

# 20 years of Environmental Performance Reviews:

Impacts, lessons learned and the potential to  
integrate the Sustainable Development Goals

**Eighth Environment  
for Europe  
Ministerial Conference**

Batumi, Georgia  
8–10 June 2016



**UNITED NATIONS**

## **Information paper**

# **20 years of Environmental Performance Reviews: Impacts, lessons learned and the potential to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals**

**Submitted by UNECE and UNEP  
27 May 2016**

# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part I: Environmental Performance Reviews: Impacts and lessons learned.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>2</b>
A brief history.....	2
Environmental Performance Review methodology.....	4
<b>Main impacts of Environmental Performance Reviews .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Improved policy and legal frameworks and better integration of environmental concerns into sectoral policies .....	6
Stronger institutions for environmental policy development and management .....	8
Improved financing for environmental protection and greening the economy.....	10
Improved environmental monitoring and information systems .....	11
Strengthened public participation.....	12
Increased international cooperation.....	12
<b>Challenges ahead.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Lessons learned in implementation of policy recommendations .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Part II: Reviewing progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals: the opportunities arising from the Environmental Performance Review methodology .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Follow up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Peer learning and cooperation at the regional level .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Integrating a review of progress in achieving SDGs in the current Environmental Performance Review process .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Other potential mechanisms and tools to support the follow-up and review of progress towards the achievement of SDGs.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Multilateral Environmental Agreements reporting processes .....	21
Global mechanisms and processes .....	22
UNECE review mechanisms and other processes.....	24
<b>Looking back, moving forward .....</b>	<b>25</b>



## Introduction

During 20 years, the Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has been assisting UNECE member States that are not part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in assessing their environmental performance. The reviews have analyzed progress and challenges and provided advice to help these countries move towards environmental sustainability. The reviews have been a collaborative effort of many governments and a number of international organizations: European Commission (EC), European Environment Agency (EEA), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank.

This paper looks at examples of the past 20 years and, given the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also discusses the potential for supporting the national efforts on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) follow-up and review, building on the EPR methodology.

The main objectives of this paper are:

- (i) to determine the impacts of EPRs by reviewing implementation of policy recommendations on the ground and highlighting the lessons learned
- (ii) to support the member States' aim to use existing mechanisms for the effective follow-up and review of the progress towards achieving SDGs.

In this context, the paper describes the evolution of the EPR Programme over the last decades in response to new environmental challenges in the region, as well as the contribution of the EPR recommendations to effect positive environmental changes in the reviewed countries. The paper then evolves into a discussion of possible approaches to introduce a review of SDGs into the EPR process and what changes would be needed to facilitate this new development. In addition, there is a presentation of other existing mechanisms and tools that could potentially support the integration of SDGs in EPRs.

Seven countries that were reviewed by the EPR Programme after the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference (Astana, Kazakhstan, 2011) have been selected for the evaluation of the contribution of the EPR process on environmental sustainability in the region: Belarus, Croatia, Georgia, Montenegro, Morocco, Republic of Moldova, and Serbia (hereinafter, selected reviewed countries). The analysis of the implementation of EPR recommendations has been carried out on the basis of a review of the implementation of EPR recommendations included in EPR reports, additional information provided by countries, and a self-evaluation prepared by the EPR Programme. Interviews conducted with EPR national coordinators, members of the Expert Group on EPRs and the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), experts of UNECE and UNEP also served as inputs to this paper.

## Part I: Environmental Performance Reviews: Impacts and lessons learned

---

*“The EPR Programme is a major stepping stone for the improvement and harmonization of environmental policy in the UNECE region based on trust, transparency and a mutual learning process.”*

*Hans-Joachim Hermann, Member of the UNECE Expert Group on EPRs, Germany*

---

### Overview

An EPR is an assessment of the efforts made by individual countries to reduce their overall pollution burden and manage their natural resources sustainably, decouple economic growth from environmental degradation through integrating environmental concerns into sectoral policies, and strengthen cooperation with the international community. EPRs also support the advancement of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy.

### A brief history

Following the launch of the EPR Programme by OECD for its member States in 1991, European environment Ministers mandated the UNECE at the Second Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Lucerne, Switzerland, 1993) to carry out the EPR Programme in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe. The challenge was to assist these countries in improving their environmental situation and promote the harmonisation of environmental policies in the UNECE region<sup>1</sup>. In 1996, the Committee on Environmental Policy decided to include the EPRs into the regular programme of the UNECE.

Based on the positive results of the first reviews, Ministers requested UNECE to undertake a second cycle of EPRs at the Fifth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Kiev, Ukraine, 2003). A few years later, they reaffirmed their support for the EPR Programme at the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 2011) and encouraged UNECE to pursue the third cycle of reviews.

#### EPRs in numbers

Over the last 20 years, the EPR Programme conducted 44 EPRs in 24 countries, of which 21 countries were reviewed in the first cycle, 18 countries in the second cycle and 5 countries in the third cycle. Two more countries are undergoing their third reviews in 2016.

Two decades of successful collaboration on EPRs have brought together 12 international organizations: EC, EEA, IUCN, OCHA, OECD, OSCE, UNDP, UNECA, UNEP, UNISDR, WHO and World Bank.

Thirty-five countries have served on the Expert Group on EPRs and/or have provided financial and/or expert support to the EPR Programme: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

Experts of more than 40 different nationalities have participated in the reviews.

More than 2,000 recommendations were provided by EPRs so far, covering about 23 environment-related topics, from legal and policy frameworks to the integration of environmental concerns into sectoral policies.

---

<sup>1</sup> As of May 2016, UNECE has 56 member States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, and Uzbekistan.

### Three cycles

Over the last two decades, the EPR Programme has evolved in order to respond to new challenges faced by the reviewed countries.

In the first cycle, EPRs assisted reviewed countries in assessing their environmental situation and in establishing baseline conditions regarding policy commitments, institutional arrangements and capacity. The second cycle EPRs showed that the majority of reviewed countries had attained significant progress since the first reviews, but not at the same pace. The main reasons were different starting points and transition paths, in spite of emerging from similar political and economic systems. For the second cycle EPRs, countries were able to implement a more complex and comprehensive approach, and more ambitious targets were set. Emphasis was placed on the implementation and financing of environment policy, integration of environmental concerns into economic sectors, and promotion of sustainable development.

The challenges faced by the reviewed countries further evolved and guidance was then needed to integrate new targets into national environmental policies. A third cycle of reviews was decided upon in 2011 and started in 2013. It focused on improving environmental governance and financing in a green economy context, strengthening cooperation with the international community and environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors. The reviews also integrated an assessment of the progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Recently, the EPR methodology has attracted the attention of countries outside of the UNECE region, leading to requests for a transfer of knowhow from UNECE to other regional commissions. Morocco was the first country outside the region for which a review was carried out by UNECE in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in 2012.

Map 1 shows countries that underwent an EPR, specifying the last cycle of the review for every country. So far, five countries have been reviewed for the third time: Belarus, Georgia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Serbia and two more countries are undergoing third cycle reviews: Bulgaria and Tajikistan.

**Map 1. Countries reviewed by the EPR Programme**



*Notes:* The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Countries in *brown* went through the first cycle of EPR, *green* – through the second cycle and *violet* – through the third cycle. The map does not show Morocco, which has undergone an EPR in 2012.

## **Environmental Performance Review methodology**

The main stages of carrying out an EPR include preparation, review mission, expert review, peer review, publication and launch (Figure 1). Each stage consists of a number of activities to be completed by various actors, i.e. the government of the country under review, the EPR Programme secretariat, the EPR review team, the Expert Group on EPRs and the Committee on Environmental Policy. Each EPR is managed on the basis of an implementation plan prepared by the secretariat in cooperation with the country under review. A key challenge is to ensure that all relevant activities are implemented in time and the whole review process is carried out in a cost-effective way. Overall, the whole EPR process takes 12 to 18 months.

**Figure 1. Summary of the main stages of an EPR**



Following the request from a country, the EPR Programme secretariat organizes a preparatory mission to the country under review. At this stage, the review's outline and the implementation plan are agreed upon by the secretariat and national officials. An international expert team, which usually includes national experts from countries in the region, as well as experts from international organizations and consultants, is assembled. The expert team carries out a review mission in the country and works with government officials, representatives of business, donor community, NGOs, local governments and independent experts. A draft report is then prepared. It focuses on the progress achieved and challenges ahead, and provides a series of recommendations on ways to overcome problems and advance sustainable development.

Subsequently, the draft report undergoes an expert review conducted by the Expert Group on EPRs. The Expert Group consists of experts from UNECE member States, who review in detail all chapters of the draft report. A one-and-a-half-day meeting is allocated for the expert review of one country, usually held at UNECE headquarters in Geneva. Experts from the reviewed country are invited to participate in this meeting and

interact with the Expert Group. At the end, the report is amended, as decided by the Expert Group, in consultation with the delegation of the country under review.

Finally, a peer review is carried out by all UNECE member States represented in the Committee on Environmental Policy. During this review, the Committee focuses on major policy issues that have been highlighted by the review and adopts the recommendations of the EPR report, with amendments, if any. Country's high-level environmental authorities also attend this meeting and participate in the debate. In this way, the adopted recommendations reflect the collective views of the UNECE countries as well as the voluntary commitment of the reviewed country to implement them.

Once the secretariat has updated the report's facts and figures and incorporated possible changes in line with the conclusions of the Expert Group and the Committee, the report is published and distributed. Upon request of the reviewed country, a launch is organized to present the findings of the EPR report to the governmental authorities, international community, NGOs and other stakeholders. The launch event is attended by the media, allowing the national environmental authority to draw attention to the most pressing environmental issues highlighted by the EPR.

#### *Advantages of the EPR methodology and challenges for the EPR process*

The main advantages of the EPR methodology include:

- Independent review
- Participatory and transparent approach
- Tailor-made approach taking into account different national contexts and capacities
- Use of temporary international teams with different expertise
- Evolution over time to cover emerging issues and new regional and global challenges
- Evidence-based review informed by national information and data and inputs from a variety of stakeholders
- Identification of solutions and best practices, and issuing of recommendations for improvements

Through the peer review mechanism, the reviewed and reviewing countries learn from each other and share experiences and best practices. The reviews also contribute to the implementation of many international environmental agreements.

Currently, the challenges for carrying out the reviews are mostly capacity-related. The EPR Programme secretariat includes three professional staff and one and a half support staff. Operational budget for the Programme's activities depends on extra-budgetary funds provided by donors and in-kind contributions, mostly in the form of experts from donor countries and international organizations. The current capacity allows a maximum of four EPRs to be completed per biennium.

Another key challenge in carrying out EPRs concerns difficulties in measuring performance and changes in the state of the environment of reviewed countries due to problems related to the availability of high-quality,

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5\\_1560](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_1560)

