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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

#### Seventh meeting

Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021,  
including financial matters**

## **Report on the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers for 2018–2021**

### **Note by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The present report was prepared by the secretariat pursuant to decision III/2 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/2017/6/Add.1, decision III/2, para. 2). It provides an overview of the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2018–2021 from 1 January 2018 to 15 July 2019.



## I. Introduction

1. The present document provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/3, annex) for 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 (Aarhus Convention) from 1 January 2018 to 15 July 2019, focusing on operational and organizational aspects. Owing to the cross-cutting nature of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, implementation of different work programme areas contributed to furthering the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals across the whole 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Goals 3, 6, 9, 12 and 16. An overview of contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme is provided in the report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Protocol's work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/5). The report also provides information on the linkages between the activities of the work programme and focal areas and objectives laid down in the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex). In that context, it should be noted that, while the report on implementation is centred around activities carried out by the secretariat and the Protocol's bodies, the strategic plan includes objectives that are intended to be implemented not only by the secretariat and the Protocol bodies, but also by the Parties, civil society organizations and other partners.

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat made strenuous efforts to avoid duplication of work and inefficient use of resources by:

- (a) Pursuing synergies with activities under other partner organizations;
- (b) Conducting specific thematic surveys prior to activities in order to better respond to the needs of Parties and stakeholders;
- (c) Continuously increasing the use and development of electronic tools for Protocol activities (for example, email consultations, telephone conferences, online databases, the online reporting tool for national implementation reports, the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and the PRTR.net global portal).

## II. Overview of implementation of the work programme

### A. Compliance mechanism

3. During the reporting period (1 January 2018 to 15 July 2019), the Protocol Compliance Committee held its seventh meeting (Geneva, 1 and 2 April 2019).<sup>1</sup> The Committee considered a report prepared by the rapporteur appointed by the Committee at its sixth meeting (Budva, Montenegro, 14 and 15 September 2017) to further explore the issue of whether European Union member States that were Parties to the Protocol were required under the Protocol to introduce their own national pollutant release and transfer registers to supplement what was done at the European Union level. The Committee agreed, on a preliminary basis, that the above-mentioned issue might lead to potential non-compliance by the Parties concerned and agreed to continue its deliberations, with a view to completing its draft findings and, as appropriate, recommendations. The Committee appointed a curator for the case to prepare draft findings for the Committee's consideration.

4. Pursuant to the decision regarding the development of the Protocol taken by the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties at its sixth meeting (Geneva, 9 November 2018), the Committee discussed the revised draft text of the Protocol prepared by the secretariat on the basis of comments provided through recent consultations carried out by the Bureau with

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting documents and other information on the work of the Compliance Committee are available at [www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-cc.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-cc.html).

Parties, other interested Member States and organizations. The Committee suggested a number of textual amendments and provided comments on the document.<sup>2</sup>

5. The Committee has not, to date, received any submissions by Parties concerning compliance by other Parties, or any submissions by Parties concerning their own compliance. Neither has it received any referrals by the secretariat or any communications from the public regarding compliance with the Protocol.

6. The work under the Protocol's compliance mechanism is relevant for the achievement of objectives I.1 and I.3–I.6 under focal area I and for all the objectives of focal area III of the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex).

## **B. Technical assistance**

7. Technical assistance activities may involve specific projects in countries needing assistance, including training workshops, guidance materials and expert assistance related to pollutant release and transfer registers. Such assistance is mainly relevant for the achievement of focal areas I and II of the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/4/Add.1, decision II/2, annex).

### **1. Workshops and country-specific projects**

8. The secretariat promoted the Protocol and built the capacity of relevant experts during the Second Steering Committee Meeting and Training and Study Tour of the Global Project on the Implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers as a tool for Persistent Organic Pollutants reporting, dissemination and awareness raising for Belarus, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, [the Republic of] Moldova and Peru, organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (Lima, 5–8 March 2018).<sup>3</sup>

9. The secretariat promoted the Protocol and built the capacity of relevant experts at the Third Steering Committee Meeting and Final Lessons Learned Workshop of the Global Project on the Implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers as a tool for Persistent Organic Pollutants reporting, dissemination and awareness raising for Belarus, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, [the Republic of] Moldova and Peru (Siem Reap, Cambodia, 25–27 March 2019),<sup>4</sup> and at a workshop organized by UNEP/Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean (MAP Phase II) as a part of the Regional Meeting on Reporting of Releases to Marine and Coastal Environment from Land-based Sources and Activities and Related Indicators (Tirana, 19 and 20 March 2019).<sup>5</sup> The secretariat also held bilateral consultations regarding the development of pollutant release and transfer register systems and possible accession to the Protocol with experts from countries of the Mediterranean region, including Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia, on the margins of the above-mentioned UNEP/MAP Phase II workshop, and with Tajikistan, on the margins of the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 26–28 June 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See

[www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/Compliance\\_Committee/7th\\_CC\\_PRTR/Summary\\_Key\\_Issues\\_for\\_Protocol\\_development\\_by\\_the\\_Compliance\\_Committee.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/prtr/Compliance_Committee/7th_CC_PRTR/Summary_Key_Issues_for_Protocol_development_by_the_Compliance_Committee.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://prtr.unitar.org/site/event/1375>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://prtr.unitar.org/site/event/1444>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://web.unep.org/unepmap/regional-meeting-reporting-releases-marine-and-coastal-environment-land-based-sources-and-activities>.

## 2. Technical assistance through electronic tools

10. The secretariat has continued to manage the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy<sup>6</sup> and PRTR.net,<sup>7</sup> a global portal used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to pollutant release and transfer registers. The secretariat maintained and updated PRTR.net in cooperation with UNITAR and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and continues to pursue close cooperation with UNITAR in order to ensure the effective use of PRTR.net and PRTR:Learn<sup>8</sup> by national focal points and stakeholders. The secretariat is currently upgrading PRTR.net to ensure its compliance with security standards and to improve its functionality and content.

11. The secretariat also continues to manage a database on capacity-building activities,<sup>9</sup> which provides information on past, future and ongoing pollutant release and transfer register capacity-building activities.

12. The Protocol section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)<sup>10</sup> website was regularly updated during the intersessional period. In addition, section D below includes information regarding the online reporting tool.

## 3. Thematic surveys

13. The secretariat carried out a survey among national focal points on progress in implementing the strategic plan for 2015–2020, in order to provide an overview in that regard. The results of the survey were made available in a document (PRTR/WG.1/2018/Inf.1)<sup>11</sup> for the sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 9 November 2018).

14. Pursuant to a request regarding the development of the Protocol made by the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol at its sixth meeting (Geneva, 9 November 2018), the Bureau agreed to hold consultations in order to gather possible suggestions from Parties, other interested States and any interested stakeholders with a view to drawing up a report:

(a) Reviewing the reporting requirements under the Protocol as referred to in article 6 (2) of the Protocol, including possible revisions of annexes I and II, taking into account recent developments in relevant international processes;

(b) Identifying possible gaps and examples of imprecise wording of other provisions of the Protocol, with regard to which Parties faced implementation challenges.

15. The secretariat assisted the Bureau in carrying out those consultations. The comments received through the consultations were considered by the Bureau when preparing its report on the subject to the Working Group for its seventh meeting (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019).

## 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 consists of: meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol; ad hoc meetings; and the use of electronic tools. Information exchange on a technical level is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan and, specifically, for the achievement of objectives I.1, I.2, II.1, II.3 and III.1.

17. In addition, section B above and section E below describe training workshops, surveys, subregional workshops, electronic tools and other activities that enable information

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.prtr.net/](http://www.prtr.net/).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://prtr.unitar.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://apps.unece.org/ehlm/pp/NIR/RLsearch.asp>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Available at [www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events/public-participation/2018/sixth-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs/sixth-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs.html](http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/public-participation/meetings-and-events/public-participation/2018/sixth-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs/sixth-meeting-of-the-working-group-of-the-parties-to-the-protocol-on-prtrs.html).

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 to the Protocol.

#### **D. Reporting mechanism**

18. The objective of the reporting mechanism is to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Protocol, the review of compliance and the exchange of experience. The method of work consists of: meetings of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol; the use of the online national implementation reports database; preparation and processing of national implementation reports; analysis of reports and preparation of a synthesis report. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of focal area I of the strategic plan.

19. Following the failure of Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia and Ukraine to submit their national implementation reports for the 2017 reporting cycle before the third session of the Meeting of the Parties (Budva, Montenegro, 15 September 2017), those Parties were called on to report by 1 October 2017. As at 15 July 2019, Slovenia had still not submitted its report for the 2014 reporting cycle and Malta and Slovenia had still not submitted their reports for the 2017 reporting cycle.

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

20. The objective of awareness-raising and promotion of the Protocol and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes is to: (a) expand knowledge of the Protocol throughout the ECE region and beyond; (b) increase the number of Parties to the Protocol; and (c) further the application of the Protocol in the context of other multilateral environmental agreements and related processes (for example, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management under the International Conference on Chemicals Management). The activity is pursued through: participation in key regional and international events and processes; the provision of support to workshops organized by others; the preparation of leaflets, publications, news bulletins and other materials on the Protocol; updating the website; and writing and reviewing articles on the Protocol. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan, and specifically for the achievement of objectives I.1, II.2–4 and III.1.

21. During the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 26 February–23 March 2018), the secretariat promoted the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on several occasions: (a) on 2 March 2018, at a side event regarding children's rights and the environment organized by the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; (b) on 5 March 2018, during the plenary discussion on the promotion and protection of all human rights and civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development; (c) on 5 March 2018, at a side event organized by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Earthjustice and the Centre for International Environmental Law on the protection of environmental human rights defenders; (d) on 6 March 2018, at the launch of the UNEP Environmental Rights Initiative.

22. During the reporting period, upon request, the secretariat also provided ongoing advisory support, including by engaging relevant experts, to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the negotiation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which also addresses the issue of pollutant release and transfer registers.

23. In response to a call by the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in October

2018, the secretariat provided input<sup>12</sup> to the Special Rapporteur's report on human rights obligations in the context of air pollution (A/HRC/40/55).

24. In response to a call for comments by the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights, in March 2019, the secretariat prepared and submitted comments on the zero draft of a legally binding instrument regulating, in international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises. The open-ended intergovernmental working group was established through Human Rights Council resolution 26/9, adopted at the twenty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 10–27 June 2014).

25. The third Global Round Table on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Geneva, 7 and 8 November 2018) was held under the auspices of ECE and OECD and in cooperation with UNITAR and UNEP. It was co-chaired by the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties of the Protocol and the Chair of the OECD Working Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. The Global Round Table fostered exchange between Governments and different stakeholders on pollutant release and transfer register-related issues. The presentations and discussions during the event were centred on good practices, common challenges and new opportunities related to the further development of pollutant release and transfer registers.

26. Furthermore, to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, the secretariat serviced the eleventh meeting of the Capacity-building Coordination Framework under the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 9 October 2018). The meeting focused on discussing potential cooperation as a part of existing and future capacity-building activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in the light of the decisions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and to the Protocol adopted at the latest sessions (Budva, Montenegro, 14 and 15 September 2017) and the ongoing in-depth review of progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 carried out under the auspices of the United Nations high-level political forum on sustainable development.

27. The secretariat also promoted the Protocol through the activities under the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals<sup>13</sup> and various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. This included contributing a textbox on pollutant release and transfer registers as a possible means of implementing many of the recommendation made in the report entitled *Measuring Progress: Towards monitoring the environmental dimension of the SDGs*,<sup>14</sup> a derivative product of the sixth Global Environment Outlook,<sup>15</sup> which was submitted to the UNEP United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session (Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019). In addition, the secretariat promoted synergy within the Multilateral Environmental Agreement Information and Knowledge Management Initiative coordinated by UNEP and took part in relevant meetings.

28. The secretariat organized a round table on the environmental dimension of Sustainable Development Goal 16, held on the margins of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region (Geneva, 21 and 22 March 2019). The round table highlighted the role of the Convention and the Protocol in achieving Goal 16. The event was organized in cooperation with UNEP, the International Telecommunication Union and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe.

29. The secretariat also provided comments on documents related to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, in particular a note by the secretariat to the Strategic Approach, which outlines an approach to creating, identifying, documenting,

<sup>12</sup> Further information is available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Pages/AirPollution.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Pages/AirPollution.aspx).

<sup>13</sup> See [www.who.int/iomc/en/](http://www.who.int/iomc/en/).

<sup>14</sup> Available at [www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/measuring-progress-towards-achieving-environmental-dimension-sdgs](http://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/measuring-progress-towards-achieving-environmental-dimension-sdgs).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Environment Outlook – Geo-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2019).

strengthening and disseminating knowledge-intensive activities (SAICM/OEWG.3/INF/32), and a paper by the Co-Chairs of the intersessional process on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 (SAICM/OEWG.3/4).<sup>16</sup>

30. Furthermore, the secretariat contributed information on electronic tools used for Convention and Protocol activities to the report of the 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/74/62-E/2019/6).

31. Finally, during the reporting period, the secretariat continued an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials on the Convention and the Protocol to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, NGOs and academic institutions in the ECE region.

## **F. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities**

32. The coordination and oversight of intersessional activities under the Protocol are carried out at meetings of the Working Group of the Parties, meetings of the Bureau, as necessary, and by consultations among Bureau members using email. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan.

33. The secretariat serviced the sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 9 November 2018), and the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth meetings of the Bureau (Gothenburg, Sweden, 23 and 24 May 2018, Geneva, 9 November 2018, and Geneva, 22 and 23 May 2019, respectively),<sup>17</sup> and coordinated a number of email consultations among the Bureau members.

34. Representatives of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements continued to: liaise at informal meetings; 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. During the reporting period, the tenth informal meeting was held in Geneva, on 28 January 2019. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, along with the secretariat, participated in the meeting and promoted issues related to the work under the Protocol, in particular the outcomes of the third Global Round Table on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers as a remarkable partnership event between ECE, OECD, UNEP and UNITAR and the work on development of the Protocol.<sup>18</sup>

35. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties also promoted the above-mentioned activities under the Protocol at the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019).

36. As at 15 July 2019, the Protocol had 36 Parties.

## **G. Technical assessment of provisions of the Protocol**

37. The 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 pollutant release and transfer registers, in line with article 6 (2) of the Protocol. This work programme activity is relevant for the achievement of all three focal areas of the strategic plan, and more specifically objectives I.1–6, II.1 and III.1–4.

38. At its first meeting (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2011), the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol agreed that no amendments to the provisions of the Protocol were

<sup>16</sup> Available at [www.saicm.org/About/OEWG/OEWG3/tabid/5984/](http://www.saicm.org/About/OEWG/OEWG3/tabid/5984/).

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see [www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-bureau.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-bureau.html).

<sup>18</sup> For Chair's summaries of the meetings, which include a list of participants, see [www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/joint-work-and-informal-networks.html](http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/joint-work-and-informal-networks.html).

needed at that time, and that experience needed to be gathered before such a review could take place. The 2014 and 2017 synthesis reports on the implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/2014/5 and ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/10) presented to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its second session (Maastricht, the Netherlands, 3 and 4 July 2014) and its third session (Budva, Montenegro, 15 September 2017), respectively, and the individual national implementation reports<sup>19</sup> on which the syntheses were based, provide insight into some of the issues related to the technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol. In addition, an assessment concerning the implementation of the Protocol's provisions and its strategic plan is provided in the following documents: Systemic issues concerning the implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers and recommendations on how to address them (ECE/MP.PRTR/2017/6/Add.2); Progress in implementing the strategic plan for 2015–2020 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2018/5); and Development of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2018/6). Pursuant to the decision of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties made at its sixth meeting (Geneva, 9 November 2018) in relation to the development of the Protocol, the Bureau is preparing a report on the subject matter that will address the issue of technical assessment of the provisions of the Protocol.

## **H. Horizontal support areas**

39. During the period 2018–2021, the objective of horizontal support activities was to provide overall support that covered multiple substantive areas of the work programme, among other things, through secretarial support and staff training. These activities are relevant for the achievement of all focal areas of the strategic plan.

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<sup>19</sup> Available at [www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/reporting.html](http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/reporting.html).