

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

Working Group of the Parties

Twenty-eighth meeting

Geneva, 4 July 2024

UNDP Statement on Capacity Building

Countries in the region are facing severe environmental and climate impacts, in particular Central Asia is experiencing some of the worst droughts in the past five years and temperatures rising faster than the global average. The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine exacerbates the environmental crisis, while large-scale mining and energy projects further strain ecosystems and lead to numerous human rights abuses.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for new approaches from the governments, businesses and civil society to address these interconnected crises.

UNDP's strategic work revolves around supporting legal frameworks for environmental treaties, including the Aarhus Convention. In addition to our work on promoting low-carbon development pathways, more sustainable use of natural resources, and increased resilience to climate change and disasters, we launched the Environmental Justice strategy in 2022.

The strategy serves as a means of effectively implementing the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

By now, following the strategy, we have initiated a **comprehensive and long-term environmental justice development programming** in the region.

Let me highlight few examples of our current work.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, we supported legislative amendment recommendations, integrated environmental criminal law into judicial training, and developed a mapping of environmental human rights violations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In **Georgia**, we produced a [baseline assessment on environmental justice](#) in 2023 - the first of its kind in the country. The report identifies the most salient barriers at the regulatory and institutional level to effective access to environmental justice in both countries and offers recommendations.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, we supported the setup of a High-level Environmental Justice Dialogue Platform, compiled Environmental Justice Case Law, and developed training and a manual for legal professionals.

In **Kosovo**¹, UNDP is carrying out innovative work to [strengthen social cohesion through environmental justice](#). The environmental challenges directly impact various groups and make them more vulnerable.

¹ All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

The main goal of this initiative is to prevent conflict and violence by uniting communities and enabling open communication.

In **North Macedonia**, UNDP supported the integration of environmental justice in the draft National Development Strategy - a key document outlining the country's long-term development priorities.

UNDP partners with the judiciary in all mentioned countries and is at various stages of development and delivery of training.

Development of sub-regional judicial networks:

A [high-level international judges conference on access to environmental justice took place](#) in the Issyk-Kul region, in 2023 which brought together more than 100 participants. The event facilitated transboundary judicial cooperation in implementing environmental justice policies. Concrete actions identified include the development of a sub-regional network in Central Asia for strengthening the **role of judges in increasing access to environmental justice**.

In Western Balkans, a regional justice meeting took place in December 2023 in Sarajevo, which helped to identify and discuss the most sustainable approaches to addressing the salient environmental issues in Western Balkans and to foster cooperation at the regional level.

The role of NHRIs

Accessible and effective NHRIs are essential for better access to justice, environmental information, and decision-making for vulnerable groups. The NHRIs in **Georgia, Moldova, Kosovo and North Macedonia** are being supported through TPP-funded projects to develop the capacity of the respective NHRIs in environmental justice to represent the interests of affected populations more effectively and adequately address individual or collective grievances.

Accountability of businesses for environmental justice

Business accountability for environmental standards needs improvement in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as large-scale mining and energy projects in the region cause ecosystem destruction and human rights challenges. The region's significant critical mineral resources are essential for the green energy transition, yet have seen over [400 allegations of human rights abuses between 2019 and 2023](#). Our [Scoping study on business and human rights](#) also noted that human rights abuses often overlap with environmental violations, especially prominent in large-scale extractive activities and recently in the hydropower sector.

It is essential to note the EU's new directives, including the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), the Regulation on Deforestation-Free Products (EUDR), the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and the Critical Minerals, are expected to impact the region's level of corporate practices on human rights and environmental protection (particularly EU companies' supply chains).

These developments **require a scale-up of support to the region, which is suffering from the shortage of resources, capacity, and technical expertise** to guide businesses and states, as well as **shrinking civic space** to enable proper monitoring of human rights and environmental protection in the region.

UNDP currently runs training academies for companies on environmental and human rights due diligence in Türkiye, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (with the support of Japan).

The initiatives led to the successful training of over 300 companies, including 303 companies with 80 Japanese entities, on human rights due diligence through the B+HR Academy and the advancements in national policy-making, such as the adoption of **Ukraine's National Human Rights Strategy inclusive of UNGPs** on BHR, Kyrgyzstan's commitment to adopt the **National Action Plan on BHR**, and the completion of **National Baseline Assessments on BHR** in Türkiye, Kazakhstan, as well as ongoing assessments in Azerbaijan and Serbia.

Aligning business operations with human rights and environmental standards in the context of war, crises, or conflict is crucial. For example, the [UNDP Guide on Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for Business in Conflict-Affected Contexts](#) is now being applied in Ukraine, and the training sessions are conducted for businesses operating in the context of the war.

UNDP will continue working on the mentioned areas, falling under the Aarhus Convention's purview, including by:

- Further providing training to the businesses to conduct environmental and human rights due diligence based on various guides
- Hosting the 4th UN Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights in Montenegro in November 2024, focusing on regulating responsible business conduct towards green transition reforms in EU accession countries
- Strengthening the implementation of laws, developing the capacities of judges, prosecutors, and environmental inspectors, and fostering regional and sub-regional exchanges.
- Continuing support for civil society in enhancing environmental justice, especially in the context of shrinking civic space.

Partnerships with the Aarhus Convention, UNECE, UNEP, OHCHR, and other development partners will be essential to advancing these goals.