

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twentieth-sixth session

Geneva, 9–11 November 2020

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Environmental performance reviews

Information paper No. 9

27 August 2020

Results of the survey on the possible options for the fourth cycle of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The UNECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews decided to conduct a survey of the reviewed countries and other interested countries to solicit views and ideas on the fourth cycle. At its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the Committee supported the proposal of the Expert Group to organize, in the first half of 2020, a survey and a meeting to discuss possible options for the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews (ECE/CEP/2019/1, para. 44 (g)). The present document contains the results of the survey carried out in January-February 2020.

The results were considered in the proposal for the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews presented in document ECE/CEP/2020/6 submitted to the twenty-sixth session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

I. Background

1. The third cycle of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs), launched by the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nur-Sultan, 21–23 September 2011), commenced in 2012. By the time of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 3–5 November 2021) the great majority of eligible countries would have already completed their third cycle reviews.
2. At its twenty-fourth session (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019), the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) conducted the mid-term review of the main outcomes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the progress achieved in the third cycle of EPRs. It appreciated progress made and requested the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews to start working, in cooperation with the reviewed countries, on proposals for the fourth cycle.
3. At its thirtieth session (Geneva, 30 October – 1 November 2019), the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews brainstormed on the possible options for the fourth cycle of EPRs, including the main objectives and scope of the fourth cycle, possible content and structure of the reviews, procedural aspects of conducting the EPRs and the ways to enhance the implementation of EPR recommendations. The Expert Group requested the secretariat to conduct a survey with the reviewed countries and other interested CEP members and observers to solicit views and ideas on the fourth cycle.
4. Outcomes of the survey will be used to inform the work of the Expert Group in preparing the proposal for the fourth cycle of EPRs to be submitted to the twenty-sixth session of the CEP (Geneva, 9–11 November 2020).

II. The survey

5. Questions of the survey aimed to obtain views on possible changes to be made to the EPRs in the fourth cycle compared to the third cycle of EPRs. EPRs in the fourth cycle will remain a voluntary exercise upon request from a government and will continue to follow a needs-driven approach.

6. The results were analysed according to two major categories: Committee of Environmental Policy (CEP) members and EPR international experts (Table 1). The CEP members category was broken down into three sub-categories: beneficiary countries, other countries and observers. The survey was composed of 11 questions that were answered by a total of 24 participants, from which:

- 12 beneficiary countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan
- 7 other countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland
- 3 observers: OECD, UNEP and Zoi Environment Network; and
- 2 EPR international experts.

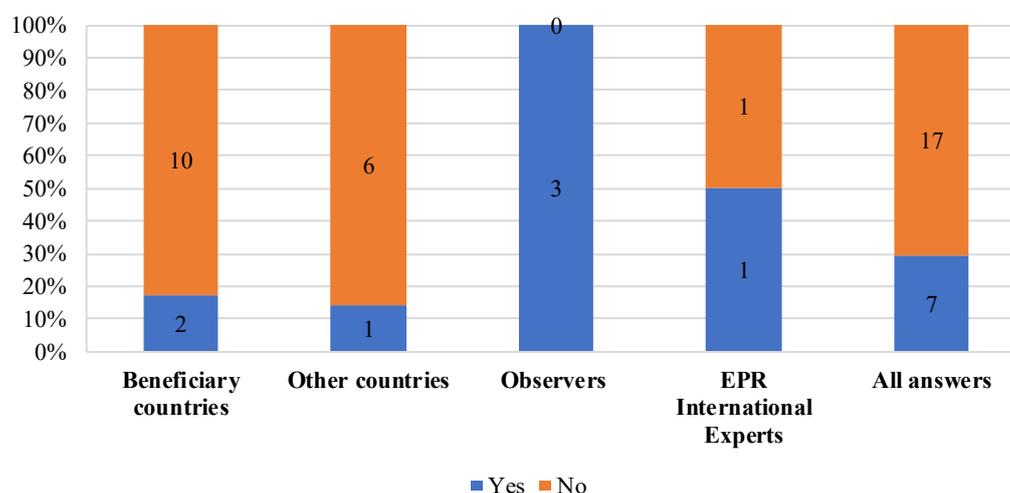
Table 1. CEP members, observers and EPR international experts that participated of the survey.

Committee on Environmental Policy			EPR International Experts
Beneficiary countries	Other countries	Observers	
Albania	Austria	OECD	Expert 1
Armenia	Czech Republic	UNEP	Expert 2
Azerbaijan	Germany	Zoi Environment Network	
Belarus	Hungary		
Bulgaria	Italy		
Kazakhstan	Portugal		
Kyrgyzstan	Switzerland		
Montenegro			
North Macedonia			
Republic of Moldova			
Tajikistan			
Uzbekistan			

III. Results of the survey

Question 1: Main objectives

Is there a need to modify the objectives of the EPR Programme in the fourth cycle?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Yes: 17% (2) – Republic of Moldova, Uzbekistan

No: 83% (10) – Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Tajikistan

Other countries (7 countries):

Yes: 14% (1) – Germany

No: 86% (6) - Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland

Observers (3):

Yes: 100% (3) – UNEP, OECD, Zoi Environment Network

No: 0% (0)

EPR International Experts (2):

Yes: 50% (1) – Expert 1

No: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 1.

Question 2: Key topics

What could be the key topics for the fourth cycle?

Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

- Climate change mainstreaming in priority sectors, climate change issues and low carbon development: 6 countries (Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan);
- Circular economy: 3 countries (Albania, Armenia and Uzbekistan);
- Environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors: 3 countries (Azerbaijan, Bulgaria and Kyrgyzstan);
- Social dimension of environmental protection and environmental sustainability in the context of economic growth and socio-economic development: 2 countries (Montenegro and Azerbaijan);
- Environmental monitoring and control and integrated environmental control: 2 countries (Armenia and Moldova);
- Environmental governance: 2 countries (Bulgaria and Kyrgyzstan);
- Green finance and environmental financing in a green economy context: 2 countries (Bulgaria and Armenia);
- Monitoring progress in achieving SDGs: 1 country (Belarus);
- Cooperation with the international community: 1 country (Bulgaria).

Other countries (7 countries):

- Sustainable path, sustainable development and transition into sustainability: 3 countries (Austria, Hungary and Portugal);
- Climate change: 2 countries (Hungary and Italy);
- The same as in the third cycle: 2 countries (Austria and Germany);
- Environment management and governance: 2 countries (Portugal and Austria);
- Implementation of the SDGs: 1 country (Portugal);
- Drift towards a nexus approach: 1 country (Switzerland);
- Implementation of recommendations: 1 country (Switzerland);
- No answer to the question: 1 country (Czech Republic).

Observers (3):

- Environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors: 2 observers (UNEP and OECD);
- Financing in a green economy context and greening investments: 2 observers (UNEP and Zoi Environment Network);
- Climate change: 1 observer (UNEP);
- Implementation of SDGs: 1 observer (Zoi Environment Network) ;
- Environmental governance : 1 observer (UNEP);
- Biodiversity loss and consumption of natural resources: 1 observer (UNEP).

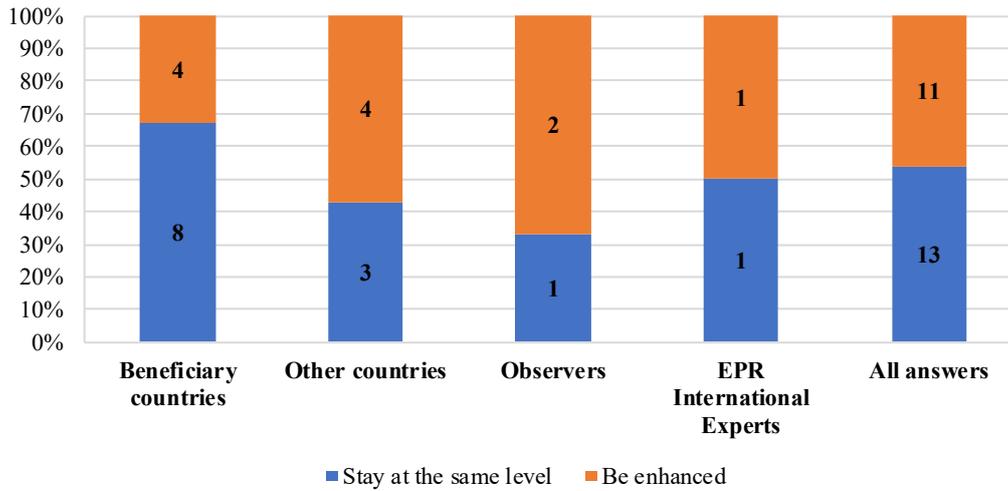
EPR International Experts:

- Remain unchanged: 1 expert (Expert 2)
- Environmental inequality (social dimension of environmental management): 1 expert (Expert 1)

Full responses can be found in Annex 2.

Question 3: Sustainable Development Goals

In the fourth cycle EPRs, should the integration of the SDGs stay at the same level or be enhanced?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Stay at the same level: 67% (8) - Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Be enhanced: 33% (4) - Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan

Other countries (7 countries):

Stay at the same level: 43% (3) - Austria, Czech Republic, Switzerland

Be enhanced: 57% (4) - Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal

Observers (3):

Stay at the same level: 33% (1) - OECD

Be enhanced: 67% (2) - UNEP, Zoi Environment Network

EPR International Experts:

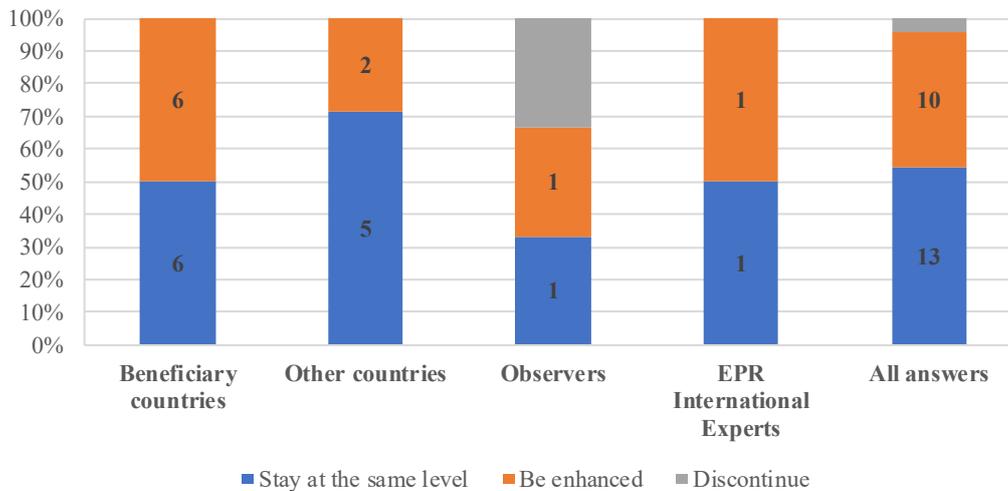
Stay at the same level: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Be enhanced: 50% (1) -Expert 1

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 3.

Question 4: Media and pollution management

In the fourth cycle EPRs, should the coverage of environmental media be discontinued, stay at the same level or be enhanced?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Discontinue: 0% (0)

Stay at the same level: 50% (6) - Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Tajikistan

Be enhanced: 50% (6) – Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Uzbekistan

Other countries (7 countries):

Obs. Switzerland responded: discontinue and stay at the same level. Therefore, there are two results for the same question. The graphic above shows the option “stay at the same level”.

Discontinue: 0% (0)

Stay at the same level: 71% (5) - Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland

Be enhanced: 29% (2) - Germany, Portugal,

Discontinue: 14% (1) - Switzerland

Stay at the same level: 57% (4) - Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy

Be enhanced: 29% (2) - Germany, Portugal

Observers (3):

Discontinue: 33,3% (1) - OECD

Stay at the same level: 33,3% (1) - Zoi Environment Network

Be enhanced: 33,3% (1) - UNEP

EPR International Experts:

Discontinue: 0% (0)

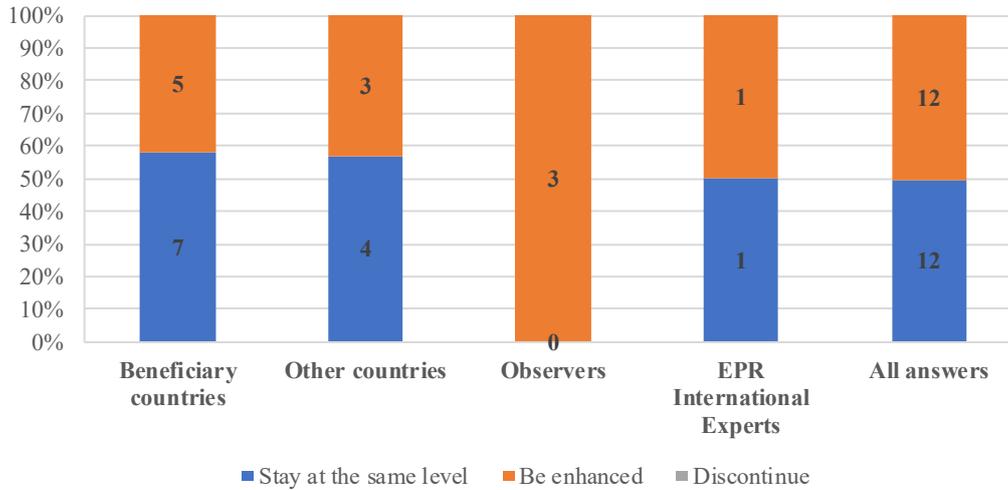
Stay at the same level: 50% (1) – Expert 1

Be enhanced: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Answers and comments by the countries can be found in Annex 4.

Question 5: Integration of environment into sectoral policies

In the fourth cycle EPRs, should the coverage of sectoral policies be discontinued, stay at the same level or be enhanced?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Discontinued: 0% (0)

Stay at the same level: 58% (7) - Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Be enhanced: 42% (5) - Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova

Other countries (7 countries):

Discontinue: 0% (0)

Stay at the same level: 43% (3) - Austria, Czech Republic, Portugal

Be enhanced: 57% (4) - Germany, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland

Observers (3):

Discontinue: 0% (0)

Stay at the same level: 0% (0)

Be enhanced: 100% (3) - UNEP, OECD, Zoi Environment Network

EPR International Experts:

Discontinue: 0% (0)

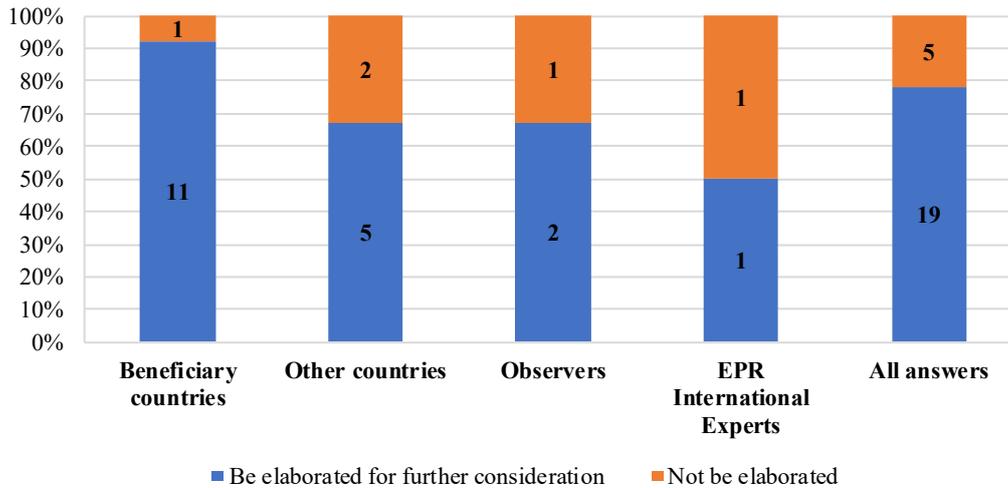
Stay at the same level: 50% (1) – Expert 1

Be enhanced: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 5.

Question 6: Nexus approach

Should the nexus approach be elaborated for further consideration or not be elaborated?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Be elaborated for further consideration: 92% (11) - Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Not be elaborated: 8% (1) - Kyrgyzstan

Other countries (6 countries):

Obs. Portugal skipped the question, but commented on that.

Be elaborated for further consideration: 67% (4) - Germany, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland

Not be elaborated: 33% (2) - Austria, Czech Republic

Observers (3):

Be elaborated for further consideration: 67% (2) - UNEP, Zoi Environment Network

Not be elaborated: 33% (1) - OECD

EPR International Experts:

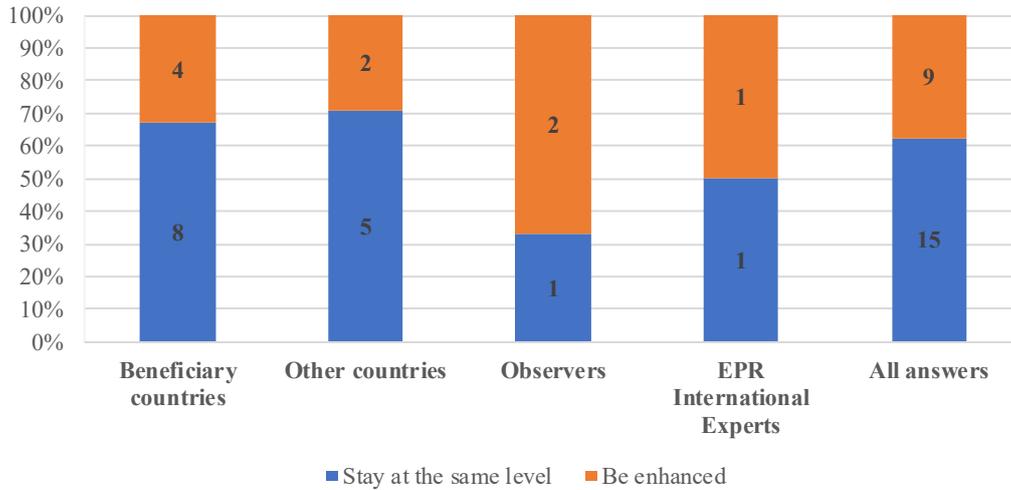
Be elaborated for further consideration: 50% (1) – Expert 1

Not be elaborated: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 6.

Question 7: Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations

In the fourth cycle EPRs, should the assessment of implementation of previous EPR recommendations stay at the same level or be enhanced?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Stay at the same level: 67% (8) - Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan

Be enhanced: 33% (4) - Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Uzbekistan

Other countries (7 countries):

Stay at the same level: 71% (5) - Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland

Be enhanced: 29% (2) - Italy, Portugal

Observers (3):

Stay at the same level: 33% (1) - OECD

Be enhanced: 67% (2) - UNEP, Zoi Environment Network

EPR International Experts:

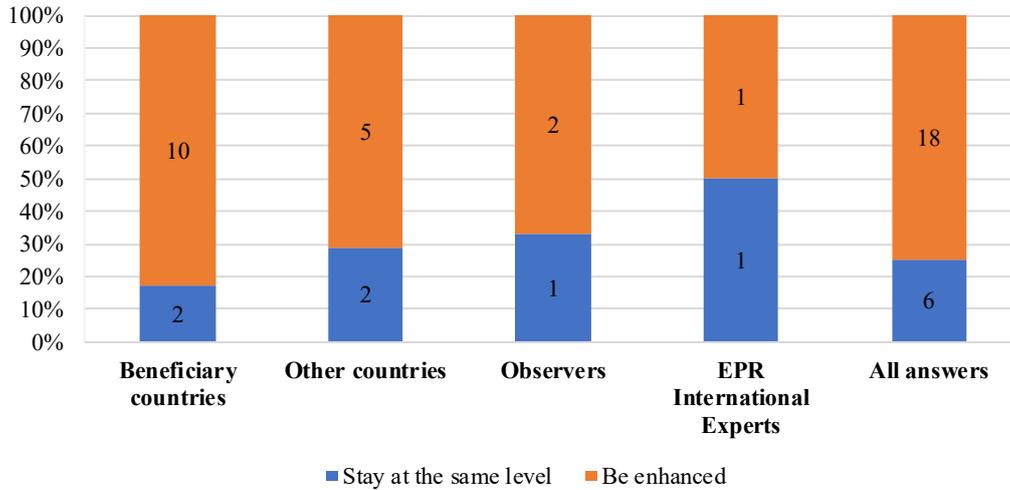
Stay at the same level: 50% (1) – Expert 1

Be enhanced: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 7.

Question 8: Support to reviewed countries in their efforts to implement EPR recommendations

In the fourth cycle EPRs, subject to availability of human and financial resources, should the support to reviewed countries in their efforts to implement EPR recommendations stay at the same level or be enhanced?



Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

Stay at the same level: 17% (2) - Bulgaria, Kazakhstan

Be enhanced: 83% (10) - Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Other countries: (7 countries):

Stay at the same level: 29% (2) - Czech Republic, Portugal

Be enhanced: 71% (5) - Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland

Observers (3):

Stay at the same level: 33% (1) - Zoi Environment Network

Be enhanced: 67% (2) - UNEP, OECD,

EPR International Experts:

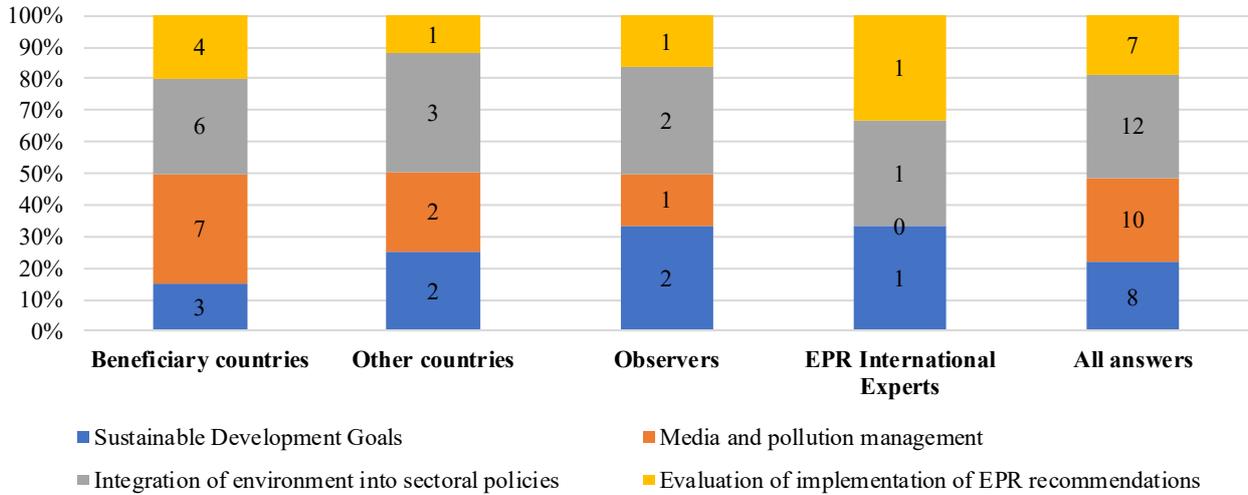
Stay at the same level: 50% (1) – Expert 1

Be enhanced: 50% (1) – Expert 2

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 8.

Question 9: Priorities

Please indicate from 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest) the priority of enhancing the following areas in the fourth cycle of EPRs.

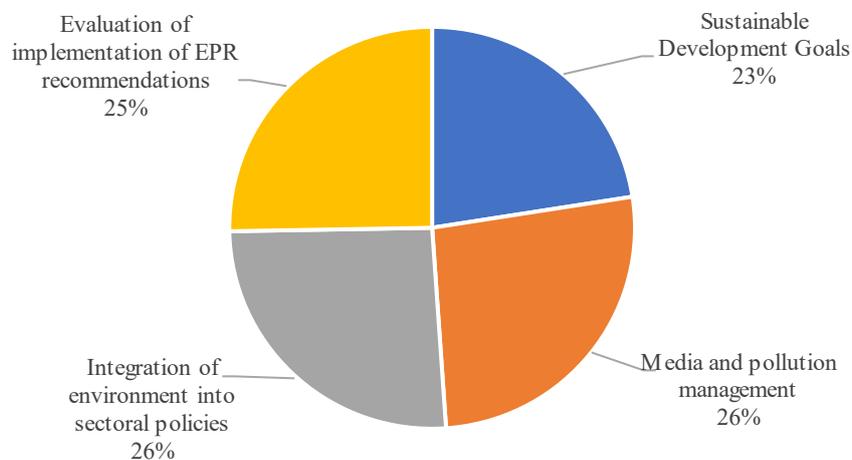


Beneficiary countries (12 countries):

The highest priority areas (indicated as 1) for enhancement in the fourth cycle of EPRs indicated by beneficiary countries are:

- 1st: Media and pollution management: 58% (7) – Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Uzbekistan
- 2nd: Integration of environment into sectoral policies: 50% (6) - Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan
- 3rd: Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations: 33% (4) – Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan
- 4th: Sustainable Development Goals: 25% (3) – Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan

Beneficiary countries	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable Development Goals	25% (3)	34% (4)	8% (1)	25% (3)	8% (1)
Media and pollution management	58% (7)	17% (2)	0%	17% (2)	8% (1)
Integration of environment into sectoral policies	50% (6)	25% (3)	8% (1)	0%	17% (2)
Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations	33% (4)	33% (4)	17% (2)	17% (2)	0%

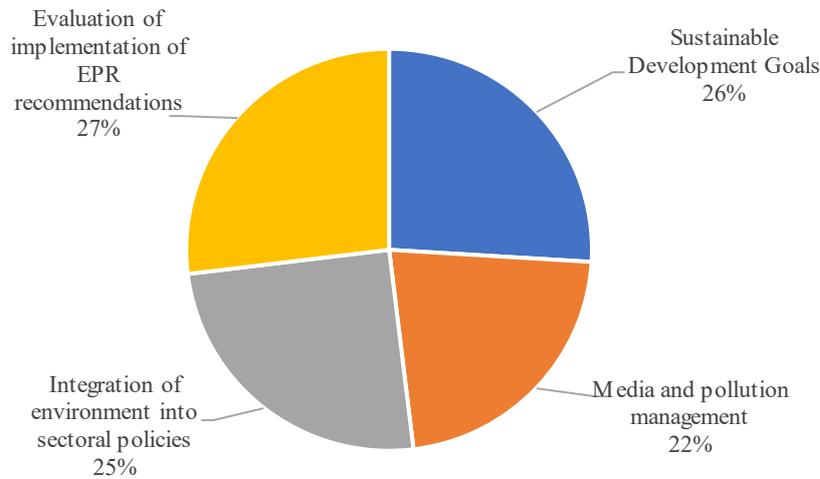


Other countries (7 countries):

The highest priority areas (indicated as 1) for enhancement in the fourth cycle of EPRs indicated by other countries are:

- 1st: Integration of environment into sectoral policies: 43% (3) - Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy
- 2nd: Media and pollution management: 29% (2) – Hungary, Portugal
- 2nd: Sustainable Development Goals: 29% (2) – Germany, Italy
- 3rd: Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations: 14% (1) - Italy

Other countries	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable Development Goals	29% (2)	43% (3)	14% (1)	14% (1)	0%
Media and pollution management	29% (2)	14% (1)	29% (2)	14% (1)	14% (1)
Integration of environment into sectoral policies	43% (3)	14% (1)	29% (2)	0%	14% (1)
Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations	14% (1)	29% (2)	43% (3)	0%	14% (1)

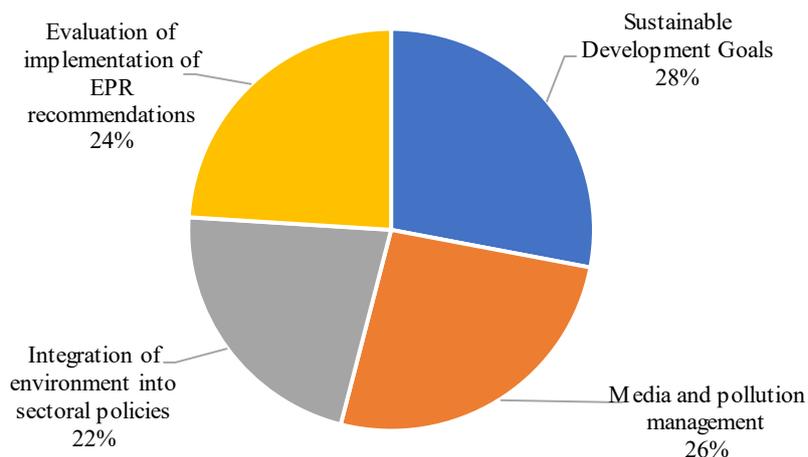


Observers (3):

The highest priority areas (indicated as 1) for enhancement in the fourth cycle of EPRs indicated by observers are:

- 1st: Integration of environment into sectoral policies: 67% (2) – UNEP, Zoi Environment Network
- 1st: Sustainable Development Goals: 67% (2) - UNEP, Zoi Environment Network
- 2nd: Media and pollution management: 33% (1) – UNEP
- 2nd: Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations: 33% (1) - UNEP

Observers	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable Development Goals	67% (2)	33% (1)	0%	0%	0%
Media and pollution management	33% (1)	67% (2)	0%	0%	0%
Integration of environment into sectoral policies	67% (2)	0%	0%	0%	33% (1)
Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations	33% (1)	33% (1)	33% (1)	0%	0%

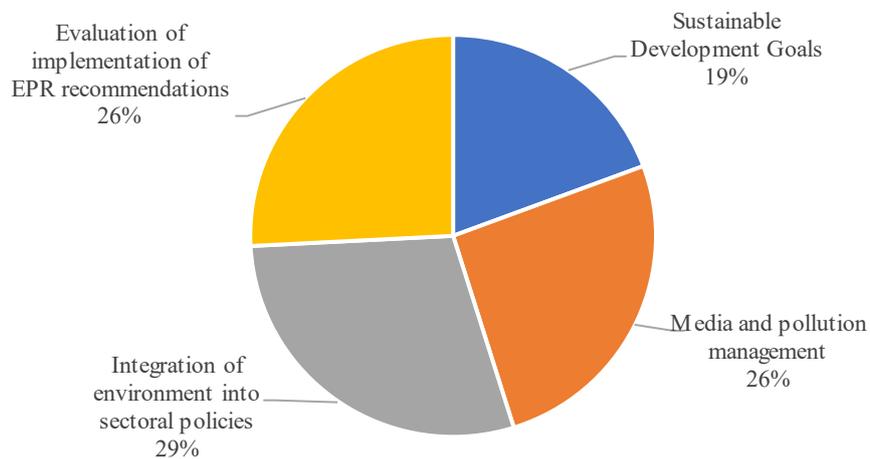


EPR International Experts (2):

The highest priority areas (indicated as 1) for enhancement in the fourth cycle of EPRs indicated by the EPR international experts are:

- 1st: Integration of environment into sectoral policies: 50% (1) - Expert 2
- 1st: Sustainable Development Goals: 50% (1) – Expert 1
- 1st: Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations: 50% (1) - Expert 2

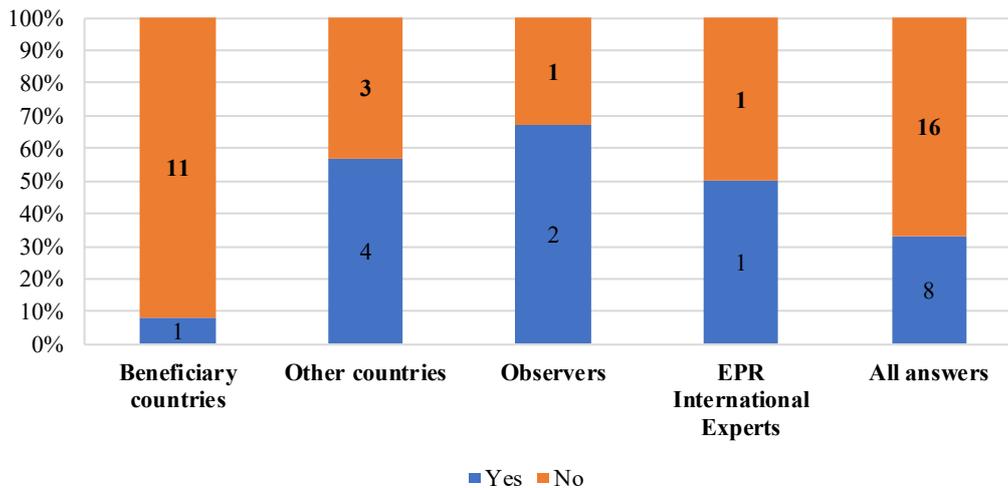
EPR International Experts	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable Development Goals	50% (1)	0%	0%	0%	50% (1)
Media and pollution management	0%	100% (2)	0%	0%	0%
Integration of environment into sectoral policies	50% (1)	50% (1)	0%	0%	0%
Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations	50% (1)	0%	50% (1)	0%	0%



Full results can be found in Annex 9.

Question 10: Procedural aspects

In the fourth cycle EPRs, should any changes be introduced to any stage of the EPR process?



Beneficiary countries (12):

Yes: 8% (1) - Montenegro

No: 92% (11) - Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Other countries (7):

Yes: 57% (4) - Germany, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland

No: 43% (3) - Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary

Observers (3):

Yes: 67% (2) - OECD, Zoi Environment Network

No: 33% (1) - UNEP

EPR International Experts (2):

Yes: 50% (1) – Expert 2

No: 50% (1) – Expert 1

Answers and comments can be found in Annex 10.

Question 11: Other

If you wish to add any other information regarding the fourth cycle of EPRs, please do:

Beneficiary countries (12 countries): Only 3 countries responded to this question.

- Albania: “For the countries like Albania, that are already advancing in their EU accession process, the highlighting of the achievements in this regard would be useful, in the light of the EU assessment procedures.”
- Kazakhstan: “We suggest strengthening countries' obligations to implement the EPR recommendations.”
- Uzbekistan: “We consider it necessary to create a permanent platform (special event) that would allow attracting investments to implement the EPR recommendations. This will ensure the implementation of

recommendations, increase the credibility of the EPR and further motivate countries to regularly participate in reviews. Currently, countries tend to be left alone with their environmental problems, as often they do not have the financial means to implement the recommendations. Moreover, the recommendations are developed taking into account best practices and advanced technologies, to which not all countries have access to.”

Other countries (7 countries): Only 2 countries responded to this question.

- Austria: *“The reviews represent one of the most important tasks of UNECE in the environmental field. The quality is very high and the results are very valuable for the tested country, but also as a comparison between the countries. The OECD country reviews show that major changes do not necessarily increase quality. On the contrary. We also speak out for some changes, even greater focus on priority topics, or increased support in implementing of the recommendations. However, we warn of radical changes that could result in this high-quality product being destroyed.”*
- Italy: *“Field missions should take place only if the Countries disclose if not all, at least the majority of the documentation for the chapter, to maximise the output and enhance the quality of the EPRs. In addition, field missions should foresee more time for experts to dig into the sector they are writing about, and then an adequate time for the writing of the chapter should be allocated for the sake of the quality and usability of the reviews.”*

Observers (3): 2 observers responded to this question.

- UNEP: *“Given the value of the programme and of its results, it should be further explored the possibility of continuing to undertake in EPRs in countries from outside of the UNECE region should these demand/request an EPR.”*
- OECD: *“Less descriptive and more analytical approach is needed. Emphasis should be placed on “big items” issues, e.g. place of environmental concerns in strategic economic planning (ie. whole-of- government commitment to green the economy), taxation, analysis of public expenditure management in environmental improvement, innovation, SEA, costs and benefits of regulations for large enterprises and SMEs and incentives for investing in greening the operations. Repetitions in different sections should be eliminated. More forward-looking approach should be taken. State of the environment part should be done by another WG.”*

EPR International Experts (2): One international expert responded to this question.

- Expert 2: *“I do think that the success, benefits and influence of the EPRs carried out so far (most recently also beyond UNECE) could largely encourage the Governments of many UNECE countries to continue, and the Governments of countries (in particular developing ones) on other continents to get involved in this scheme. Therefore, some enhanced promotion of the EPR should preferably precede or accompany the launch of the EPRs fourth cycle.”*

ANNEX 1: Q1 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	No	
Armenia	No	
Azerbaijan	No	
Belarus	No	
Bulgaria	No	
Kazakhstan	No	
Kyrgyzstan	No	In the Kyrgyz Republic, there is a need for specific recommendations on improving the policy and its implementation in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At present in the Kyrgyz Republic, a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDGs is being prepared. The process of preparing the VNR shows that it is necessary to intensify actions for implementing and monitoring the SDGs, and specific needs for implementing individual SDGs.
Montenegro	No	
North Macedonia	No	
Republic of Moldova	Yes	To include additional in the EPR programme related to "implementation of green economy in reviewed countries", because "green economy" was one of the priority theme of the last two Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" and it is important to see the progress made by countries in implementation the provisions of the Ministerial Declarations.
Tajikistan	No	
Uzbekistan	Yes	Considering that the issues of climate change and low-carbon development are extremely urgent at present, we consider it possible to add to the EPR objectives "stimulating low-carbon development and assisting in mitigating climate change".
Other countries		
	No	
Czech Republic	No	
Germany	Yes	To assist countries to achieve a high level of environmental protection and a sustainable development
Hungary	No	
Italy	No	
Portugal	No	
Switzerland	No	
Observers		
UNEP	Yes	
OECD	Yes	In the fourth cycle, the EPR programme should focus more strongly on one of the listed objectives, i.e. better integration of environmental considerations in economic development policies. The task of assessing/showing environmental performance should be carried by the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (as its name already suggest!). This will help to address the key challenges of the EPRs which are long review cycle and limited resources. If the current approach remains much more resources to carry EPRs should be mobilized.
Zoi Environment Network	Yes	It may make sense to edit – shorten and sharpen - the objectives and also introduce something around measuring effectiveness and impacts of environmental policies.
EPR International Experts		
Expert 1	Yes	EPR objective - to recommend better policy design in sectoral policies to reduce environmental inequality, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations (i.e. inequality in access to energy, clean water, water resources, health inequalities (air pollution impacts on children and elderly, etc.)).
Expert 2	No	

ANNEX 2: Q2 - Answers

Beneficiary countries	Answers
Albania	The next EPR could consider the objectives set out in the European Green Deal, the objectives of climate change integration across the sectors, as well as the topic of circular economy.
Armenia	Environmental monitoring and control; Climate change mainstreaming in priority sectors; Circular economy and green finance.
Azerbaijan	Environmental sustainability in the context of demographic growth and socio-economic development; Efficient use of natural resources to meet the needs of present and future generations; Environmental mainstreaming in other sectors.
Belarus	Environmental [media] management and pollution prevention; Monitoring progress in achieving SDGs; Climate change impact on the state of the environment.
Bulgaria	Environmental governance and financing in a green economy context; Countries' cooperation with the international community; Environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors.
Kazakhstan	Low-carbon economy and its financing mechanisms
Kyrgyzstan	Enhancing the integration of environment into sectoral policies; Environmental governance (implementation of international environmental standards, etc.) and financing mechanisms (attracting private investment, etc.).
Montenegro	Involvement of a social dimension of environment protection could be a plus, taking care of respect of human rights, elaborating poverty, energy poverty, vulnerable groups of population, environmental protection measures that can have an effect on low income households, etc.
North Macedonia	Improving compliance and coordination among international donors when it comes to their activities on national levels
Republic of Moldova	Implementation of the environmental policies; Integrated environmental control
Tajikistan	Climate change issues can be added
Uzbekistan	Low carbon development, circular economy, climate change mitigation. At the same time, we consider it necessary to identify a number of chapters of the fourth EPR, which will be developed by default, i.e. in any event. For example, the same main topics should be in the EPR of each country. This is necessary in order to get an overall picture in each country covered by the EPR.
Other countries	Answer
Austria	The same like in the third UNECE cycle or in OECD Country Reviews: Environmental Management, Sustainable Development and International Commitments
Czech Republic	-
Germany	The same
Hungary	Actions to fight and mitigate climate change and adaptation (Paris Agreement); Decarbonisation and transition into sustainability (production, consumption, behavioral change)
Italy	Mainstreaming climate change into all sectors
Portugal	Key policies and measures to advance in a Sustainable Path; Countries' efforts within the international context to achieve environmental objectives; Implementing the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals; Environment governance framework and sustainable investment
Switzerland	The 4th cycle of the EPRS should drift away from comprehensiveness towards a nexus approach that fits the reviewed country's needs. The implementation of the recommendations and support for their implementation should be a central concern in the 4 th cycle of the EPRs.
EPR International Experts	Answer
Expert 1	Environmental inequality - the way in which the quality of the environment differs between different communities in the country. These differences are felt across a number of aspects of the environment, including air pollution, access to green space, access to clean drinking water, exposure to flood risk, etc
Expert 2	The key topics for the fourth EPR cycle should remain unchanged, as in the third cycle.
Observers	Answer
UNEP	Environmental governance and financing in a green economy context; Countries' cooperation with the international community; Environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors; Priority action on biodiversity loss and on climate change mitigation/adaptation; Consumption of natural resources

OECD	Environmental mainstreaming in the economic policy and one-two priority sectors identified by each country
Zoi Environment Network	Measuring and Delivering the SDGs (also see below); Greening Investments

ANNEX 3: Q3 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	Be enhanced	The review could also report on the actual level of implementation of the SDGs, its economic, social, financial impact on the societies, both on central level and local level, not just their integration in strategic documents, policies and legislation.
Armenia	Be enhanced	
Azerbaijan	Be enhanced	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. It is important to track the level of mainstreaming of SDGs in national policies and provide recommendations for further improvement.
Belarus	Stay at the same level	If necessary, the scope of the EPR can be expanded or narrowed directly during the process of conducting the EPR.
Bulgaria	Stay at the same level	The integration of the SDGs in the third cycle EPRs was sufficiently well reported, so its integration in the fourth cycle EPRs should stay at the same level.
Kazakhstan	Stay at the same level	
Kyrgyzstan	Be enhanced	In the Kyrgyz Republic, there is a need for specific recommendations on improving the policy and its implementation in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At present in the Kyrgyz Republic, a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDGs is being prepared. The process of preparing the VNR shows that it is necessary to intensify actions for implementing and monitoring the SDGs, and specific needs for implementing individual SDGs.
Montenegro	Stay at the same level	Countries still do not have enough information on achievements of SDGs and are still establishing systems for monitoring. Some emphasis on availability of data to monitor SDGs could be added to the chapter on environmental monitoring.
North Macedonia	Stay at the same level	Still lacks the institutional cooperation
Republic of Moldova	Stay at the same level	
Tajikistan	Stay at the same level	Because in the third cycle the SDGs were covered in detail.
Uzbekistan	Stay at the same level	The EPR is still a document relating to environmental activities. Moreover, the SDGs only partially relate to ecology and environmental protection. In addition, as a rule, in countries covered by the EPRs, the ministries of economics are responsible for the implementation of the SDGs, rather than environmental authorities, which complicates the process of monitoring the implementation of the SDGs within the framework of the EPR.
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	Stay at the same level	The product is good as it is and changes would not improve its quality. This also applies to SDGs
Czech Republic	Stay at the same level	
Germany	Be enhanced	Relevant SDGs should be reviewed in the specific chapters of the report and be integrated in the policy recommendations
Hungary	Be enhanced	Chapters might be reorganized in a way that SDGs appear at the very beginning of the chapter and perhaps the inner structure and logic of the/some chapters might be adapter more to the relevant SGDs where is it possible.
Italy	Be enhanced	Reviewed Countries should be stimulated to have a more thorough approach to SDGs and to adequately monitor the targets, therefore in my opinion it would be useful to highlight addressed SDGs at the beginning

		of the chapters, and then in the para dedicated to SDGs to visualise the situation also in an appealing graphic format.
Portugal	Be enhanced	The contribution of EPRs (the reviews themselves) to SDG's should become more relevant. We should approach SDG's in exams in a less complementary way, that is, SDG's should be given as much attention as any other chapter of EPR's. The fragmentation of its treatment, both in terms of analysis and in terms of presentation, makes it difficult to understand the whole picture and, as well, to have a clear perception of whether the overall evolution and needs as a whole are reduced or significant. By losing the effect of reading together, it also loses the potential for impact on those who read. SDG's are lost in the text. It also makes sense that the SDGs' governance and implementation framework should appear alongside their analysis. Because they are not indistinguishable from each other. The performance and results that countries achieve in terms of SDGs are not independent of the governance and implementation framework that countries establish on SDGs. The United Nation's 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are the navigation chart for the International Community and countries. As such, they should be included in the international cooperation chapter.
Switzerland	Stay at the same level	By 2030, when the SDGs are supposed to be realized, the international community may develop a new Agenda (2050?) with new goals and targets in a maybe very different political context. This is the reason why the integration of the SDGs should not be enhanced at this stage. The EPRs provide useful information on the implementation successes and challenges of certain SDGs and this is already an added-value of the programme.
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	Be enhanced	It should be enhanced so as to cover additional environmental SDG indicators (as relevant) of the total of 93 environment related SDG indicators in the Global SDG Indicator Framework, and assess national availability of data and national reporting practices in relation to national and global reporting on progress on the environmental dimension of the SDGs
OECD	Stay at the same level	
Zoi Environment Network	Be enhanced	The next decade will see the 'delivery' of the SDGs, thus measuring, monitoring, showing progress and impact along the SDG's will probably evolve to the 'main currency', not only for countries but also for enterprises, even individuals.
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	Be enhanced	Include SDG 10.
Expert 2	Stay at the same level	The current level of the integration of the SDGs seems to be adequate. Each chapter of EPR reports since 2017 sufficiently includes both the evaluation of the current stand of the reviewed country vis-à-vis most relevant selected SDG Targets, and expert recommendations on measures which shall be undertaken in order to progress towards the full achievement of selected targets.

ANNEX 4: Q4 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	Be enhanced	Yes, we believe that the EPR should also cover media environmental awareness, its role in raising public awareness towards the importance of environmental decision-making, public education on environmental crime and environmental security, as truly significant actors in improving environmental democracy, particularly in former communist countries.
Armenia	Be enhanced	
Azerbaijan	Stay at the same level	The environmental media and pollution management are main parts of the EPR's structure and are well covered by the proposed EPR structure, and depend on the countries request.
Belarus	stay at the same level	
Bulgaria	stay at the same level	Environmental media are of importance of the reviewed environmental issues.
Kazakhstan	Stay at the same level	
Kyrgyzstan	Be enhanced	Coverage of environmental media should be strengthened, since assessing the pressure on environmental media (including pollution) is part of the environmental agenda in recent years.
Montenegro	Stay at the same level	
North Macedonia	Be enhanced	As an EU candidate country, the environmental legislation is established, but the challenges regarding implementation are present. The interest of the general public for ongoing activities on site is strengthening and the coverage of the environmental media should be enhanced.
Republic of Moldova	Be enhanced	More attention needs to be focused on implementation of the environmental policies and integrated control of environment.
Tajikistan	Stay at the same level	To take into account the opinion of the reviewed country when determining the topics related to environmental [media] management.
Uzbekistan	Be enhanced	The main effect of the EPR is the receipt of qualified assistance in the form of recommendations on the main areas of environmental protection. This is very important, in conditions of a shortage of specialists in the environmental departments of countries covered by the EPR.
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	Stay at the same level	
Czech Republic	Stay at the same level	
Germany	Be enhanced	Be decided in dialogue with the country under review according to its needs
Hungary	Stay at the same level	In most of the reviewed countries the level of environmental media and pollution management was not sufficient, thus they need to remain high on the environmental agenda of these countries.
Italy	Stay at the same level	
Portugal	Be enhanced	Environmental media as chapters should remain but they should start with a state of the art regarding the legal framework (replacing the legal chapter and placing the legal framework only once in the text in each relevant chapter). The chapter on the legal framework should exclusively and very briefly "set the scene" identifying the macro structure governing the environment and the main legal architecture in place.
Switzerland	Discontinue and stay at the same level	Discontinue: The 4th cycle of the EPR should make a shift towards covering less environmental media and pollution management issues and focusing more on the integration of the environment into sectoral policies (see answer to question 5 below. Stay at the same level: Only for the countries of the pan-European region that have the least developed environmental policies, it would make sense to continue

		analysing all the environmental media and pollution management issues. For these countries, the EPR could indeed show what are their specific needs that could be addressed afterwards through bilateral development cooperation programmes.
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	Be enhanced	If not already mandatory (i.e. not optional), the Chapter on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation should de facto be a mandatory chapter, not open to negotiation
OECD	Discontinue	Media specific issues should be discussed in the context of economic development, looking at costs of degradation (but also cost of regulations to the regulated community) and benefits (of protecting assets/reducing pollution)
Zoi Environment Network	Stay at the same level	The review of the media is usually 'understandable' by non-specialists and thus should be maintained at the existing level
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	Stay at the same level	
Expert 2	Be enhanced	<p>The set of environmental media in the fourth cycle EPRs should remain unchanged, as in the third cycle. However, even though each EPR is a voluntary exercise, Governments requesting the fourth cycle EPRs should always consider, and agree upon the review of the full, 'EPR standard' set of media, perceived more as a mandatory EPR contents than a "wish or not list" of subjects to choose from, as the current EPR set of media (air, water, waste & chemicals, biodiversity, forestry, land resources) seems to be common and vital, hence indispensable for all countries worldwide, regardless whether reviewed or not.</p> <p>Otherwise, taking into account the time interval between successive reviews, exclusion of media X in one EPR cycle automatically leads to the discontinuity in the review of country's performance on this particular subject, sometimes resulting in up to some 20 year long time gap (e.g. between the first and third cycle review) during which the environmental performance in particular thematic area is not monitored and evaluated. In result, even if the performance in particular thematic area is reviewed in e.g. 3rd EPR, its findings and conclusions would relate solely to the progress (or failures) made throughout the last 10 years preceding the 3rd EPR, while little information would be available in e.g. the first 10 years following 1st EPR (cases of e.g. KZ, UZ).</p> <p>Moreover, such gaps in thematic (media) coverage in EPRs of one country make e.g. the regional assessments (comparisons of the situation and performance in a larger region, including several neighbouring countries) on such thematic areas, where the knowledge is 'fragmented', much less feasible.</p>

ANNEX 5: Q5 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	Be enhanced	Integration of environment into sectoral policies is a key issue and should be further enhanced in the fourth cycle of EPR. As such and given the fact that mainstreaming in other sectors should continue and be strengthened in the next period.
Armenia	Be enhanced	
Azerbaijan	Stay at the same level	The integration of environment into sectoral policies are well covered by the proposed EPR structure and depend on the countries approach.
Belarus	stay at the same level	
Bulgaria	Stay at the same level	The EPRs include an important number of sectorial policies that are in a relation with the environment. For that reason, their coverage in the fourth cycle EPRs should stay at the same level.
Kazakhstan	Stay at the same level	
Kyrgyzstan	Be enhanced	In the fourth cycle of EPRs, sectoral policy considerations should be strengthened with a view to make recommendations.
Montenegro	Stay at the same level	
North Macedonia	Be enhanced	Protecting the environment and climate change aspects require interdisciplinary approach and continued incorporation in the sectoral policies. Namely, the national adopted documents such as National Strategy for Energy Development, National Plan for Waste Management, National Strategy for Transport and many more include climate change aspects.
Republic of Moldova	Be enhanced	More attention needs to be focused on implementation of the environmental policies for relevant sectors.
Tajikistan	Stay at the same level	Integration of environment into sectoral policies covered by the EPR should be left at the same level.
Uzbekistan	Stay at the same level	Initially, it is necessary to assist countries in improving the efficiency of their own activities, within the mandate of their environmental authorities, and only then engage in other sectors.
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	Stay at the same level	
Czech Republic	Stay at the same level	
Germany	Be enhanced	Be decided in dialogue with the country under review according to its needs
Hungary	Be enhanced	For the sectors whos share in GHG emission is the highest (energy, agriculture, industry, transport) it should be enhanced, for the rest they can be on the same level. The transformation of these sectors are crucial in the fight against climate change.
Italy	Be enhanced	Human settlements chapter should be always present, and the structure of the land management chapter should be accordingly revised.
Portugal	Stay at the same level	
Switzerland	Be enhanced	Environment is a crosscutting and important dimension in many public policies. The integration of such dimension in the legislation and in the policy/regulatory design, implementation and enforcement is essential. It is so in the essence of the SDGs as well. And, more and more, the environment is taken into account by the private sector in its operation. For the government to guide it in this way is also a challenge that the EPR should cover.
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	Be enhanced	The Chapter on Environment and Health should be a mandatory sectoral chapter, not open to negotiation

OECD	Be enhanced	The main focus should be on integration of environmental considerations in the country economic policy (strategic planning, fiscal, public expenditure planning, labour, social). Focus on sectors should be very selective: only one or two depending on the country priority.
Zoi Environment Network	Be enhanced	Following the logic of the SDGs, integration into the sectorial policies will be key.
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	Stay at the same level	
Expert 2	Be enhanced	One important state policy domain remains missing so far under the EPR – <u>physical/spatial planning</u> , which is simultaneously the resultant of the vast majority of sectoral policies covered in EPRs, and reflects the general approach of the Government to the complexity of environmental issues and challenges versus the socio- economic development of a country. Performance in physical/spatial planning for land use and land/sea resources management is directly connected to SDG Targets 2.4, 3.6, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 7.2, 7.b, 8.9, 9.1, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4, 11.5, 11.6, 11.7, 11.a, 11.b, 12.2, 13.1, 13.2, 13.b, 14.1, 14.2, 14.5, 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.4, 15.5, 15.9, and 17.14.

ANNEX 6: Q6 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	Be elaborated for further consideration	Nexus approach is being piloted in Albania, in the framework of some IPA CBC projects being implemented in the country. As such the idea of further consideration is appropriate for the fourth cycle EPRs.
Armenia	Be elaborated for further consideration	
Azerbaijan	Be elaborated for further consideration	This analytical-based approach should be elaborated for further discussions.
Belarus	Be elaborated for further consideration	This approach has not been scientifically developed in the Republic of Belarus, and therefore it can be considered premature. Nevertheless, the approach should be elaborated in more detail for further consideration, especially the “nexus” inter-relationship “air-transport-health”.
Bulgaria	Be elaborated for further consideration	The nexus approach could provide new ways to address problems that exist in the environmental, social and economic sectors. In the context of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which integrate different policies, we should take into consideration the idea that the domains are interconnected and interdependent. The impact of the different sectors and the ways they interact with each other should be taken into account.
Kazakhstan	Be elaborated for further consideration	The “Nexus” approach should be elaborated in more detail in the sections addressing transboundary water cooperation.
Kyrgyzstan	Not be elaborated	The “nexus” approach for the Kyrgyz Republic can be applied later, following the results of the next, the fourth EPR for the Kyrgyz Republic.
Montenegro	Be elaborated for further consideration	Taking into account the length of the EPR cycle, tackling one nexus at time could endanger completeness of information given by an EPR. The next cycle will in that case be something else (the other nexus) and will cause discontinuity between EPRs. Why the country can choose only one nexus?
North Macedonia	Be elaborated for further consideration	As previous question, environmental protection requires interdisciplinary approach, intersectoral cooperation and systematic approach for developing complex solutions.
Republic of Moldova	Be elaborated for further consideration	
Tajikistan	Be elaborated for further consideration	For Tajikistan priority is tourism – water – waste.
Uzbekistan	Be elaborated for further consideration	An interesting idea, however, it will require further elaboration for the countries, since it is difficult to understand.
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	Not be elaborated	
Czech Republic	Not be elaborated	
Germany	Be elaborated for further consideration	Be decided in dialogue with the country under review according to its needs
Hungary	Be elaborated for further consideration	
Italy	Be elaborated for further consideration	

Portugal	-	EPRs should embrace for the fourth cycle the extremely difficult “mission” of supporting the attainment of SDG’s and should not, at least for the 4th cycle, disperse attention in exercises with the complexity of the nexus. However, given the interest, perhaps a pilot project could be developed with one country (additional to the normal EPR) to assess the suitability and relevance of applying this approach to EPRs.
Switzerland	Be elaborated for further consideration	The nexus approach is interesting as it could suit the reviewed country’s needs better than separated chapters covering each of the issues in the nexus chosen. Further reflection on the nexus approach is advisable, especially with regard to the idea of comprehensiveness of the EPRs: Must the EPRs really be comprehensive? Is comprehensiveness bringing more added value to the reviewed country than a well-chosen nexus?
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	Be elaborated for further consideration	
OECD	Not be elaborated	It will be covered if the integration is taken as a principal approach
Zoi Environment Network	Be elaborated for further consideration	Nexus discussions are usually stimulating for environmental mainstreaming, they should however not be taken at absurdum, i.e. the number of possible nexus permutations is probably bottomless. Thus, it makes sense to focus on the classical: water-food-energy-environment.
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	Be elaborated for further consideration	EPR can propose a tailored nexus of SDG targets to be implemented in the EPR recommendations based on the identified issues and priorities of the country (e.g. Montenegro’s priority issues identified within the scope of responsibilities of the Ministry of Environment included a policy package of measures addressing nexus between air pollution in Podgorica (SDG target 11.6), causing adverse impacts on human health (SDG target 3.9), necessitating improvements in energy efficiency in buildings (7.3) (to reduce the effects from burning the solid fuels) and transport. Therefore, the proposed SDG target nexus to address the above sustainability issues will translate into the nexus of targets 11.6+3.9+7.3, delivery of which should be conducted in an integrated way as they are interdependent and support each other’s implementation.
Expert 2	Not be elaborated	Even though the nexus approach idea is quite fresh, innovative and ‘catchy’ – proving the countries reviewed under the fourth cycle EPRs the opportunity to choose the nexus approach would automatically mean the abandonment and discontinuity of the ‘traditional’ predefined media- and sector-based EPR approach (successfully applied since the late 1990’s), with all adverse consequences of discontinuity described above, in my response to Question 4 (concerning Media and pollution management). In other words – I find this innovative idea dangerously revolutionary.

ANNEX 7: Q7 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	Stay at the same level	
Armenia	Be enhanced	
Azerbaijan	Stay at the same level	It is important to have the evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations of previous years. It enables to capture the specific progress and identify level of dedication.
Belarus	Stay at the same level	
Bulgaria	Stay at the same level	The assessment of the implementation of recommendations in the previous EPRs is quite well given. For that reason, it should stay in order to measure the progress achieved between the EPRs.
Kazakhstan	Stay at the same level	
Kyrgyzstan	Be enhanced	In the fourth cycle of EPRs, the assessment of the implementation of the recommendations of the previous EPR should be strengthened considering the changes that have taken place since 2009, the year of the last EPR in the Kyrgyz Republic.
Montenegro	Be enhanced	Recommendations are the core of an EPR. If the country achieved improvement of environmental governance by implementing the EPR recommendation it should be emphasized and highlighted. However, the countries should not be judged for not implemented recommendations, respecting voluntary participation in EPRs.
North Macedonia	Stay at the same level	The implementation of the EPR recommendations remains a big challenge for MoEPP of the Republic of North Macedonia. We need enhanced support in our efforts for implementing the recommendations.
Republic of Moldova	Stay at the same level	
Tajikistan	Stay at the same level	I consider that a great achievement is if countries succeed in fulfilling all the EPR recommendations.
Uzbekistan	Be enhanced	Countries should feel responsible for implementing recommendations. At the same time, UNECE should also assist in their implementation, given that countries, as a rule, do not have possibilities to independently implement the recommendations.
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	Stay at the same level	
Czech Republic	Stay at the same level	
Germany	Stay at the same level	
Hungary	Stay at the same level	A graphic/tabular overview after the textual assessment of the implementation might be useful to add.
Italy	Be enhanced	
Portugal	Be enhanced	The assessment of the implementation of the recommendations of previous EPRs should be a stand-alone chapter written by the country itself. It would enhance ownership and responsibility regarding the recommendations and the review itself.
Switzerland	Stay at the same level	It is good to assess how well the recommendations have been implemented and why some have not been. But it is difficult for a reviewed country to receive new recommendations and at the same time address the ones from the previous EPR. New recommendations should, as far as possible, be built upon the recommendations from the previous EPR, if still relevant for the country.
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	Be enhanced	

OECD	Stay at the same level	
Zoi Environment Network	Be enhanced	Well, if we talk about both ‘performance’ and ‘review’ there is a need to monitor implementation. Here it may also make sense to develop a metric to measure progress, potentially linked to the SDGs.
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	Stay at the same level	
Expert 2	Be enhanced	Although it could somehow extend the time between the completion of the review mission and the finalization of a draft EPR report – in case of unsatisfactory findings concerning the implementation of previous EPR recommendations, the reviewed countries should be provided an opportunity to explain the sound reasons or describe obstacles which prevented or impeded the successful implementation of recommendations. Such explanations could then accompany corresponding negative conclusions / assessment of the EPR report in this annex and would immediately indicate problems which might still require further efforts, attention, and response by the Government (apart from recommendations formulated in the current EPR report).

ANNEX 8: Q8 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	Be enhanced	Implementation of EPR recommendations needs substantial efforts and funds, therefore any support for their enforcement in terms of financial and technical assistance will be a great help for the country. More projects like the one implemented in the five countries of South-Eastern Europe are needed to help the countries in implementing the recommendations and at the same time to enhance the importance and impact of this exercise at the reviewed countries.
Armenia	Be enhanced	
Azerbaijan	Be enhanced	Support and assistance of UNECE and other UN agencies that involved in EPR development procedure seems to be an important aspect of implementation of EPR recommendation, taking into account vast experience, knowledge and lessons learned of those organizations. Continuation and enhancement of such support are highly appreciated.
Belarus	Be enhanced	In particular, financial support is required to implement the Recommendation 1.7. regarding the creation of an environmental information portal and preparatory work for accession to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. We also consider it appropriate to strengthen support by expanding the circle of experts/specialists in various fields for the exchange of experience and further cooperation.
Bulgaria	Stay at the same level	Providing a support to reviewed countries for implementation of EPR's recommendations is important. In case those countries who have received such support are satisfied and that support contributed significantly for the implementation the support could be extended.
Kazakhstan	Stay at the same level	
Kyrgyzstan	Be enhanced	Subject to the availability of human and financial resources, there is a need to strengthen the support to reviewed countries in their efforts to implement the EPR recommendations. Such support will: provide an impetus to countries to improve environmental governance and activities; facilitate the exchange of information and experience between countries; help integrate environmental policies into economic sectors; increase responsibility towards the public; and strengthen cooperation with the international community.
Montenegro	Be enhanced	It would be good to discuss with reviewed country at the moment of adoption of recommendations which recommendations are mostly welcome and how EPR Programme could contribute to their implementation.
North Macedonia	Be enhanced	The implementation of the EPR recommendations remains a big challenge for MoEPP of the Republic of North Macedonia. We need enhanced support in our efforts for implementing the recommendations.
Republic of Moldova	Be enhanced	
Tajikistan	Be enhanced	While drafting the EPR recommendations, to consider achievements of advanced countries in a specific area of environmental protection and recommend to the reviewed countries to use these experiences.
Uzbekistan	Be enhanced	The ongoing project needs to be extended to other countries covered by the EPR. It would be good to see countries whose experts have assisted in the development of the EPR recommendations, showing responsibility in their subsequent practical implementation. We also believe that it is possible to organize regular events to cover the implementation of recommendations not only in individual countries, but across the region, to exchange experiences and receive assistance from donor countries, IFIs, etc., which will help countries in finding sources of financing for environmental projects.
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	Be enhanced	The answer is simple. Because that is exactly what the exams are about.
Czech Republic	Stay at the same level	

Germany	Be enhanced	Be decided in a dialogue between the Secretariat, the reviewed country and possible donors
Hungary	Be enhanced	It should be enhanced as far as possible. EPRs and relevant EPR recommendations should be also better
Italy	Be enhanced	
Portugal	Stay at the same level	
Switzerland	Be enhanced	Support for the implementation of certain recommendations from the reviews brings coherence to the EPR Programme, which not only recommends but also help the countries reviewed implement the recommendations. It also allows the EPR teams to calibrate and adjust the recommendations so that they are as close as possible to the countries' needs and to their implementation. During the EPR Expert Group Meetings, the implementation question of the recommendations should also be kept in a central position.
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	Be enhanced	
OECD	Be enhanced	Good idea, should engage all development partners active in the region. The EPR programme would not be able to do it by itself.
Zoi Environment Network	Stay at the same level	This also depends on available funding. In my opinion it may make more sense for the performance review to remain 'independent', however try to influence development assistance / funding through other channels in general. This may actually be achieved with a sharper, more impact focused review series.
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	Stay at the same level	
Expert 2	Be enhanced	In the fourth cycle EPRs, subject to availability of human and financial resources, the support to reviewed countries in their efforts to implement EPR recommendations could further be enhanced, e.g. by providing consultancy expert services assistance in thematic areas, where the skills and capacities of the domestic institutions' personnel are insufficient, or where the exchange of experience could significantly enhance the successful implementation of particular EPR recommendations.

ANNEX 9: Q9 – Answers

Beneficiary countries	Answers
Albania	Sustainable Development Goals -4 ; Media and pollution management : 4; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Armenia	Sustainable Development Goals -1 ; Media and pollution management - 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.
Azerbaijan	Sustainable Development Goals -5 ; Media and pollution management : 4; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -5; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -4.
Belarus	Sustainable Development Goals -4 ; Media and pollution management : 5; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -5; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -4.
Bulgaria	Sustainable Development Goals -4 ; Media and pollution management : 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Kazakhstan	Sustainable Development Goals - 1 ; Media and pollution management - 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.
Kyrgyzstan	Sustainable Development Goals -1; Media and pollution management : 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.
Montenegro	Sustainable Development Goals - 2; Media and pollution management : 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -3; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -2.
North Macedonia	Sustainable Development Goals - 3 ; Media and pollution management : 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -2; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -2.
Republic of Moldova	Sustainable Development Goals - 2 ; Media and pollution management : 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -2; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -2.
Tajikistan	Sustainable Development Goals - 2 ; Media and pollution management : 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.
Uzbekistan	Sustainable Development Goals - 2 ; Media and pollution management : 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -2; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -2.
Other countries	Answers
Austria	Sustainable Development Goals -3 ; Media and pollution management - 3; Integration of environment into sectoral policies –3; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Czech Republic	Sustainable Development Goals -2 ; Media and pollution management - 3; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Germany	Sustainable Development Goals -1 ; Media and pollution management : 5; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -5; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -5.
Hungary	Sustainable Development Goals -2 ; Media and pollution management - 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Italy	Sustainable Development Goals -1 ; Media and pollution management - 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.
Portugal	Sustainable Development Goals -2 ; Media and pollution management- 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -3; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -2.

Switzerland	Sustainable Development Goals -4 ; Media and pollution management - 4; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -2; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1; Nexus approach (added) -2.
Observers	Answers
UNEP	Sustainable Development Goals -1 ; Media and pollution management - 1; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.
OECD	Sustainable Development Goals -2 ; Media and pollution management - 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -5; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Zoi Environment Network	Sustainable Development Goals -1 ; Media and pollution management - 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -2.
EPR International Experts	Answers
Expert 1	Sustainable Development Goals -1 ; Media and pollution management - 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -2; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -3.
Expert 2	Sustainable Development Goals -5 ; Media and pollution management - 2; Integration of environment into sectoral policies -1; Evaluation of implementation of EPR recommendations -1.

ANNEX 10: Q10 - Answers and comments

Beneficiary countries	Answer	Please explain
Albania	No	
Armenia	No	
Azerbaijan	No	
Belarus	No	
Bulgaria	No	
Kazakhstan	No	
Kyrgyzstan	No	
Montenegro	Yes	It would be good if feasible, to have one step between review mission and the expert review, because, sometimes real questions arise during the drafting of the report. It could be a one-day meeting with reviewed country representatives, an additional opportunity to acquire additional data and information...
North Macedonia	No	
Republic of Moldova	No	
Tajikistan	No	
Uzbekistan	No	
Other countries	Answer	Please explain
Austria	No	
Czech Republic	No	
Germany	Yes	If possible, shorten the time between the start and end of the process to improve its relevance
Hungary	No	
Italy	Yes	Definitely, as an author and also as a reviewer, what I noticed is that several chapters contain very good information that are not reflected in the recommendations. It is hard for the reviewer during the review process only to introduce additional recommendations, and sometimes the quality of the recommendations suffer from that. Recommendations are the most important output for reviewed Countries, and also an inspiration for possible future cooperation activities. The EPR process should therefore include an additional step to check the consistence of the recommendations against the contents of the chapter, well before the chapter is finalised and sent to the reviewers, also to allow reviewed countries to analyse them
Portugal	Yes	The missions should not start before having the information provided by the country (replies to the questionnaires).
Switzerland	Yes	Support for the implementation of the recommendations should be added. Nexus approach in the preparation of the mission and during the review mission should be introduced if it fits the reviewed country's needs. What about a voluntary mid-term review decided by countries that want to show progress in the implementation of their recommendations? It is done so within the OECD EPR Programme and some UNECE countries should now be capable to follow suit.
Observers	Answer	Please explain
UNEP	No	
OECD	Yes	Whatever it takes to reduce the cycle...
Zoi Environment Network	Yes	Not sure whether 'lighter' and 'sharper' and why not 'faster' may be possible: In my opinion the current EPR assessments while in general high quality and useful are not really made for larger user groups and communities. Potentially more focus on data and indicators rather than narratives. More integration of the various chapters.
EPR International Experts	Answer	Please explain
Expert 1	No	
Expert 2	Yes	In the fourth cycle EPRs I do see the need to improve both the preparation and review mission phases, however I do not know how

exactly such improvements could be negotiated and agreed upon with the beneficiary Governments, while the effect of such possible improvements would still mainly depend on the good will and performance of the host Governments, requesting the EPR. Below I quote several examples from my EPR experience, which shall not be understood as any kind of complaint – I simply want to prevent the future EPR experts (e.g. under the fourth cycle EPRs) be affected by similar experiences, which could make their work on the EPR even more complicated than it is unavoidable. Maybe, the collection of similar experiences by other EPR experts could be summarized in a ‘secret handbook’ for the future EPR experts and enrich / add to the required ‘Advanced Security in the Field’ training.

The efficiency of preparation for the EPR mission, as well as the quality of the EPR results as such, largely depend on the availability of data and information, to be provided on experts’ request by the Governments of reviewed countries, either in preparation for the review mission, or during the mission, at the latest. Therefore, the situation where the Government fails to respond to requests addressed by experts gathering data in preparation for the EPR, which requests had duly been formulated, translated and delivered well in advance of the mission dates [case of 3 EPR TJ] can hardly be excused, much less accepted. Most probably the Governments should be informed at the very beginning of the procedure, that in such cases the review mission shall be postponed, and the new date can be agreed only when the Govt. responses and data effectively reach the EPR experts. However, even more difficult and embarrassing was the situation [case of 3 EPR UZ] where the Government solemnly declared to deliver all requested data and information in due time prior to the mission, then repeated / confirmed the above promise during the review mission, later continued promising throughout some 3 months after the end of the mission, and finally failed to keep the promise, and provide all requested information, which resulted in significant delay by some (less lucky and most affected) experts. Secondly, during the review mission, the EPR experts should have the ‘unlimited’ access to the personnel of institutions indicated in their requests for meetings, the pre-arranged and officially agreed meetings should preferably not be cancelled without a sound reason, in particular not at the last moment (on the agreed date, or just a day before [cases of 3EPR KZ and 3 EPR UZ], or e.g. 2 hours after the agreed meeting hour while the EPR expert and interpreter had been waiting for these 2 hrs. at the guarded entrance [case of 3 EPR KZ]). Last, but not least, the National Focal Points appointed to each EPR expert by the host Government should preferably stay in their country and remain available for the EPR experts during the review mission [from my experience: during 2 EPR AL, right after welcoming me in Tirana, my NFP disappeared for a conference in Korea, and stayed there as long as the EPR mission continued. During the 3 EPR UZ I had a working meeting (site visits does not count as working meetings, as there is no access to documents, databases etc.) with my both NFPs once (but in the presence of the whole management of their institution), while the next promised meeting with NFPs has been cancelled, or “no longer confirmed”, and did not happen.

To summarize – the overall quality of each EPR depends not only on the experience, skills and dedication of EPR experts, but mostly on the full commitment and involvement of respective host Governments prior to, and during the EPR review mission.