# ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

# STATE-OF-THE ENVIRONMENT REPORTING IN EECCA COUNTRIES[1]

Reporting and assessment form the "output" of monitoring systems, communicating environmental information to end-users. Indeed, different levels of synthesis or detail are appropriate for the needs of different end-users (see box 1).

This section reviews state-of-the-environment (SoE) reporting in the EECCA countries. Other sections describe international reporting issues as well as indicators, which are a key tool for presenting complex environmental information in SoE reporting.

Effective SoE reporting can:
- Assess and describe environmental trends and conditions, their causes and consequences;
- Provide a foundation for improved decision-making, and facilitate the measurement of progress towards policy goals; and
- Increase awareness and understanding of environmental issues among decision makers, key stakeholders and the general public.
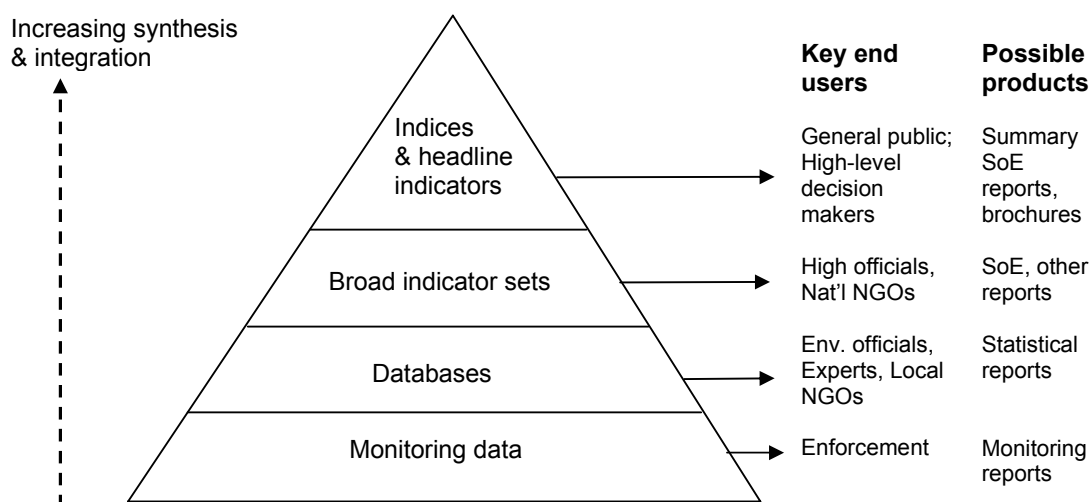
All EECCA countries have produced state-of-the-environment reports in the last ten years. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Uzbekistan have published reports on a regular basis – for some, such as the Russian Federation and Ukraine, every year. Other countries have produced fewer SoE reports: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan each published one SoE report in the 1990s. In Georgia, two SoE reports were published (UNECE, 2003b). Tajikistan has produced three reports over the past five years: its most recent was released in early 2003.

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[1] This review of SoE reporting is based on research for and discussions within the UNECE Working Group, including an overview prepared with the support of Eco-Accord of Moscow: UNECE, 2002a. The section is adapted from the UN Publication *Environmental Monitoring and Reporting: Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia*, New York and Geneva, 2003 (Sales No. E.03.II.E.33).

## Legal and institutional context

In most EECCA countries, national environmental laws and regulations call for regular environmental reporting, often specifying SoE reports.

In a few countries, laws and regulations set out detailed requirements and approaches. In Georgia, a 1999 presidential decree regulates the legal arrangements for the development of national SoE reports, its submission to the President, as well as public access. Under Ukraine's 1991 Law on Environmental Protection, the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources must submit annual SoE reports to Parliament; subsequent cabinet decrees set specific requirements and created an inter-ministerial commission for the reports. The legal framework in the Russian Federation is described in box 2.

The development of SoE reports requires cooperation across government ministries and agencies (indeed, reporting can be an important driving force for inter-ministerial cooperation on data and information exchange). In most EECCA countries, SoE reports are prepared and written by a

network of government experts and institutions. The ministry responsible for environment typically has a central, coordinating role.

In Kyrgyzstan, for example, almost 20 institutions are involved in the development of SoE reports, including the National Committee for Statistics, the Public Health Ministry, the *Kyrgyzenergo* company, institutes of the National Academy of Sciences and NGOs. In the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry for Environment develops SoE reports; other agencies and ministries contribute, and specific chapters are developed through a network of experts established under the National Institute of Ecology. In Ukraine, several ministries and other government institutions, the National Academy of Science and NGOs all contribute to the annual SoE reports. Many national and sub-national bodies are involved in preparing the Russian Federation's reports (see box 2). In a few countries, environmental NGOs are consulted; however, their participation is generally limited.

Some countries, however, have not used a broad network of experts and institutions. In Georgia, for example, individual chapters are prepared by staff members of the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources and the Institute for Environmental Protection.

Even where numerous bodies are formally involved in SoE preparation, obtaining necessary data is often difficult. In many countries, however – including Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation – the offices coordinating SoE preparation do not have direct access to databases in other ministries and agencies, and obtaining necessary data often requires specific inter-ministerial requests and agreements.

Another key issue regards costs and funding. In most EECCA countries, the budgets to develop, write and publish SoE reports are insufficient. As a result, printing is limited to a relatively small number of copies, the use of colour or user-friendly graphic design is restricted. In the Russian Federation and Ukraine, for example, budget allocations are approximately $20,000 a year, most of which is needed for salaries. Other countries that encounter budget difficulties include the three Caucasian republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In contrast, some Central Asian countries have sufficient funding to produce SoE reports using colour charts and diagrams as well as modern printing technologies.

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**Box 2. The legal and institutional framework for SoE reporting in the Russian Federation**

The Russian Federation's 1991 Law on Environmental Protection and a presidential decree call for the preparation of annual SoE reports. A 1993 government decree specifies that SoE reports are official documents that provide government agencies and the public with analytical information on conditions and trends related to the environment and natural resources. It calls for the reports to describe the implementation of government measures for environmental protection and natural resources conservation and to provide a framework for the development of government programmes and review priorities.

The Ministry for Natural Resources is responsible for developing national SoE reports, and a wide array of other ministries, agencies and institutes provide information, analytical material and assessments. Indeed, participation in the Russian Federation's SoE reports extends across almost 40 federal ministries and agencies, agencies in the federation's 89 constituents, major corporations and NGOs. Officials appointed by these bodies are members of the inter-ministerial working group that prepares material for the SoE report.

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**Report contents and coverage**

The SoE reports prepared in EECCA countries cover a broad array of topics. Their structure and contents reflect national environmental priorities and urgent local problems. All reports provide information on environmental conditions and pressures and government actions, to the extent that data are available (see table 1).

Naturally, reports in different countries cover slightly different topics and issues, reflecting national context and priorities. Kyrgyzstan's SoE reports, for example, contain chapters on the transboundary environmental impact of mining operations and on environmental conditions in the city of Bishkek. The Russian Federation's national SoE report provides a comprehensive review, covering essentially all the issues listed in the table, as well as others such as the environmental impacts of the Armed Forces and the development of environmental NGOs and the environmental movement. Its review of policy work includes sections on environmental security, enforcement, and information support for environmental activities.

**Table 1. Main issues covered in EECCA SoE reports**

| Environmental issues | Economic sectors | Environmental policy actions |
|---|---|---|
| Air: emissions and quality | Energy | Pollution abatement and control activities |
| Inland water bodies: quality and quantity | Transport | Economic instruments |
| Groundwater: quality and quantity | Agriculture | Environmental expenditures (including foreign assistance) |
| Coastal areas and seas (where applicable) | Forestry | Subnational/local authorities |
| Soil contamination | Fisheries | NGO and public participation |
| Chemicals | Tourism | Environmental education |
| Industrial accidents | Other sectors | Environmental research and development |
| Solid waste: generation, storage and treatment | | International cooperation |
| Biodiversity and nature protection | | |
| Urban environment | | |
| Environmental health | | |

In most EECCA countries, SoE reports cover issues identified as national environmental priorities. Fewer reports, however, provide information related to the implementation of policy efforts to address these priorities.

The Russian Federation covers a huge land area, and it is difficult to identify common, nationwide environmental priorities. National SoE reports include information on the different priorities across *oblasts* and other units of the Federation. Moreover, the reports provide information on progress in the implementation of NEAPs and special federal programmes, as well as compliance with international commitments.

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The issues covered in Ukraine's reports generally reflect national policy priorities, and also cover important *oblast* ones. The information provided allows some assessment of progress towards national goals and international commitments. Moreover, the structure of the report is adjusted year to year to reflect urgent subnational issues.

**Supporting environmental policy**

Environmental reporting – and SoE reporting in particular – is a key tool to support policy. At present, however, coverage of policy issues and implementation varies significantly across EECCA countries. Most reports make some limited use of indicators tied to policy targets. A few SoE reports, such as those of the Russian Federation, have extensive chapters on policy.

Only a few SoE reports in the subregion draw specific conclusions regarding upcoming issues for policy attention. The Russian Federation's SoE reports provide one example: they end with a section providing forecasts and recommendations to improve national legislation as well as strengthen the implementation of national actions. These have encouraged the development of some short- and long-term policies, as well as programmes addressing national issues such as drinking-water supply and waste management. Ukraine's reports also contain summaries, including policy conclusions and recommendations, addressed to the Cabinet and Parliament and are also used by the Ministry's Board of Senior Officials.

**Public access to SoE reports**

In many EECCA countries, national legislation establishes the public's right to environmental information. Moreover, most EECCA countries have ratified or acceded to the 1998 Aarhus Convention, which calls on national governments to publish regular, public SoE reports (see box 3).

Across EECCA countries, however, SoE reporting is currently not widely disseminated. One key problem in most countries is that financial considerations keep the print run of SoE reports too low to meet the information needs of all interested organizations. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, only 300 copies of the SoE reports are published. As a result, most copies are distributed to national ministries and agencies, subnational and local offices. Print runs are slightly higher in the Russian Federation (about 1,000) and in Ukraine, where they increased from 1,000 in 1992 to 2,000 in 2001. Nonetheless, these print runs are relatively low in comparison with the countries' large populations.

The price of SoE reports, on the other hand, is not a significant obstacle to public access: in many EECCA countries, these reports are free. Kyrgyzstan's national SoE report is available to all interested parties (within the limits of its print run); copies are distributed free of charge to government offices, NGOs, and selected schools and universities. In Ukraine, SoE reports are distributed on request – they are available free of charge to the general public – and at environmental conferences and meetings. Distribution, however, is restricted by the relatively low print run.

A few EECCA countries have produced summary SoE reports. In Georgia, summary versions (about 25 pages long) are prepared for the general public and presented via the press. The full versions are distributed mainly among government agencies. In the Republic of Moldova, a 1997 agreement between the Environment Ministry and NGOs led to various information dissemination commitments, including the preparation of summary SoE reports, to be distributed via mass media. With the country's economic difficulties, however, the Ministry does not produce annual SoE reports, nor has it published summary versions.

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**Box 3. The Aarhus Convention**

The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was adopted on 25 June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus, at the fourth "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference. The Aarhus Convention links environmental rights and human rights, acknowledges an obligation to future generations, and declares that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders.

The Convention establishes citizens' rights in three key areas: access to information, access to participation and access to justice. Among its requirements, the Convention states that environmental information held by government authorities should be available to the public through clear and transparent procedures. Exemptions should be limited and clearly defined. Moreover, public authorities must collect, update and disseminate essential environmental information, including regular state-of-the-environment reports.

The Convention's first protocol, on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs), was open for signature at the 2003 "Environment for Europe" Conference in Kiev. Under the protocol, large polluting enterprises in ratifying countries will be required to report annually on their releases (to the environment) and transfers (to other companies) of 86 key pollutants, including greenhouse gases and heavy metals. This information will be gathered on a public register accessible to the public via the Internet. The registers can play a key role in pollution reduction: in countries that have adopted PRTRs, many large enterprises have striven to reduce pollution levels beyond permit and other legal requirements.

*Source:* UNECE. (http://www.unece.org/env/pp/).

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In the Russian Federation, the national SoE report is presented annually to journalists. However, interest in the mass media appears limited given the many other pressing social problems (crime, living standards and more). Excerpts and summaries of yearly SoE reports are also provided in some newspapers and journals, in particular those with an environmental focus, such as *Zeleniy Mir* newspaper and *ECOS-Inform* magazine.

In Kazakhstan, some information based on SoE reports and their conclusions may be published in the mass media. Moreover, summary brochures and leaflets based on SoE reports are commonly prepared for specific events, but generally are not distributed to the public.

Language can be a factor for public access. In some countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, SoE reports are prepared in Russian only. In Kazakhstan, reports are published in Russian, though in recent years Kazakh versions have been produced (few copies were printed, however).

Internet versions can also help to disseminate SoE reports. In preparation for the fourth pan-European Conference of Environmental Ministries in Aarhus, in 1998, most EECCA countries produced electronic versions of national SoE reports, with English translation (the UNEP GRID network provided several countries with training and support for these efforts, and the reports are available on the GRID Arendal web site, (http://www.grida.no/enrin). A few countries have produced more recent electronic versions, and some, such as Ukraine, have posted SoE information

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on national ministry web sites. A few countries, including Ukraine and Uzbekistan, have published SoE reports on CD-ROM.

Although web-based versions are an important step in providing broad public access to SoE reports, in many EECCA countries few people have regular access to the Internet. Moreover, in most EECCA countries the demand for environmental information from both the high political level and the general public is relatively low, often overshadowed by attention to pressing economic and social problems. As economic recovery continues, public interest in the environment should become more prominent. Moreover, public awareness and participation can be important support as well as a key driving force for environmental policy. Some policy instruments, such as pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs), the subject of the Aarhus Convention's first protocol, make explicitly use of public information (see box 3).

**Statistical and other reports**

More detailed reports can provide important information for particular policy work and for specific audiences (see box 1). Many EECCA governments produce reports of environmental statistics. These typically have a restricted audience of environmental officials, experts and researchers. Moreover, their print runs are limited, and these compendiums are largely used within government only.

In Belarus, both the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry for Statistics and Analysis publish regular statistical information on the environment. In Turkmenistan, the National Institute of Statistics publishes annual documents on the environment and natural resources. Uzbekistan's Ministry for Economic Statistics prepares a report on environmental protection and natural resources use, but it has a circulation of only 30 copies, intended mainly for official use.

Other publications cover specific themes. In Belarus, the Ministry for Public Health, the Ministry for Forestry and other bodies publish reports on environmental issues within their competence. In the Republic of Moldova, some units of the Ministry for Environment, Construction and Territorial Development, such as the State Environmental Inspectorate, publish their own annual reports. The Russian Federal Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Service publishes surveys and maps on key themes such as air and water pollution. Policy documents, such as environmental strategies, National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs), Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and Reports on Sustainable Development include information on environmental conditions and trends.

In addition, nearly all constituents – *oblasts*, autonomous republics and others – of the Russian Federation publish their own annual SoE reports. These largely follow the structure of the national report though with specific attention to important local factors.

**Strengthening SoE reporting**

The UNECE overview of SoE reporting notes that in EECCA countries, the "development of SoE reports is prone to serious difficulties". Among common problems, countries across the sub-region need to strengthen the legislative basis, financing and inter-ministerial coordination in this field. Moreover, report objectives, structure and target audiences should be better defined.

The use of indicators in SoE reports can also be strengthened. In this field, several documents in this CD can be useful, in particular the Methodology for indicators and the Core set of environmental indicators for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.