

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

What **UNECE** does for you



...**UNECE**
assesses environmental
performance in
your country

How to manage the pressure on the environment stemming from human activities? How to maintain biological diversity many threats? Are countries doing their utmost to protect and maintain the environment in its best possible state? The answers to these and other questions are provided in reports known as environmental performance reviews (EPRs) conducted by UNECE to assess the situation in countries with economies in transition.



What is an EPR?

An EPR is an independent, external assessment that is carried out under the auspices of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy. An EPR evaluates a country's efforts to reduce its overall pollution burden and manage its natural resources. It also examines how the environment is incorporated in socio-economic policies and monitors cooperation with the international community and the implementation of environmental legislation, policies and strategies.

The goal of the EPR Programme is to help countries with economies in transition improve their environmental management by recommending better policy implementation. However, the environment

concerns the general public as well; therefore EPRs aim to stimulate a greater involvement of the public in debates and decision-making on environmental issues.

What is its origin?

The UNECE EPR Programme originated from the Environmental Performance Review Programme of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which was launched in 1991 to help OECD member countries improve environmental management in their countries. The Programme was extended to the UNECE region in 1996, as the Committee on Environmental Policy recommended that it be incorporated into UNECE's regular work programme.

The target group of EPRs consists of countries from Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

How is an EPR conducted?

The Programme is voluntary – an EPR is undertaken only at the request of a UNECE member State. Once the request is received, a preliminary mission is organized by the UNECE secretariat to visit the country and assess the situation jointly with the country's environmental authorities. Once the structure of the review has been agreed upon, a fully fledged expert team of 10 to 14 international experts embarks upon a fact-finding mission in the country concerned for 8 to 12 days. During that time, they meet with national and local governmental representatives, NGOs and the private sector to gain an in-depth understanding of specific issues to be covered by the EPR and to prepare their respective chapters, which include an analysis and a series of conclusions and recommendations for the country under review.

How are EPR teams formed?

To ensure a high-quality product and guarantee that the report recommendations are well-targeted and country-specific, an EPR team is composed of experts from diverse backgrounds:

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government, NGOs, international organizations such as OECD, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, and private consultancies.

How is the EPR Programme financed?

The Programme is funded mainly by voluntary contributions from UNECE member countries, which in some cases provide experts in kind.

Who are the main counterparts of the EPR Programme in the reviewed countries?

The environmental protection authorities in the country under review are its main counterparts. Even though the reviewed country is not expected to contribute financially to the review, it must put significant effort into the exercise. A national coordinator is appointed for the review and a national contact person for each chapter. Their task is to ensure that international experts meet all relevant parties during the mission: Government and ministry officials, and representatives of civil society, the business community, academia and media. The national contact persons are also responsible for providing data and information to the EPR team.

UNECE cooperates closely with international organizations working in the country under review. Country offices of the United Nations Development Programme provide invaluable logistical support and advice. The

EPR Programme has established close working relationships with local offices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the World Bank, the European Commission, Regional Environmental Centers and many international cooperation agencies as well as NGOs.

What are the implicit obligations in an EPR?

Unlike a ratified international convention, there is no legal obligation for a country to implement EPR recommendations. However, experience has shown that countries make serious efforts to implement the recommendations because they participate in and commit to this exercise voluntarily.

This commitment is further strengthened during a peer review which is carried out at the annual session of the Committee on Environmental Policy during which UNECE member States and a high-level delegation from the country under review participate in the adoption by the Committee of the EPR recommendations. The country therefore agrees to these recommendations and commits itself to their implementation. Furthermore, before starting its next review, the country is required to submit a report on how the recommendations from the previous review have been implemented.

Environment Ministers of UNECE member countries consistently praise the Programme whenever they meet, pointing out its many benefits.

Do countries find EPRs useful?

The usefulness of these reviews is assessed through informal discussions with governmental authorities. They are practically unanimous in their conviction that EPRs offer valuable inputs, and many officials find them useful in their day-to-day work. As an independent external assessment, an EPR provides governments and other national stakeholders with an appropriate framework for identifying and tackling thorny environmental issues. National environmental authorities also use EPRs to raise their governments' awareness of pressing environmental problems.

How is the review promoted once it has been completed?

Dissemination of environmental information is a key element of the whole EPR process. The reports are available in English and sometimes in Russian. To make the information



easily accessible, efforts are also made to provide reviews in the national languages of the reviewed countries. Printed copies are distributed free of charge to the national environmental authorities, and electronic versions of all reports can be downloaded free of charge on the UNECE website.

It is particularly important for the general public and NGOs to be aware of the review because they can exert pressure on the authorities and create internal demand for the implementation of EPR recommendations.

Launch events involving the national environmental authorities, other relevant ministries and agencies, country offices of international organizations and NGOs are organized upon the Committee's adoption of the EPR recommendations. These events, which vary from country to country, can take the form of press conferences or workshops for government officials with the participation of NGO representatives and the public, presentations at Parliamentary committees, seminars for international organizations and donors, or a combination thereof.



For more information, please visit:

<http://www.unece.org/env/epr>

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