

Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on
Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers
to the Convention on Access to Information,
Public Participation in Decision-making and
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Working Group of the Parties

Third meeting,

Geneva, 20 and 21 November 2013

Item 4(d) of the provisional agenda

OUTCOMES OF THE SURVEY ON THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Note by the secretariat¹

This document presents the outcomes of the survey that was conducted in line with Communication Strategy (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.2)² endorsed by the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) at their fourth session (Chisinau, 2011) and welcomed by the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention at their first meeting (28-29 November 2011). The survey's objective was to evaluate whether current communication activities are perceived as relevant and successful by countries and stakeholders, and in what areas there is a need for improvement. The document was made available to the Working Group of the Parties for information.

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¹ This document was not formally edited.

² http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/docs/2011/ece.mp.pp.2011.2.add.2_eng.pdf

Summary of Outcomes of the survey on the Communication strategy

- Survey was conducted in line with Communication strategy (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.2) and its objective was to evaluate whether current communication activities are perceived as relevant and successful by countries and stakeholders, and in what areas there is a need for improvement.
- All together 33 completed questionnaires from countries and NGOs were received and analysed.
- Survey analysis structure presents separately results from countries and from NGOs and also contains a chapter on comparison of responses between countries and NGOs. Annex to the Survey results contains a list of countries and NGOs that submitted their responses.
- Summary of results:
 - Majority of countries and NGOs are satisfied with communication about the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs).
 - Most countries and NGOs have an impression they are fairly well informed and feel they know a fair amount about the Convention and the Protocol.
 - Most respondents believe it is most important for them to receive information about Meeting of the Parties, Working Groups and Task Forces.
 - Great majority of both countries and NGOs believe the secretariat and the website are the two most important information sources; they also use these two sources most for their work; and would prefer to receive most of information about what is going on about the Convention and its Protocol from these two sources.
 - Most respondents believe communication should be on a monthly level, though several answered it should be weekly or quarterly.
 - Most respondents would prefer personal communication, but also through website.
 - Analysis also considered open-ended questions for additional insights.

1. About the survey

This survey has been prepared pursuant to the Communication strategy (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.2) endorsed by the Meeting of Parties to the Aarhus Convention on its fourth session on 29 June-1 July 2011 and welcomed by the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs at its first meeting on 28-29 November 2011.

The survey was conducted to identify the needs of national focal points (NFPs), Aarhus Centres, Regional Environmental Centres and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The European ECO Forum coordinated the survey for non-governmental organizations and collected the responses. The answers to the survey helped to evaluate whether current communication activities are perceived as relevant and successful or not, and in what areas there is a need for improvement.

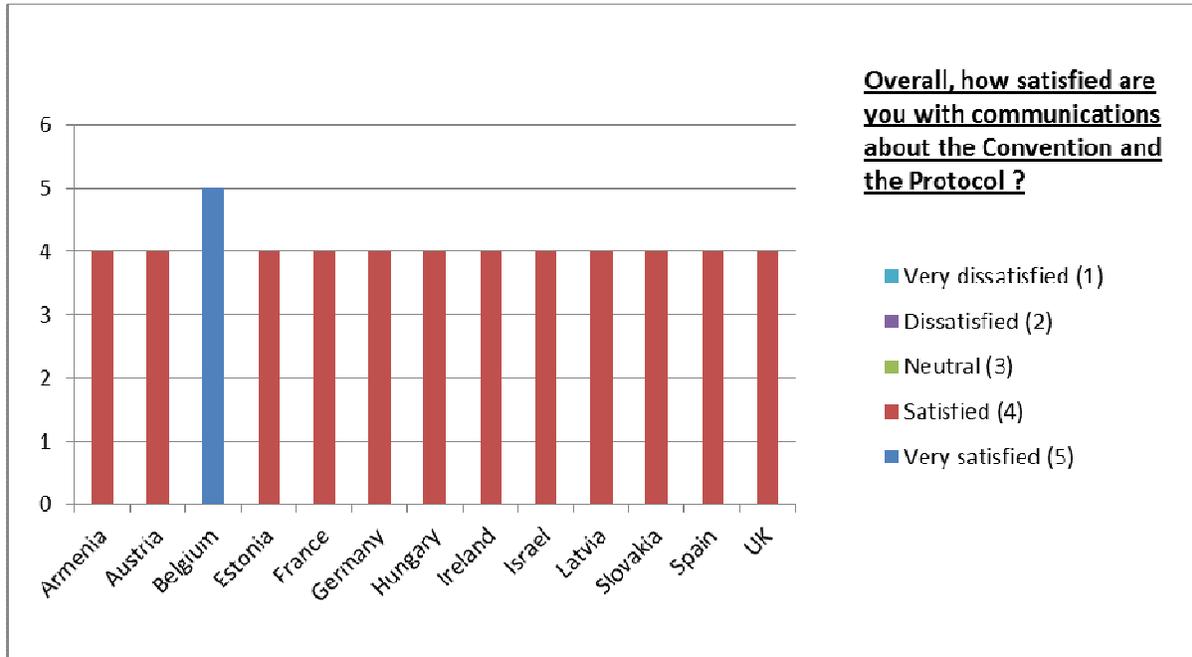
Analysis of the survey is based on 33 completed questionnaires. Secretariat received 16 filled-in questionnaires from 13 different countries (some countries submitted a separate questionnaire for the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs). 17 filed-in questionnaires were received from NGOs. No questionnaires were received from Aarhus Centres and Regional Environmental Centres.

The survey was composed of 12 questions, out of which 9 were closed-ended and 3 were open-ended.

2. Analysis of results for countries

Question 1:

Overall, how satisfied are you with communications about the Convention and the Protocol?

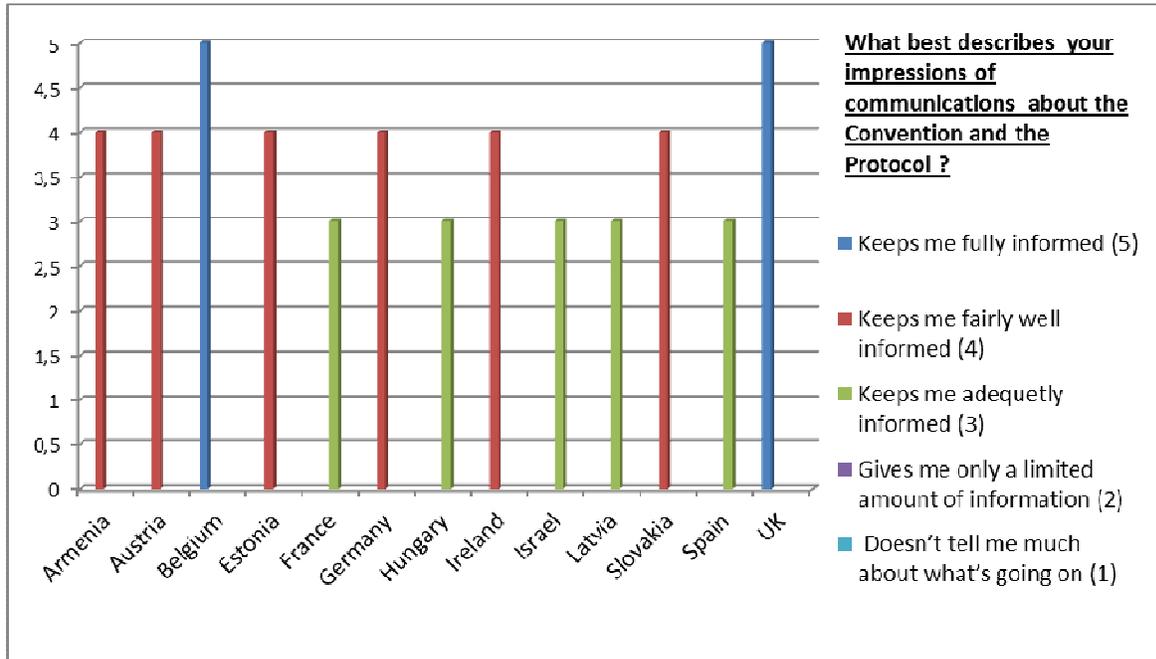


Comment:

As the bar chart shows, the trend is constant, meaning that 12 out of the 13 countries surveyed declared themselves “satisfied”(a level of 4 out of 5) with the communications about the Convention and the Protocol, with the exception of Belgium which declared itself “very satisfied”.

Question 2:

What best describes your impressions of communications about the Convention and the Protocol?

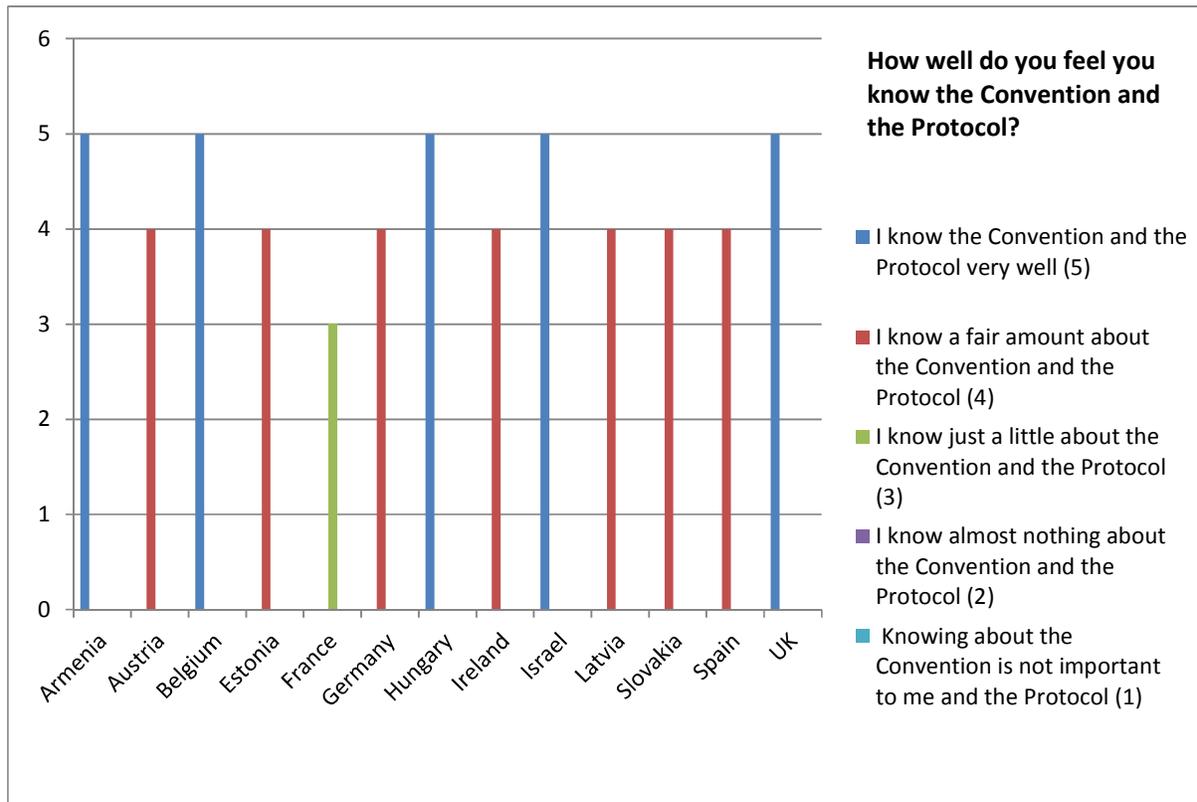


Comment:

As the bar chart shows, the trend is rather fluctuant, meaning that many countries gave a range of different replies. One of possible reasons is that the survey questions calls for a more “subjective” view, given the word “impressions” used. Nevertheless, the fluctuation is not too significant given the answers are spread between 3 (“keeps me adequately informed”) to 5 (“keeps me fully informed”). More in detail, 5 countries have stated to be “adequately informed”, 6 countries believe to be “fairly well informed” while Belgium and United Kingdom stated their impression is to be “fully informed”.

Question 3:

How well do you feel you know the Convention and the Protocol?



Comment:

As this bar chart shows, countries feel they are relatively knowledgeable about the Convention and the Protocol. Armenia, Belgium, Hungary, Israel and United Kingdom feel they know the Convention and the Protocol very well. 7 countries feel they know “a fair amount”, while only one country feels it knows “just a little”. This means 92% of countries (12 out of 13) are relatively well informed about the Convention and the Protocol.

Question 3 was followed by an open-ended question on **what is the best thing about the communication from the Convention and the Protocol** and below are selected representative answers from countries:

- Lot of communication establishes links with other topics dealt in other forums than traditional “Aarhus-like” ones.
- The best thing about communications from the Convention is that we are promptly informed about the latest news, issues etc. of the Aarhus Convention activities.
- Communication is focused on the most important information.
- As the National Focal Point, I receive all information I need promptly and have opportunities to participate in meetings.
- Common Secretariat and list e-mails for information distribution.
- In general, communications are quite efficient due to the use of email and websites.

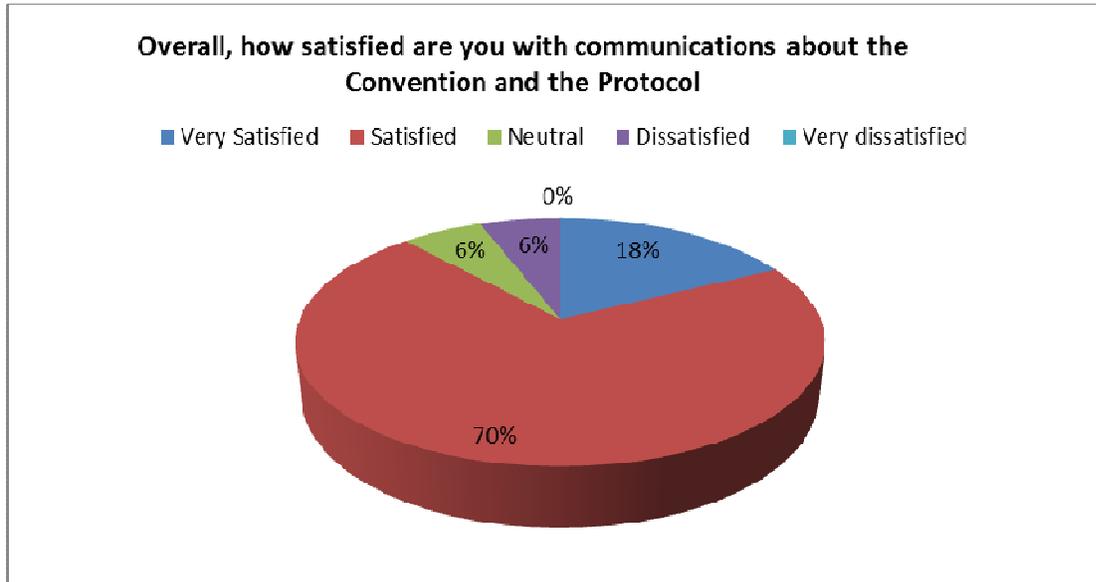
To summarize, respondents agree that communication is prompt and covers relevant and up-to-date issues.

Note: questions from 4-9 are analysed jointly with answers from NGOs in Section 4 (Comparison of results between countries and NGOs).

3. Analysis of results for NGOs

Question 1:

Overall, how satisfied are you with communications about the Convention and the Protocol?



Comment:

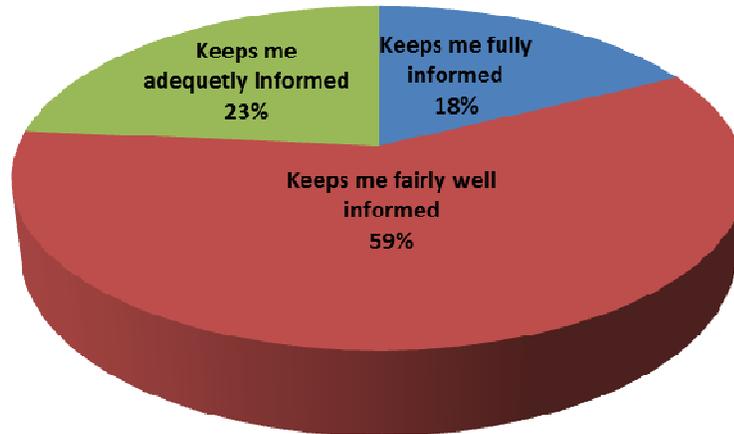
The pie chart shows a positive trend, with 70% of the NGOs declaring themselves “satisfied”, on a scale of 4 out of 5, whilst 18% said to be “very satisfied”, on a scale of 5 out of 5³. In other words, this means 88% of the NGOs that participated in the survey are satisfied with the communication of the Convention and the Protocol.

³ NGO survey results were analysed with the assistance of the European ECO Forum.

Question 2:

What best describes your impressions of communications about the Convention and the Protocol?

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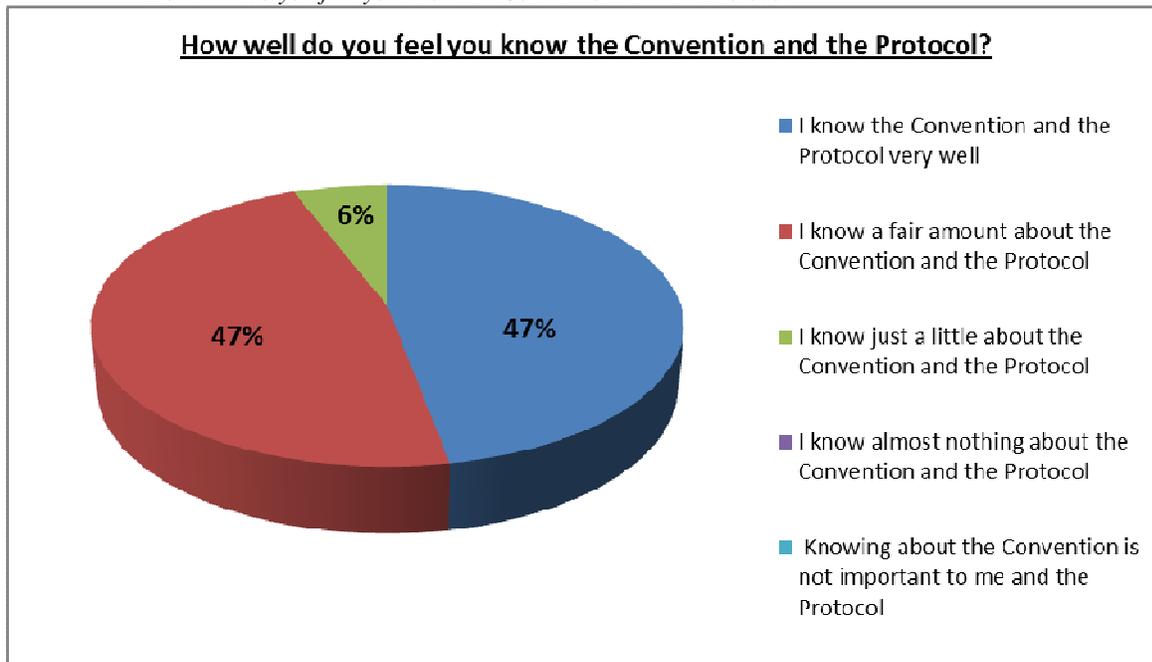


Comment:

The pie chart shows a positive trend, with nearly 60% of the NGOs declaring themselves “fairly informed”, on a scale of 4 out of 5, whilst 23% said to be “adequately informed”, on a scale of 3 out of 5. What is more, 18% said to be kept “fully informed”, on a scale of 5 out of 5. On a positive note, none of the NGOs has the impression to have “only a limited amount of information” or “doesn’t know much about what is going on”.

Question 3:

How well do you feel you know the Convention and the Protocol?



Comment:

The pie chart shows there is a significant split between 47% of NGOs that declare to know the Convention “very well”, on a scale of 5 out of 5, and those that say to know it “a fair amount”. This displays a positive trend that shows how NGOs are well aware of the Convention and the Protocol. This trend is not fully in congruence with results to Question 2 that shows 23% of NGOs declare themselves only “adequately” informed with regards to the Convention and the Protocol. On the other hand, this pie chart shows that respondents are aware and knowledgeable about the Convention and the Protocol as instruments, but what seems to be missing is how they could be more effectively informed about them through communications.

Question 3 was followed by an open-ended question on **what is the best thing about the communication from the Convention and the Protocol** and below are some selected representative answers from NGOs:

- The well organised webpage and information on upcoming meetings. But also information and news from the European ECO Forum.
- To see the progress made in different areas. It is important that information is not too comprehensive.
- The electronic media and the attachments with decisions.
- They are precise, give full scale information and they are digital in addition to being online available.
- Keeping civil society groups updates as if they were Party to the Convention.
- Get to see the same info as the government.
- They help to be informed just-in-time about the implementation and real application of the treaties at national level and the activities of Compliance Committee.
- International communication inside of NGO (European ECO Forum) community as well as regular information from the Secretariat.

- The website and the Clearinghouse mechanism.
- The Aarhus Convention communication system is generally very efficient and gives information on the Aarhus process and evolutions. It gives the opportunity to all national focal points, NGOs, etc. to be fairly well informed and work consistently for the implementation of the Convention.

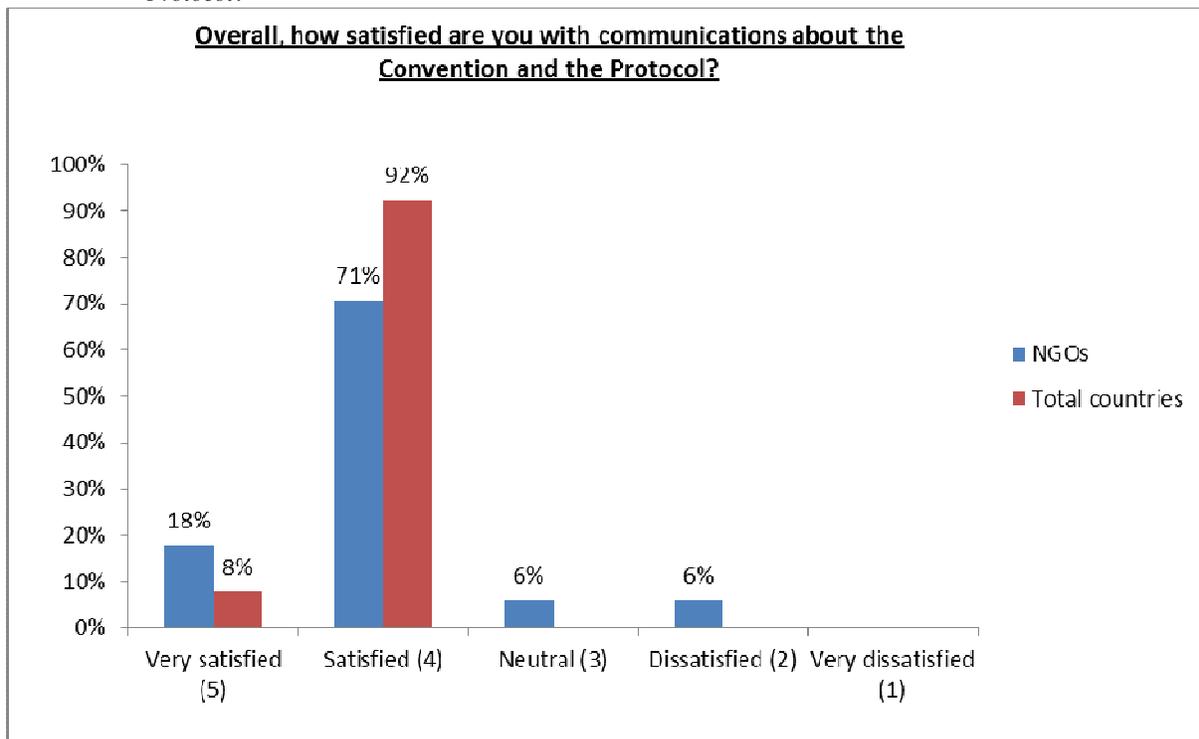
To summarize, respondents believe the communication is precise, they appreciate it is available in electronic form and is keeping them informed about relevant activities of the Convention and the Protocol.

Note: questions from 4-9 were analysed jointly with answers from Countries in section 4 (Comparison of results between Countries and NGOs).

4. Comparison of results between countries and NGOs

Question 1:

Overall, how satisfied are you with communications about the Convention and the Protocol?

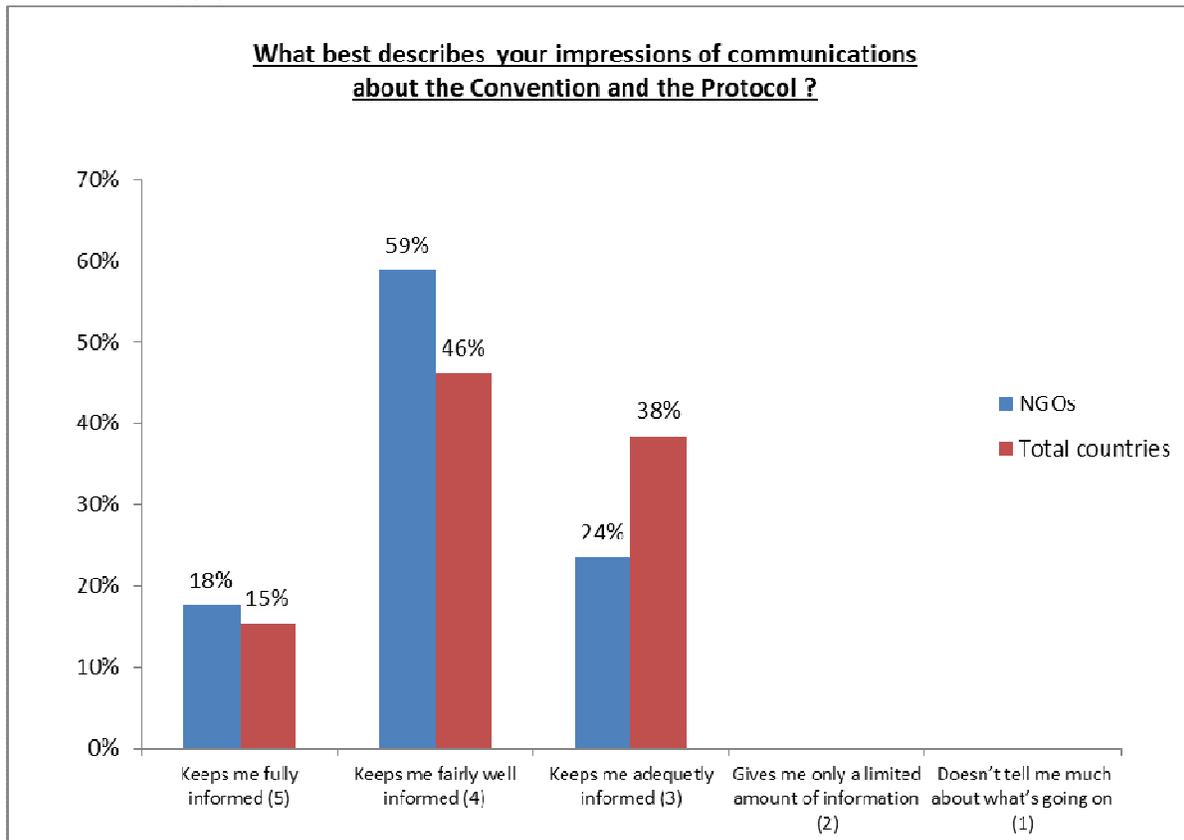


Comment:

There is a clear trend that both countries and NGOs are overall satisfied or very satisfied with the communication about the Convention and the Protocol. All countries (100%) responded with 4 and 5 to this question. With NGOs, however, there are more nuances. Many more NGOs than countries (18% vs 8%) are very satisfied with the communication. On the other hand, there are also NGOs that are either neutral (6%) or dissatisfied (6%) with the communication.

Question 2:

What best describes your impressions of communications about the Convention and the Protocol?

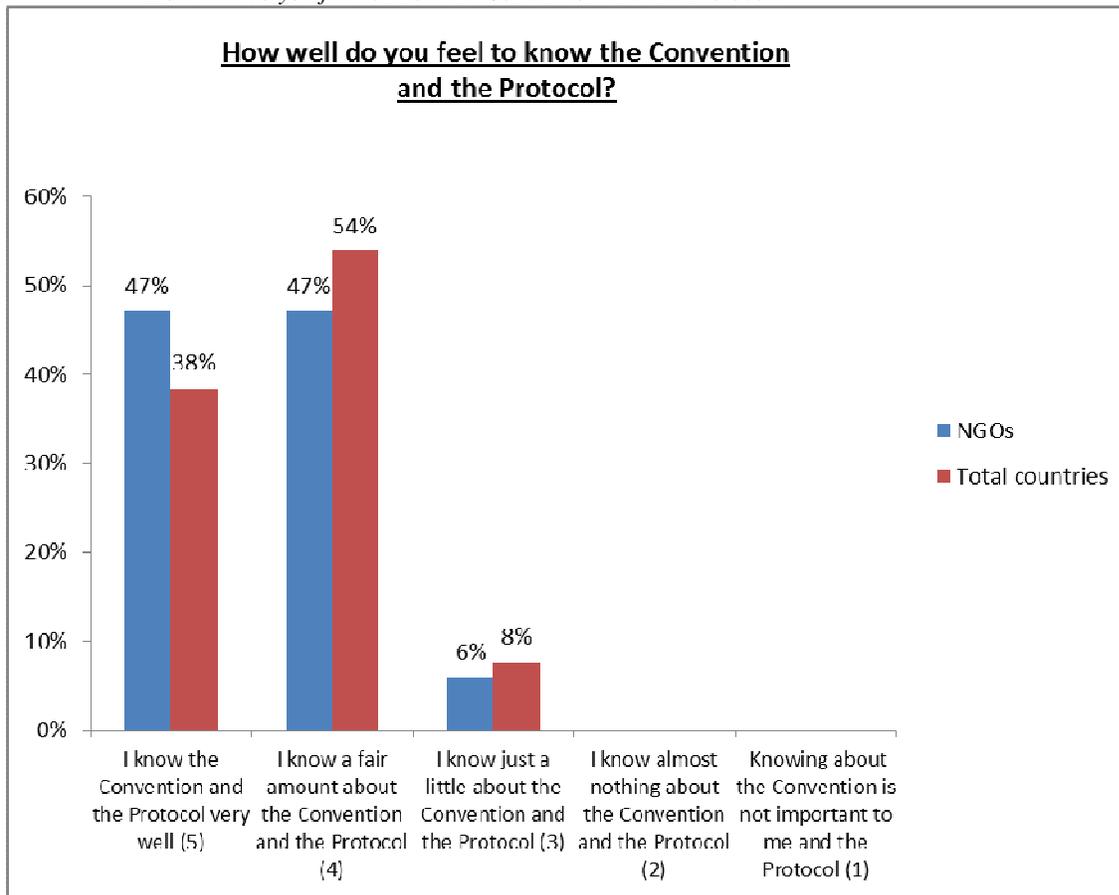


Comment:

Impression of both countries and NGOs is that communication about the Convention and the Protocol keeps them relatively well informed. What is interesting is that 38% of countries have an impression they are only adequately informed, while countries seem to be much more satisfied with the communication (Question 1). 59% of NGOs have an impression they are fairly well informed.

Question 3:

How well do you feel to know the Convention and the Protocol?

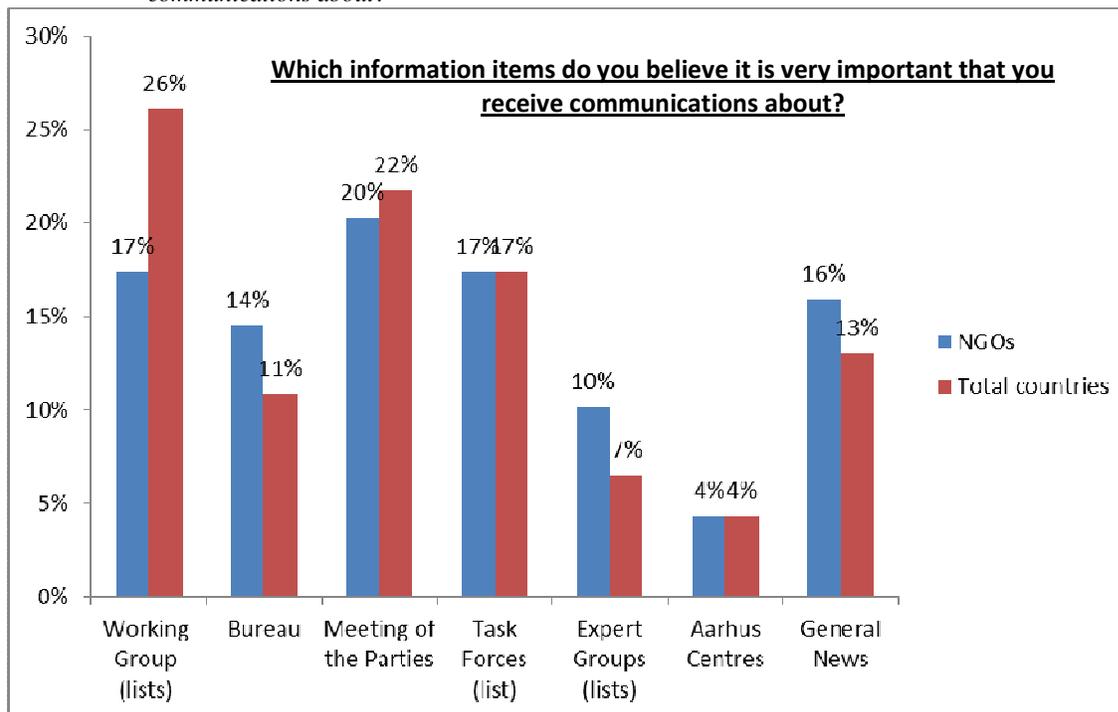


Comment:

Majority of countries feel they know a fair amount about the Convention and the Protocol (54%), while 8% feel they know just a little about the Convention and the Protocol. NGOs', on the other hand, feel more knowledgeable about the Convention and the Protocol. 47% feel they know the Convention and the Protocol very well, while only 6% feel they know just a little about the two treaties.

Question 4:

Which information items do you believe it is very important that you receive communications about?



Comment:

On the question regarding the importance of different information items, countries believe Working Group (26%), Meeting of the Parties (22%) and Task Forces (17%) are the three most important. At the same time countries believe Aarhus Centres (4%) and Expert Groups (7%) are the least important for them to receive information about. Answers from NGOs are more distributed, though. Meeting of the Parties (20%) is the most important information item for them. While Working Groups (17%), Task Force (17%) and General news (16%) are all equally important. Least important communication item NGOs would like to receive information about are the Aarhus Centres (4%).

Overall both countries and NGOs believe Meeting of the Parties is the most important information item, for countries this is also Working Group.

Question 4 was followed by an open-ended question on “**What other topics do you feel are important for you to know more about and would you like to be included in future communications?**” Below are some answers from countries and NGOs:

Answers from countries

- Role of NGOs in different countries, their contribution to the Convention and the Protocol implementation, list of contact persons.
- Publication of the CVs of the members of the Secretariat of the Convention and Protocol on the internet would be of interest (as e.g. for the members of the Compliance Committee).
- Current level of information is enough.
- Information on main developments under the other UNECE MEAs, in particular if there is a connection to the Aarhus Convention.

- Summary about latest actions of NGOs.
- Information on the work of the Aarhus Convention and PRTR Compliance Committees.
- We are very satisfied and fully informed about all important topics included in the Aarhus Convention communication. The communications provided from the Convention secretariat, in our point of view are sufficient and adequate.
- It would be interesting to share the information provided by Parties to the Secretariat on the implementation of the Aarhus provisions at national level.

Answers from NGOs

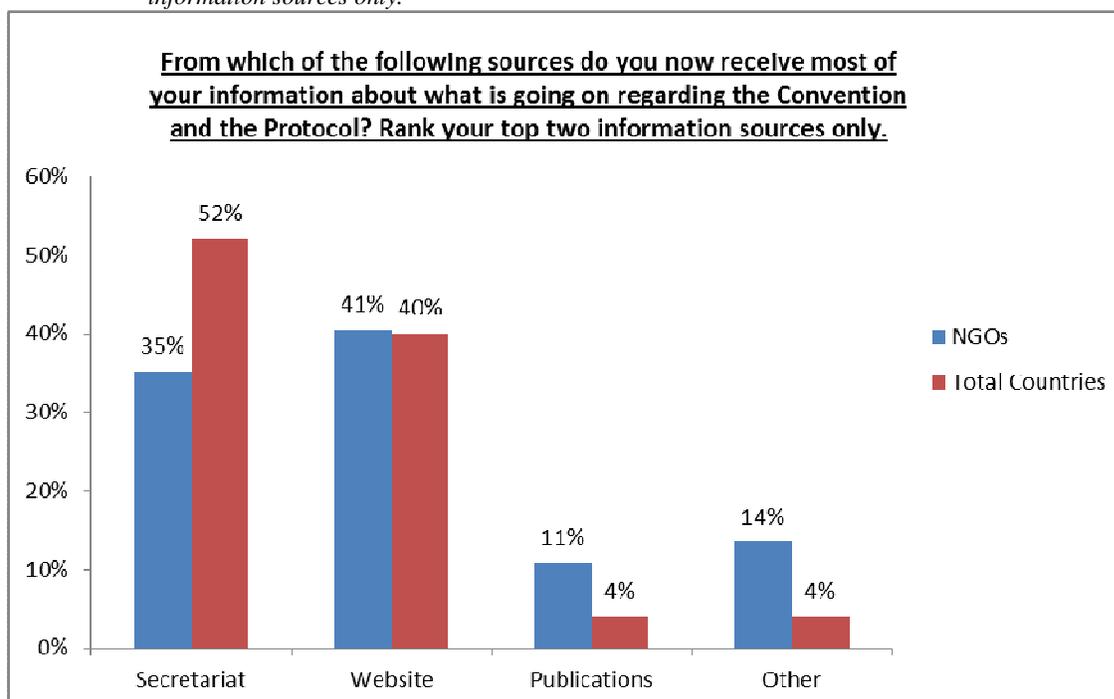
- To receive information on new complaints arriving to the Compliance Committee and when documents regarding this are publicised on the webpage.
- To receive an e-mail when new important publications are posted on the website.
- Information from the Working Group of the Parties regarding public participation in International fora.
- Status of compliance cases, including implementation of MoP decisions.
- Useful practices.
- Compliance Committee related issues.
- ACCC case law, national implementation reports and case law, the EU case law (not Member States but EU, e.g. Commission, Court, etc.).
- News about decisions or acts made to guarantee the real application at the national level, starting by the national legislations on the Aarhus Convention principles and new publications (books, researches, articles etc.) about the Aarhus Convention application from all Parties.
- Experience exchange between countries/organisations on concrete items and consultations, questions/answers.
- News and national approaches with regard to implementation of the demands of Convention and its Protocol.
- About implementation of access to justice, including best practice, international cases etc.
- Early information about upcoming meetings (dates) and more country specific information.
- Seminars/training for journalists.

To summarize, few respondents from countries would like to receive more information about the NGOs and about the developments in other ECE MEAs, while some respondents believe current level of information is sufficient.

NGOs responded they would like to know more about the Compliance Committee work and cases, best practice example from other countries as well as receive a notification about new uploads to the website.

Question 5:

From which of the following sources do you now receive most of your information about what is going on regarding the Convention and the Protocol? Rank your top two information sources only.



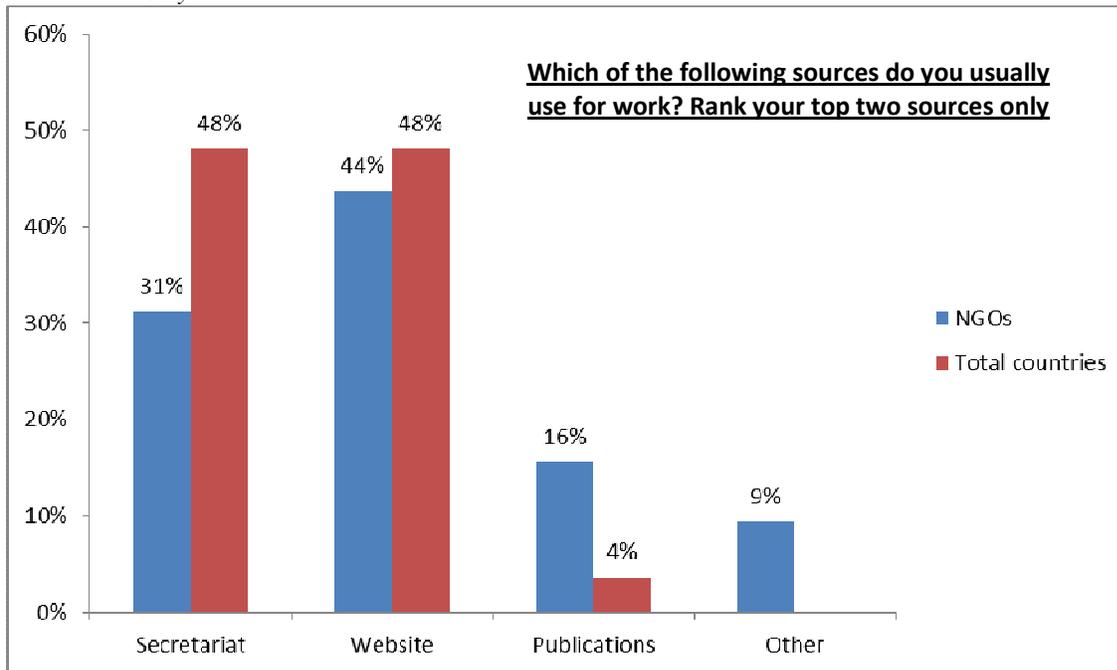
Comment:

Majority of countries (52%) responded they receive most of information from the secretariat. Countries also receive substantial amount of information from website (40%), while only a minor share of information is received from publications (4%) and other sources (4%).

NGOs, however, receive information about the Convention and the Protocol from various sources, mainly from website (41%). NGOs also responded they receive 35% of information from the secretariat, 11% from publications and 14% from other sources. It can be concluded that secretariat and the website are the main source of information both for countries and NGOs.

Question 6:

Which of the following sources do you usually use for work? Rank your top two sources only

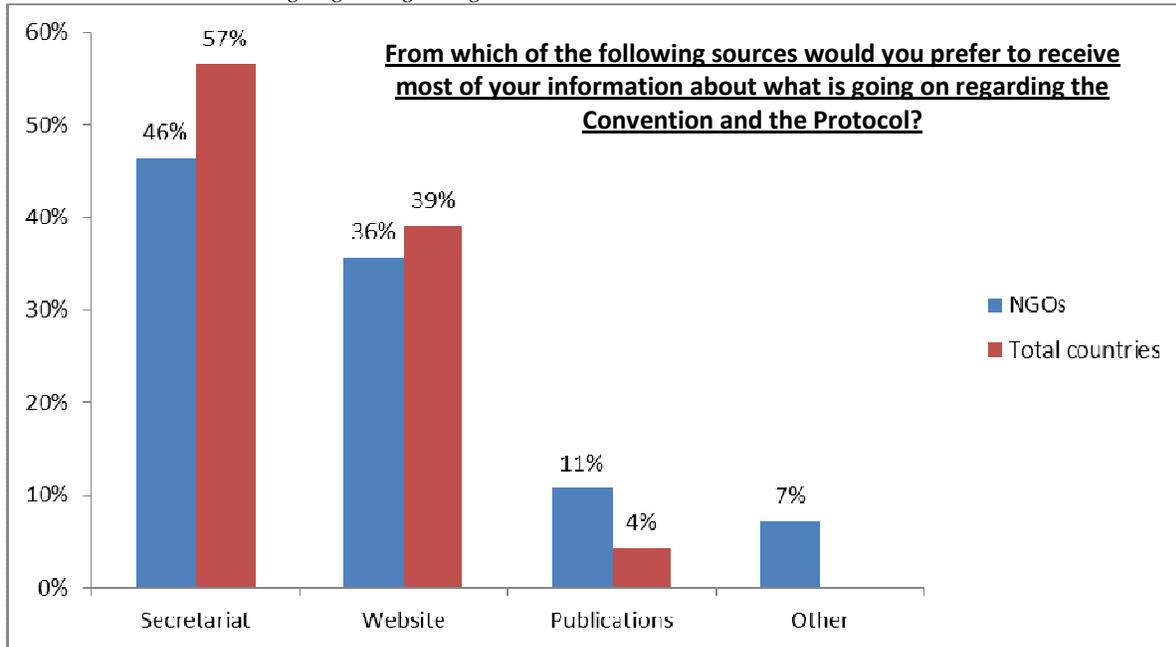


Comment:

Similarly as in previous question, 96% of countries responded they use information from Secretariat and website as two most important sources for their work. 75% of NGOs would agree that they rely mainly on these two sources for their work, while 25% of NGOs would also use publications and other sources. Consequently, it is important that communication from those two information sources is accurate, prompt and relevant for the users.

Question 7:

From which of the following sources would you prefer to receive most of your information about what is going on regarding the Convention and the Protocol?

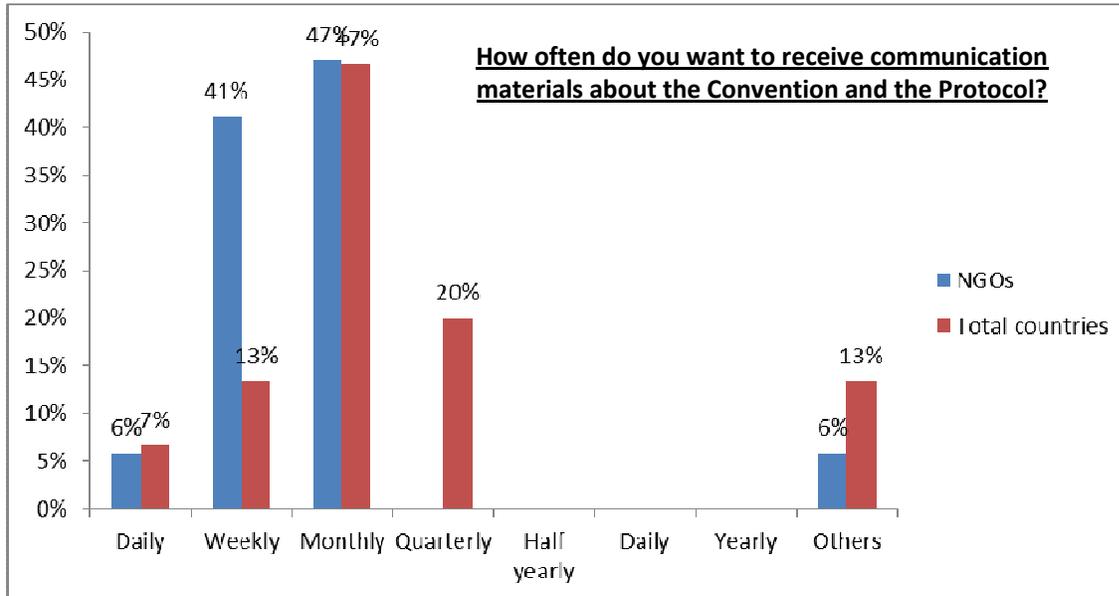


Comment:

As already indicated in Question 5 and 6, for both countries and NGOs, secretariat and website are the two main sources of information and they mainly use these two sources for their work. Opinion of both countries (96%) and NGOs (82%) is that they would prefer to receive most information about the Convention and the Protocol from these two sources also in the future. Nevertheless, 17% of NGOs would like to receive information also from publications and other sources.

Question 8:

How often do you want to receive communication materials about the Convention and the Protocol?

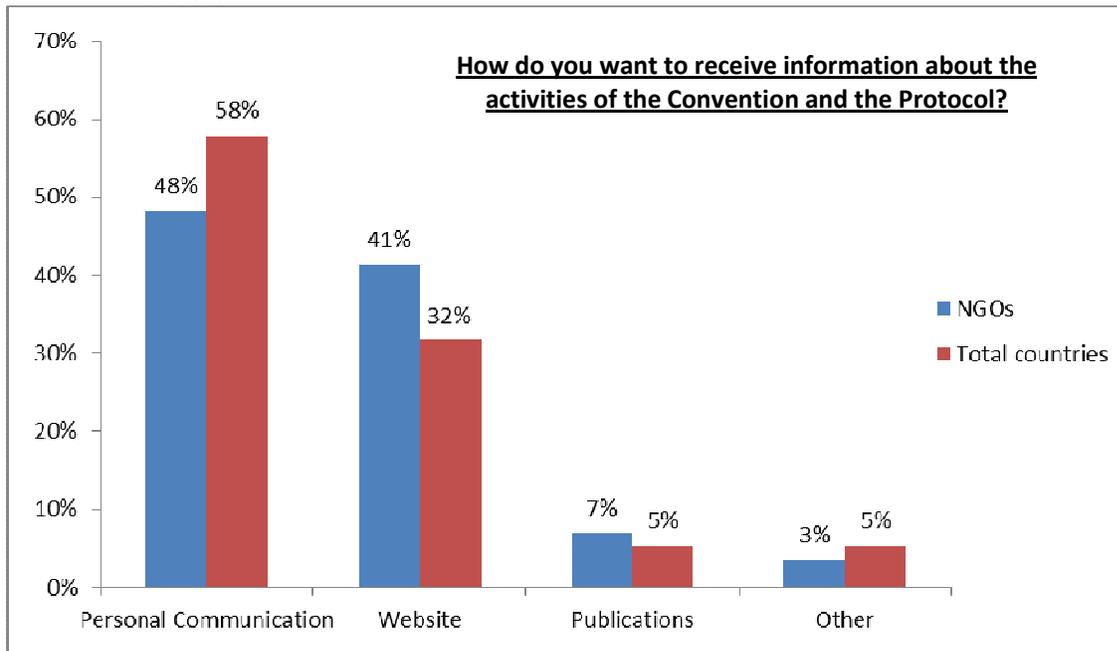


Comment:

Regarding the frequency at which respondents want to receive information, almost half (47%) of countries and NGOs believe monthly communication cycles are sufficient. What is interesting is that 41% of NGOs believe communication should be weekly, or even daily (6%). 20% of countries, on the other hand, believe communication should be less frequent, i.e. quarterly. While 13% of countries believe it should be weekly, or even daily (7%).

Question 9:

How do you want to receive information about the activities of the Convention and the Protocol?



Comment:

58% of countries and 48% of NGOs would like to receive information about the activities of the Convention and the Protocol through personal communication. The second most preferred answer was through website (32% of countries and 41% of NGOs). Only very few respondents from countries and NGOs would like to receive information through publications (5% and 7%, respectively) or via other means (5% and 3%, respectively). Analysis of this question clearly indicates that personal communication is still the preferred way of communication, especially for countries. However, since countries, secretariat and NGOs have limited resources, it would be extremely difficult to commit to even higher degree of personal communication than at present. Use of website, electronic communication and video conferences should be encouraged as well.

Question 9 was followed by an open-ended question on ‘Which messages/news encourage you to promote the Convention and the Protocol (directive from minister; suggestion from international organization; publication in mass media)?’ Below are some answers from countries and NGOs:

Answers from countries

- As focal point for a country, any kind of message has to be interpreted and transmitted to the right person(s) but it’s mainly the message towards the ministers or messages from international organisations that draw our attention.
- All of the before mentioned aspects are encouraging. Input from NGOs is also a good encouragement.
- Messages from authorities and NGOs.
- A user-friendly, interactive website containing general information would be useful in helping to promote the Convention and the Protocol to the public and stakeholders.
- The progress and achievements of other countries; Publications regarding the use and benefits from the Convention and the Protocol.
- All types of messages/news connecting to the Convention encourage us to promote the most important topics/issues in appropriate way to the public.
- Ratification of the Convention and the Protocol by new Parties; accession by states from outside the UNECE region; access & participation initiatives in other UN regions; general news on Aarhus issues; implementation of the Aarhus provisions by the European Court of Justice and by Courts at national level.

Answers from NGOs

- No specific messages but the existence of the Convention, the Protocol and their Compliance mechanism.
- Showing success and best practices.
- Showing specific problems and its solutions.
- Format that can be forwarded to non Aarhus experts.
- Suggestion from international organization and publication in mass media – 2 respondents.
- Suggestion from international organization – 3 respondents.
- Suggestions from international organisations or upcoming events, meetings etc.
- Directive from minister.
- Publication in juridical media, publications for ECOs.
- Negative legislative changes, negative case law re the implementation of the Convention, countries and regions of the world being interested in the application of P10 and either joining the AC or creating their own access conventions.
- Messages about successful ratifications and implementation.
- Comparative analyses about implementation.
- Information about attempts to establish a convention / a protocol in other UN regions (with no regard to the sender).
- This does not depend on messages or news but is included in everyday activity.

- Generally it is news from developments in our own national situation or from the EEB/European ECO Forum, as well as Aarhus Secretariat emails.
- All messages/news over suggested are useful and welcomed to continue to fight for the application and respect of Aarhus Convention principles at local level.

To summarize, some countries responded they would like to receive more news from NGOs, as well as more examples of good practices. Some believe website needs to be more user-friendly and interactive in order to address needs of public and other stakeholders. Also NGOs believe even more examples of good practices could be communicated but also negative case law regarding the Convention. Communication could include more cooperation with international organizations and mass media.

Annex

List of countries and NGOs that returned filled-in questionnaire

List of countries that participated in the survey (in brackets their affiliation with the Convention or Protocol on PRTRs)

- Armenia⁴
- Austria⁵
- Belgium⁶
- Estonia⁷
- France⁸
- Germany⁹
- Hungary¹⁰
- Ireland¹¹
- Israel¹²
- Latvia¹³
- Slovakia¹⁴
- Spain¹⁵
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK)¹⁶

List of NGOs that participated in the survey

- Swedish Society for Nature Conservation
- Oekobuero (Austria)
- Ecoforum (Uzbekistan)
- AJA (Spain)
- EMLA (Hungary)
- UfU (Germany)
- Environmental Public Advocacy Centre (Armenia)

4 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Protocol on PRTRs.
5 Two questionnaires were submitted: for the Aarhus Convention and for the Protocol on PRTRs
6 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Protocol on PRTRs.
7 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Aarhus Convention.
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11 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Protocol on PRTRs.
12 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Protocol on PRTRs.
13 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Aarhus Convention.
14 Two questionnaires were submitted: for the Aarhus Convention and for the Protocol on PRTRs
15 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Aarhus Convention.
16 The completed questionnaire was submitted by the contact person for the Protocol on PRTRs

- Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership (Ireland)
 - Adriatic Greenet (Italy)
 - Green Dossier (Ukraine)
 - International Centre for Environmental Research (Georgia)
 - Legal Information Centre for NGOs (Slovenia)
 - Women in Europe for a Common Future (Netherlands)
 - Greenwomen (Kazakhstan)
 - Elliniki Etairia (Greece)
 - Terra-530 (Republic of Moldova)
 - European ECO Forum/EEB
-