



International PRTR Coordinating Group

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR POLLUTANT RELEASE AND TRANSFER REGISTERS IN THE UNECE REGION AND BEYOND *

Information paper prepared by the Aarhus Convention secretariat

1. Article 16, paragraph 2 (c), of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) to the Aarhus Convention¹ requires the Parties to encourage cooperation among each other and with relevant international organizations, as appropriate, to promote “the provision of technical assistance to Parties that are developing countries and Parties with economics in transition in matters relating to the Protocol”. In accordance with article 17, paragraph 2 (h), of the Protocol, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol is required to keep under continuous review the implementation and development of the Protocol and, with this purpose in mind, to consider *inter alia* establishing technical assistance mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol.²

2. At the second session of the Meeting of the Parties, the Parties recognized that “with the development of the Protocol on PRTRs ... there is a need to support its future implementation, in particular through technical assistance and capacity-building” (ECE/MP.PP/2005/16, para. 59). In the Almaty Declaration (27 May 2005), the Parties further affirmed that “promoting implementation will require further capacity-building efforts aimed at addressing the identified needs of specific countries or groups of countries or addressing specific topics or professional target groups and providing guidance and support for implementation (ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.1, para. 17).

3. This document sets out possible elements for a PRTR technical cooperation mechanism in the UNECE region. It first reviews the Aarhus Convention’s capacity-building framework and framework programme for capacity-building for PRTRs developed by the secretariat in consultation with its partner organizations. The document next addresses possible arenas for regional and international cooperation and support for national PRTR development within and beyond the UNECE region. It concludes by inviting consideration of the establishment of a particular technical cooperation mechanism in support of implementation of the Protocol,

* This information paper is adapted from “Capacity-building for the Protocol” (ECE/MP.PP/AC.1/2007/L.5), which was prepared by the Bureau to the Working Group on PRTRs for its fourth meeting, 14-16 February 2007, in Geneva.

¹ The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was adopted in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998. The Protocol on PRTRs to the Convention was adopted in Kiev, Ukraine, in May 2003. Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the European Community are Signatories to the Protocol. The UNECE region encompasses the whole of Europe and five Central Asian countries, as well as Canada, Israel and the United States.

² “Technical assistance” is understood as assistance aimed at resolving specific technical needs; whereas “capacity-building” more broadly encompasses the strengthening and/or development of a country’s human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities.

in light of future experience gained under the Protocol's framework programme for capacity-building for PRTR.

I. THE AARHUS CONVENTION CAPACITY-BUILDING FRAMEWORK

4. The Aarhus Convention's capacity-building framework, which was launched at a capacity-building coordination meeting organized by the secretariat in September 2003, is open to the main international and regional organizations significantly involved in capacity-building activities relating to the Convention. It functions more as a forum for information exchange, cooperation and (where so desired by the partners) coordination than as a body organizing concrete projects. The latter should be developed by the organizations themselves, individually or in groups, with regard for the needs and wishes of the countries themselves.

5. The partner organizations involved in the framework's activities in 2006 included UNECE, UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC), Milieukontakt Oost-Europa, The Access Initiative (TAI) and European ECO-Forum.

6. The Aarhus Convention secretariat has undertaken or coordinated a number of capacity-building activities specifically relevant to the development of national PRTR systems within the scope of the Convention's capacity-building framework, including participation in regional and subregional workshops, media presentations and other technical exchange and promotional activities undertaken at the international level within the context of the Work Programme of the Convention. Such activities are supported through extrabudgetary resources through implementation of the 2006–2008 Work Programme for the Convention.

II. FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME ON CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR POLLUTANT RELEASE AND TRANSFER REGISTERS

7. At its first meeting in February 2004, the UNECE Working Group on PRTRs welcomed the efforts that UNECE, UNEP and UNITAR were making to coordinate their work on PRTRs and invited them to refine and further develop a proposal for a framework programme on capacity-building for PRTRs. It also welcomed the work of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) and encouraged the United Nations bodies to explore with the REC possibilities for a coordinated approach. In accordance with this mandate, UNECE, UNEP, UNITAR and the REC jointly developed a framework programme on regional, subregional and national PRTR capacity-building. The programme is open to other interested organizations.³

8. The PRTR framework programme includes the following proposed regional, subregional and national activities:

³ http://www-dev.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/docs/2007/PRTRs_donor_invitation_2007_02_05.pdf

Regional activities

- (a) Development of guidance on technical issues related to compliance and implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs (UNECE, UNITAR and REC); and
- (b) Further development of the Virtual Classroom on PRTRs (<http://prtrvc.unitar.org>) to give technical assistance in the implementation of the Protocol (UNECE and UNITAR).⁴

Subregional activities

- (a) Workshops on legal, institutional and/or technical themes related to the Protocol's implementation, following the model of the workshops conducted in partnership with the REC and the EECCA RECs prior to the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention (UNEP, UNITAR, REC and European ECO-Forum); and
- (b) Workshops and study tours bringing experts from countries developing PRTRs to countries with operational PRTRs to acquire experience and expertise (REC).

National activities

- (a) Training programmes on legal, institutional and/or technical aspects of developing a pilot PRTR (UNECE, UNITAR, UNEP/GRID-Arendal and REC);
- (b) Assessment of existing reporting systems in comparison with the Protocol on PRTRs and models of good practice (UNECE);
- (c) Identification of needs/priorities to develop legislative and institutional frameworks for PRTRs (UNECE, UNITAR and REC);
- (d) Development of a strategy on establishing national PRTR systems, in cooperation with relevant government agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders (UNECE, UNITAR and REC);
- (e) Capacity-building for Governments, NGOs and other stakeholders on PRTR issues (UNITAR, REC and CAREC⁵); and
- (f) Public education to promote understanding of the benefits and use of PRTR systems (UNECE, UNEP, UNITAR, REC and CAREC).

9. Among the results expected through implementation of the framework programme are:

- (a) Country strategies to establish PRTR systems and to ratify/implement the Protocol;
- (b) Review of existing reporting systems identifying gaps and needs and providing recommendations for developing legislative and institutional frameworks for PRTRs;
- (c) Operational Virtual Classroom Internet discussion forums;
- (d) Pilot projects in selected countries resulting in progress towards PRTR systems in a transparent process involving the public and other stakeholders; and

⁴ The Virtual Classroom on PRTRs provides a forum for the exchange of information and good practice in international and national PRTR development. It may be well suited to promoting the exchange of technical information by electronic means among Parties, Signatories and other interested stakeholders and thus could be considered an integral part of any future technical assistance mechanism under the Protocol. Outside of the UNECE region, the Virtual Classroom has been applied, notably, to PRTR development in Chile.

⁵ The Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC).

- (e) Strengthened capacities of Governments, NGOs and the private sector for understanding and developing PRTRs.

10. The list of PRTR capacity-building activities, developed cooperatively by UNECE, UNEP, UNITAR and the REC at the request of the Working Group on PRTRs and with contributions from other capacity-building partners, has been compiled and updated semi-annually by the secretariat beginning in 2004. It may prove useful for tracking and reporting on PRTR capacity-building activities at the international level, and in particular for tracking implementation of SAICM⁶ for the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM).

11. The involvement of the private sector and NGOs, in order to strengthen and further improve their relationship with Government and to increase resources and expertise contributions, is seen as highly desirable in UNECE programme activities and initiatives. The development of PRTRs, which by their nature are intersectoral instruments and demand a high degree of coordinated action for their implementation, requires broad multi-stakeholder involvement at the national and international levels. Any future technical cooperation mechanism would also need broad multi-stakeholder involvement and should therefore place a premium on coordination of effort.

III. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL COOPERATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

A. International PRTR Coordinating Group

12. The Inter-Organizational Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) PRTR Co-ordinating Group concluded its activities in June 2005. Subsequently, the IOMC Group's former members agreed to establish a new International PRTR Coordinating Group as successor to the IOMC PRTR Co-ordinating Group.

13. The overall objective of the new International PRTR Coordinating Group is 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 serves to promote capacity-building for PRTR systems in developing countries and countries with economies in transition through intergovernmental coordination. It could also serve as a reporting mechanism for the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM), in particular to measure progress on the SAICM Action Plan and to analyse trends in national implementation (see paragraphs 20-21 below).⁷ Regional SAICM meetings could also provide opportunities for the Coordinating Group to provide information on national developments and promote the exchange of good practice.⁸

14. The International PRTR Coordinating Group may provide a useful forum for promoting international cooperation and technical assistance. It enjoys wide participation by countries which have established PRTR systems or are involved in the development of PRTRs

⁶ Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management.

⁷ For the significance of PRTRs to SAICM implementation, see ECE/MP.PP/AC.1/2006/2, paragraph 24.

⁸ E.g. "PRTRs in Action: Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers as a tool for SAICM and Multilateral Environmental Agreements implementation", SAICM Central and Eastern Europe Regional Meeting of SAICM, 5 December 2006, Riga, Latvia.

internationally. The Coordinating Group operates on the basis of consensus. It will, through activities implemented individually or jointly by its members:

- (a) Promote mechanisms to harmonize activities and avoid duplication of efforts;
- (b) Increase, through collaboration, coordination and information exchange between its members, the efficiency of international efforts to bring together expertise on PRTRs;
- (c) Coordinate PRTR outreach, training and capacity-building activities of international organizations, national governments and other interested parties;
- (d) Facilitate the exchange of information on ongoing and planned PRTR activities of its members;
- (e) Enhance the network of PRTR resource institutions and individuals; and
- (f) Coordinate the preparation of reports concerning international PRTR activities to be submitted for consideration to relevant forums (e.g. the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety).

15. The International PRTR Coordinating Group operates on an interim basis as a self-standing independent body; consideration of operating under the auspices of another international body will be kept under review as international chemicals management coordination evolves. UNECE currently serves as the secretariat of the Coordinating Group and its Bureau, on which UNEP, UNITAR and the Government of Denmark are currently represented.

B. OECD Task Force on PRTRs

16. In 2002, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) convened a Task Force on PRTRs (OECD Task Force). The OECD Task Force has a wide mandate to

- (a) Improve and make widely available release estimation techniques;⁹
- (b) Facilitate the sharing of PRTR data between countries;¹⁰
- (c) Advance and improve the uses of PRTR data;
- (d) Identify, analyse and develop tools and provide guidance in areas that would promote the establishment and improvement of PRTRs in OECD countries and beyond;
- (e) Promote communication and a close working relationship between the Task Force and relevant organizations on the various aspects of the PRTR work; and
- (f) Analyse and share developments in the field of PRTRs.

17. The meetings of the Task Force are hosted by participating OECD member countries on a rotating basis. When the Task Force schedules its meetings in Europe, the International PRTR Coordinating Group has agreed to hold its meetings back-to-back with those of the OECD Task Force in order to promote participation by international experts who might not be able to attend a stand-alone meeting of the Coordinating Group.

⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/env/prtr/rc>

¹⁰ <http://www.oecd.org/env/prtr/data>

C. Environment and Security Initiative

18. The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) provides a framework for cooperation on environmental issues across borders to promote peace, stability and sustainable development. ENVSEC is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP, OSCE and UNECE that builds on the combined strengths and field presence of the lead organizations to perform three key functions:

- (a) Assessment and monitoring of environment and security linkages;
- (b) Capacity-building and institutional development; and
- (c) Integration of environment and security concerns and priorities into international and national policymaking.¹¹

19. Implementing PRTRs, particularly in targeted subregions, can be viewed as part of this larger effort in the context of ENVSEC. In November 2006, UNECE presented a concept proposal to the ENVSEC Management Board for the development of capacity by enterprises and Governments in EECCA to implement national PRTRs in preparation for implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs. The Board made a number of recommendations, notably to expand the geographic scope of the concept to include South-East European countries and to specify subregions, facilities and partners in a full proposal. The secretariat is circulating the concept proposal to potential partner organizations and Governments. It is expected that the final proposal (or set of proposals) will be included in the UNECE ENVSEC Work Programme and formal requests made to potential donors to fund PRTR capacity-building activities in line with the PRTR framework programme.

D. Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management

20. The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) Overarching Policy Strategy and Global Plan of Action were adopted at the International Conference on Chemicals Management, in Dubai in February 2006. SAICM recognizes the importance of all stakeholders taking cooperative action on global priorities, including *inter alia* "encouraging implementation of existing internationally recognized standards, tools and approaches...such as...pollutant release and transfer registers". The Global Programme of Action included PRTRs as possible areas of work, e.g. the creation of national and international registers and of guidance supporting their implementation, and promotion of political consensus in favour of access to information (UNEP/GCSS/IX.6/Add.2).

21. To promote implementation of SAICM in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, the ICCM had resolved to launch the Quick Start Programme with support from donor Governments for an initial period of five years. A total of 4.5m USD had been made available for first round projects ranging from 50,000 to 250,000 USD for two-year long projects. Governments seeking assistance with national implementation of the Global Programme of Action may wish to consider including within the scope of their proposals development of national PRTR systems.

E. Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

22. Article 10, paragraph 5, of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants requires each Party to give sympathetic consideration to developing mechanisms,

¹¹ ENVSEC participating organizations include UNDP, UNEP, OSCE, NATO, UNECE and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). UNECE became a full partner in 2005.

such as pollutant release and transfer registers, for the collection and dissemination of information on estimates of the annual quantities of the chemicals listed in Annex A, B or C that are released or disposed of.

23. In accordance with paragraph 1 of Article 7 of the Stockholm Convention, each Party develop and endeavor to implement a plan for the implementation of its obligations under the Convention and to transmit its plan to the Conference of the Parties within two years of the date on which the Convention enters into force for it. Financing for eligible countries to develop these plans is available through the Global Environment Facility.

24. Countries developing such National Implementation Plans may be encouraged to consider development of a national PRTR system, according to their national priorities.

IV. CONCLUSION

25. Opportunities for PRTR technical cooperation and capacity-building exist in a variety of regional and international forums and initiatives being undertaken both within and beyond the UNECE region. Making good use of existing technical expertise and intergovernmental processes, such as the OECD PRTR Task Force and International PRTR Coordinating Group, would promote international PRTR development while helping avoid any potential duplication of activity. The International PRTR Coordinating Group may wish to consider how best to raise awareness of these opportunities among developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The idea of establishing a particular technical cooperation mechanism for the Protocol may be explored in future by the Working Group on PRTRs, if the experience of the impact of the framework programme on capacity-building for PRTR indicates that such a mechanism might provide clear added value.