



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
12 November 2018

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Environmental Policy

#### Twenty-fourth session

Geneva, 29–31 January 2019

Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda

#### Mid-term review of the main outcomes of the Eighth

**Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference:  
multilateral environmental agreements**

## **Implementing multilateral environmental agreements in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

### **Note by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

At the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016), ministers recognized the need to strengthen the participation of civil society and the private sector in the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe multilateral environmental agreements and recognized the opportunities provided by those agreements to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 8).

At its twenty-fourth session, the Committee will hold a mid-term review to assess progress in implementing the outcomes of the Batumi Conference. To facilitate the Committee's review, the present document provides an overview of how the ECE multilateral environmental agreements being implemented in support of the 2030 Agenda.



## Introduction

1. Ministers at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016) recognized both the need to strengthen the participation of civil society and the private sector in the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements and the opportunities these agreements provided to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 8).

2. In accordance with the request of ministers at Batumi for a mid-term review of the Batumi Conference's main outcomes, the Committee agreed to hold the mid-term review within the framework of its twenty-fourth session and invited partners and stakeholders to prepare mid-term review reports to facilitate the review.

3. The present document was prepared in accordance with the template for review reports (ECE/CEP/2017/16, annex II). It focuses on the role of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and in particular linkages to the achievement of particular Sustainable Development Goals. It also includes information on how these agreements have strengthened their links with the private sector and increased the participation of civil society in their work.

## I. Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution

### A. Overview of main achievements and key findings

4. At its thirty-sixth session (Geneva, 15–16 December 2016) the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) recognized the numerous linkages between the Convention and Sustainable Development Goals 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 and recommended that those linkages be increasingly reflected in the Convention's future work, including in the workplan. The 2018–2019 workplan for the implementation of the Convention accordingly sets out activities through which the Air Convention supports Parties in implementing the Goals.

5. The Air Convention assisted countries in abating nitrogen emissions and managing nitrogen more sustainably by setting targets for ammonia and nitrogen oxides. This had direct impacts on soil quality and helped in promoting sustainable agriculture, thus contributing to Goal 2.

6. The Air Convention continued to tackle the world's largest environmental health risk for non-communicable diseases by reducing air pollution, thus contributing to Goal 3.

7. The Air Convention stimulated investment in clean technologies, including in the energy sector, by setting emission limit values for air pollutants. This helped countries in promoting clean energy (Goal 7) and sustainable industrialization (Goal 9).

8. Reductions in air pollution at the national level achieved under the Air Convention also improved air quality at the city level (Goal 11). This also protected historical buildings and monuments, as air pollution is a key factor in the degradation of building materials. Moreover, the Convention's International Cooperative Programme on Effects of Air Pollution on Materials, including Historic and Cultural Monuments performed quantitative evaluations of the effects of major pollutants on the atmospheric corrosion of important materials and assessed the trends of corrosion and pollution. The information assisted countries in protecting their cultural heritage.

9. The Air Convention assisted countries in sustainably managing and improving air quality and in reducing releases of chemicals into the air by setting emission targets for various air pollutants. In doing so, the effects of air pollution on other natural resources, such as water, are also reduced. The Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP) provided sound scientific support by playing a major role in informing policy developments and helping countries in monitoring progress in reducing air pollution. The Convention's International Cooperative Programme on Assessment and Monitoring of Acidification of Rivers and Lakes assessed, on a regional basis, the degree and geographical extent of the acidification of surface waters. The three latest protocols to the Convention – the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol), the Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Protocol on Heavy Metals – further helped countries in ensuring the environmentally sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle and reducing their release into the air (Goal 12).

10. The Gothenburg Protocol is the first legally binding agreement containing obligations to reduce the broader spectrum of short-lived climate pollutants, including ground-level ozone precursors and black carbon. Implementation of the Protocol's obligations also had climate co-benefits (Goal 13). The Task Force on Hemispheric Transport of Air Pollution continued to work to better understand the intercontinental transport of air pollution across the Northern Hemisphere, including estimates of specific air pollutants, and the interactions between greenhouse gases and air pollution.

11. The Air Convention assisted countries in reducing marine pollution from land-based activities (Goal 14), particularly nutrient pollution by setting targets for various air pollutants, including ammonia and nitrogen oxides. The Convention's International Cooperative Programme on Assessment and Monitoring of the Effects of Air Pollution on Rivers and Lakes assessed the degree and geographical extent of the acidification of surface waters in the region, with follow-on effects for oceans, seas and marine resources.

12. The Air Convention assisted countries in mitigating pollution effects on ecosystems and biodiversity by setting targets for emissions of various air pollutants (Goal 15). The Convention's International Cooperative Programme on Assessment and Monitoring of Air Pollution Effects on Forests provided a periodic overview of the condition of forest ecosystems in terms of health, productivity, diversity and nutrition. The assessments carried out under the water-related International Cooperative Programme also assisted countries in mitigating pollution effects on ecosystems and biodiversity.

13. The Convention provided a regional platform for sharing knowledge and expertise to support the achievement of a number of Sustainable Development Goals in countries of the region (Goal 17). The knowledge gathered is freely available and can also be used by countries beyond the ECE region. Exchange of data has also been fostered between the Air Convention, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Arctic Council, among others.

## **B. Lessons learned and challenges**

14. At the Executive Body's thirty-sixth session (15–16 December 2016), several Parties reported on how the Sustainable Development Goals were impacting national policies. Parties emphasized that the Goals offered an opportunity to highlight the work under the Convention that should not be missed.

15. The secretariat has since produced communication materials linking the work under the Convention to the Goals and presented the Convention work in the framework of international forums, such as the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

(Ostrava, Czechia, 13–15 June 2017), the third United Nations Environment Assembly (Nairobi, 4–6 September 2018), the Asia-Pacific Clean Air Week (Bangkok, 19–23 March 2018) and the First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health (Geneva, 30 October–1 November 2018).

### **C. Further steps**

16. The Task Force on Reactive Nitrogen under the Air Convention will continue to develop technical and scientific information and encourage coordination of air pollution policies on nitrogen in the context of the nitrogen cycle. The work of the Task Force will help countries in fulfilling their obligations to reduce nitrogen oxides and ammonia emissions under the Gothenburg Protocol and the Protocol concerning the Control of Emissions of Nitrogen Oxides or their Transboundary Fluxes.

17. The Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution, established by the Executive Body for the Convention and the World Health Organization (WHO) European Centre for Environment and Health, will continue to assess the health effects of long-range transboundary air pollution and provide supporting documentation. These assessments make it possible to quantify the contribution of transboundary air pollution to human health risks and to define priorities to guide future monitoring and abatement strategies. This will help countries in reducing morbidity and premature mortality related to air pollution.

18. The Task Force on Techno-Economic Issues under the Convention will continue to develop a techno-economic database of information on control technologies for air pollution abatement and their costs. The information will be used both to update the technical annexes to the Convention's protocols and for input data to integrated assessment modelling. It will also assist countries in identifying technologies to reduce air pollution.

19. The quantification of the effects of air pollution at the city level by EMEP bodies and centres will assist countries in tracing progress towards improving urban air quality.

20. Convention bodies will continue to cooperate with the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme on the modelling of air pollutants, including black carbon.

## **II. Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment**

### **A. Overview of main achievements and key findings**

21. The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and, in particular, its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment continued to provide a legal framework and concrete procedures for the comprehensive integration of environmental and health concerns into a wide range of national strategies and development activities in all economic sectors, thus helping countries to ensure the alignment of their development with almost all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

22. The Espoo Convention and its Protocol also continued to promote access to environmental information, consultation of stakeholders and public participation, which are essential in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

23. Both treaties contributed to reducing environment and health hazards from chemicals and air, water and soil contamination and pollution by ensuring that such impacts are assessed and mitigated early in the planning of all potentially polluting economic

activities. Enshrining the precautionary principle, the implementation of the treaties gave countries early warning of unsustainable development options and chances to anticipate and prevent damage to the environment before it occurred.

24. An informal brainstorming session on the future of the two treaties was held in November 2016. Among the conclusions, the participants underlined the need to increasingly promote the treaties as important mechanisms for addressing key challenges, including achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. At their most recent sessions (Minsk, June 2017), the Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol adopted a ministerial declaration emphasizing the role of the two treaties in translating global commitments into practical action at the national and regional levels and confirmed the contribution of the Convention and its Protocol to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and targets. The Parties and civil society stakeholders also held a panel discussion on the future role of the treaties, notably in assisting countries in implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the 2017–2020 workplan for the treaties related Sustainable Development Goal targets are indicated for several activities.

25. In the reporting period, a large number of technical assistance and capacity-building activities were carried out under the treaties in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to assist them in aligning their legislative frameworks with the Convention and the Protocol and in implementing their obligations. The efforts to promote the ratification and implementation of the treaties also facilitated implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example, regarding Goal 7, the pilot application of strategic environmental assessment to sectoral energy plans and programmes assisted countries in meeting their renewable energy targets and in enhancing international cooperation.

## **B. Lessons learned and challenges**

26. Among lessons learned are that effective integration of environmental and health targets into economic development should build on a solid legislative basis and that the success of legal reforms is dependent on high-level political commitment. It is also important not to forget civil society, which plays a key role in advocating for environmental assessments and sustainable development. Challenges include insufficient awareness of the sectoral authorities of the benefits of environmental assessment.

## **C. Further steps**

27. With funding raised from European Union, Germany and Switzerland, further capacity development activities such as training-of-trainers workshops and pilot projects will continue to be organized to assist countries to effectively implement strategic environmental assessment and to increase the membership of the Protocol.

28. More work will be done with representatives of the economic sectors to which strategic environmental assessment was applied to increase their ownership of such assessments. A goal is to move away from the vision of strategic environmental assessment or environmental impact assessment as “legal” or “control” instruments, towards a more positive vision of them as “support” instruments, for example, for finding the best available technologies for integrating environmental issues into decision-making and for involving stakeholders. Activities will continue to encourage a change in the perception of strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment from environmental tools to tools to manage scarce resources, such as energy and food.

### III. Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and Protocol on Water and Health

#### A. Overview of main achievements and key findings

29. Work under both the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and its Protocol on Water and Health strongly supports not only Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation but also many other Sustainable Development Goals that are closely linked to and dependent on water.

30. As emphasized by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its fourth session (Geneva, 14–16 November 2016), the Protocol offers a powerful platform that provides concrete tools to operationalize the achievement of the water-related Sustainable Development Goals in the national and regional contexts by promoting integration of policies, a holistic and preventive approach to water, sanitation and health and a focus on sustainable water management and equity issues. The brochure *A Healthy Link: The Protocol on Water and Health and the Sustainable Development Goals* (ECE/INF/NONE/2016/16), prepared in 2016, provides insights on how to benefit from the Protocol as a tool to implement the Goals at the national level, underlining the strong interdependencies with other Sustainable Development Goals.

31. The Protocol's obligations to set targets, assess progress and report are fully aligned with the approach of the 2030 Agenda and can provide a strong basis for its implementation. In this respect, a guidance document to support the joint implementation of the Protocol and the 2030 Agenda, providing step-by-step guidance for coordinated action, will be published at the end of 2018.

32. The Protocol explicitly calls for ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation to promote health and well-being for all. This is closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.1 and 6.2. Work under the Protocol has promoted self-assessment of the situation of access to water and sanitation through an equity lens. The Protocol's Equitable Access Score-card has been applied in 11 countries of the pan-European region, where it helped governments and other stakeholders to establish baseline measures of the equity of access, identify priorities and discuss necessary actions to be taken. This has had a remarkable impact on increasing awareness on the challenges still faced in ensuring equitable access in the region and prompted concrete improvements through policies, measures and targeted actions addressing the equity gaps.

33. Under the Water Convention, the work on promoting joint adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, and thereby implementation of Goal 6 and Goal 13, has inspired basins worldwide. Transboundary basins are increasingly adopting basin-wide adaptation strategies, the most advanced example being the Danube River Basin Climate Adaptation Strategy.

34. Work under the Convention has also focused on disaster risk reduction. A *Words into Action Guide on Water and Disaster Risk Management* was prepared in cooperation with United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in order to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 in the water sector.

35. With its unique focus on the transboundary and regional dimensions, the Convention's work on the water-food-energy-ecosystem supports implementation of the 2030 Agenda and is closely aligned with the latter's intersectoral and integrated approach. Cooperation with other sectors that affect water use has progressively been strengthened, in

particular with the energy sector. This sector was actively involved in the projects in the Drin and Drina River basins and the North-Western Sahara aquifer system contributing to the joint definition of actions for progress in those basins. In the Drina basin, the report *Reconciling Different Resource Uses in Transboundary Basins: Assessment of the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus and Benefits of Transboundary Cooperation in the Drina River Basin* is a main outcome of a project on greening economic development in the Western Balkans through application of a nexus approach. The project has fostered cooperation across sectors and borders by identifying intersectoral synergies and determining measures that could alleviate tensions related to the multiple needs of basin countries for common resources. The nexus assessment identified a broad range of opportunities and concrete benefits of transboundary cooperation across sectors but also improved intersectoral coordination nationally. In an ongoing follow-up project, “Renewable Energy Hard Talks” are being planned for Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. These three Hard Talks will focus not only on renewable energy but on the potential for synergies with water management using an energy-water nexus approach.

36. The national policy dialogues on integrated water resources management, carried out by ECE in cooperation with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) within the framework of the European Union Water Initiative, serve as an important platform to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the integration of sectoral policies.

37. At its seventh session (Budapest, 17–19 November 2015), the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention established a regular reporting mechanism. Reporting offers a means to gather data and information on the Convention’s implementation, exchange lessons learned and good practices, identify emerging issues and difficulties, inform and support the mobilization of resources and measure progress across reporting cycles. A pilot reporting exercise under the Convention was carried out in 2017–2018, in conjunction with reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2. The level of participation was high: 38 of the 40 Parties submitted national reports. The first report on the implementation of the Convention<sup>1</sup> shows that the Parties have made significant progress: most basins are covered by agreements for transboundary water cooperation and almost all these agreements have joint bodies in place to support their implementation. This has brought many concrete results, including enhanced human and ecosystem health, improved water quality, mitigation of the impacts of floods and droughts and better joint planning in many areas – from hydropower operation to river basin management. The reporting exercise also highlighted difficulties faced by countries in implementing certain provisions, such as activities related to joint monitoring and assessment, joint water quality standards, extreme events and public participation.

38. In addition to the activities carried out under the Water Convention and its Protocol, the ECE secretariat has strongly supported the implementation of Goal 6 in its role as co-custodian for indicator 6.5.2. The baseline monitoring of indicator 6.5.2 was carried out in 2017–2018. It had a 70 per cent response rate: of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters, 107 replied. For the first time, an overview of progress in transboundary water cooperation based on data officially provided by countries is now available. This very high response rate reflects the importance of the issue and provides a solid foundation for future reporting. The report shows that for the 62 countries where indicator 6.5.2 can be calculated only 59 per cent of their transboundary basin area is covered by operational arrangements, and only 17 of those countries have all their transboundary basins covered. This falls far

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.E.25.

short of having all transboundary basins covered by operational arrangements by 2030, in line with the ambition set in the 2030 Agenda.

39. Beyond the work on indicator 6.5.2, the Water Convention secretariat has actively contributed to the UN-Water activities supporting implementation and monitoring of Goal 6, in particular the development of the UN-Water analytical brief on *Water and Sanitation Interlinkages Across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and *Sustainable Development Goal 6: Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation*.

## **B. Lessons learned and challenges**

40. Both the findings of the 2018 *Synthesis Report* and the outcomes of the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development held in 2018 indicate that the ECE region is not on track to achieve Goal 6.

41. The region is still far from reaching universal and equitable access to safe water and sanitation for all. Despite progress made in the past decades, inequities in access persist. There remain large urban/rural disparities, unaddressed affordability issues and problems of access in specific settings such as schools, hospitals and prisons. Also, marginalized population groups such as minorities, rural women, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees require increased attention. In addition to access, the quality and safety of water and sanitation services requires serious policy attention.

42. Water scarcity is becoming more acute, even in previously water-rich countries. This entails heavy economic impacts on all sectors, strong water competition and environmental challenges. Cost recovery and appropriate technologies for water saving, water recycling and reuse and nature-based solutions, such as natural water retention, are very important to reduce water use, especially in agriculture. Quality is also threatened by the complex chemical environment.

43. The fact that most water resources in the ECE region are shared across borders creates additional challenges in balancing water uses, allocating water and addressing water scarcity.

44. Solutions to water problems are often beyond the realm of the water sector. It is therefore key to find synergies with other sectors and to adopt an integrated or nexus perspective to evaluating actions by considering the impacts of different sectoral measures and their trade-offs. At the same time, when such interlinkages are not properly assessed, there are risks for sustainability.

## **C. Further steps**

45. Work in the above areas will continue under the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health, reinforced by the lessons learned.

46. In particular, given the specific challenges related to sanitation in the ECE region, from access to water reuse, a scoping study on the policy and technical practices and challenges in the region will be finalized by 2019.

47. Considering the financing challenges to promote sustainable development in transboundary basins, financing will become a new focus area of work under the Water Convention. Specific capacity-building activities are foreseen in this area in 2019–2021.

48. Similarly, the challenges identified in terms of water allocation in transboundary basins in the light of growing water scarcity will be addressed through the development of a handbook based on existing practices, covering the key aspects of equitable and sustainable



allocation of water in the transboundary context, addressing both surface waters and groundwaters, and also environmental flows.

## **IV. Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents**

### **A. Overview of main achievements and key findings**

49. Activities under the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) have supported countries in the safe management of technological hazards in the form of industrial installations and in the reduction of related disaster risks. The Convention has assisted Governments in reducing the potential loss of life and environmental damage caused by industrial accidents, including those triggered by natural disasters, by investing in prevention and preparedness.

50. Through its Assistance Programme, the Convention has been assisting countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to implement Sustainable Development Goals 3, 9 and 12 and the Sendai Framework. Through the development of national self-assessments and action plans by Assistance Programme beneficiary countries, the Convention encourages the development of integrated policies on disaster resilience and fosters their alignment with disaster risk reduction strategies and action plans, developed in line with the Sendai Framework.

51. During the period 2015–2017, the Convention secretariat organized three subregional workshops on industrial accident prevention for countries of Central Asia; South-Eastern Europe; and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in order to enhance industrial safety and subregional cooperation and increase awareness with regard to the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, the Convention has been implementing a project on strengthening industrial safety in Central Asia (2016–2019) and a pilot project to strengthen the safety of mining operations (2018–2019), in particular tailings management facilities, in Kazakhstan and beyond in Central Asia. Both projects aim to support Central Asian countries in enhancing industrial safety and, thus, protecting human health and the environment.

52. In the framework of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Ljubljana, 28–30 November 2016), a joint seminar was held to showcase and examine how the work of ECE and OECD on industrial and chemical accidents prevention, preparedness and response contributes to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the goals and priority actions set out in the Sendai Framework. Participants concluded that Parties to the Convention were making progress at the national level in this respect, and that the Industrial Accidents Convention played an important role in supporting countries in the implementation of the respective global commitments.

53. With respect to Goal 11, the secretariats of the Industrial Accidents Convention, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, and the ECE Committee on Housing and Land Management have collaborated on activities on land-use planning and industrial safety, bringing together the safety, environmental assessment and planning communities for more effective awareness-raising and cooperation. Such activities included the development of the ECE *Guidance on Land-Use Planning, the Siting of Hazardous Activities and related Safety Aspects*,<sup>2</sup> a related video and the holding of two events: a workshop on land-use planning, the siting of hazardous activities and related

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.E.6.

safety aspects (Geneva, 13 May 2016); and a seminar on land-use planning and industrial safety (Mechelen, Belgium, 16–17 May 2018).

54. Regarding Sustainable Development Goal target 6.3, the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents, co-led by the Water Convention, developed draft safety guidelines and good practices on the management and retention of firefighting water, providing general recommendations (ECE/MP.WAT/2018/9-ECE/CP.TEIA/2018/12) and technical and organizational recommendations (ECE/MP.WAT/2018/10-ECE/CP.TEIA/2018/13).

55. The Convention secretariat has continued to actively contribute to the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Industrial Accidents, which considers synergies among a wide group of international stakeholder organizations in the field of industrial accident prevention and preparedness, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework. As part of an inter-agency effort, guidance has been prepared, in cooperation with other international organizations, to support countries in meeting their commitments under the Sendai Framework, with respect to man-made and technological hazards.<sup>3</sup>

## **B. Lessons learned and challenges**

56. Countries are not always fully aware of the linkages between existing legal agreements such as the ECE Industrial Accidents Convention and global policy commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework. The substantive awareness-raising and assistance activities under the Convention have played a crucial role in this regard and have improved the understanding by Parties to the Convention and beneficiary countries of its Assistance Programme of these linkages.

57. Some countries lack adequate knowledge about identifying existing or planned industrial facilities and their potential transboundary effects in case of an accident. Several countries also lack access to programmes or resources to support awareness, knowledge and skills to build capacity for disaster risk reduction, and related capacity development opportunities. As the Sendai Framework addresses the management of man-made and technological hazards and the reduction of related risks, which was not part of the previous framework for disaster reduction, the Industrial Accidents Convention has an important role to play in supporting countries address the sub-set of technological and industrial hazards.

## **C. Further steps**

58. The Industrial Accident Convention's draft long-term strategy until 2030 (ECE/CP.TEIA/2018/5), expected to be adopted in December 2018 at the next Conference of the Parties, sets out the Convention's overall vision until 2030: to significantly increase industrial safety and reduce technological disaster risks through the Convention's full implementation, its wide recognition as a legal instrument for technological disaster risk reduction under the Sendai Framework and its contribution to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. To implement this vision, the Convention will continue to contribute expertise to relevant regional and global initiatives, building on ongoing efforts

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<sup>3</sup> See United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Man-made and Technological Hazards*, Words into Action Guidelines series, 2018 public consultation version available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/words-action-guidelines-man-madetechnological-hazards-2018-public-consultation-version>.

to enhance outreach through partnerships with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and other organizations, offering policy guidance, tools and good practices for the prevention of and preparedness for industrial accidents.

59. For example, the Convention will contribute a sub-chapter on chemical and industrial hazards to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be launched at the sixth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Geneva, 13–17 May 2019).

60. The Convention will also continue to address the linkages with the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework through future capacity-building efforts. Awareness-raising for all Parties will naturally continue, for example through a seminar on risk assessment methodologies to be held on 4 December 2018 as part of the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, organized in follow-up to the joint ECE/OECD seminar on fostering implementation of the sustainable development agenda for industrial accidents prevention, preparedness and response (see para. 50 above).

## **V. Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers**

### **A. Overview of main achievements and key findings**

61. The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, owing to their cross-cutting nature, can play a role in the achievement of virtually all of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as ending poverty (Goal 1); health protection (Goal 3); water and sanitation management (Goal 6); clean energy (Goal 7); green economy (Goals 8, 9 and 12); the reduction of inequalities (Goal 10); sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12); climate action (Goal 13); tourism (Goals 8, 12, 14 and 15); and urban planning (Goals 11 and 13). In particular, the work under the Convention and its Protocol has helped Governments to achieve peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16), by promoting effective, accountable and transparent governance; effective access to information; effective and inclusive public participation and transparency in national and international decision-making; and effective and equal access to justice for all. Furthermore, like the two treaties, Goal 16 itself is cross-cutting and pivotal for the implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda.

62. Decision-making on sustainable development concerns a wide range of policies, projects, strategies, plans and legal acts. The Convention's activities helped to build the capacities of authorities to apply effective public participation procedures for decision-making related to all of these. The work on access to justice assisted Parties in establishing effective frameworks for access to remedies by the public, thereby reinforcing the rule of law and strong institutions. Furthermore, the activities helped to enhance transparency and public participation in international decision-making regarding areas such as climate change, chemicals and waste, natural resources and biosafety, health, trade and energy. The Convention and the Protocol also enabled Governments to establish coordinated reporting systems on the release of hazardous chemical substances and to promote easy online access to them and other environmental information. It facilitated early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.

63. Support to countries was provided by developing recommendations, guidance material<sup>4</sup> and electronic information tools, such as the Aarhus Clearinghouse and PRTR.net, and through advisory services to Governments and international organizations. The treaties also provided platforms for sharing knowledge and expertise to build countries' capacities for the attainment of the Goals. Dialogue was fostered among authorities, technical experts, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders by organizing meetings of subsidiary bodies, workshops and round tables. A number of Parties reported on different occasions how the treaties were helping them to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

64. The treaties' activities also lead to solid political obligations. The 2017 joint high-level segment of the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol (Budva, Montenegro, 14 September 2017) included a multi-stakeholder debate on the role of the treaties in implementing the Goals. By adopting the Budva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Our Sustainable Future (ECE/MP.PP/2017/16/Add.1-ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/2/Add.1), Parties took a commitment to promote effective public participation and access to information and justice and to raise awareness of the treaties in the context of the Goals.

65. The work also fostered international cooperation between Parties, organizations and other stakeholders in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional and global coordination mechanisms have been established to facilitate the promotion of synergies and partnerships. Last but not least, the knowledge gathered under the two treaties was used by countries beyond the region. For instance, advisory support was provided to the development of the recently adopted Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which in its turn will help to further the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in that region.

## **B. Lessons learned and challenges**

66. The following lessons have been learned from the work under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol:

(a) The environment is at the very heart of efforts to attain the Goals and access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters should be seen as universal principles guiding action in every context and providing spillover effects on other sectors;

(b) The Aarhus Convention and its Protocol are instrumental for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16, by providing solid frameworks, principles and procedures for effective access to information and justice and for the engagement of the public in decision-making related to sustainable development at the national and international levels;

(c) Given the cross-cutting nature of the Goals, in particular Goal 16, there is a crucial need to foster effective interministerial and intra-ministerial cooperation mechanisms and to use such mechanisms to promote the obligations of the Convention and the Protocol in sustainable development-related decision-making;

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<sup>4</sup> Available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/aarhus-convention/key-guidance-material.html>.

(d) The work under the treaties provided a platform to share relevant experiences and address challenges in achieving the Goals. At the same time, it demonstrated both gaps and opportunities to support their follow-up and review through reporting and compliance mechanisms;

(e) The two treaties have become a benchmark for other processes and have a key role to play in setting standards for transparency, access to justice and public participation in decision-making, inspiring others and helping to promote environmental democracy in Sustainable Development Goal-related activities in other regions and in other sectors;

(f) Effective and inclusive engagement of members of the public, non-governmental organizations, academia and other stakeholders could greatly reinforce and complement the ability of the Governments to achieve the Goals. The Convention and its Protocol are therefore particularly relevant to ensure the broad participation of the public in the implementation of the Goals, so that no one is left behind.;

(g) The increase in the harassment, silencing and even murder of environmental activists around the world, including in the ECE region, has been alarming. Parties jointly affirmed the commitment to ensure due protection of environmental activists and whistle-blowers so that they can exercise their rights in accordance with both treaties;

(h) Partner organizations played a significant role in capacity-building at the national, local and subregional levels. Aarhus Centres, where established, can serve as a platform to promote multi-stakeholder dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring the sustainability of these Centres remains crucially important.

## C. Further steps

67. Governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention and the Protocol and their coordination mechanisms will continue to provide effective platforms to share good practices and address the challenges to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice relevant to the achievement and review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

68. The work will continue building authorities' capacities to ensure that when aligning legislation, plans, programmes and policies with the Goals, this is done through a transparent and participatory process in accordance with the provisions of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol.

69. The outcomes of the work under the Convention and the Protocol can serve as inputs to the follow-up and review of implementation of the Goals, in particular Goal 16, which will undergo in-depth review in 2019, including as inputs to the voluntary national reviews and reviews by the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and other relevant forums.

70. Further work needs to be undertaken to:

(a) Assist countries in identifying and applying measurable indicators in relation to the implementation of the environmental dimension of Goal 16 and, possibly, other relevant Goals;

(b) Include information in national implementation reports and in relevant reviews (for example, environmental performance reviews, state-of-the-environment reports, regional environmental assessments, voluntary national reviews and reviews by regional forums and the high-level political forum on sustainable development) on how

public participation and access to information and justice were promoted in the context of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

71. Efforts should be made to promote:

(a) Greater political support for the use of the frameworks and approaches provided by the Convention and the Protocol, including by other multilateral environmental agreements and processes, to pursue Sustainable Development Goal-related activities with transparency and the effective involvement of the public;

(b) Transparent and participatory decision-making in relation to the Goals among different (non-environmental) authorities at the national level and among other multilateral environmental agreements, ECE programmes and international forums at the international level;

(c) Timely and effective administrative or judicial review procedures, by eliminating standing-related, financial and other barriers, strengthening the capacities of review bodies and collecting relevant statistics to support attainment of Goal 16;

(d) The use of pollutant release and transfer registers for fact-based decision-making in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

(e) Synergy across sectors and within ECE activities through the combination of environmental information, including pollutant release and transfer register data, with other types of data, such as health, infrastructure, demographic and economic data, and advancing disclosure of information through e-government and open data initiatives for the purpose of achieving and measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals;

(f) The accession of non-ECE countries to the Convention and Protocol in the context of efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, for example as part of the recommendations of environmental performance reviews.

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