Subregional and national activities: achievements, needs and challenges for capacity-building

27. The Acting Chair recalled that capacity-building remained vital for the promotion of the Protocol to countries with developing economies and economies in transition around the globe, and stressed that success in the Protocol's ratification and in establishing PRTRs was also very much dependent on the political will of the decision-makers in the countries concerned. She then invited the panellists to make their presentations.

28. A representative of Armenia provided an overview of the status of PRTR in the country, covering aspects such as legislation and policy frameworks, data collection and reporting procedures. The legislative framework in Armenia was undergoing revision to align it with international standards, focusing on preventing environmental pollution and regulating specifically air, water and land pollution. In 2018, the Concept for the Development of State Environmental Monitoring had been adopted. Challenges identified included the need to legally implement a unified environmental monitoring and information system, develop indicators and the respective monitoring forms, as well as modernize the monitoring network. While some monitoring initiatives were underway, improvement of

¹¹ For information on negotiations related to United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme resolution 5/14 entitled "End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument", see www.unep.org/about-un-environment/inc-plastic-pollution.

¹² See https://unece.org/environmental-policy/public-participation/2025-reporting-cycle-0#accordion_.

monitoring capacity was still a key challenge, and the speaker highlighted the need to develop monitoring capabilities with automated and remote monitoring methods. Other areas that required additional activity were the currently inadequate landfill facilities and filling gaps in public awareness on environmental issues. Furthermore, an integrated cadastral strategic plan had come into force in 2021. It included the implementation and operation of a geoportal, together with the creation of metadata and specific layers of other data. The process was ongoing and would also be an important platform for the introduction of a PRTR system in Armenia.

29. A representative of Chile outlined the status and functioning of the PRTR within the Department of Environmental Information's broader responsibilities. PRTR in Chile was already integrated with other policy instruments, such as the green taxation and compensation system, as well as within the framework of the fulfilment of different international commitments, including commitments to OECD and the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement). The PRTR data collection process in Chile involved reporting from a database of over 40,000 establishments in a single window system, primarily from industrial operations such as thermoelectric plants, cement plants, and mining, but also including many smaller businesses. The high granularity of the data from the single window reporting system resulted in a vast scope for its possible analysis, while also posing challenges in deciding where to focus attention for building information. Currently, two ideas to improve the use of PRTR data had been implemented. These ideas addressed: (a) moving from data to information as a thorough process, including by restructuring the workflow within the department; and (b) moving from a register to an information instrument. Challenges had been identified in both data management and operational aspects. There was a need for further capacity-building, as well as further automation through the different stages of data flow, also including the final dissemination of information to users. Overall, the aim was to use the data to have greater impact on the public and other stakeholders. He concluded by noting his country's efforts to further increase existing cooperation with other countries and organizations.

30. A representative of Serbia highlighted the country's commitment to enhancing its national register of pollution sources and aligning it with European Union directives and reporting requirements. The national PRTR system contained information from approximately 30,000 companies with reporting obligations. Recent improvements to the system included substantial software improvements to reduce the former technical limitations of the PRTR system. The improvements also addressed challenges related to data quality and a lack of human capacity, such as for determining the material balance of polluting substances when reporting on pollutant releases. For example, a new set of forms, which were based on measured values of pollutant releases, facilitated the calculation of average annual releases and created a material balance based on them. Furthermore, there was a new reporting system for the control of volatile organic compound emissions. For 2024 and 2025, additional legislative and technical improvements were planned, including:

- (a) A new reporting module for waste movement, including enabling provision of analytical reports for every type of waste and every company;
- (b) A new reporting module for the reuse and recycling of waste materials;
- (c) Comprehensive revision of all submitted data from the past three to five years for the extended producer responsibility reporting system.

31. A representative of Ukraine discussed the country's progress in implementing the Protocol on PRTRs as a Party thereto. A law on the national PRTR had come into force on 8 October 2023, requiring companies to enter PRTR data within a six-month timespan. Various regulatory acts had also been adopted to establish the legal status of and rules for operating the register. Despite challenges, including wartime conditions, Ukraine had demonstrated determination in fulfilling obligations under United Nations conventions and in achieving European Union integration goals. Ukraine sought support from the Protocol's Compliance Committee and from the secretariat for the implementation of a PRTR in Ukraine, including advice on its national legislation and institutional framework and on practical and methodological issues. Currently, guidelines were being developed to support all

stakeholders involved in the register, ensuring a clear understanding of its principles and operation. In that context, further support was needed, in particular for implementing reporting on diffuse sources, continuous monitoring, and harmonizing the national register with other existing databases. The speaker added that, while security concerns hindered the sharing of certain data, the national PRTR would serve as an instrument for environmental democracy, facilitating citizen involvement and control over pollution. The system would be integrated into the unified ecological platform with various online services. She concluded by highlighting that Ukraine was committed to integrating the PRTR into the European register despite existing challenges.

32. A representative of the European Union provided a brief update on the process of revising the European PRTR. The revision had initially been proposed by the European Commission in April 2022 and the European Council and the European Parliament were scheduled to finalize negotiations by the end of 2023. If successful, the Commission would present the outline of the new regulation during the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

33. A representative of UNEP/MAP informed participants about projects in Israel and Morocco for calculating pollution loads from diffuse sources, particularly in agriculture, aquaculture and catchment runoff. The projects involved, among other things, examining the estimation of pollutants such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sodium chloride and boron resulting from agricultural practices, including the use of sludge from wastewater treatment plants and manure. The aim was to use the project outcomes to identify and improve waste management practices and use the calculated data as an illustrative example to be adapted for reporting of diffuse emissions also by other contracting parties under the Barcelona Convention. Furthermore, the speaker addressed challenges in selecting emission coefficients, and outlined ongoing efforts for data verification. He also shared plans for the upcoming fifth reporting cycle under UNEP/MAP in 2026, highlighting the broader goal of improved monitoring of implementation of the regional plans related to urban wastewater and catchment runoff.

34. A representative of Participatio Limited, a company providing environmental policy advice,¹³ outlined the progress and challenges faced in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Republic of Moldova, as well as Kosovo.¹⁴ A key project in the region, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and supervised by the German Environment Agency, focused on developing or upgrading PRTRs, enhancing capacities, and supporting informed decision-making for sustainability. Notable achievements under the project included legislative advancements and the collaborative development of a shared software solution to meet Protocol on PRTRs and European Union reporting requirements. Challenges involved the lack of human capacity, including information technology staff shortages, the absence of regular budgets for long-term PRTR implementation and changes in European Union reporting requirements. The speaker also shared lessons learned, emphasizing the importance of incremental development and knowledge-sharing. Positive practices also included a visit to a company with effective data collection in place and the development of a common PRTR software package for use by several project participants, thereby creating significant synergies.

35. A representative of Brazil congratulated the presenters and acknowledged the challenges in developing a PRTR system. Brazil was currently developing its own PRTR and she expressed interest in the experiences of Chile, particularly in public participation during the development process. The speaker emphasized her country's commitment to implementing a PRTR system in the coming years. An important upcoming step in the implementation process was the design of an implementation strategy with regulatory impact analysis. Brazil sought technical assistance from the secretariat and other organizations and was open to cooperation with other countries, especially those of Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹³ Mention of any firm, product, service or licensed process does not imply endorsement or criticism by the United Nations.

¹⁴ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

36. A representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided an update on the status of efforts to establish a PRTR in the country. Notably, significant progress had been achieved within the framework of the project “Enhancement of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in the Western Balkans countries and the Republic of Moldova”, financially supported by the German Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. New bylaws on pollutant registers had been adopted, also in alignment with European Union regulations. The speaker highlighted a nationwide agreement on a harmonized methodology for data collection, processing and entry into the register, along with ongoing efforts in software development and information technology equipment procurement. Importantly, efforts were currently underway to reach an agreement among ministers on the ratification of the Protocol on PRTRs.

37. A representative of Colombia announced the issuance of resolution 839 of 2023, marking an eight-year journey of institutional commitment and collaboration on PRTR implementation. The approved PRTR was aligned with the Escazú Agreement. The representative emphasized the PRTR’s role in fostering public engagement through a web portal, promoting pollution reduction, and facilitating identification of major pollution sources. He expressed the country’s willingness to continue organizing workshops on the new PRTR system and addressing inquiries from stakeholders about the implementation of the Colombian PRTR, thereby demonstrating its commitment to transparency and environmental stewardship.

38. A representative of Georgia provided an overview of recent PRTR-related developments in the country, including legislative changes such as the introduction of an industrial emissions law, the main part of which would become effective from September 2026. Furthermore, she informed participants about recently expanded air quality monitoring, with mandatory self-monitoring for industrial emissions, producer responsibility regulations, ongoing improvements to waste reporting systems, and the introduction of obligations for public information on water quality. Those measures contributed to the increasing availability of data for improved management of pollution, waste and water resources in Georgia.

39. A representative of Ghana underscored the country’s commitment to managing chemicals and waste, with a regulatory framework for chemicals and waste being in place. He emphasized his country’s active role in international negotiations on plastic pollution and in international efforts regarding sound chemical and waste management, with the latter undertaking contributing to the fulfilment of the objectives of various treaties, including the Protocol on PRTRs. In that context, the speaker underlined the complementary roles of the Protocol and other multilateral environmental agreements in achieving common goals, such as protecting human health and the environment, and meeting sustainable development objectives. He outlined a national ten-year strategic plan (2021–2030) with defined national objectives, tasks, targets and milestones for managing chemicals and waste. Objectives included identifying, implementing and enforcing measures to prevent or, when not feasible, minimize harm from chemicals through their life cycle, including waste, generating relevant data and information, and making data available and accessible to all stakeholders to enable informed decision-making. Said objectives could only be attained once a national PRTR mechanism had been implemented, and the country was seeking support in that regard. The representative concluded by expressing the country’s readiness to collaborate and seek partnerships with relevant stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels in order to fulfil existing obligations and enhance chemical management.

40. A representative of Kazakhstan outlined aspects related to the country’s efforts in implementing the Protocol on PRTRs. Kazakhstan had ratified the Aarhus Convention in 2000 and the Protocol on PRTRs in 2020. It had incorporated PRTR practices into its Environmental Code in 2021. In that context, the representative referred to milestones, such as the issuance of rules and regulations for applying PRTR in Kazakhstan, the establishment of an information analysis centre and the ongoing development of a national environmental protection database. The representative acknowledged the learning process, emphasized the importance of timely reporting, and underscored the goal of reducing pollution and waste and keeping the public informed.

41. A representative of the NGO Eco Contact, speaking on behalf of the Republic of Moldova, focused on progress in implementing the PRTR system in the country. As part of an e-government programme, the country's PRTR platform had recently been successfully integrated into a national registry of State-owned assets. Training events involving various stakeholders, upgrades to the PRTR software, and other efforts were important steps in further enhancing awareness and accessibility of PRTR data in the Republic of Moldova. Challenges remained with regard to the lack of a functional funding mechanism for continuous improvement of the national pollutant register. Other challenges were related to the need for further development of methods for estimating releases to water and soil, as well as for estimating diffuse emissions and collecting waste-related data. Reflecting on lessons learned, he highlighted as a key element of successful PRTR implementation regular awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building events with operators, owners and other stakeholders.

42. In the ensuing discussion, a speaker from Aarhus Centre Yerevan raised concerns about dangerously high levels of air pollution in the city, primarily attributed to industrial activities, improper construction practices and waste disposal sites. She highlighted the challenges faced by environmental NGOs in disseminating information to residents and stressed the importance of governmental action in addressing pollution issues. She emphasized the need for timely information and called for the ratification of the Protocol on PRTRs.

43. In response to a question from Brazil regarding public participation, the representative of Chile emphasized the challenge of implementing the Escazú Agreement and mentioned efforts to update the national PRTR report to include guidelines promoting public engagement. Another participant raised a question about data accessibility and suggested using electronic input formats to streamline data handling, referencing the example of the Ukrainian e-permitting system. The representative of Chile responded by discussing the implementation of new technologies, including data warehousing, to improve efficiency and potentially shorten reporting periods. Furthermore, a representative of the European ECO-Forum expressed appreciation for the progress made by countries, particularly highlighting the positive developments in the ECE and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean regions. She expressed support for efforts to improve interregional collaboration and expressed the hope that, in the future, there would be opportunities to share experiences and provide assistance through international initiatives and programmes.

44. The Working Group took note of the examples presented by panellists representing Armenia, Chile, Serbia, Ukraine, UNEP/MAP and Participatio Limited, along with information provided by other participants, and expressed its appreciation to presenters for sharing valuable experiences. In addition, the Working Group expressed its appreciation to Ukraine for progress achieved in establishing its PRTR system despite the extraordinary circumstances due to the war launched against the country by the Russian Federation.

45. Furthermore, the Working Group:

(a) Welcomed efforts by countries and organizations to promote the establishment of PRTR systems and steps taken towards implementation of and accession to the Protocol;

(b) Encouraged Protocol national focal points to promote, in cooperation with national focal points of other relevant treaties and organizations, financial support, such as through the Global Environment Facility, to countries that wished to establish PRTR systems on their own or as a group;

(c) Recognized the importance of modernizing PRTR systems;

(d) Also recognized the usefulness of such activities in showing ways to optimize existing PRTR systems and design new PRTRs that addressed the Protocol's objective to establish coherent and integrated PRTRs in an efficient manner.

VI. Fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol

A. Substantive preparations

46. Turning to the issue of substantive preparations for the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, the Acting Chair introduced the Note on the work programme for 2026–2029 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/5) and the Note on future financial arrangements under the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/6), prepared by the Bureau. A representative of the Bureau introduced the Draft proposal on a possible decision on promoting innovative approaches for modernizing pollutant release and transfer registers, their global promotion and synergy (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/7). The Acting Chair also highlighted the fact that, as per previous practice, the Bureau would proceed with preparation of the draft agenda for the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol for the next meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. The agenda would normally follow main items of the work programme and would be similar to the agenda of the previous session.

47. The Acting Chair also recalled that, as per previous practice, the Bureau might also proceed with preparation of draft elements for the declaration for a High-level Segment, in cooperation with the Convention's Bureau. Inviting participants to start the discussion on the topic, the Acting Chair noted that subjects should be relevant for both the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol. The triple planetary crisis (climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution) could be considered as an overarching theme, with the focus on the role of the Convention and the Protocol in addressing that critical issue. Other important subjects, such as chemicals, plastics, minerals and metals, could be also reflected in the context of the triple planetary crisis. It was also noted that the value of digital transformation, including through modernizing PRTRs, for implementing the Convention and the Protocol would also fit well with the theme.

48. Delegations shared their views on the introduced documents and on possible subjects to be considered by the High-level Segment put forward by the Acting Chair. Pursuant to the discussion, the Working Group took note of the:

(a) Note on the work programme for 2026–2029 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/5) and of the statements made by participants, and requested the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to prepare a draft decision on the work programme for 2026–2029 for the Protocol for the next meeting of the Working Group, in line with the approach and indicative timeline outlined in the Note, for consideration and approval by the Working Group and its subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration. The draft would be made available to national focal points and stakeholders for comments prior to the next meeting of the Working Group;

(b) Note on future financial arrangements under the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/6) and of statements by participants, approved the Note, and requested the Bureau, with support of the secretariat, to finalize it in the form of a draft decision for submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration at its fifth session;

(c) Draft proposal on a possible decision on promoting innovative approaches for modernizing pollutant release and transfer registers, their global promotion and synergy (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/7) and of the statements and the comments provided by participants, recognizing the importance of modernizing pollutant release and transfer register systems. The Working Group agreed that possible additional written comments could be submitted to the secretariat by 1 March 2024 and requested the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to revise the document in the light of the comments received and submit it to the eleventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties in 2024 for consideration and approval and its subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration. A draft would be made available to national focal points and stakeholders for comments prior to the next meeting of the Working Group;

(d) Suggestions provided by the Acting Chair regarding the agenda for the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol and possible elements for the declaration to be prepared for a High-level Segment, and requested the Bureau to prepare a draft agenda for the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties and draft elements for the declaration, in cooperation with the Aarhus Convention's Bureau, for its next meeting, for consideration and approval by the Working Group and their subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration. Drafts would be made available to national focal points and stakeholders for comments prior to the next meeting of the Working Group.

B. Hosting and preparatory timeline

49. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat regarding related outcomes of the twenty-seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 26–28 June 2023) related to the hosting of and the preparatory timeline for the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs, including possible dates for the fifth session, to be held in the autumn of 2025.

50. The Working Group further:

(a) Welcomed the preliminary interest expressed by the Government of Lithuania in hosting the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs, and requested the secretariat to further liaise with the Government of Lithuania and other potential host countries on that matter;

(b) Mandated the Bureau to take the decision on the hosting and timing of the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol prior to the next meeting of the Working Group, as appropriate, and to report to the Working Group on the issue at its next meeting;

(c) Took note of the Note on the preparatory timeline for the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (PRTR/WG.1/2023/Inf.1).

VII. Implementation of the work programme for 2022–2025, including financial matters

51. Regarding the implementation of the work programme for 2022–2025, the Working Group took note of the:

(a) Report on the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/3);

(b) Information provided by the secretariat on self-evaluation of the activities under the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs;¹⁵

(c) Report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/4), as well as the Note on update to contributions received between 1 September and 15 November 2023 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/Inf.2) and major recent trends regarding financial matters.

52. The Working Group expressed its appreciation for the work carried out by the secretariat and recognized the difficulties posed by limited and unpredictable funding. The Working Group also expressed its concern regarding the low number of pledges and urged Parties had not to date contributed to proceed with the contributions for all missing years without any further delay. The Working Group also reiterated its call on Parties to refrain from earmarking large contributions for specific purposes, so as to facilitate the management of funds for implementation of the work programme in a balanced way.

¹⁵ See <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EVALUA~1.PDF>.

VIII. Calendar of meetings

53. The Working Group took note of the relevant meetings planned for 2024.¹⁶

IX. Adoption of the decisions and outcomes of the meeting

54. The Working Group took note of the statements by delegations, adopted the decisions and major outcomes presented by the Acting Chair at the current meeting (PRTR/WG.1/2023/Inf.4), and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Acting Chair, to finalize the report incorporating the outcomes and decisions adopted.

55. The Acting Chair then thanked the participants for their contributions and the interpreters and the secretariat for their support and closed the meeting.

¹⁶ A calendar of meetings for 2024 is available at <https://unece.org/info/events/unece-meetings-and-events/environmental-policy/public-participation>.