



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited  
23 December 2016  
English  
Original: English, French and  
Russian

## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Environmental Policy

#### Twenty-second session

Geneva, 25–27 January 2017

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

#### Environmental performance reviews

## **Role of Environmental Performance Reviews in supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region**

### **Note by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews\***

#### *Summary*

Acknowledging the important contribution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme over the past 20 years as an effective and practical policy tool, at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, 8–10 June 2016), ministers and heads of delegation highlighted the role that the EPR Programme "can play in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region".

The present document was prepared by the Expert Group on EPRs with support of the secretariat, to facilitate the discussions by the Committee on Environmental Policy on how the EPR Programme can support the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. The document reflects the outcomes of discussions by the Expert Group on EPRs during its extended meeting (Geneva, 9 December 2016).

The Committee is invited to consider the present document with a view to its prospective approval.

\* This document was not formally edited.



## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	3
II. Third cycle reviews .....	3
A. Structure.....	4
B. Experience with applying the third cycle reviews structure .....	4
III. Supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region .....	6
A. Role and scope.....	6
B. Contribution to the follow-up and review at national and regional level.....	7
C. Practical ways of incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into Environmental Performance Reviews .....	7
D. Guidance .....	9
IV. Data and resource requirements .....	9
A. Data and information .....	9
B. Resource requirements.....	10

## I. Introduction

1. Acknowledging the important contribution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme over the past 20 years as an effective and practical policy tool, at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, 8–10 June 2016), ministers and heads of delegation highlighted the role that the EPR Programme "can play in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region".
2. The present document was prepared by the Expert Group on EPRs with support of the secretariat, to facilitate the discussions by the Committee on Environmental Policy on how the EPR Programme can support the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. The document reflects the outcomes of discussions by the Expert Group on EPRs during its extended meeting (Geneva, 9 December 2016).
3. The Committee is invited to consider the present document with a view to its prospective approval. The following questions are proposed to facilitate the discussion:
  - (a) What should be the role of the EPR Programme in supporting the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals?
  - (b) Should the practical ways of incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into EPRs be left for discussion with every country under review on the basis of possible options outlined in the present document, in order to allow taking into account the needs of the country and the available resources?
4. In addition, the Committee may wish to encourage the eligible countries to benefit from using the EPR Programme in support of their efforts towards the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. Third cycle reviews

5. At the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference held in Astana in 2011 the Ministers and heads of delegation invited ECE to conduct a third cycle of EPRs for eligible ECE member countries. The Ministerial Declaration adopted in Astana identified three blocks of issues that may be addressed by the third cycle reviews: (a) environmental governance and financing in a green economy context; (b) countries' cooperation with the international community; and (c) environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors (ECE ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1, para. 13).
6. In the period from 2012 to 2016, the third cycle methodology was applied to the third cycle reviews of the Republic of Moldova (2013), Montenegro (2014), Serbia (2014), Georgia (2015), Belarus (2015), Tajikistan (ongoing) and Bulgaria (ongoing).<sup>1</sup> It was also applied to the second cycle review of Croatia (2013) and the review of Morocco (2013). At the time of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference held in Batumi in 2016 the third cycle was approaching its midpoint.

---

<sup>1</sup> All dates refer to the years of adoption of EPR recommendations by the Committee on Environmental Policy.

## A. Structure

7. In 2013 the Committee on Environmental Policy supported the detailed structure of third cycle reviews proposed by the secretariat, agreeing to revisit it in the light of experience gained in its practical application (ECE/CEP/2013/2). The detailed structure of third cycle reviews includes (ECE/CEP/2013/12):

"15. *Introduction: Environmental overview.* This will provide a succinct synopsis of the socioeconomic context and major developments (in terms of environmental pressures and natural resource use) in key environmental areas (such as air, climate change, water, waste, land, soil and biodiversity).

16. *Part I: Environmental governance and financing in a green economy context.* Major issues to be covered are:

- (a) The legal and policymaking framework and its implementation, including specific green economy initiatives such as energy efficiency, renewables, low carbon mobility, increased resource efficiency, including energy and water use efficiency, green jobs and eco-innovation;
- (b) Regulatory instruments and their enforcement;
- (c) Economic instruments and environmental expenditures, including investments in innovative green technologies;
- (d) Environmental monitoring, information and education.

17. *Part II: Domestic-international interface.* This part focuses on:

- (a) The implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and commitments, bilateral cooperation and international technical assistance on environment and sustainable development;
- (b) Policies and measures to address climate change adaptation and mitigation.

18. *Part III: Integration of environmental considerations with economic sector policies and selected environmental sector issues.* This part covers environmental issues, including green technology issues, in selected socioeconomic sectors such as industry, energy, transport, agriculture, forestry, health and housing, but also in water resources management, air protection, waste management, biodiversity and nature protection. Up to four sectors and areas in total will be selected for each EPR in consultation with the country under review."

## B. Experience with applying the third cycle reviews structure

8. The abovementioned third cycle reviews structure has in general been welcomed by countries and allowed covering the three blocks of issues outlined by Astana Ministerial Declaration. However, the experience showed that most countries under review preferred to familiarize themselves with the detailed terms of references for all possible EPR chapters and to hold extensive internal consultations on the structure of their EPR report prior to hosting the EPR preparatory mission or during such mission.

9. As a result, the abovementioned third cycle reviews structure was followed by the third cycle reviews of Bulgaria, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Serbia. Georgia preferred a slightly different structure that was also favoured by Belarus and Tajikistan: (i) the issues of monitoring, international cooperation and climate change were integrated into other chapters of the review rather than being standalone chapters; (ii) Part II was fully

devoted to media and pollution management issues, covering in separate chapters the topics of air protection, water management, waste management, biodiversity and protected areas; (iii) a number of sectors was covered in Part III devoted to interaction of environment with selected sectors/issues. Belarus, Georgia and Tajikistan highly valued the opportunity to address mainstreaming of environmental considerations into a large number of sectoral policies through an EPR and appreciated the prospect to strengthen cooperation with sectoral ministries during the EPR process. In addition, tackling more sectors in the EPR allowed raising the profile of the EPR exercise and the resulting EPR recommendations at the governmental level: for example, the launch of the third EPR of Belarus was attended by the country's Prime Minister, and the country adopted at the level of the Vice Prime Minister a cross-sectoral action plan to implement EPR recommendations.

10. Therefore, it appeared to be important to maintain certain flexibility when discussing the structure of EPR reports on the basis of the detailed structure set in ECE/CEP/2013/12. The secretariat ensured that the three blocks of issues identified by Astana Ministerial Declaration for the third cycle are prominently reflected in the review irrespectively of the exact structure negotiated with the country through adjustments made to the terms of references of individual chapters.

11. Content wise, a challenging task has been to devote adequate attention in third cycle reviews to environmental governance and financing in a green economy context and to specific green economy initiatives. The reviews addressed green economy aspects both in various chapters (e.g. legal and policy framework, or energy and environment) and in a dedicated chapter on economic instruments and environmental expenditure. However, in many countries the lack of legal and policy framework for green economy was observed, together with the shortage of specific green economy initiatives, except for few green economy projects supported by international donors. It was also a challenge to cover the investments in greening the economy separately from the general environmental expenditures, as no such information is separately collected in the countries. Therefore, the reviews tended to emphasize the need for a clear policy framework and formalized institutional responsibilities and/or coordination mechanisms on green economy, rather than describe such frameworks and mechanisms. In some countries that have gone through the third cycle reviews, the policy framework on green economy is now enhancing: for example, Belarus has developed a national action plan to introduce green economy principles for the period until 2020.

12. No difficulties were encountered with covering in detail the other two blocks of issues identified in Astana Ministerial Declaration – countries' cooperation with the international community and environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors.

13. All but one third cycle reviews included the evaluation of implementation of the recommendations in the second reviews, prepared by the review team on the basis of information provided by the countries under review, with clear indication of implemented, not implemented and partially implemented recommendations. Such evaluation was not done for Bulgaria because of changes in political situation in the country and the lengthy period (16 years) between its second and third reviews.

14. All third cycle EPRs continued to include annexes with information on key data and indicators, participation in MEAs and major environment-related legislation. In addition, the third cycle reviews of Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia and Tajikistan included annexes on Millennium Development Goals (MDG) indicators. Moreover, the third cycle reviews of Belarus, Georgia and Tajikistan also included annexes on the results of the For Future Inland Transport Systems (ForFITS) tool applied to support the analysis in the chapters on transport and the environment.

### III. Supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region

#### A. Role and scope

15. In line with the outcomes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, 8–10 June 2016) and building on the experience with assisting countries in the achievement and monitoring of MDGs, EPRs can assist countries with achievement and monitoring of relevant Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, they can:

- (a) Assist in adapting to the national context of relevant Sustainable Development Goals in the countries under review;
- (b) Assess the progress a country under review is making in achieving relevant Sustainable Development Goals, identify challenges and provide recommendations to address them;
- (c) Identify systemic problems and cross-cutting issues related to the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals; and
- (d) Contribute to sharing of experience among countries on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

16. EPRs do not cover the whole range of issues addressed by the 2030 Agenda. They can support the achievement and monitoring of those goals and/or targets from the 2030 Agenda that are relevant for the particular EPR content requested by the country under review, thereafter "EPR-relevant goals and/or targets". These EPR-relevant goals and/or targets would differ from a review to review depending on the thematic structure of the EPR report agreed with the country under review. For example, when the country has requested a chapter on water management, Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) would be considered as EPR-relevant. In many cases, only one or more targets within a goal would be EPR-relevant rather than the entire goal.

17. In the majority of cases, the EPR-relevant goals and/or targets would be environment-related, however this would not always be the case. The environmental dimension of some goals and targets may be not very pronounced but may appear rather important for sectoral chapters of a given EPR, in particular in light of the integrated and indivisible nature of the Sustainable Development Goals that balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. For example, Goal 5 (gender equality) and its target 5a (*Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws*) can be relevant for the EPR of a country that has requested a chapter on land management or a chapter on agriculture and environment and that is facing gender imbalances in access to land ownership.

18. The related recommendations provided in EPR reports should aim to support the achievement of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets by a country under review. Such recommendations can provide advice, for example, on the need to improve legislation and its enforcement or on additional and/or alternative measures to support the achievement of the EPR-relevant goals and/or targets.

## **B. Contribution to the follow-up and review at national and regional level**

19. By assisting countries under review with achievement and monitoring of the EPR-relevant goals and/or targets through the provision of recommendations, EPRs can contribute to the country-driven follow-up and review of Sustainable Development Goals at national level. In particular, they can serve as a building block, i.e. one of many inputs, to national reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals when such reviews are prepared by the EPR-reviewed countries in cooperation with the United Nations Country Teams. At the same time, they can also serve as inputs to the Voluntary National Reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, when the EPR-reviewed countries undertake such reviews. Ultimately, they can provide an input to a future regional follow-up and review mechanism.

## **C. Practical ways of incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into Environmental Performance Reviews**

### **Possible options**

20. There are various ways how EPR-relevant goals and/or targets can be incorporated into the contents of the EPR report. The one-size-fits-all approach is to be avoided and some flexibility is needed to ensure that such incorporation best responds to the needs of the countries under review. The options outlined below can serve as a starting point for discussion with a country under the review when consultations on the structure of the future EPR report take place.

*Option 1: Including the review of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets into the contents of the chapters of the EPR report*

21. Building on the experience with MDGs, the most straightforward way to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals in the reviews would be to include the review of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets into the contents of the chapters of the EPR report agreed with the country under review and to address the inter-linkages and crosscutting issues in chapters covering horizontal issues (e.g., the chapters on legal and policy framework or on economic instruments for greening the economy).

22. A detailed target-specific mapping of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets vis-à-vis the chapters of an EPR report would need to be undertaken for every review and be adjusted to the structure of the EPR report. As some targets could potentially be addressed by more than one chapter, the review-specific mapping would also allow avoiding duplications.

23. In the short-term, the reviews of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets in the chapters of the EPR report could focus on the existence of an enabling framework for achieving the goal and/or target, while at a later stage the reviews could move towards an assessment of progress towards achievement of the goal and/or target and provision of recommendations on how to foster progress.

24. The reviews of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets in the chapters of the EPR report can be in form of a box or a section.

25. It is important that the reviews of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets in the chapters of the EPR report serve to complement the overall analysis of the topic of the chapter but do not highjack the content of the whole chapter.

*Option 2: Chapter on the assessment of progress towards achieving EPR-relevant goals and/or targets*

26. The second way would be to either (i) introduce a comprehensive chapter on the assessment of progress that a country has made towards achieving EPR-relevant goals and/or targets, or (ii) extend the chapter on the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and commitments to include a part on EPR-relevant goals and/or targets.

27. Such a chapter or part could provide a detailed coverage of all EPR-relevant goals and/or targets in one place, together with the analysis of the inter-linkages and crosscutting issues. Such a chapter or part could address:

- (a) Overall framework in support of implementation of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets, including
  - Legal and policy framework
  - Institutional framework, including coordination mechanisms and stakeholder participation
  - Information and data
  - Resources and other means of implementation
- (b) Assessment of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets (one-by-one or clustered assessment), including
  - Adapting the goals to the national context
  - Progress made, remaining challenges
- (c) Crosscutting issues in the achievement of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets
- (d) Conclusions and recommendations.

*Option 3: Integrating EPR-relevant goals and/or targets into the contents of the chapters and covering in an additional chapter the goals and/or targets not addressed by other chapters but requested by the country under review*

28. Another option would be to integrate EPR-relevant goals and/or targets into the contents of the chapters of the EPR report and cover in an additional chapter those goals and/or targets that were not addressed by other chapters but are requested by the country under review. This would allow broader coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals in case when the structure of the EPR report includes a limited number of subjects/sectoral issues. For example, for a review which follows the third cycle review structure and includes in Part III only the chapter on "Water management", the option 3 would allow (i) integrating Goal 6 in the chapter on "Water management", and (ii) covering a broader range of goals and/or targets requested by the country in a separate chapter, together with the analysis of the inter-linkages and crosscutting issues in such a chapter.

*Option 4: Providing a general review of the 2030 Agenda implementation in the chapter on legal and policy framework and including the review of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets into the contents of the other chapters of the EPR report*

29. Under this option, a general review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals would be provided in the chapter on legal and policy framework, whereas the review of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets would be included in other chapters of the EPR report. The general review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals in the chapter on legal and policy framework



would address, for example, such aspects as the existence of a national sustainable development strategy, its update/alignment with Sustainable Development Goals, the process of implementation, the availability and effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms, etc. The review of EPR-relevant goals and/or targets in other chapters of the EPR report would be similar to the one proposed under option 1 and could be done in the form of a box or a section within respective chapters.

#### **Annex**

30. At a later stage, an annex with Sustainable Development Goals indicators can be added to complement the substantive analyses in the report, as it was done with MDG indicators in the third cycle reviews of Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia and Tajikistan. Such annex could complement any of the abovementioned options.

### **D. Guidance**

31. In line with its mandate to provide guidance to the ECE secretariat and Committee on Environmental Policy on all substantive and organizational matters arising in the implementation of the EPR Programme (ECE/CEP/2014/13, annex), the Expert Group on EPRs can provide guidance on opportunities for improving the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals into EPRs.

32. The secretariat would need to provide guidance to the review teams with regard to the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals into EPRs.

## **IV. Data and resource requirements**

### **A. Data and information**

33. The availability of high-quality, reliable and timely data in countries under review may represent a serious challenge. The EPR process relies mostly on the collaboration with national authorities to obtain the necessary data for the report. The main sources of EPR data include national statistical offices, national environmental authorities and other relevant bodies in the country under review, as well as international organizations.

34. Incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into the reviews would require efforts from the country under review to provide additional data and information on EPR-relevant goals and/or targets. It would also require efforts from the review teams to access and analyse such data and information.

35. In addition to national sources, a number of mechanisms and tools can enhance information and data support to incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into the EPRs. These include, among others, the national reporting processes under various MEAs, a number of global processes and instruments, including the UNEP-Live platform and its Indicator Reporting Information System and the Global Environment Outlook process, as well as several ECE review mechanisms and processes besides the EPRs (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/5).

## **B. Resource requirements**

### **Operational budget**

36. While the core secretariat for the EPR Programme is provided by the ECE regular budget, the operational budget for the Programme will continue to depend on extrabudgetary funds provided by donors directly to the EPR trust fund or through contributions in kind, mostly in the form of experts provided by countries and international organizations and institutions like European Environment Agency, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, UNEP and World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. In recent years, other ECE divisions than the Environment Division also provided their staff to the review teams.

37. The extrabudgetary funding requirements for the review of a country range between US\$100,000 and US\$250,000, depending on a number of factors, such as mission costs, number of chapters, availability of experts provided by countries and international organizations and fluctuations in currency exchange rates. These cost requirements cover the preparatory mission, the review mission, consultancies, editing of the English language version of the report, participation to the meeting of the Expert Group on EPRs and the session of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the translation in Russian or local languages, and the launch event.

38. Incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into EPRs would require bringing additional expertise into the review teams. For this, the current engagement between the EPR Programme and partner organizations needs to be strengthened, the collaboration with new partners needs to be developed, and cooperation with other ECE divisions needs to be enhanced. It would also require securing the availability of expertise in case an additional comprehensive chapter on the assessment of progress towards achieving EPR-relevant goals and/or targets (under option 2) or option 3 are chosen and such a chapter is not prepared by an expert provided in-kind by a country or an international organization.

### **National level**

39. The third cycle reviews already involve a wide range of national authorities beyond the environmental authorities. For example, during the review mission, the review team for the third EPR of Belarus met over 50 governmental authorities, institutions and organizations outside the system of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. However, in some countries under review incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into reviews may require additional efforts to enhance participation in EPRs of governmental institutions other than national environmental authorities.

### **Expert Group on EPRs**

40. The membership of the Expert Group on EPRs, which carries out the expert review process, consists of 10 to 14 participants nominated by ECE Member States. Members of the Expert Group have diverse experience, which allows providing substantive input and comments to various chapters and recommendations of EPR report. According to the Terms of References of the Group, additional experts nominated by the delegates of the Committee on Environmental Policy and agreed by the members of the Expert Group in consultation with the secretariat, as well as international institutions invited by the secretariat, may participate in the meetings of the Expert Group (ECE/CEP/2014/13, annex).

41. The opportunity of inviting additional experts from governments and international organizations to participate in meetings of the Expert Group is used rather often, especially

in case of lengthy reports and reports covering specific sectors. Some ECE Member States nominated alternate members to the Expert Group to allow adapting participation to the contents of the report under review.

42. Incorporating Sustainable Development Goals in EPRs may require enhancing the current practice of inviting additional experts from governments and international organizations to participate in the Expert Group on EPRs. In turn, incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into the reviews may raise the interest of governments not participating in the Expert Group to get involved in its activities.

---