Economic and Social Council

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

Fourth meeting
Madrid, 26 November 2015
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
**Implementation of the work programmes for 2011–2014
and 2015–2017, including financial matters**

Report on implementation of the work programmes of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2011–2014 and 2015–2017

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report was prepared by the secretariat pursuant to decisions I/6 and II/3 of the 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 (see ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/6, para. 4, and ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/3, para. 2, and annex, item F). It provides an overview of the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2011–2014 for the period 1 April to 31 December 2014, and of the implementation of the work programme for 2015–2017 up to 15 August 2015.

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Introduction

1.   Since the adoption of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) in 2003, 38 States have become Signatories to the Protocol and there are currently 33 Parties.

2.   This document provides an overview of the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2011–2014 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/6, annex I) from April to December 2014[1] and the implementation of the work programme for 2015–2017 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/3, annex) as of 15 August 2015, focusing on operational and organizational aspects.

3.   In its efforts to implement the work programmes, the secretariat made serious efforts to avoid duplication of work and inefficient use of resources through:

(a)   Pursuing synergies with activities under other partner organizations;

(b)   Conducting specific thematic surveys prior to activities in order to respond better to the needs of Parties and stakeholders;

(c)   Continuously increasing the use and development of electronic tools for Protocol activities (e.g., e-mail consultations, phone conferences, online databases, the online reporting tool for national implementation reports, the clearinghouse mechanism and the PRTR.net global portal).

I.   Overview of implementation of the work programme

A.   Compliance mechanism

4.   Since 1 April 2014, the Protocol Compliance Committee has held three meetings: the second (Geneva, 1–2 April 2014); third (Maastricht, Netherlands, 3–4 July 2014); and fourth (Geneva, 27–29 April 2015).[2] The main focus of the Committee's work was on lessons learned from the first reporting cycle under the Protocol. In this context, the Committee prepared a number of documents with the support of the secretariat:

(a)   A synthesis report (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/5)[3] based on the national implementation reports submitted in the 2014 reporting cycle, which was submitted to the Meeting of the Parties at its second session (Maastricht, Netherlands, 3–4 July 2015);

(b)   Two documents developed with inputs from Parties and stakeholders that are being submitted for the Working Group's consideration at its present session: draft guidance for reporting on the implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2015/6); and draft systemic issues arising under the Protocol and recommendations on how to address them (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2015/5).[4]

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[1]   The report on implementation of the work programme for 2011–2014 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/6) is available from http://www.unece.org/prtrmopp2_docs.html#/. It contains information on the implementation of the work programme up until 31 March 2014.

[2]   Meeting documents and other information on the work of the Compliance Committee are available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-cc.html.

[3]   Available from http://www.unece.org/prtrmopp2_docs.html#/.

[4]   Documents for the Working Group's fourth meeting are available from http://www.unece.org/prtrwgp4#/.

5.	The Committee also discussed the need to amend the format for the implementation reports (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/5, annex). Based on the comments received from Parties, the Committee agreed that there was no need to revise the format at this stage. At the same time, it considered that all the concerns raised by Parties in relation to the format should be addressed through the guidance for reporting currently being developed.

6.	The Committee also noted that the national implementation reports from a number of Parties suggested that there may be issues to address concerning the fulfilment of the obligation to establish national pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) as opposed to reporting to regional reporting mechanisms, such as to the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR).[5] In order to determine whether this indicates a widespread failure fully to comply with the Protocol, the Committee decided to request the secretariat to further investigate the issue.

7.	The Committee has to date received no submissions by Parties concerning compliance by other Parties, no submissions by Parties concerning their own compliance, no formal referrals by the secretariat and no formal communications from the public regarding compliance with the Protocol.

## B.	Technical assistance

8.	Technical assistance activities may involve specific projects in countries needing assistance, including training workshops, guidance materials and expert assistance.

### 1.	Workshops and country-specific projects

9.	Preparatory work has been started with regard to a subregional workshop for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which is scheduled to take place in 2016. In addition, a project to promote PRTRs in South-Eastern Europe and the Republic of Moldova, funded by Germany, will be implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, with the advisory support from the secretariat, in 2016.

10.	During the reporting period, the secretariat continued providing substantive support to the implementation of the project under the Environment and Security Initiative umbrella on the promotion of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in Belarus. This included the promotion of the Protocol at an expert meeting on 23 June 2015 in Grodno with representatives of enterprises and local environmental authorities.

### 2.	Technical assistance via electronic tools

11.	The secretariat has continued managing the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy[6] and the PRTR.net global portal.[7] The PRTR.net global portal is used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to PRTRs. The Protocol secretariat maintained and updated PRTR.net in cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and continues pursuing close cooperation with UNITAR in order to ensure the effective use of PRTR.net and PRTR:Learn[8] by national focal points and stakeholders. For example, PRTR.net was synergized with the PRTR:Learn website (an interactive portal developed and managed by UNITAR). A project to upgrade PRTR.net and the Aarhus Clearinghouse is expected to be

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[5]	See http://prtr.ec.europa.eu/.

[6]	See http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/.

[7]	See http://www.prtr.net/.

[8]	See http://prtr.unitar.org/.

conducted by the Global Resource Information Database centre in Arendal, Norway (GRID-Arendal) in 2015–2016.

12. The secretariat continues administration of a database on capacity-building activities,[9] which serves as an information source for past, future and ongoing PRTR capacity-building activities. This includes a feature on PRTR.net to enable national focal points and stakeholders to log in and add data to the PRTR capacity-building activities database.

13. The Protocol on PRTRs section of the ECE website has been regularly updated in the intersessional period. In addition, section D below includes information regarding the online reporting tool.

2. Thematic surveys

14. To support the preparation of the draft reporting guidelines and draft report on systemic issues (see para. 4 (b) above), the secretariat also carried out a survey on lessons learned from the first reporting cycle, as well as to identify good practices and systemic challenges for the implementation of the Protocol, and whether Parties had any specific suggestions for the amendment of the reporting format for the second reporting round.

3. Framework for technical assistance

15. As requested by the Working Group at its second meeting (Geneva, 20−21 November 2012), the Governments of Armenia and Belarus prepared a proposal on activities for the promotion of the Protocol on PRTRs in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia on the basis of the outcomes of a consultation with national focal points of the countries concerned (see ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2012/2, para. 23 (c)−(e)).[10] The proposal was endorsed by the Meeting of the Parties at its second session, as a document describing an overall framework for possible areas for bilateral and multilateral cooperation (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.2).[11]

C. Information exchange on a technical level

16. The objective of information exchange on a technical level is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol. The method of work for information exchange is via meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, ad hoc meetings and the use of electronic tools.

17. In addition, sections B above and E below describe trainings, surveys, subregional workshops, electronic tools and other activities that enable information exchange on a technical level. Sections D and F below include information on the reporting mechanism and the meetings of the Working Group of the Parties.

D. Reporting mechanism

18. The objective of the reporting mechanism is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol and to this end also to facilitate reporting, the review of compliance and the exchange of experience. The method of work is via meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, exchange on a technical level of information on the application of electronic information tools and the use of the online national

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[9] Available from http://apps.unece.org/ehlm/pp/NIR/RLsearch.asp.
[10] Availbale from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28225.
[11] Available from http://www.unece.org/prtrmopp2_docs.html#/.

implementation reports database in the Aarhus Clearinghouse, the PRTR:Learn website, the PRTR capacity-building activities matrix and e-reporting.

19.   The secretariat has engaged a consultant to develop an online reporting system for the Protocol.[12] The online reporting tool was used for the submission of national implementation reports by the Parties for the 2014 reporting cycle. In addition, section B above includes information on other electronic tools.

20.   Following the failure of Albania, Cyprus and Slovenia to submit their national implementation reports for the 2014 reporting cycle before the second session of the Meeting of the Parties, these Parties were invited to report by 1 October 2014. As of 15 August 2015, Albania and Cyprus have submitted their reports. Slovenia has not submitted its report.

E.   Awareness-raising on and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes

21.   The objective of awareness-raising on and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes is to expand knowledge of the Protocol throughout the ECE region and beyond, to increase the number of Parties to the Protocol and to further the application of the Protocol in the context of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and related processes (e.g., the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)/International Conference on Chemicals Management under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)). The activity is pursued through participation in key regional and international events and processes; provision of support to workshops organized by others; preparation of leaflets, publications, news bulletins and other materials on the Protocol; updating the website; and writing and reviewing articles on the Protocol.

22.   The secretariat has carried out this activity through the participation of, or arranging for the participation of, representatives of Convention and Protocol bodies at a number of relevant workshops and other events in various countries. Notably, the secretariat promoted the work under the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes, among others, at the following events:

        (a)   The first meeting of the Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System (Geneva, 12 May 2014);

        (b)   The eighth session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (Geneva, 14–15 May 2014);

        (c)   The Symposium of the Commission Nationale du Débat Publique (Paris, 16−17 June 2014);

        (d)   The seventeenth meeting of the OECD Task Force on PRTRs (Santiago, Chile, 6–7 October 2014);

        (e)   A PRTR capacity-building workshop (Santiago, Chile, 9 October 2014) organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) with a presentation highlighting aspects regarding the Protocol's legally binding nature;

        (f)   The fifth and sixth meetings (Geneva, 15 April and 24 June 2015, respectively) of the Issue Management Group on Sound Management of Chemicals and Wastes.

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[12]   Available from http://www2.unece.org/prtr-nir/.

23.   Furthermore, to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, the secretariat serviced the ninth meeting of the International PRTR Coordinating Group (Santiago, Chile, 8 October 2014),[13] which was held back to back with the meeting of the OECD Task Force on PRTRs. The Coordinating Group maintained continuous close cooperation with the Global Environment Facility, GRID-Arendal, OECD, ECLAC, UNEP and UNITAR on PRTR-related issues. The ninth Aarhus Convention Capacity-Building Coordination meeting (Geneva, 25 February 2015), reviewed the work undertaken in this area for the Convention and its Protocol by the secretariat and partner organizations, as well as specific aspects of projects and activities, such as their geographical scope, target groups, available and required funding, cooperation with partner organizations and challenges encountered in the implementation of activities.[14]

24.   A second joint global round table on PRTRs, under the auspices of ECE and OECD and in cooperation with UNITAR and UNEP, is planned for 24 and 25 November 2015 in Madrid, hosted by Spain.

25.   The increased cooperation between the secretariat and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council in recent years is noteworthy, in particular with regard to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment created in March 2012.[15] Given the continued relevance of the Protocol on PRTRs, cooperation has also been promoted with the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes.[16] Cooperation with the latter was carried out through promotion of the Convention and the Protocol during a side event at the second meeting of the SAICM Open-ended Working Group (Geneva, 15–17 December 2014) and at a preparatory meeting for a country visit by the Special Rapporteur to Kazakhstan (Geneva, 20 March 2015).

26.   The secretariat also promoted the Protocol through various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. This included contribution to the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on Climate Change-Related Statistics*.[17] Furthermore, the secretariat contributed information on PRTR and Aarhus electronic tools to the ECE submission prepared as an input to the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels (A/68/65–E/2013/11), submitted to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development at its eighteenth session (Geneva, 4–8 May 2015).

27.   The secretariat continued an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials about the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions in the ECE region.

F.   Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

28.   Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities under the Protocol are carried out via meetings of the Working Group of the Parties, meetings of the Bureau, as necessary, and consultations among Bureau members using e-mail.

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[13] See http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html.

[14] See http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38025#/.

[15] Originally called the Independent Expert on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. See http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/IEEnvironment/Pages/IEenvironmentIndex.aspx.

[16] See http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/ToxicWastes/Pages/SRToxicWastesIndex.aspx.

[17] Available from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=37166/.

29.   The secretariat serviced the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the Joint High-level Segment with the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention held in Maastricht, the Netherlands from 2 to 4 July 2014. It also serviced the seventh meeting of the Bureau held in Maastricht on 1 July 2014, and coordinated a number of e-mail consultations among the Bureau members.

30.   Representatives of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the ECE MEAs continued to liaise at informal meetings to exchange information on priorities under the agreements and identify and discuss possible areas of cooperation and synergy in the light of recent and future key developments in the area of the environment. At the last meeting (Geneva, 27 October 2014), held back to back with the twentieth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 28–31 October 2014), the Chair of the Protocol on PRTRs participated, as well as the secretariat.[18]

31.   Activities under the Protocol on PRTRs were presented at the twentieth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy by the Vice-Chairs of the Convention and the Chair of the Protocol on PRTRs.

G.   Technical assessment of provisions of the Protocol

32.   Technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol involves the drafting of recommendations on technical issues for the Meeting of the Parties, based on the assessment reports. The method of work for this activity includes meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol, electronic consultation and drafting of assessment reports on experience gained in the development of national PRTRs according to article 6, paragraph 2, of the Protocol.

33.   The first meeting of the Working Group of the Parties agreed that no amendments to the provisions of the Protocol were needed at that time, and that experience needed to be gathered before such a review should take place. The synthesis report on the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/5)[19] and national implementation reports[20] from the first reporting cycle under the Protocol provide insight on some of the issues related to the technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol. The current work under the Compliance Committee on a document addressing systemic issues arising under the Protocol (see para. 4 (b) above), currently before the Working Group for consideration, addresses this work area.

H.   Horizontal support areas

34.   During the period 2014–2015, the objective of horizontal support activities was to provide overall support that covered multiple substantive areas of the work programme, inter alia, through secretarial support and staff training.

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[18]   Chair's summaries of the meetings, which include a list of participants, are available from http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/informal-networks.html.

[19]   Available from http://www.unece.org/prtrmopp2_docs.html#/.

[20]   Available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr_reports_implementation_2014.html.