



Evaluation of the Project

Self-evaluation of the activities serviced by UNECE under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) (January 2023)

Progress Report as of 31 December 2023

| # | Recommendation | Management response | Responsibility | Target date | Date of implementation/comments |
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| 1 | Continue to encourage a participatory approach by engaging Parties, NGOs, and other stakeholders in activities and preparing work programmes containing budgets and other documents for decision-making to maximize the commitments and possibility of mobilizing adequate resources. | <p>UNECE accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will continue encouraging that Parties, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders: (a) have effective opportunity to share their good practices and challenges by liaising with the respective Chairs on allocation of a prominent speaking place at treaties' meetings, in particular as panellists; (b) have opportunity to comment work programmes containing budgets and other documents for decision-making by making those documents and the comments received available online in advance of the documents' adoption, and notifying Parties, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders accordingly.</p> | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary to the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, Environment Division | <p>31 December 2024 for (a);</p> <p>31 December 2025 for (b)</p> | <p>(a) Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>A number of activities have taken place in the reporting period. Through these activities, the secretariat continued encouraging that Parties, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders have effective opportunity to share their good practices and challenges by liaising with the respective Chairs on allocation of a prominent speaking place at treaties' meetings, in particular as panellists. This have been evidenced, but not limited to, by the following:</p> <p>1. Convention's Task Force on Access to Justice held its meeting and the Judicial Colloquium (Geneva, 3-5 April 2023), focusing on e.g., cases related to climate change and biodiversity protection; and energy-related and pollution from chemicals and waste- related cases; and on measures removing barriers related to costs, access to assistance mechanisms and timeliness of the review procedures. Both events featured panel discussions with participation of representatives of NGOs, judiciary and other stakeholders, see the programmes: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/15TFAJ_Inf1_ProvisionalProgramme_Add.1_Rev1.pdf and https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2023_Judicial_Colloquium_Provisonal_Programme_EN_3Apr_2023.pdf.</p> <p>2. Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention held its twenty-seventh meeting (Geneva, 26-28 June 2023) to address a range of pressing issues. Reflecting on the major milestones achieved during 25 years since the Convention's adoption, Parties to the Convention came together with the representatives of international organizations, NGOs, academia and other key stakeholders, such as child and youth defenders. A number of commitments were taken, including with regard to protection of environmental defenders; advancing public participation in decision-making on large-scale infrastructure; promotion of transparency and public participation in international forums dealing with environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context and trade; and on the issue of balanced and equitable</p> |

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| | | | | | <p>participation and different modalities for engaging stakeholders in international decision-making. All stakeholders were given effective opportunity to speak at the meeting. See the Speakers' List with statements under the Tab "Statements" on the meeting's webpage. Furthermore, two thematic sessions with several panel discussions were held and for each panel NGOs, Aarhus Centres and other stakeholders participated as panellists. See Tabs "Thematic session on PPDM" and "Thematic session on PPIF" on the meeting's webpage.</p> <p>3. Convention's Task Force on Access to Information at its 8th meeting featured an international workshop entitled "Advancing public access to environment-related product information: Challenges and opportunities". Both events aimed at promoting digital access to information in support of green and circular economy and focused on e.g., transparency in the environmental performance of economic activities; effective public access to environmental information on products, on emissions into the environment; and the provision of information to public authorities by third parties, both routinely and in case of an imminent threat to human health or the environment. Both events featured panel discussions and at each panel representatives of NGOs, Aarhus Centres and other stakeholders participated as panellists. See programmes of the events: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/8TFAI_MeetingAgenda_inf.1_Add.1_Programme.pdf and https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/API_Workshop_Provisional_Programme_Fnl%20%281%29.pdf</p> <p>4. Tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (Geneva, 27–28 November 2023) focused on the need for PRTR databases to become interoperable and integrated with other sources of data; and the role of PRTRs in promoting synergy among different international reporting obligations and in breaking down silos across sectors – one of the main requirements for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the transition to green and circular economies. The meeting allowed to further coordination and cooperation with other MEAs and processes dealing with pollution, chemicals and waste, including the recently agreed Global Framework on Chemicals. Numerous stakeholders participated in the meeting, including representatives of NGOs and Aarhus Centres, who also acted as panellists and were given opportunity to make statements from the floor, as needed, see tab "Statements, Comments and Presentations" on the meeting's webpage.</p> <p>5. Fourth Joint Roundtable on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding Living Modified Organisms/Genetically Modified Organisms was held (Geneva, 11-12 December 2023) under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena</p> |

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| | | | | | <p>Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity to build countries' capacities through sharing knowledge, experiences and lessons learned regarding these subjects and put forward suggestions for future action at the national and international levels. The meeting featured a training session on procedures and practice on access to justice related to LMOs/GMOs. Numerous stakeholders participated in the meeting, including representatives of NGOs, Aarhus Centres and private sector, who also acted as panellists, see programme for the event: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Provisional_Programme_GMO_LMO_Roundtable2023_v11Dec.pdf</p> <p>(b) In progress</p> <p>The secretariat continued encouraging that Parties, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders have opportunity to comment work programmes containing budgets and other documents for decision-making by making those documents and the comments received available online in advance of the documents' adoption, and notifying Parties, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders accordingly. This has been evidenced by the proceedings of the tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (Geneva, 27–28 November 2023). See, for example, the following documents for decision-making that have been made available online in three official ECE languages well in advance of the meeting:</p> <p>ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/7 – Item 6 (a) (i): Draft proposal on a possible decision on promoting innovative approaches for modernizing pollutant release and transfer registers, their global promotion and synergy</p> <p>ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/5 – Item 6 (a) (ii): Note on the work programme for 2026–2029 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers</p> <p>ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2023/6 – Item 6 (a) (iii): Note on future financial arrangements</p> <p>and Comments by the European ECO Forum on Draft proposal on a possible decision on promoting innovative approaches for modernizing pollutant release and transfer registers, their global promotion and synergy Word</p> <p>More documents for decision-making are expected to be submitted to the Working Group of the</p> |

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| | | | | | Parties to the Aarhus Convention (July 2024) and to the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (November 2024). The related progress will be reported in due course. |
| 2 | Liaise with OSCE to explore its possible interest in designing a regional program to support Aarhus Centres that have been left behind in fulfilling their responsibilities. Communicate this issue to Parties, other interested Members States, relevant UN organisations, and their regional and development partners with similar agendas and interests. | Management Response: UNECE accepts the recommendation. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will: (a) liaise with OSCE to explore its possible interest in designing a regional program to support Aarhus Centres; (b) communicate this issue to Parties, other interested Members States, relevant UN organisations, and their regional and development partners with similar agendas and interests, through addressing it in formal reports on implementation of the treaties' work programmes (which will be translated in ECE official languages) and submitting them for the attention of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs in 2023. | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, Environment Division | 31 December 2023 | <p>Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>The secretariat liaised with OSCE to explore its possible interest in designing a program to support Aarhus Centres and the issue was communicated to Parties, other interested Members States, relevant UN organisations and their partners.</p> <p>This have been evidenced by the proceedings of the 27th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, the Convention's decision-making body which meets annually during the intersessional period, see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) statement by the representative of OSCE, and the meeting's report para 54; (b) statement by the Deputy-Director of the ECE Environment Division (para 6 of the meeting's report); (c) practical example of the role of the Aarhus Centres to support civil society to exercise their rights under the Convention, whose representatives was invited to speak as a panellist at the meeting and to make a statement from the floor (paras 17 and 55 of the meeting's report); (d) appreciation to and recognition of the important role of the Aarhus Centres by the Working Group of the Parties and welcoming efforts by OSCE and encouraging Convention's national focal points to support capacity building in that regard (para 57 (b), (c), (d) of the meeting's report). |
| 3 | Encourage Member States to allocate an adequate budget to: a) Adjust the organisation's human, technical, and financial resources to address | Management Response: UNECE accepts the recommendation. (a) The secretariat will bring the issue of lack of resources to the attention of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, Environment | 31 December 2023 for (b) and (c); 31 December 2024 for (a) | <p>(a) In progress</p> <p>The secretariat brought the issue of lack of resources to the attention of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs together with its Working Group of the Parties, and is being assisting the Bureaux in preparing the work programmes, including the required resources and financial arrangements, see relevant outcomes and decisions (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/ACB_51_meeting_report.pdf, paras 3-4 and <a 893="" 897="" 910="" 917"="" data-label="Page-Footer" href="https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div data-bbox=">4</p> |

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| | <p>the ongoing political and economic demands.</p> <p>b) Support newly established mechanism for environmental defenders.</p> <p>c) Adjust the organisation's culture to support evaluation, including a greater awareness of the benefits and importance of accountability.</p> | <p>Aarhus Convention and the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs and will assist the Bureaux in preparing the work programmes for the Aarhus Convention and for the Protocol on PRTRs encouraging to address the required resources in those work programmes.</p> <p>(b) Pursuant to the adoption of decision VII/9 by the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 21 October 2021), the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention will seek additional resources for appropriation in 2024 as to support newly established rapid response mechanism for environmental defenders by submitting a decision on this subject matter for consideration by ECE Commission in 2023.</p> <p>(c) The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will raise awareness of the benefits and importance of accountability promoted through evaluations among Parties and stakeholders by (a) notifying Parties and a wide range of stakeholders about availability of this evaluation online and (b) addressing the current evaluation in formal reports on implementation of the treaties' work programmes (which will be</p> | Division | | <p>11/Protocol_WGP-10_Outcomes_27Nov_as_adopted.pdf, Item 6 (a)(ii) and (a)(iii)). Draft work programmes containing budgets and the respective decisions of financial arrangements are expected to be prepared by the Bureaux in the course of 2024-2025. The progress achieved will be reported in due course.</p> <p>(b) Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>Pursuant to the adoption of decision VII/9 by the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 21 October 2021), the secretariat submitted a draft decision requesting additional resources to support newly established rapid response mechanism (RRM) for environmental defenders, for consideration by relevant UN bodies, namely UN ECE Commission (see Other issues calling for decision by the Commission, Item IX and Oral Statement related to draft decision IX); by ECOSOC (ECOSOC at its management segment adopted resolution 2023/21 on RRM through which ECE requested funding to support RRM from UN Regular Budget). The General Assembly approved the request through resolution 78/253 of 22 December 2023.</p> <p>(c) Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>The secretariat raised awareness of the benefits and importance of accountability promoted through evaluations among Parties and stakeholders by (a) notifying Parties and a wide range of stakeholders about availability of this evaluation online and (b) addressing the current evaluation in formal reports on implementation of the treaties' work programmes (which were translated in ECE official languages) and submitting them for the attention of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs in 2023. See: https://unece.org/environment/documents/2023/05/item-8-report-implementation-work-programme-2022-2025 (para 60) and https://unece.org/environment/documents/2023/08/working-documents/item-7-report-implementation-work-programme (para 30)</p> |

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| | | translated in ECE official languages) and submitting them for the attention of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs in 2023. | | | |
| 4 | Subject to resources, plan and budget for impact evaluation to assess the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention in the region. ECE may also consider the possibility of assessing the effectiveness and impact of the Compliance Committees and Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders. | <p>UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention will assess feasibility of conducting an impact evaluation on the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention and will bring the issue for attention of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention for its consideration.</p> | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, Environment Division | 31 December 2024 | <p>Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>The secretariat assessed feasibility of conducting an impact evaluation on the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention and concluded that the current XB funding and the expected pledges is consistently experiencing systemic challenges and lacking sufficient resources for implementing the adopted work programme, even without additional activities. The secretariat brought the issue to the attention of the Convention's Bureau and the Working Group of the Parties. No Party indicated any interest in increasing its contributions or to allocate additional contributions for this purpose. Instead, Parties decided that the work area "Compliance mechanism" shall receive priority for funding, namely, advisory support and capacity-building for the Parties concerned with regard to compliance matter and rapid response mechanism for protection of environmental defenders, see paras 86 and 87 (a, f, g, h) https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/ECE.MP_PP_WG_1.2023.2.E.pdf.</p> |
| 5 | Continue enhancing synergies among relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes, including those related to the issue of environmental defenders. | <p>UNECE accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will continue enhancing synergies among relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes, including those related to the issue of environmental defenders by: (a) exchanging</p> | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, Environment Division | 31 December 2024 | <p>Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>The secretariat continued enhancing synergies among relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes, including those related to the issue of environmental defenders by: (a) exchanging relevant information with them; (b) promoting the treaties obligations and activities in other relevant processes; and (c) inviting representatives of other relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes to participate in the treaties' meetings and other activities. This have been evidenced, but not limited to, by the following.</p> <p><u>For (a) and (b), see:</u></p> |

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| | | <p>relevant information with them; (b) promoting the treaties obligations and activities in other relevant processes; and (c) inviting representatives of other relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes to participate in the treaties' meetings and other activities.</p> | | | <p>Sections II B and C and section III: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/ECE.MP_PP.WG.1.2023.5.E.pdf and</p> <p>Section, II E: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/ECE.MP_PRTR.WG.1.2023.3.E.pdf</p> <p>For (c), see:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convention's Task Force on Access to Justice and the Judicial Colloquium (Geneva, 3-5 April 2023), the latter was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Development Programme, Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe, IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law, Global Judicial Institute on Environmental Law, European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment, and other partner organizations. Representatives of many other relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes participated and made presentations at the events, see for example: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/ECE.MP_PP.WG.1.2023.4.E.0.pdf 2. 27th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 26-28 June 2023). Representatives of many other relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes participated and spoke at the event, including with regard to protection of environmental defenders. See for example, https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/ECE.MP_PP.WG.1.2023.2.E.pdf and Tabs "Statements", "Thematic session on PPDM" and "Thematic session on PPIF", on the meeting's webpage. 3. Convention's Task Force on Access to Information at its 8th meeting featured an international workshop entitled "Advancing public access to environment-related product information: Challenges and opportunities". The latter was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), UNEP, ONE Planet Network and European Environment Agency. Representatives of many other relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes participated and made presentations at the events, see for example: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/8TFAI_KeyOutcomes_inf.3_fnl.pdf and Tabs "Task Force Statements and Presentations", "International workshop "Advancing public access to environment-related product information: Challenges and opportunities", on the meeting's webpage. 4. Tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (Geneva, 27-28 November 2023). Representatives of many other relevant international instruments, organisations, and processes participated and made presentations at the event. See for example, https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Protocol_WGP-10_Outcomes_27Nov_as_adopted.pdf and tab "Statements, Comments and Presentations" on the meeting's webpage. |

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| | | | | | <p>5. Fourth Joint Roundtable on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding Living Modified Organisms/Genetically Modified Organisms (Geneva, 11-12 December 2023). To promote synergy, the event was organised jointly with the secretariat of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the representatives of these treaties promoted their relevant obligations at the meeting, see programme for the event: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Provisional_Programme_GMO_LMO_Roundtable2023_v11Dec.pdf</p> |
| 6 | Continue encouraging gender considerations and a human rights-based approach in the activities under the two treaties and monitor the participation of women and people with disability in the Parties' and stakeholders' delegations and in senior management positions in governing and subsidiary bodies. | <p>UNECE accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will continue: (a) encouraging gender considerations and a human rights-based approach in the activities under the two treaties, including at dedicated thematic sessions of the treaties' bodies and through conducting a survey regarding groups in vulnerable situations and (b) monitor the participation of women and people with disability in the Parties' and stakeholders' delegations and in senior management positions in governing and subsidiary bodies.</p> | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, Environment Division | 31 December 2024 | <p>Implemented as of 31 December 2023</p> <p>It shall be noted that the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs aim to empower the public with the right to access information, participate in decision-making in environmental matters and seek justice. Thereby, all activities under the treaties promote human rights without any discrimination of people in vulnerable situations in terms of gender, disability or other aspects.</p> <p><u>For (a):</u> The secretariat continued encouraging gender considerations and a human rights-based approach in the activities under the two treaties, including at the following dedicated thematic sessions of the treaties' bodies and through conducting a survey regarding groups in vulnerable situations. This has been evidenced by the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thematic session with panel discussion on balanced and equitable participation and different modalities for engaging stakeholders in international decision-making at the 27th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties and the related survey, see programme of the session: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/WGP-27_Programme_PPIF_session.pdf ; Survey report: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/WGP-27_PPIF%20Survey%20report.pdf and Tab "Thematic session on PPIF, Item III": https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-seventh-meeting-working-group-parties-aarhus-convention |

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| | | | | | <p>2. Thematic session with panel discussion on public access to environmental information, considering needs of the groups in vulnerable situations, at the 8th meeting of the Task Force on Access to Information. See meeting's outcomes, section III: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/8TFAI_KeyOutcomes_inf.3_fnl.pdf and Tab "Task Force Statements and Presentations", Item III: https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_PP_8TFAI_API_workshop and the Updated recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools, (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2) which specifically address the needs of groups in vulnerable situations and were promoted at the meeting: https://unece.org/environment/documents/2022/02/updated-recommendations-more-effective-use-electronic-information</p> <p>3. Thematic session with panel discussion on access to justice in cases related to climate change and biodiversity protection, considering needs of the groups in vulnerable situations at the 15th meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice. See meeting's outcomes, section II: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/15TF.AJ_Inf.4_KeyOutcomes_as_circulated.pdf and Tab "Statements and Presentations": https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/fifteenth-meeting-task-force-access-justice-under-aarhus-convention</p> <p>For (b): It shall be noted that nomination of participants, panellists and treaties' officers is the responsibility of Member States and the organizations concerned and the secretariat has no influence on their decisions. However, the secretariat made efforts to ensure that each panel at every meeting organised by the secretariat included female speakers, and vast majority of delegations were comprised of female participants as well. This have been evidenced by the lists of participants, documents and statements available on the meetings' webpages, provided through the reporting on Recommendation 1 above. No participant with disability has been registered for the meetings in the reporting period.</p> <p>For what concerns senior management positions in governing and subsidiary bodies, it shall be noted that: out of seven members of the Convention's Bureau, six are females; out of seven members of the Protocol's Bureau, five are females; and three females are holding Chairs positions for the two Convention's Task Forces and the Compliance Committee.</p> |
| 7 | Strive to ensure that the UNECE Secretariat's activities conform to the | UNECE accepts the recommendation. The secretariat of the Aarhus | Ella Behlyarova, Secretary of the Aarhus Convention and its | 31 December 2024 | In progress The secretariat initiated a discission with a potential host country for organising next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties aiming to conform to the accessibility standards for people with |

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|---|--|---|--|-------------|--|
| | <p>accessibility standards for people with disabilities, as well as that the outputs are produced and generated in an appropriate manner (e.g., sign language, etc.) and strive to allocate the required budget and technical assistance for this purpose.</p> <p>Report on the extent to which gender equality is being streamlined and monitor it periodically. As opposed to focusing on gender-disaggregated participation data, it is more appropriate to focus on gender representation in decision-making roles within the Party's delegations.</p> | <p>Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, in consultation with relevant units of ECE and UNOG, will prepare a proposal for organising next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties aiming to conform to the accessibility standards for people with disabilities and will bring the issue to the attention of the Bureaux of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs for their consideration.</p> | <p>Protocol on PRTRs, Environment Division</p> | | <p>disabilities. The progress achieved will be reported in due course.</p> |