

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twenty-sixth session

Geneva, 9-11 November 2020

Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference: Background thematic documents

Information paper No. 5

29 October 2020

Draft outline of the background thematic document of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference: “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”

Note by the secretariat¹

1. The Reform Plan of the Environment for Europe process calls for the preparation of one official document per selected theme of each Environment for Europe ministerial conference (ECE/CEP/S/152 and Corr.1, annex I, para. 12 (d)). The document aims to facilitate the ministerial discussion by providing background information to support delegations in preparing for the Conference.
2. At its twenty-fifth session, the Committee mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders (including UNEP, and OECD GREEN Action Task Force), to prepare the first drafts of the two background thematic documents on: “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure” (information paper No. 5); and “Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism” (information paper No. 6).
3. During its online consultations on 15 April, the Bureau discussed the relevance of the two themes for the Nicosia Conference taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ECE countries and their economies. With regard to the first theme “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”, the Bureau recommended that it be kept unchanged. With regard to the second theme “Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism”, the Bureau recommended that sustainable tourism be kept, but that the focus be changed to make it more relevant to the countries taking into consideration the current situation regarding the pandemic and its heavy impact on the tourism sector.
4. During its online meeting on 4 June, the Bureau discussed the first drafts of outlines of two background thematic documents. The Bureau agreed to seek further comments/proposals on the first drafts of outlines by the Bureau members and partner organizations; discuss the revised drafts at its next (virtual) meeting in September 2020; agree on the structure; and advise the secretariat on further steps.
5. During its online meeting on 23 September, the Bureau discussed the revised drafts based on the comments/proposals received from the members and the partner organizations. The Bureau agreed that the secretariat will submit them to the CEP-26 as information documents; that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic can be addressed in all relevant chapters in both documents (no dedicated chapters needed); and recommended the secretariat to start drafting next year to gather all relevant information on the two themes and prepare very first drafts of background thematic documents for discussion at the Bureau meeting (2-3 June 2021).
6. The result of the above work - the draft outline – is presented in Annex 1 of the present information document. Its structure follows that of the background thematic document “Greening the economy in the pan-European region” (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/4) of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial

¹ This document was not formally edited.

Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 2016), which was successfully used for facilitating the Ministerial discussion (see also the Annex 2 to this paper). The structure is loosely based on the drivers-pressures-state-impact-response (DPSIR) model of intervention.

7. The questions under each chapter of the draft outline will facilitate the ministerial discussion at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference under the theme “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”. It is expected that concrete national perspectives under each of the identified questions will be brought up during the ministers’ interventions and discussion. The list of questions will be finalised through the Committee’s consideration and agreement at its special session in advance of the Ministerial Conference.

8. The Committee will be invited to consider the information provided.

Annex 1

The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

Theme 1: “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”

Background thematic document (draft outline)

Introduction

Content: Scope, structure, basic definitions, partners

I. Setting the Scene

(Presenting driving forces (trends and actions in infrastructure development) and pressures created as a result (on environment, resources, etc)).

Content: Describing the present situation and global and regional trends in infrastructure development

Questions for discussion:

- [How can we define criteria and indicators for sustainable infrastructure?]
- [...]

II. Infrastructure and sustainability: challenges and opportunities

(The state and impact from the sectors' development on the environment, and how does it affect the achievement of SDGs)

Content: Describing challenges - the problems; and opportunities - what we want to achieve; especially taking into account Agenda 2030

Questions for discussion:

- [How can we define criteria and indicators for sustainable infrastructure?]
- [How to get the financial sector on board?]
- [How to integrate infrastructure systems and sectors?]
- [How to balance environmental, economic and social sustainability?]
- [How to ensure sustainability from planning to construction and maintenance?]
- [...]

III. Practice and experience

(The response, concentrating on both national actions and these from intl. organisations; also as related to Agenda 2030)

Content: Describing national and international practice/tools/experience from member States and intl. organisations

Questions for discussion:

- [What policy action at global level could ensure that infrastructure deliver the SDG?]
- [How to apply infrastructure sustainability rating systems?]

- [How can we measure the sustainability of infrastructure at the aggregate (e.g. national) level? What can be done to develop better indicators for measuring progress towards SDG target 9.1?]
- [Covid-19 related recovery packages are directed towards sustainable infrastructure. How to take advantage of this "unprecedented opportunity"?)]
- [...]

IV. Future, and our place in it

(Collective response using international processes – first of all, the EfE - for achieving the discussed above)

Content: Describing the directions of cooperation within and outside the UNECE region

Questions for discussion:

- [What could be the next steps at EfE, and UNEA-6?]
- [How to facilitate capacity building?]
- [What steps could be taken to further promote cooperation among countries in the pan-European region?]
- [Invitation to governments on the commitment to implement "Good Practice Guidance Framework for Sustainable Infrastructure"?)]
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V. Conclusions and the way forward

Annex 2

For comparison:

The structure of the background thematic document “Greening the economy in the pan-European region” (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/4) of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 2016)

“Greening the economy in the pan-European region”

Introduction - 1.5 pages

I. Challenges and opportunities – 5 pages

Questions for discussion:

- What are the pressing challenges to greening the economy in your country?
- What positive effects on, e.g., employment, human well-being, prosperity and natural capital are evident after introducing green economy policies?
- Have trade-offs been taken into account in policymaking — e.g., in terms of the impact on employment, social equity and private investment?

II. Paths to sustainability – 8 pages

Questions for discussion:

- What approaches have proven most useful to promote a more efficient use of natural resources and to reduce pressures on them (e.g., circular economy, green innovation and initiatives in the fields of energy, building, transport infrastructure, water, fiscal reforms, standards and labelling)?
- What initiatives are working successfully or are planned to be introduced in your country to address challenges and major obstacles, including to sustainable consumption and production patterns?

III. Green incentives – 6 pages

Questions for discussion:

- What incentives concerning sustainable public procurement, environmental taxation and the removal of environmentally harmful subsidies, including fossil fuel subsidies, have been introduced, and what else can be done?
- What do you do to encourage green investment, including private and foreign direct investment and technology transfer in different sectors?

IV. Cooperation – 2 pages

Questions for discussion:

- What steps could be taken to further promote cooperation among countries in the pan-European region to facilitate the transition to a green economy, including in the context of the post-2015 development agenda?

V. Conclusions and the way forward – 1 page