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## 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

#### Fifth meeting

Geneva, 23 and 24 November 2016

Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Promotion and capacity-building: electronic tools and technical resources**

### Technical assistance and resources

#### Note by the secretariat\*

##### *Summary*

At its first meeting (Geneva, 28–29 November 2011), the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers asked the secretariat to prepare a note describing different modalities of possible technical assistance (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2011/2, para. 22). At its second meeting (Geneva, 20–21 November 2012), the Working Group reviewed the note on technical assistance and resources prepared by the secretariat (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2012/4). Pursuant to a request by the Bureau at its ninth meeting (Madrid, 27 November 2015), the secretariat, in cooperation with partner organizations, also reviewed the 2012 note. The present note incorporates changes and suggestions made during those reviews.

The note is submitted to the Working Group at its fifth meeting for information.

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\* The present document is being submitted late owing to delays in contributions from partner organisations and due to editorial constraints.



## Introduction

1. The present note describes different modalities for the possible provision of technical assistance to support implementation 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), thereby offering a useful source of information for Governments and stakeholders.

### I. Multilateral processes

2. Multilateral processes provide useful modes for technical assistance and enable countries to learn directly from each other, to network with pollutant release and transfer register (PRTR) experts in other countries and to establish contacts for information exchange and capacity-building activities. Options for multilateral processes are set out below.

#### A. Coordination mechanisms

3. Coordination mechanisms of relevance to the Protocol include:

(a) *International PRTR Coordinating Group.*<sup>1</sup> The Coordinating Group, serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat, works to improve coordination between international organizations, Governments and other interested parties in their ongoing and planned efforts related to the further development and implementation of PRTR systems. The Coordinating Group also serves to promote capacity-building for PRTR systems in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The Group provides a forum and a structured approach to coordinating PRTR developments, sharing information in relation to ongoing and planned activities and coordinating global promotion of the Protocol. Synergies between organizations, in particular, ECE, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Global Environment Facility and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), should be further strengthened and pursued in a more structured way, in order to make more efficient use of technical assistance resources;

(b) *Capacity-building coordination under the Aarhus Convention.*<sup>2</sup> Capacity-building coordination is useful as a means to adequately address the need for coordinated and systematic assistance to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, primarily in countries with economies in transition. This capacity-building mechanism streamlines and rationalizes capacity-building activities and promotes synergies. The mechanism, facilitated by the Convention secretariat, involves some of the main international organizations involved in capacity-building under the Convention;

(c) *ECE multilateral environmental agreements coordination.* The ECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) coordination mechanism is an informal consultation among the representatives of the governing bodies of ECE MEAs. The initiative is useful, as the geographical and substantive scopes of the ECE MEAs are often interrelated and the implementation of one MEA could be facilitated and strengthened by

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html>.

the implementation of others. In addition, this might be useful in establishing synergistic opportunities for technical assistance.

## **B. Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol**

4. The Working Group provides a useful multilateral platform not only for deliberations on policy matters, but also for technical assistance, as it aims to address a number of related issues, such as: oversight of the implementation of the work programme for the Protocol; exchange of information on technical issues dealing with practical implementation of the Protocol; exploration of methodologies for presenting the information to the public; exchange of examples of good practices on public participation in the development of PRTRs; and the development of guidance documents on implementation of the Protocol.

## **C. Task Force on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers under the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development<sup>3</sup>**

5. OECD work on PRTRs is overseen by the Task Force on PRTRs. The activities of the Task Force seek to: (a) develop practical tools and guidance to help member countries implement PRTRs; (b) provide outreach to non-member countries, including the provision of information and technical support; and (c) promote communication and a close working relationship between the OECD Task Force on PRTRs and other relevant organizations. Among technical and practical aspects, special focus is given to the dissemination and use of PRTR data and release estimation techniques under a PRTR scheme.

## **D. Subregional workshops**

6. Subregional workshops enable more in-depth discussion and sharing of common challenges relevant to PRTRs. The problems, needs, and solutions identified at the subregional workshops can help define the technical assistance for the target countries. The outcomes of the workshops can provide a basis for identifying priority needs for future work and capacity-building activities. International organizations embarking on PRTR developments can review and utilize the outcomes from such workshops to further inform their PRTR-related activities.

## **E. Surveys**

7. Surveys in relation to PRTRs are a useful tool to ascertain the status of PRTR developments and possible future needs. The results of such surveys can provide bodies under the Protocol, national focal points and stakeholders with additional insights into technical assistance needs and required resources.

## **II. Bilateral assistance**

8. Bilateral cooperation is useful for countries developing PRTR systems as it enables learning and assistance that may not otherwise be possible, for example, owing to a lack of funds, and enables countries with advanced experience in implementing PRTRs to

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/pollutant-release-transfer-register/>.

disseminate and share knowledge and expertise. Options for modes of bilateral cooperation include:

- (a) Exchange of study tours, technical expertise, technical trainings, international best practices, or experience;
- (b) Increased sharing of information and cooperation between countries' institutions;
- (c) Countries with advanced experience in PRTRs offering access to PRTR software to countries developing PRTRs;
- (d) Development of more focused outcomes in the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument;<sup>4</sup>
- (e) Bilateral exchange and assistance by means of electronic tools for videoconferencing, e-meetings, e-learning and multimedia-assisted experience exchange;
- (f) A dialogue between countries to work out the best ways to assist each other in developing PRTRs.

### **III. Electronic tools and materials**

#### **A. Electronic tools and material for pollutant release and transfer registers**

9. Use of electronic tools for PRTRs managed by ECE, OECD and UNITAR should be encouraged. These tools provide accessible support and learning mechanisms to stakeholders for numerous aspects of PRTR implementation and development. Electronic PRTR tools include the following options and corresponding uses:

(a) *PRTR global portal*.<sup>5</sup> PRTR.net, as a global PRTR portal, provides information and activities from countries and organizations around the world. PRTR.net includes the following features:

- (i) Information about PRTRs developed by countries and regions;
- (ii) Details on the benefits of implementing a PRTR;
- (iii) Information from other agencies and organizations about PRTRs;
- (iv) Responses to a series of "frequently asked questions" about PRTRs;
- (v) Information on upcoming PRTR-related meetings and PRTR-related events;
- (vi) A mechanism for PRTR national focal points and stakeholders to add data to the PRTR capacity-building activities database;
- (vii) Updates in five languages: English, French, German, Russian and Spanish;
- (viii) Integration between the updated PRTR.net portal and the new UNITAR PRTR:Learn Platform, currently under development;

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<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.enpi-info.eu/main.php?id\\_type=2&id=402](http://www.enpi-info.eu/main.php?id_type=2&id=402).

<sup>5</sup> Available from <http://www.prtr.net/>.

(b) *PRTR capacity-building activities database.*<sup>6</sup> The capacity-building activities database is useful as anyone can search it to learn about PRTR projects and initiatives around the world and it enables the progress and outcomes of the projects listed to be monitored. Advice and assistance can then be directed to specific countries where needed. The database lists detailed information on these activities including project title, proposed outcomes, duration, and the stakeholders involved. National focal points and stakeholders are encouraged to contribute to the capacity-building activities database, as this will greatly facilitate information exchange and planning of future activities. Via the PRTR.net global portal, national focal points and stakeholders can log in to add information to the database of capacity-building activities. User instructions for national focal points and stakeholders to add information to the capacity-building activities database are available from the Aarhus Convention secretariat;

(c) *Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy.*<sup>7</sup> The Aarhus Clearinghouse mechanism is dedicated to promoting the exchange of information and good practice in implementation of the Aarhus Convention and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. In addition, the Aarhus Clearinghouse provides news and information on PRTRs and laws and practices relevant to the public's rights, including to access environmental information. User instructions for national focal points and stakeholders to add information to the Aarhus Clearinghouse are available from the Aarhus Convention secretariat;

(d) *ECE Public Participation website with guidance material.*<sup>8</sup> The ECE Public Participation website contains information about the Protocol on PRTRs, including the text of the Protocol, the status of ratification, the Protocol bodies, the Protocol meetings and meeting reports, capacity-building events, PRTR surveys and publications;

(e) *PRTR:Learn Training and Knowledge Sharing Platform.*<sup>9</sup> PRTR:Learn is an interactive platform to share insights, information, knowledge and resources on UNITAR PRTR Projects. PRTR:Learn is useful as it makes innovative tools available online for PRTR capacity-building. Its resources include:

- (i) A Document Repository with various guidance documents, including the UNITAR Guidance Series for Implementing a National PRTR Design Project;
- (ii) An online forum;
- (iii) A tool for online webinars and videoconferences;
- (iv) An interactive map of all the participating countries of the UNITAR PRTR Programme;
- (v) A link to UNITAR E-learning courses on PRTRs;

(f) *Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) Toolbox for Decision Making in Chemicals Management.*<sup>10</sup> The Internet-based IOMC Toolbox enables countries to identify the most relevant and efficient tools to address specific national problems in chemicals management. The Toolbox takes into account the resources available and guides users towards cost-effective solutions adapted to the country situation. At each implementation step, the Toolbox presents the relevant IOMC resources, guidance documents and training material, all available online and free of charge. The

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<sup>6</sup> Available from <http://apps.unece.org/ehlm/pp/NIR/RLsearch.asp>.

<sup>7</sup> Available from <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://prtr.unitar.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Available from <http://iomctoolbox.oecd.org/>.

Toolbox focuses on seven schemes for chemicals management, including the design and implementation of PRTRs. The PRTR scheme is grouped into the following three categories:

- (i) PRTR Initiation, which covers the steps and activities needed to design a PRTR system, gain support from decision makers, and to establish the PRTR;
- (ii) PRTR Operation, which covers steps and activities related to running a PRTR (e.g., staffing and collecting, reviewing, and disseminating data);
- (iii) Long Term Success, which covers expanding the benefits and activities of a PRTR and making future enhancements;
- (g) *OECD Centre for PRTR Data*.<sup>11</sup> The Centre for PRTR Data presents national PRTR data from OECD countries at one Internet location. The purpose of the database is to share PRTR data as widely as possible within the OECD area — from as many OECD countries as practicable and feasible — consistent with the OECD Council Recommendation on Implementing Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.<sup>12</sup> PRTR data included in the database is compiled on the national or subnational level. It does not include PRTR data for individual sites or facilities. The database will be updated on a regular basis to include additional and new data that has been made available. Users can create a report of PRTR data according to years, countries, regions, industry sectors, chemicals, types of release sources and types of releases and transfers;
- (h) *OECD Resource Centre for PRTRs*.<sup>13</sup> This online resource centre provides information on available release estimation techniques, overarching documents and general information for estimating releases from various sources.

## **B. Free software available for managing pollutant release and transfer register data flow**

10. Access to free software available for managing PRTR data flow is available through several means. For example, E-PRTR software hosted by the European Environment Agency is available for free download.<sup>14</sup> The software is open source (with the exception of the map viewer functionalities); it can be understood and adapted easily by a knowledgeable programmer and can be reused by other countries (or regions) that are developing a national PRTR website linked to a national PRTR database.

## **C. Pollutant Release and Transfer Register Cost Model<sup>15</sup>**

11. The PRTR Cost Model is a tool that enables the cost involved in the implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs to be assessed. The Cost Model enables the development of detailed estimates of the magnitude of costs of monitoring emissions (releases) of substances, contained in the annex to the Protocol, to different environmental media (air, water and land) in order to assist Parties to the Protocol with its implementation.

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<sup>11</sup> Available from [http://www.oecd.org/env\\_prtr\\_data/](http://www.oecd.org/env_prtr_data/).

<sup>12</sup> Recommendation C(96)41/Final, as amended by Recommendation C(2003)87.

<sup>13</sup> Available from <http://www.prtr-rc.fi/>.

<sup>14</sup> Available from <https://svn.eionet.europa.eu/repositories/EPTRTR/trunk/>.

<sup>15</sup> Available from <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/protocol-on-prtrs/areas-of-work/envppprtrcb/prtr-cost-model.html>.

**D. Utilization of the Shared Environmental Information System principles<sup>16</sup>**

12. The use of Shared Environmental Information System principles in the process of PRTR development has the potential to create compatible PRTR systems and data across multiple countries.

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<sup>16</sup> See European Commission, “Shared Environmental Information System”, 8 May 2015. Available from <http://www.eionet.europa.eu/seis/principles> and <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/seis/index.htm>.