



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Twenty-sixth session**

Geneva, 9–11 November 2020

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Cross-sectoral activities**Cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau, meeting in an extended format (Geneva, 28 February 2018), requested the secretariat to prepare a briefing note as an official document on all cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environment subprogramme. The first documents under such a format (ECE/CEP/2019/11 and ECE/CEP/2019/17) were considered by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-fourth (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019) and twenty-fifth (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019) sessions respectively.

The Committee on Environmental Policy Bureau meeting (online, 4 June 2020) requested the secretariat to continue this practice and to prepare a similar document for the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy. Following up on that request, the present document elaborates on recent developments, plans for the future and the expected decisions by the Committee.



I. Education for sustainable development

A. Overview of recent developments

1. Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the ensuing international travel restrictions, the fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (to be held in Geneva) has been postponed from 7 and 8 May to 19 and 20 October 2020.

2. On 7 May 2020, the Steering Committee held an online consultation meeting with a shortened agenda agreed with the Chair of the Steering Committee and the Bureau. The main purpose of the virtual meeting was to welcome the new national focal points and discuss some of the agenda items requiring attention before October (including the status of official documents, both drafted and under preparation, which required the Committee's insights and inputs).

3. The Ad Hoc Group on Strategic Planning continued its work and its second meeting was held on 27 and 28 September 2019 in Nicosia, with the support of the Government of Cyprus. The members of the Group discussed the content of, and comments received on, the draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2019/4) and the outline of the draft workplan for the post-2019 implementation framework for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2019/3), submitted for initial discussion at the fourteenth session of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (Geneva, 2 and 3 May 2019). The members of the Group agreed on elaborating further the texts of the documents and to discuss them at the third meeting of the Ad Hoc Group (Nicosia, 15 and 16 March 2020), but that event had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and instead a virtual meeting of the Group was held on 30 April 2020, at which the members agreed to revise the concept note taking into consideration the effects of the pandemic on the region's socioeconomic development, and to present the revised draft of the concept note for consideration at the fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee.

4. At its fourteenth meeting (Geneva, 2 and 3 May 2019), the Steering Committee decided to establish the Ad Hoc Working Group on Indicators, with a mandate to elaborate the new reporting format (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2019/2, para. 74 (a)). In 2019 and 2020, the Ad Hoc Working Group held three working meetings: from 23 to 25 October 2019, in Utrecht (Netherlands); on 16 and 17 December 2019, in Podgorica; and from 12 to 14 February 2020, in Brussels. All three meetings were organized with the support of the respective national Governments. The Group worked on updating the monitoring and evaluation framework, including revising the draft format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2020 to 2030, by means of elaborating new indicators or introducing changes to the existing indicators that were included in the updated reporting format.

5. The final draft of the format for reporting will be considered at the fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Group, to be convened virtually in autumn 2020 (exact dates to be confirmed) before the fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee. The fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Group will be devoted to incorporating all comments into the final document and to finalizing it as a definitive and final framework for monitoring and evaluation in the form of the format for reporting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2020 to 2030, which will be presented at the rescheduled fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee.

6. At its fourteenth meeting, the Steering Committee discussed the possibility of establishing an ad hoc group of young persons representing the member States at the Committee (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2019/2, para. 26 (b)) and, as a result, the Ad Hoc Group on Youth "Education for Sustainable Development and Youth" was established, the first meeting of which was held from 16 to 18 February 2020 in Vienna, with the support of the Government of Austria. The Group produced a draft outcome document, which included a summary of recommendations regarding the methods of engagement of young people in the ECE process on education for sustainable development in general and in particular the

options for/ways of youth engagement in the draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework, elaborated by the Ad Hoc Group on Strategic Planning.

B. Goals and challenges

7. At the Second High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Batumi, Georgia, 8 June 2016), the mandate for cooperation on education for sustainable development across the region was extended to 2030, with the timeline to be aligned with other global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (paras. 7 and 10, ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.2).

8. There is continuing interest among ECE member States in regional cooperation for the implementation of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development as part of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 4 and targets 4.7 and 12.8. With the activities of the Steering Committee intensifying, participation in both the process and the meetings of the Steering Committee has been increasing, and the work of the expert groups has begun to deliver practical results. However, some key challenges remain, including achieving: more balanced subregional participation; involvement of ministries of both education and environment; and efficient involvement of stakeholder groups.

9. The challenges as outlined in the key findings of the preliminary report of the fourth mandatory reporting cycle include: efficient coordination at the national level of various policies in support of education for sustainable development; the involvement of various stakeholders; application of the whole institution approach in practice; the establishment of networks promoting cooperation on education for sustainable development at the national level; the establishment of quality control criteria for related tools and materials; and financial and time constraints in implementing national implementation plans.

10. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, a number of new challenges have been placed on the global agenda by the pandemic, entailing health, environmental, social, economic and other crises. As a result, the Steering Committee must rethink and reconsider not only the challenges, but also the opportunities and required changes when drafting the future implementation framework of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. This calls for the strengthening and enhancement of the role of education for sustainable development as a powerful tool for introducing the necessary changes and effectively contributing to a realistic transformation of the world to a healthier, more stable and peaceful and fairer place to live.

11. In addition, mobilization of stable and predictable extrabudgetary funding in support of the secretariat services for the Steering Committee remains a challenge; however, the trend is positive and the number of member States contributing financially and in-kind to the work of the Committee is increasing.

C. Planned activities

12. The fourth (virtual) meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Indicators is to be held in September 2020.

13. The fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development is to be held in Geneva, on 19 and 20 October 2020.

14. A capacity-building workshop on the promotion of education for sustainable development at the national level, supported by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation and scheduled to be held in Baku, on 15 and 16 April 2020, was postponed to the autumn of 2020, due to pandemic-related developments (dates to be confirmed).

15. The Committee will pursue its efforts to engage youth in advancing the education for sustainable development agenda and particularly in the processes under ECE, possibly through the organization of a youth meeting at the end of 2020 or in early 2021 in Cyprus and through the participation of youth representatives in Steering Committee meetings.

16. The Steering Committee will continue preparations for the Third High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries of the ECE region, which is to be held in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Meeting (Nicosia, 3–5 November 2021); in this regard the Steering Committee will work in close cooperation with the Committee on Environmental Policy.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

17. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to take note of the information provided on the work of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development and to encourage its members from the countries participating in the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development to remain informed of the process at the national level by establishing and maintaining working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Committee on Environmental Policy is also invited to confirm its willingness to continue close cooperation with the Steering Committee in the framework of the preparations for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

II. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

A. Overview of recent developments

18. The Bureau of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) decided to convene an extraordinary meeting (online, 22 April 2020) to assess the impact of the pandemic on transport, health and environment in member States. At the online meeting:

(a) Member States began to assess the impact of the consequences of the pandemic on the outcome documents of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (originally scheduled to be held in Vienna, on 26 and 27 November 2020);

(b) The delegation of Austria announced its intention to inform the Bureau and the Steering Committee of the need to postpone the High-level Meeting because of the consequences of the pandemic and the unpredictable situation. The postponement would also be an opportunity to include in the outcome documents reflections on the changes in mobility in member States;

(c) Member States decided to create a task force to develop green and healthy sustainable transport principles. The principles would be presented for adoption at the High-level Meeting.¹ The ECE Sustainable Transport Division was to lead the work.

19. A webinar on sustainable transport in cities during the pandemic was organized under THE PEP and the European Environment and Health Process on 24 June 2020.

20. The thirty-seventh meeting of the Bureau of THE PEP Steering Committee took place online on 29 June 2020. It was followed by a preparatory meeting of the Fifth High-level Meeting (30 June 2020). The delegation of Austria confirmed the need to postpone the High-level Meeting and informed the Bureau that new dates for the session had yet to be identified. The Bureau supported the outcomes of the extraordinary meeting and the work of the Task Force on the Development of Green and Healthy Sustainable Transport Principles. Furthermore, because of the postponement of the High-level Meeting, the Bureau:

¹ See Report of the extraordinary meeting of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), paras. 14–19. Available at <https://thepep.unece.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Report%20special%20THE%20PEP%20meeting%20clean%20for%20web.pdf>.

(a) Agreed to the request of the delegation of Austria to ask the Steering Committee to postpone the High-level Meeting;

(b) Decided that the eighteenth session of the Steering Committee should be convened on the dates originally planned for the High-level Meeting (25–27 November 2020), but in Geneva, and requested the secretariat to organize the interpretation of the meeting and the translation of official documents into the three ECE official languages.²

21. On 30 June 2020, a preparatory meeting for the High-level Meeting took place online. The meeting:

(a) Discussed the themes and programme of the High-level Meeting, in view of recent developments, as well as the changes needed in the outcome documents;

(b) Established a new timeline towards the High-level Meeting.

B. Goals and challenges

22. The work under THE PEP will continue with the elaboration of green and healthy sustainable transport principles and with activities and events positioning THE PEP as a forum for discussions on changes in mobility and exchange of good practices.

23. THE PEP will continue to function as a forum to support member States in implementing the Paris Agreement and selected Sustainable Development Goals, notably when working on decarbonization and sustainable urban transport.

24. The need for sustainable financial resources to support member States in implementing the Programme's workplan and programme of work remains a challenge for THE PEP. More sustainable resources would allow a for more tailored approach to support member States, particularly those with economies in transition.

25. Member States will continue working on the preparation of the Fifth High-level Meeting.

C. Planned activities

26. The Task Force on Green and Healthy Sustainable Transport Principles will continue to meet once a month remotely to conclude its work. A meeting to discuss indicators as a basis for a brochure on transport, health and environment facts and figures will be organized at the end of September 2020.

27. The eighteenth session of the Steering Committee will take place in Geneva, from 25 to 27 November 2020.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

28. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to take note of the information provided and to welcome the work under THE PEP. Furthermore, it is invited to support THE PEP and to encourage the participation of experts in the Task Force on the Development of Green and Healthy Sustainable Transport Principles and in the preparatory process for the High-level Meeting.

29. The Committee is also invited to continue to encourage the nomination of national focal points to THE PEP from the environment side.

² See Report of the meeting, paras. 7–9. Available at https://thepep.unece.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Draft%20report%20Bureau%20meeting%2029%20June_for%20the%20web.pdf.

III. European Environment and Health Process

A. Overview of recent developments

30. The ninth meeting of the European Environment and Health Task Force (Bonn, Germany, 9 and 10 December 2019) celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the European Environment and Health Process. The Task Force:

(a) Exchanged experiences of member States in developing and implementing national portfolios of actions, as per the Ostrava Declaration.³ Member States reported difficulties in assigning human and financial resources to the development of portfolios and indicated that air quality, chemical safety and healthy and sustainable cities were priorities;

(b) Heard reports from working groups established under the Task Force;

(c) Adopted the programme of work for 2019–2020, which included cooperation with ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

31. On 15 June 2020, the fifth meeting of the Bureau of the Task Force took place online. The meeting tackled the following themes and issues:

(a) The implications of the pandemic for the environment and health agenda;

(b) An update on the activities implemented since the Task Force meeting. Those included webinars focused on technical guidance and advocacy to promote safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices during the pandemic and sustainable transport in cities during the COVID-19 outbreak. These events were held in cooperation with the Protocol on Water and Health and THE PEP, respectively;

(c) Activities foreseen for the first half of 2020 and review of work undertaken by the working groups. The Task Force invited member States and stakeholders to nominate members for a working group on collaboration with local and subnational authorities;

(d) The themes and organization of the next meeting of the Task Force (December 2020). The Bureau members requested the secretariat to organize a short survey among member States to identify themes for discussion at the Task Force meeting. The Bureau also planned to discuss at the end of summer whether the Task Force would meet face-to-face or online, according to the evolution of the pandemic.

B. Goals and challenges

32. The Task Force will: further develop the evidence base and capacities of member States for action in the field of environment and health; continue to lead the European environment and health agenda; and intensify the use of health arguments in climate change policy and the sustainable development agenda.

33. The organization of activities and events is subject to the availability of resources.

C. Planned activities

34. The Task Force will meet in December 2020. At the end of summer 2020, a survey on possible topics will be launched.

35. Webinars in support of member States' efforts to react to the pandemic and activities under the working groups will continue.

³ Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, available at www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2017/06/sixth-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health/documentation/declaration-of-the-sixth-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

36. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to note the information provided with respect to the European Environment and Health Process and to reconfirm its commitment to contribute thereto.

IV. Environment and Security Initiative

A. Overview of recent developments

37. On 26 August 2019, a new framework memorandum of understanding was signed by all the Environment and Security Initiative partners: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States; UNEP; and ECE.

38. The Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe did not sign the new memorandum of understanding.

B. Goals and challenges

39. The partner organizations have agreed to enter into a new framework memorandum of understanding to align the Initiative with new developments in the area of environment and security and in particular with: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in particular with regard to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17), which, among other things, sets the goal for revitalizing partnerships for sustainable development; the Paris Agreement; and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

40. The Initiative works to assess and address environmental problems that threaten, or might potentially threaten, security, societal stability and peace, human health and/or sustainable livelihoods, within and across national borders.

41. The partner organizations collaborate closely with beneficiary Governments, particularly through Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Environment, national experts and NGOs through extensive national and regional consultations with multi-stakeholder participation.

42. In the reporting period, ECE and OSCE continued their activities to support transboundary water cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Kura River basin, by engaging with the relevant authorities in the countries at both the political and technical levels with a view to a possible launch of formal negotiations on finalizing the draft agreement between Azerbaijan and Georgia on cooperation in the field of protection and sustainable use of the water resources of the Kura River basin. Historically, this activity has been supported through the Initiative and more recently also through the European Union Water Initiative Plus for the Eastern Partnership programme.

C. Planned activities

43. Regular dialogue and meetings between the partner organizations will take place on matters of common interest, in accordance with an agenda agreed in advance by the partner organizations, for the purposes of: developing and monitoring collaborative projects; discussing technical and operational issues; exchanging information on the latest political and technical developments in the environment and security field; discussing prospects for Initiative engagement; and reviewing progress of work undertaken by the partner organizations within the framework of the Initiative in the priority areas of cooperation.

44. Separate legal instruments may be concluded between the partner organizations to define and implement any subsequent activities, projects and programmes.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

45. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to note the information provided with respect to the Initiative.

V. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities

A. Overview of recent developments

46. Following up on the objectives contained in the United Nations ECE Gender Action Plan 2018–2019,⁴ the Environment Division reported on the implementation of activities in 2019 as part of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Furthermore, the Environment Division provided its inputs to the Gender Action Plan for 2020⁵ and to the first progress report following the gender mainstreaming evaluation of ECE performed in 2019. Following the recommendations of the gender mainstreaming evaluation, three gender co-focal points were nominated (one P-5 and two P-4 regular budget staff). A recommendation has been formulated to promote gender balanced participation in events organized by the ECE Environment Division: “The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe is committed to gender equality. To this end, the UNECE encourages member States to propose gender-balanced nomination of candidates to the upcoming [event title].”

47. Following up on the 2018–2019 plan, an ECE Gender Action Plan for 2020 was developed to implement the ECE gender policy. The Plan’s strategic actions include the promotion of a gender perspective and raising the importance of taking a gender perspective into account in the different activities and events under the Environment subprogramme, as appropriate.

48. The secretariat continuously promoted a gender balance in the governing bodies of the multilateral environmental processes that it services. In the period 2018–2019, the majority of the chairs of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements were women. In the same period, the Chairs of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators were women, whereas the Chairs of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews and the Steering Committee of THE PEP were men. The secretariat also strived to ensure equal opportunities for the participation of women and men in meetings, capacity-building seminars, workshops and training sessions organized under the auspices of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and programmes.

49. The gender dimension was incorporated into the third environmental performance review of Romania undertaken in 2019–2020 through the inclusion of sections on gender in several chapters.

50. Under THE PEP, gender considerations were inserted into the draft declaration of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (Vienna, 2021) to ensure that all members of the public can equally benefit from clean, healthy and sustainable transport.

51. A gender perspective was mainstreamed in the activities on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The gender dimension was reflected in the country self-assessment report on equitable access to water and sanitation

⁴ See www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/publications_and_papers/UNECE_Gender_Action_Plan_2018-2019.pdf.

⁵ Available at www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/UNECE_GAP_2020_final.pdf.

from Belarus analysing the situation on equity in the Districts of Vilejka and Mosty, which was finalized in 2020. The gender dimension is also mainstreamed in the new publication *The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in Practice: Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region* finalized at the end of 2019.⁶ Gender disparities were further addressed in the guidance document *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A practical guide for joint implementation*,⁷ which emphasizes the gender dimension of water and health issues in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

B. Goals and challenges

52. Major challenges in mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities include: the lack of national policies addressing gender and the environment; and the absence of gender-disaggregated data on environmental issues, such as access to water and sanitation, access to energy, access to land and coverage by waste collection in the countries of the region. With regard to the availability of gender-disaggregated data, the situation is slightly improving as countries start to collect and disclose gender-disaggregated data on achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

C. Planned activities

53. In September 2020, a webinar on gender and environment will be organized with a view to facilitating experience sharing by member States on their work on mainstreaming gender aspects in environmental and climate change policy and management.

54. The agenda of the fifteenth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development includes an item on mainstreaming gender issues in education for sustainable development to exchange information on achievements in that area.

D. Decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy

55. The Committee is invited to note the information provided with respect to gender mainstreaming across ECE activities and in environmental activities carried out by the Environment Division since the Committee's last session and to:

(a) Recognize the importance of gender mainstreaming in environmental activities, particularly in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and to emphasize that gender equality is both a goal in itself and a means to contributing to achieving sustainable development;

(b) Support international initiatives to promote gender equality and welcome continued cooperation and coordination with the United Nations bodies and other relevant international forums and actors to that end;

(c) Agree to continue to mainstream a gender perspective in its activities.

⁶ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.12.

⁷ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.E.15.