



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 August 2024

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twenty-ninth session

Geneva, 6–8 November 2024

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Cross-sectoral activities

Cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau, meeting in an extended format (Geneva, 28 February 2018), requested the secretariat to prepare a briefing note as an official document on all cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme. The documents under such a format (ECE/CEP/2019/11, ECE/CEP/2019/17, ECE/CEP/2020/4, ECE/CEP/2021/4 and ECE/CEP/2023/4) were considered by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-fourth (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019), twenty-fifth (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), twenty-sixth (Geneva (hybrid), 9–10 November 2020), twenty-seventh (Geneva (hybrid), 3–5 November 2021) and twenty-eighth (Geneva, 1–3 November 2023) sessions respectively.

As per established practice, the present document elaborates on the recent developments, plans for the future and the expected decisions by the Committee.



I. Education for sustainable development

A. Overview of recent developments

1. On 29–31 May 2024, the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) held its nineteenth meeting in Geneva, at which it, among other things:

(a) Approved the following proposed documents: “Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2025)” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2024/3); and the guidance for working with indicators entitled “Guidelines for the process of reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2024/6);

(b) Agreed to launch the next (fifth) mandatory reporting cycle after the current meeting and to circulate the final (and slightly revised) version of the reporting format (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2024/3) to the Committee;

(c) Approved the establishment of the “Organizing Committee for commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for ESD” (Organizing Committee), comprised of the Steering Committee members and experts;

(d) With regard to the activities of the UNECE ESD Youth Platform, agreed on the following:

(i) The acting national focal points have to remind their respective Governments to facilitate the nomination of the youth focal points;

(ii) The elected youth focal points are invited to work with the coordinator of the UNECE ESD Youth Platform on organizing their work during the upcoming UNECE Forum on ESD (Limassol, Cyprus, 27–28 June 2024);

(iii) The member States are invited to appoint a youth focal point to the UNECE ESD Youth Platform in order to provide for the active engagement of youth in the process, based on the existing example of the acting Austrian and German youth focal points, actively involved in the work of the Committee;

(e) Regarding the planned publications for 2024, agreed to:

(i) Look into the possibility of preparing the publication *Guiding Framework for Twenty-first Century Competences for Innovation and Entrepreneurship* after the Forum in Limassol, Cyprus; if experts are not identified shortly after the Forum, then to postpone its publication for 2025;

(ii) Postpone the publication *Youth Empowered: From Words to Action* to 2025 and to eventually prepare an online toolkit in 2024 (depending on availability of funds);

(f) Regarding the forecast of official documents for the twentieth meeting of the Steering Committee, to be held in 2025, agreed to the list of the documents, proposed by the secretariat as follows:

- Annotated provisional agenda for the twentieth meeting (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2025/1);
- Report of the twentieth meeting of the Steering Committee (post-session) (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2025/2);
- Draft proposal for implementing the third strand on “Digital education, information and communications technology and education for sustainable development” of the implementation framework of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2025/3);
- Outcomes of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Forum on Education for Sustainable Development – “Empowering Youth for Sustainable

Futures: Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Engagement” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2025/4).

2. The Committee took note of:

(a) The presentations made by the country representatives on the progress made in implementing the Strategy since the previous meeting;

(b) The information about the outcomes of the 2024 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, 13–14 March 2024); and of the online side event “Advancing the six transitions: What role for young people?”, co-organized by Cyprus, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ECE, Geneva Environment Network and Youth and Environment Europe, on 11 March 2024, in the framework of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;

(c) The information about the outcomes of the two capacity-building workshops for building member States’ capacity in national reporting on implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD held online on, respectively, 12 December 2023 and 23 January 2024, and the follow-up workshop held on 29 May 2024 in Geneva, with the purpose of facilitating national reporting on implementing the new implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD (2021–2030) along the four priority strands;

(d) The information about the outcomes of the process of elaboration of the Strategic framework on whole institution approach and education for sustainable development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2024/4) and on the next steps in carrying out the planned activities for implementing the second strand on the whole institution (school) approach and ESD, outlined in the draft workplan;

(e) The information about the progress in developing a toolkit on whole institution approach and ESD (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2024/5);

(f) The information about an outline of practical steps for implementing the workplan activities/outputs on the third strand on digital education, information and communications technology and ESD of the implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030;

(g) The information about the successful completion and the outcomes of the capacity-building workshop on implementing the fourth priority area on “Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and education for sustainable development” of the implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD from 2021 to 2030 (Tbilisi, 30–31 October 2023);

(h) The information about the progress in organizing the upcoming regional conference on implementing the fourth strand on entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and ESD, entitled “UNECE Forum on ESD - Empowering Youth for Sustainable Futures: Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Engagement”, to be held on 27–28 June 2024 in Limassol, Cyprus;

(i) The information about activities organized by the UNECE ESD Youth Platform since the previous meeting and about the proposed plan of activities for 2025;

(j) The presentations given by the representatives of UNESCO, UNEP, the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, the Global Education Network Europe and the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, and agreed to work closely with the above-mentioned organizations, as well as with other regional and global partners, on further promoting the ESD agenda in the region;

(k) The information regarding the planned participation in the upcoming regional and international forums;

(l) The information about the status of the trust fund and resource requirements.

B. Goals and challenges

3. At the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022), the ministers responsible for education and the environment adopted the Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/11). In the statement, taking into account the continued challenges and needs identified by the member States in their national implementation reports related to the strengthening of regulatory frameworks, educator competences on ESD, quality learning outcome assessment mechanisms, enhancement of the whole school/whole institution approach to sustainable development, support to research on ESD, empowerment of youth participation in decision-making, speeding up of the transition towards green and digital economy and society, based on transformative learning environments, acknowledging also that some countries, particularly countries with economies in transition, may continue to need support for carrying out relevant activities, the ministers expressed strong support for the continuation and stepping up of efforts for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD until 2030 at the regional level, in synergy with relevant efforts undertaken at the global and subregional levels (e.g., UNESCO, the European Union/European Economic Area, Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, Central Asia) and at the national level.

4. The ministers recognized the great importance of the issues elaborated in the adopted Framework for Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 and the need to, as a matter of urgency, mobilize political and financial resources for strengthening the ESD contribution to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in order to fully benefit from its potential to effectively contribute to addressing the multiple crises and challenges related to the achievement of sustainable development.

5. The ministers committed to focusing their efforts, promoting and achieving concrete progress on the four priority areas/strands of policy identified by the Steering Committee (Quality education and ESD; Whole institution approach/Institutions as communities of transformational learning; Digital education, information and communications technology and ESD; 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.

6. The ministers requested the Executive Secretary of ECE to catalyse efforts for resource mobilization, including financial support, by member States, for strengthening and scaling up ESD actions [in partnership with UNESCO and UNEP] and to mainstream ESD activities, partnerships and initiatives in all programmes.

C. Planned activities

7. The twentieth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development is to be held in Geneva, on 28–30 May 2025.

8. As requested by the Committee, the secretariat will provide the necessary secretarial support in launching the next (fifth) mandatory reporting cycle, including preparing the revised and final version of the “Format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (2021–2025)” (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2024/3) for circulation, and preparing and sending out to the respective Governments of the member States official letters, on behalf of the Executive Secretary, asking for the national implementation reports to be prepared and submitted.

9. The secretariat will also provide the necessary secretarial support in circulating an email to the Committee inviting the members to participate in the work of an expert and support groups, to be established for the elaboration of the Strategic Framework on Whole Institution Approach and ESD and the Toolkit on Whole Institution Approach and ESD.

10. Furthermore, the secretariat will provide the necessary secretarial support in preparing and sending out letters to the Committee members inviting them to appoint youth national focal points to the UNECE ESD Youth Platform.

11. As requested by the Committee, the secretariat will send out its regular annual letters to the Governments of the member States (education and environment ministries) asking for financial contributions in support of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in 2025.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

12. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to take note of the information provided on the work of the Steering Committee on ESD, and to encourage its members from the countries participating in the Strategy for ESD to remain informed of the process at the national level by establishing and maintaining working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

II. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

A. Overview of recent developments

13. The Partnerships under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) continued their work. On 26–27 September 2023, THE PEP Partnership on Sustainable Tourism Mobility met in Bohinj (Slovenia). The Partnership is building a toolbox to promote sustainable mobility in tourism. The toolbox targets authorities at the national level, in contrast with existing manuals and toolboxes, which target destinations. In all, 15 member States were involved at the time of writing. An advanced draft of the toolbox was discussed at an online meeting of the Partnership on 20 March 2024.

14. On 14–15 September 2023, THE PEP Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility¹ met in Lisbon. The main aim was to work on a master plan on walking, the first draft of which was shared with members of the Partnership and the secretariat at the beginning of 2024.

15. The Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility also met to address cycling on 26–27 October 2023, in Madrid. The Partnership has been working on the implementation of the Pan-European Master Plan on Cycling Promotion.² The Partnership also met on 23–25 April 2024, in Belgrade, and in the framework of a series of meetings on THE PEP (22–25 April 2024), starting with a relay race workshop focused on active mobility.

16. On 13–14 November 2023, THE PEP Partnership on Child- and Youth-friendly Mobility met in Luxembourg. The Partnership has been working on a pan-European master plan on child- and youth-friendly mobility, to be completed by 2025. The plan's objectives are: the raising of awareness on the importance of considering youth and children when setting up urban and mobility plans; the promotion of the exchange of good practices and learning experiences; and the elaboration of guidelines and tools.

17. The Partnership on Jobs in Green and Healthy Transport met on 15 March 2024 to launch a third study. The study, financed by France, aims to look at the employment impact of moving to greener and healthier urban logistics across the ECE region.

¹ The Steering Committee, at its twenty-first session (Geneva, 23–25 October 2023), agreed on the extended Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility, under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) and the European Environment and Health Process and welcomed the Netherlands as an additional leader of the Partnership (ECE/AC.21/SC/2023/2–EUCHP2219536/1.1/2, paras. 50 and 62 (a)).

² Adopted by ministers of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region at the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (Vienna, 17–18 May 2021).

18. THE PEP continued its preparation of a strategy on transport, health and environment. The Ad hoc Working Group on Strategy and Possible Legal Instruments (Working Group) and the Bureau presented a first version of the strategy (ECE/AC.21/SC/2023/5–EUCHP2219536/1.1/5) at the twenty-first session of THE PEP Steering Committee (Geneva, 23–25 October 2023). A revised version was discussed at the eighth meeting of the Working Group (online, 27 February 2024). The Bureau was to provide its formal approval at its meeting at the end of June or the beginning of July 2024, when preparing the twenty-second session of the Steering Committee (Geneva, 28–30 October 2024).

19. At the same meeting in February 2024, the Working Group discussed the mandate from the Vienna Declaration³ to draft a proposal for possible legal instruments to be addressed by the Sixth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment. The Working Group concluded that they had received neither enough guidance nor sufficient resources from the Steering Committee and that additional discussions could take place at the next session of the Steering Committee (Geneva, 28–30 October 2024).

20. THE PEP organized a side event on the margins of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, 5–7 July 2023). In addition, a workshop on “Transport planning for the future” took place on 23 October 2023. The event looked at future transport from the perspectives of walking, cycling, micromobility, public transport, coordination and planning among different authorities and tools that could be used by planners and policymakers.

21. The twenty-first session of THE PEP Steering Committee adopted the Communication strategy for the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (ECE/AC.21/SC/2023/6–EUCHP2219536/1.1/6). In addition, having discussed the limited time available to complete work on possible legal instruments and the short period between the Fifth and Sixth High-level Meetings – the latter planned for 2025 – the Committee decided to recommend the postponement of the Sixth High-level Meeting.⁴

22. At an Extraordinary Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (Geneva, 19 February 2024), in the light of the above-mentioned Steering Committee proposal, the member States decided to postpone the Sixth High-level Meeting.⁵

B. Goals and challenges

23. The Steering Committee is expected to adopt the strategy on transport, health and environment at its twenty-second session. Member States will also need to discuss the mandate in the Vienna Declaration to “analyse different legal options to give effect to our vision and strategy, and elaborate draft proposals for possible legal instruments”.⁶ The work to analyse different legal options requires in-kind and/or financial contributions.

C. Planned activities

24. The Bureau of THE PEP is to meet at the end of June or the beginning of July 2024 to prepare the twenty-second session of THE PEP Steering Committee. The work of the Partnerships is to continue.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

25. The Committee may consider inviting its members to identify additional participants in the work on possible legal instruments. In addition, members of the Committee may be invited to contact THE PEP secretariat should they wish their country to be involved in any of the activities under THE PEP, especially the Partnerships, or to contribute financially.

³ ECE/AC.21/SC/2022/2–EUCHP2219536/1.1/2, para. 24 (b) and (f).

⁴ ECE/AC.21/SC/2023/2–EUCHP2219536/1.1/2, paras. 27, 32 (b) and 34 (c).

⁵ ECE/AC.21/2024/2–EUCDE2422320/4.2.2, para. 7.

⁶ ECE/AC.21/2021/3–EUCHP2018924/4.3.3, para. 4.

III. European Environment and Health Process

A. Overview of the recent developments

26. The Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, under the European Environment and Health Process (EHP), took place in Budapest, on 5–7 July 2023. The Conference adopted the Budapest Declaration,⁷ which prioritizes urgent action on health challenges related to the triple environmental crisis of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss. The Conference was attended by more than 600 participants, including delegates from 43 member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region, representatives of stakeholders (including youth representatives and representatives of subnational and local levels of government), observers and guests. The member States' delegations included nearly 40 senior political officials: ambassadors, ministers, deputy ministers, secretaries of state and chief medical or environmental officers.

27. The Declaration adopted a new implementation mechanism, the EHP Partnerships: the first four Partnerships, launched during the Conference, are:

- EHP Partnership on Human Biomonitoring in the WHO European Region (led by Germany and co-led by Georgia)
- EHP Partnership for Health-Sector Climate Action (led by Ireland)
- THE PEP/EHP Partnership on Healthy Active Mobility (led by Austria, France and the Netherlands)
- EHP Partnership on Youth in the WHO European Region (led by Slovenia and the International Youth Health Organization)

28. The Budapest Declaration also reaffirmed the commitments from previous Ministerial Conferences, particularly the Ostrava Declaration.⁸ The Ministerial Conference was preceded by a youth forum (Budapest, 4 July 2023). To strengthen countries' implementation capacities, the Budapest Declaration, in its paragraph 14, emphasized the need to support and empower youth organizations to make their actions more relevant in policymaking.

29. The Bureau of the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF) of EHP met online, on 22 April 2024. The aim of the meeting, chaired by the Netherlands and co-chaired by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was to prepare the fourteenth meeting of the Task Force (Utrecht, Netherlands, 26–27 June 2024), and discuss progress in the follow-up to the Budapest Conference, as well as the activities to be carried out in the implementation, in the 2024–2025 biennium, of the Budapest Declaration and its Road map for healthier people, a thriving planet and a sustainable future 2023–2030. At the meeting, countries tackled the:

- Follow-up to the Budapest Conference: member States and stakeholders shared examples of the implementation of commitments to promote transparency, accountability and peer learning. Countries highlighted actions undertaken to address climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss.
- Draft programme of work for the Task Force for 2024–2025: Bureau members provided comments on the proposal for the biennial Programme of Work for 2024–2025. The revised document was to be sent to the Task Force for consultation before its fourteenth meeting.
- Agenda of the Task Force: among other things, the Bureau suggested reviewing environment- and health-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators to incorporate nature and health perspectives, as well as revising the rules of procedure of the Task Force.

⁷ Available at https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/371461?search-result=true&query=Declaration+of+the+Seventh+Ministerial+Conference+on+Environment+and+Health&scope=&rpp=10&sort_by=score&order=desc.

⁸ Available at <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/347249>.

- Updates on EHP Partnerships.
- Programme for the Bonn Dialogues on Environment and Health in the biennium 2024–2025, and possible topics for the Dialogues: the Bureau proposed that topics for the next Dialogues be connected to the triple environmental crisis.
- Draft updated rules of procedure for the Task Force.

30. At the invitation of the Chair of EHTF, representatives of 43 member States of the WHO European Region and 12 stakeholders gathered at the fourteenth meeting of EHTF to review progress in implementing the commitments made in the Budapest Declaration. The meeting was co-organized by the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment of the Netherlands and the City of Utrecht (Netherlands).

31. The member States adopted the programme of work for 2024–2025, including the topics of the Bonn Dialogues on Environment and Health, the rules of procedures of EHTF and the terms of reference of the EHP Partnerships. Additionally, the member States elected two new EHTF Bureau members, and engaged with youth organization representatives to discuss progress on the Budapest Youth Declaration.⁹ The meeting also took stock of the work of the EHP Partnerships and established two new EHP Partnerships: the EHP Partnership on Poison Centres, led by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the EHP Partnership on Risk Reduction in the School Environment, led by Hungary.

B. Goals and challenges

32. In the period considered in this report, the activities under EHP were designed to contribute to implementing the Budapest Declaration and the work of the newly established EHP Partnerships. In particular, the Task Force, through the WHO Bonn office, committed to supporting member States in building technical and leadership capacities in environment and health.

C. Planned activities

33. There are plans to develop and organize an executive officers' meeting on governance and capacity in environment and health, in order to:

- Develop professional profiles and competencies on environment and health for strengthening service delivery by the environment and health workforce.
- Update environmental inequality indicators on air quality to improve targeted environment and health policies towards narrowing inequality gaps.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

34. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to note the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference and to reconfirm its commitment to contribute to EHP.

IV. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities

A. Overview of recent developments

35. The Environment Division participated in the preparation of the ECE Gender Action Plan 2023–2024, reported on the implementation of activities according to the ECE Gender

⁹ Available at www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/budapest-youth-declaration-2023.

Action Plan 2021–2022,¹⁰ and contributed to the forthcoming United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment report for 2023.

36. A peer-learning round table session on Sustainable Development Goal 13 (climate action) of the 2024 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the ECE region was organized (Geneva (hybrid), 13 March 2024) within the framework of the United Nations inter-agency Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia. Guiding question 2 – on the effectiveness of inclusive adaptation policies and activities in ensuring that no-one is left behind – had a gender dimension,¹¹ which was taken up by the speakers and reflected in the Co-Chairs’ summary of the discussions.¹² As usual, a 50–50 gender balance among speakers was ensured.

37. Montenegro was supported on equitable access to water and sanitation. A preliminary report concerning the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation was presented during the National workshop on the findings of the Equitable Access Score-card in Montenegro (Podgorica, 16 May 2023). The findings revealed an extensive data gap when assessing equity, particularly in rural areas. The revised Score-card focuses extensively on assessing menstrual hygiene in institutional settings such as schools and health-care facilities. The findings revealed that capacities were lacking when it came to menstrual hygiene management, but the situation was improving.

38. Following Montenegro, Albania was the second country to pilot the draft revised Equitable Access Score-card developed under the ECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health. The project was launched during the Inception workshop on assessing equitable access to water and sanitation in Albania (Tirana, 30 October 2023). Among the participants, various representatives of civil society, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer NGOs, were present. The preliminary findings were presented at the National workshop on the findings of the equitable access to water and sanitation self-assessment in Albania (Tirana, 27 March 2024), which highlighted a data gap on vulnerable and marginalized communities and insufficient coordination among responsible stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector.

39. During the period 2023–2024, the third reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was carried out in cooperation with UNESCO. Following a gender contextualization project under the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, the third reporting exercise integrated a gender perspective. For the first time, data were collected on gender and transboundary water cooperation. The outcomes will be presented at the fifth joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 6–8 May 2024) under the Water Convention.

40. The environmental performance review (EPR) for Kyrgyzstan, carried out in 2022/23, addressed gender equality considerations, ranging from public participation, water management, energy, health, industry and waste management, to education for sustainable development and the availability of gender and environmental statistics. A workshop on climate change policy development: policies and practices on the basis of ECE EPRs, was held on 2–3 October 2023 in Skopje. During the workshop, a session on gender and climate change highlighted the importance of incorporating gender and climate change into policies to achieve sustainable development, a fair and just society and ambitious climate action. It provided participants with the key methodology of introducing the gender perspective into climate change policies by presenting the key gender-based causes, steps and methods in

¹⁰ Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/ECE_GAP%202021-2022_final.pdf.

¹¹ See Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region 2024, Sustainable Development Goal 13 round table programme, p. 2. Available at <https://regionalforum.unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/RFSD%202024%20SDG%2013%20RT%20Programme%20March%202024.pdf>.

¹² ECE/RFSD/2024/2 (advance, unedited version), annex, paras. 52 and 59. Available at https://regionalforum.unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/RFSD_2024_report_advance%20version.pdf.

terms of addressing gendered vulnerabilities in both mitigation and adaptation areas. Gender indicators in the monitoring and verification processes of climate action were also introduced.

41. The ECE Environment and Statistics Divisions have jointly completed the revision of the environmental indicator guidelines and the publication *Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators: 2023 Edition*, which highlights the importance of data disaggregation, including by gender.

42. The Environment Division also promoted a participatory and human rights-based approach and gender considerations, including through the work of the Task Force on Access to Information and the Working Groups of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. The Task Force, at its eighth (Geneva, 9–10 November 2023) meeting, provided a platform to Governments, NGOs, academia and a wide range of other stakeholders for exchanging challenges and good practices to strengthen public access to environmental information. The meeting was preceded by a workshop on advancing public access to environment-related product information: challenges and opportunities (Geneva, 9 November 2023). The Updated recommendations on more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2), which specifically address the needs of groups in vulnerable situations, including women, were promoted at the meeting.

43. During the Fourth Joint Round Table on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding Living Modified Organisms/ Genetically Modified Organisms under the auspices of the secretariats to the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (Geneva, 11–12 December 2023), the need for more public awareness programmes and educational tools, targeting different stakeholder groups, such as Indigenous peoples and local communities, farmers, youth and women, was articulated. This should also include efforts to improve understanding of scientific and technical issues, including new technological developments, by these groups. In addition, during the discussions, it became clear that there was a pressing need to develop and implement effective mechanisms to ensure meaningful and inclusive public participation in decision-making regarding genetically modified organisms, in particular aimed at involving children, youth, elderly persons and women.

44. The Convention's Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders at his regional (Central Asia) consultation with civil society (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 4–8 March 2024), had included a session specifically dedicated to the situation of female environmental defenders in that region. Self-evaluation on the activities serviced by ECE under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers undertaken by ECE had resulted in recommendations, including to continue to encourage a participatory and human rights-based approach, synergy and gender considerations.

45. The ECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents ensures inclusive public information and participation by implementing its article 9 with the population's involvement, regardless of age and gender, in line with the Long-term strategy for the Convention until 2030 (ECE/CP.TEIA/38/Add.1, decision 2018/3) and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The Convention has promoted gender-balanced participation in the framework of its projects and events, among other things, during the second meeting of the Inter-institutional Working Group on Tailings Safety and Prevention of Accidental Water Pollution in Kazakhstan (Astana (hybrid), 15 March 2023) and the second meeting of the Inter-institutional Working Group on Tailings Safety and Prevention of Accidental Water Pollution in Tajikistan (online, 4 April 2023), in addition to the Subregional workshop on mine tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution in Central Asia (Dushanbe (hybrid), 25–26 May, 2023). In 2023, the Convention's Working Group on Implementation added a question to the reporting format for national implementation reports for the tenth round on implementation (2019–2022) about how countries ensure that public information and participation under the Convention are inclusive of persons of different ages and genders and persons with disabilities, given that they may be exposed to different risks and may need particular information and measures in the event of an industrial accident. Analysis of the data received will be presented to the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting (Geneva, 27–29 November 2024).

46. The Steering Committee of THE PEP has a female Chair. After the inclusion of questions on gender in the biennial survey on the implementation of THE PEP, for the first time, the Steering Committee at its twenty-first session heard a report on examples of inclusion of gender considerations into healthy, green and sustainable transport.¹³ At the relay race workshop dedicated to active mobility (Belgrade, 22–25 April 2024), presenters also focused on the gender perspective.

B. Goals and challenges

47. Equal gender representation continues to be a big issue in environmental policy, however, it seems to be more difficult to go beyond issues of gender balance and find adequate responses to the substance of environmental policies and their impacts on gender equality. One of the main challenges is a lack of local gender-disaggregated data.

C. Planned activities

48. The Environment Division will continue to support gender mainstreaming work in countries through capacity development and awareness-raising events at the request of Governments. For example, in the period 2025–2026, under the new European Union-funded project “Air Quality for Better Citizens’ Health” within the European Union Green Connectivity Programme for Georgia, ECE, in cooperation with WHO, will carry out two activities on capacity-building on gender mainstreaming in air quality management, namely to develop a gender equality framework and toolkit, including a checklist for air quality management, and to build capacities of relevant stakeholders in applying gender equality tools in air quality management.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

49. The Committee is invited to note the information provided with respect to gender mainstreaming across ECE activities and in environmental activities carried out by the Environment Division since the Committee’s last session and to:

- (a) Reaffirm the importance of gender mainstreaming in environmental activities and to emphasize that gender equality is both a goal in itself and a means of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development;
- (b) Support international initiatives to promote gender equality and welcome continued cooperation and coordination with the United Nations bodies and other relevant international forums and actors to that end;
- (c) Agree to continue to mainstream a gender perspective in its activities.

¹³ ECE/AC.21/SC/2023/2–EUCHP2219536/1.1/2, para. 52.