



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Twenty-fifth session**

Geneva, 13–15 November 2019

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

**The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference:
selection of the themes for the Conference****Proposed framework for preparing the Ninth Environment
for Europe Ministerial Conference****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The Environment for Europe Reform Plan stipulates that not later than 18 months before the conference, the Committee on Environmental Policy at its regular session will decide on not more than two themes and discuss the outline of the agenda of the Conference (ECE/CEP/S/152 and Corr.1, annex I, para. 12 (a)).

The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau meeting (Geneva, 6 June 2019) recommended soliciting ideas concerning the themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States, partner organizations and ECE multilateral environmental agreements through a simple online survey.

The present document is based on the replies to the survey and aims to facilitate the discussion by the Committee on Environmental Policy on the preparations for the Ninth Environment for Europe Conference and to assist it in reaching agreement on the themes of the Conference.



Introduction

1. The Environment for Europe Reform Plan (ECE/CEP/S/152 and Corr.1, annex I) stipulates that, not later than 18 months before the Conference, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy at its regular session will decide on not more than two themes and discuss the outline of the agenda of the Conference.
2. Concerning the selection of themes, the Reform Plan states the need to identify a limited number of themes, not more than two, to be addressed by each Conference. Within the identified themes there should be a focus on specific needs of the subregions, in order to contribute to better cooperation and more substantive and action-oriented outcomes of the Conference.
3. The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau meeting (Geneva, 6 June 2019) discussed the procedure of the selection of themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and recommended soliciting ideas concerning the themes for the Conference from the ECE member states, partner organizations and ECE multilateral environmental agreements through a simple online survey.
4. The present document has been largely prepared based on the outcomes of the survey to facilitate the selection of themes for the next Conference.
5. At its Lisbon meeting in September 2019, the Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau will use the draft of this document to screen the long list of the proposed themes for the Conference with a view to prepare the short list to be circulated to the Committee in advance of its twenty-fifth session.
6. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to consider the present document and the Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau recommendations with a view to deciding on the two themes for the Conference.

I. Prospective themes for the next Ministerial Conference¹

A. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe multilateral environmental agreements and Sustainable Development Goals

7. During its twenty-fourth session (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019), the Committee on Environmental Policy recognized the important role of multilateral environmental agreements in assisting Governments to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and the need to allocate sufficient resources for that purpose and reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening cooperation in support of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
8. The Committee welcomed the operationalization in 2016 of the amendment to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) allowing accession to all States Members of the United Nations. It also welcomed the accession by Chad and Senegal to the Convention in 2018 and the interest in acceding thereto officially expressed by 20 countries at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018).
9. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to ECE multilateral environmental agreements and Sustainable Development Goals:
 - (a) Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation in the ECE region/ECE context (Finland);
 - (b) Environmental impact assessment and strategic environment assessment (Republic of Moldova);

¹ Multidimensional proposals may appear under more than one chapter below.

(c) Assessing progress in cleaning the air (as a follow up to the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016) (Luxembourg);

(d) Improving air quality (Austria);

(e) Assessing progress/regress in implementation of previous Environment for Europe decisions and other multilateral environmental agreements (European ECO-Forum).

B. Education for sustainable development

10. At its twenty-fourth session, the Committee on Environmental Policy took note of the information provided on the work of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development and encouraged its members from the countries participating in the Strategy to remain informed of the process at the national level through establishing and maintaining working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations.

11. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to education for sustainable development:

(a) Education and environmental awareness-raising: successful ways of communication (Lithuania);

(b) Education for sustainable development (European ECO-Forum).

C. Climate Change

12. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to climate change:

(a) Climate change in cities (Romania);

(b) Air quality and climate change: To what extent can achieving Paris Agreement targets improve air quality in cities? (Russian Federation);

(c) Afforestation in the fight against air pollution and climate change (Serbia);

(d) Strengthening the pan-European regional response to global warming of 1.5°C (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP));

(e) Scaling-up of nature-based solutions to increase climate action, reduce biodiversity loss and protect ecosystem services in the pan-European region (UNEP).

D. Sustainable consumption and production

13. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to sustainable consumption and production:

(a) Transition to sustainability through sustainable consumption and production (France);

(b) Good practices in environmental innovation on specific production processes (Turkey);

(c) Sustainable consumption and production – transition to sustainability (Luxembourg);

(d) Sustainable consumption and production (Turkey, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).

14. The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau recommended that the Committee consider addressing sustainable consumption and production at the next Environment for Europe Conference, possibly in the context of greening the economy.

E. Green/circular economy

15. Ministers at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference endorsed the voluntary Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy — a tool supporting countries' efforts in transitioning to a green economy and, at the same time, contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals — and invited ECE member States and other stakeholders to implement it. They welcomed the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy, which consists of voluntary commitments to operationalize the Strategic Framework.

16. During its twenty-fourth session, the Committee on Environmental Policy welcomed the progress achieved in implementing voluntary commitments by the member States and organizations participating in the Batumi Initiative and affirmed that the Initiative continued to provide a solid mechanism for the implementation of the decisions of the Eighth Ministerial Conference. The Committee called upon the member States and other stakeholders to continue active participation in the Initiative.

17. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to green/circular economy:

- (a) Zero waste approaches as a base for circular economy (Slovakia);
- (b) Resource efficient circular economy (Finland);
- (c) Greening the economy and moving forward to sustainable development in the ECE region (Republic of Moldova);
- (d) "Green Economy" through the perspective of the "Circular Economy" (Austria);
- (e) Financing of green economy (France);
- (f) Circular economy in cities (Romania);
- (g) "Greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development" (Turkey);
- (h) Assessing progress in greening the economy (as a follow-up to the Batumi Conference) (Luxembourg).

F. Waste and chemicals

18. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to waste and chemicals:

- (a) Wastes (Achieving sound waste management for healthy environment and people) (European ECO-Forum);
- (b) "The Road to 2030: International Chemicals and Waste Management (Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management) – towards sustainability for human health and the environment" (Germany);
- (c) Waste and wastewater (Serbia);
- (d) How to deal with land-based marine litter in Europe (Turkey);
- (e) Zero waste approaches as a base for circular economy (Slovakia).

G. Sustainable infrastructure

19. In March 2019, the United Nations Environment Assembly passed a resolution on sustainable infrastructure (UNEP/EA.4/Res.5) and a resolution on mineral resource governance (UNEP/EA.4/Res.19).

20. The resolution on sustainable infrastructure recognizes infrastructure's centrality to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Among other things, it encourages Member

States, as well as relevant stakeholders, to apply appropriate sustainability criteria to all infrastructure, and to promote the mobilization and realignment of investments towards sustainable infrastructure projects.

21. The survey results regarding the theme “sustainable infrastructure” received a few positive responses (Lithuania, Sweden, Switzerland and the European Investment Bank).

H. Smart sustainable cities: drivers for sustainable development

22. The high-level segment during the sixty-eighth session of the Commission was held under the theme “Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for Sustainable Development.” Discussions focused on: national priorities and good practices related to sustainable cities in the region; ECE initiatives aimed at supporting Governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda; and the impact of relevant ECE norms, standards and Conventions at the national and regional levels. The segment considered how cities can provide inhabitants of all ages with a high quality of life, not leaving anyone behind, while becoming centres of innovation and competitiveness.

23. The survey results contained the following proposals for a possible theme related to smart sustainable cities:

- (a) Urban issues, including the urban agenda and smart cities – hubs for green progress (Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification);
- (b) Climate change in cities (Romania);
- (c) Air quality and climate change: To what extent can achieving Paris Agreement targets improve air quality in cities? (Russian Federation).
- (d) Smart regions/Smart cities/Smart environment (Slovakia);
- (e) Circular economy in cities (Romania);
- (f) Sustainable cities: policies for better environment (Czechia).

I. Other themes

24. The survey revealed a few other themes for the Conference:

- (a) Protecting biodiversity by making progress in other areas such as water, energy, food and climate change;
- (b) Sustainable mining (Sweden);
- (c) Good environmental governance (European ECO-Forum);
- (d) Trade and environment (European ECO-Forum);
- (e) Sustainable energy - preparing the ECE region for an energy transition (Czech Republic);
- (f) Governance of mineral resources/extractive sector (Switzerland);
- (g) Greening Society (Hungary);
- (h) Scaling-up of nature-based solutions to increase climate action, reduce biodiversity loss and protect ecosystem services in the pan-European region (UNEP).