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Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range
Transboundary Air Pollution

Working Group on Strategies and Review

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**Revision of the Protocol to Abate Acidification,
Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone,
as amended in 2012**

Draft plan for the revision of the Gothenburg Protocol, as amended in 2012

Summary

At its forty-third session (Geneva, 11–14 December 2023), the Executive Body adopted decision 2023/5 launching a process to revise the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, as amended in 2012 (ECE/EB.AIR/154), and to address other conclusions of its review. Pursuant to paragraph 5 of that decision, the Executive Body requested the Working Group on Strategies and Review to develop a plan, including timelines, to guide its work in revising the Protocol based on a draft plan developed by the Chair of the Working Group, as well as views submitted by Parties.

The present document, prepared by the Bureau of the Working Group, identifies the work and activities ongoing or required to enable Parties to make decisions on the aspects of the negotiations. Furthermore, it sets out a tentative timeline for conducting the negotiations within the timeframe defined in Executive Body decision 2023/5. The document provides information on activities held outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region that may be of use regarding the negotiations going forward. It also provides recommendations on the path forward for the negotiations. The Working Group is invited to discuss the proposed draft plan and to agree on the plan to be forwarded for consideration by the Executive Body at its forty-fourth session (Geneva, 9–12 December 2024).



I. Introduction

1. The Executive Body, at its forty-third session (Geneva, 11–14 December 2023), adopted decision 2023/5 launching a process to revise the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, as amended in 2012, and to address other conclusions of its review (ECE/EB.AIR/154).
2. This document responds to paragraph 5 of that decision, in which the Executive Body requests the Working Group on Strategies and Review to develop a plan, including timelines, to guide its work in revising the current Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol) based on a draft plan developed by the Chair of the Working Group, as well as views submitted by Parties. It also takes into account the items to be considered in the revision process, as decided in paragraph 2 of decision 2023/5.
3. The purpose of this document is to provide a draft plan for discussion by the Working Group at its sixty-second session. An additional table, included in an accompanying informal document,¹ lists Convention documents that can serve as a background and a basis for discussions on the items listed in paragraph 2 (a)–(h) of Executive Body decision 2023/5.

II. Background

4. At its sixty-first session (Geneva, 4–6 September 2023), the Working Group on Strategies and Review discussed the official document entitled “Options to address the conclusions of the review of the Gothenburg Protocol, as amended in 2012” (ECE/EB.AIR/WG.5/2023/2), which provided a list of policy approaches and options, accompanied by a comprehensive analysis thereof carried out by a dedicated ad hoc group of experts.
5. The above-mentioned official document recommended that, in order to address and respond to the conclusions of the Gothenburg Protocol review,² Parties should consider a comprehensive revision of the text and annexes of the amended Gothenburg Protocol, with due regard to removing barriers to ratification and implementation, while also working to achieve further emission reductions (referred to as approach 2b in the official document).
6. The Working Group concluded that there was significant support for this approach and recommended to the Executive Body that, at its forty-third session, it launch a process for revising the Gothenburg Protocol.³
7. At its forty-third session, the Executive Body took note of the summary of the discussion held by the Working Group on Strategies and Review on the options proposed by the expert group, and adopted decision 2023/5.⁴

III. Scope and identification of tasks

8. A comprehensive revision of the Protocol will allow Parties to set new commitments for emission reductions, including updated commitments on current pollutants, as well as considering commitments for new pollutants. At the same time, it will allow for the consideration of revised flexibilities and other provisions for current non-Parties to be included in the Protocol.
9. Paragraph 2 of decision 2023/5 stipulates that the revision process will include consideration of various items (see table 1, items (a)–(h)). This process will require the involvement of the Convention’s subsidiary bodies and task forces. Table 1 provides an overview of activities that will be required, the existing corresponding items of the 2024–

¹ To be made available on the web page of the session, see <https://unece.org/info/events/event/384007>.

² See the Report on the review of the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, as amended in 2012 (ECE/EB.AIR/150/Add.2).

³ ECE/EB.AIR/WG.5/130, para. 18 (e).

⁴ ECE/EB.AIR/154, para. 38 (a) and (e).

2025 workplan for the implementation of the Convention (ECE/EB.AIR/154/Add.1) with potential lead bodies (in addition to overarching workplan item 2.1.2), potential gaps in capabilities and potential interdependencies and decisions that would need to be addressed as part of negotiations. Taking into account these interdependencies, a sequential prioritization of activities and decisions is proposed in section IV, including table 2.

Table 1
Overview of ongoing and required activities

<i>No.</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Corresponding specific items in the 2024–2025 workplan for the implementation of the Convention and lead bodies</i>	<i>Activities of the Working Group and other bodies</i>	<i>Gaps and/or dependencies (decisions)</i>
(a)	New emission reduction commitments for pollutants currently covered by Gothenburg Protocol	1.1.2.11, 1.1.2.12, 1.1.2.15, 1.1.3.2, 1.2.2, 4.3.2 primarily TFIAM/CIAM, CEIP, WGSR	New scenarios to develop, including non-technical and structural measures; recommendations on type of commitment, ambition level, base and target years, etc.	Related, inter alia, to (decisions on) (e)–(h)
(b)	Potential revisions to technical annexes to current Gothenburg Protocol, including with regard to their scope and level of ambition	2.1.3 (annex IX to Protocol only) TFTEI, TFRN, WGSR	Discuss potential updates to annexes based on preparatory work of TFTEI, either as binding or non-binding option; role of technical annexes in relation to best available techniques/guidance documents	Related to how technical annexes are included in revision (i.e. as binding or non-binding commitments), and links to (f) new flexibilities/approaches for non-Parties
(c)	How to deliver further reductions of black carbon emissions	TFEIP, TFTEI, Arctic Council, CCAC, TFI (IPCC)	Explore feasibility and utility of further commitments on black carbon component of particulate matter in revision of Protocol	Take into account potential developments in UNFCCC process on policy and science and reporting requirements on black carbon
(d)	Whether and how to address methane emissions	1.1.2.1, 1.2.3, 2.2.8 TFIAM, TFHTAP, TFTEI, TFICAP, WGSR	Discuss feasibility and utility of options of including methane in revised Protocol or other means to reduce methane emissions, based on options identified in review, the methane options informal document for forty-third session of Executive Body, and report on review	Subject to developments/decisions in UNFCCC or subsidiary processes and/or Executive Body decision on how to include methane in Protocol, including decisions on items (a)–(b)

No.	Item	Corresponding specific items in the 2024–2025 workplan for the implementation of the Convention and lead bodies	Activities of the Working Group and other bodies	Gaps and/or dependencies (decisions)
(e)	How to achieve additional ammonia emission reductions	2.1.7, 2.1.8, 2.1.9, 2.2.6, 2.2.7, 2.2.8 TFRN, WGSR	Explore options for further policy responses for reducing ammonia emissions, including revision of annex IX	Linked to decisions, inter alia, on (a)–(b)
(f)	New flexibilities, and other approaches to better facilitate ratification and subsequent implementation by current non-Parties to current Gothenburg Protocol	WGSR, in particular non-Parties to Protocol; TFTEI, TFEIP, TFIAM	WGSR could discuss new flexibilities and explore new approaches for non-Parties to Protocol	Links to decisions particularly on (a)–(b)
(g)	Overarching, collective risk-based target(s) to reduce harmful effects to health and to ecosystems, including biodiversity loss in ECE region	2.1.12, 1.1.1.16, 1.1.1.19, 1.1.1.20, 1.1.1.21, 1.1.1.23, 1.1.1.32, 1.1.1.33, 1.1.1.34, 1.1.2.16, 1.1.3.2, 1.2.1, TFIAM, WGE and its task forces, WGSR	WGSR should define policy options for targets, instruct task forces to jointly identify feasibility of these targets, and recommend target (options) to Executive Body	Final targets dependent on decisions made on (a)–(e), and (f) in relation to approaches taken for current non-Parties
(h)	How to achieve integrated approaches among climate, energy and air policies	1.1.2.14, 1.1.2.15, 1.1.2.16, 2.2.4, TFHTAP, TFIAM, TFTEI, TFRN, WGSR, (UNFCCC/IPCC) (CBD/IPBES)	Task forces should continue to explore co-benefits and trade-offs of introduction of Net-Zero and other climate mitigation policies, as well as biodiversity protection policies with air quality	When deciding on (a)–(e) Parties should take into account aims and ongoing work by initiatives outside Convention

Abbreviations: CBD, Convention on Biological Diversity; CCAC, Climate and Clean Air Coalition; CEIP, Centre on Emission Inventories and Projections; CIAM, Centre for Integrated Assessment Modelling; ECE, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; IPBES, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; IPCC, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; TFEIP, Task Force on Emission Inventories and Projections; TFHTAP, Task Force on Hemispheric Transport of Air Pollution; TFI, Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories; TFIAM, Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling; TFICAP, Task Force for International Cooperation on Air Pollution; TFRN, Task Force on Reactive Nitrogen; TFTEI, Task Force on Techno-economic Issues; UNFCCC, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; WGE, Working Group on Effects; WGSR, Working Group on Strategies and Review.

IV. Prioritization of activities and decisions

10. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of its decision 2023/5, the Executive Body aims to conclude the revision of the current Gothenburg Protocol by its forty-sixth session, unless it decides otherwise. This denotes that there will be at least three sessions of the Executive Body and potentially five sessions of the Working Group during the revision process.

11. In paragraph 6 of its decision 2023/5, the Executive Body also decides to include two meetings of the Working Group on Strategies and Review in the calendar of meetings starting in 2025 until the end of negotiations, to accommodate the revision process, subject to available resources. Additionally, in its paragraph 7, the decision encourages Parties to consider hosting an informal meeting between the sixty-second session of the Working Group on Strategies and Review and the forty-fourth session of the Executive Body, to make progress on the negotiations to revise the Gothenburg Protocol. Belgium has agreed to host such a meeting (Leuven, Belgium, 21–24 October 2024).

12. Table 2 follows the schedule stipulated in Executive Body decision 2023/5 and provides a provisional list of topics to cover for each meeting, to help Parties to define positions. It must be noted that there can be no strictly linear sequence of negotiating individual items (a)–(h), as these depend on each other in various ways (see table 1, last column).

13. Pending the Executive Body's decision on the plan for negotiations to be made at its forty-fourth session, the Working Group on Strategies and Review may wish at its sixty-second session to start an initial discussion on the following items to help focus the discussion and decisions of the Executive Body at its forty-fourth session:

(a) For instance, the Working Group could discuss scope and indicator(s) for (an) overarching target(s) (item (g)) based on documents provided by the Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling and initially commented by Parties; it could do this without considering various specifics of other negotiation items, and then instruct relevant task forces to carry out further work. The quantification of any such target(s) then must wait until other decisions, for example, on the level of ambition of emission reduction commitments and/or abatement techniques, have been made;

(b) The Working Group could initially discuss base and target years and other specifics for the negotiation of possible emission reduction commitments (item (a));

(c) The Working Group could also initially discuss whether and how to include methane in the Protocol (item (d)), as this item will likely require the most time to negotiate and various general options have been previously identified in informal meetings and documents (see table in accompanying informal document for references);¹

(d) Lastly, the Working Group could start a general discussion on the scope and the mandatory or voluntary nature of technical annexes (item (b)) in connection with an initial exchange with non-Parties on their needs or preferences for possible flexibilities or other approaches facilitating revision and implementation (item (f)).

14. The Executive Body at its forty-fourth session could include the following to determine further work of the Working Group on Strategies and Review in 2025:

(a) For instance, it could discuss and possibly agree on the type of emission reduction commitments (item (a)) and, if possible, base and target years, so that the lead bodies listed in table 1 could focus their work and provide more specific options to the Executive Body meeting at its forty-fifth session;

(b) Connected to subparagraph (a) above, and considering the initial discussion by the Working Group, it could decide on scope and indicator(s) for (an) overarching, risk-based target(s) (item (g)) and discuss how to achieve integrated approaches (item (h));

(c) It could discuss and possibly decide on whether and how to include methane emissions in the Gothenburg Protocol (item (d));

(d) A decision on whether, or under which circumstances regarding flexibilities, to retain mandatory technical annexes in general (item (b)), would enable further negotiations on this item and item (f)).

15. Depending on any decisions made by the Executive Body at its forty-fourth session, a possible allocation of negotiation topics is suggested for the Working Group on Strategies and Review's sessions in 2025 (see table 2). This allocation assumes that there will be two sessions per year, as decided by the Executive Body subject to available resources; the allocation will have to be changed if there is only to be one session per year and/or a possible informal meeting:

(a) The Working Group at its sixty-third session could focus on more specific negotiations on annex II and technical annexes, if so decided (items (a) and (b)), also based on the Executive Body's discussions or decisions on flexibilities/new approaches (item (f)) and methane emissions (item (d));

(b) The sixty-fourth session of the Working Group could, on this basis, deal specifically with pollutants identified in decision 2023/5 as priority (black carbon, methane and ammonia);

(c) Considering the overall timeframe, the Working Group should strive to already negotiate during both sessions the specific emission reduction options, including levels of ambition.

16. Depending on its previous decisions on items mentioned above and on the results of negotiations by the Working Group on Strategies and Review in 2025, the Executive Body at its forty-fifth session could start negotiations on the text of the Protocol, annex II and/or technical annexes.

17. Depending on previous Executive Body decisions (see table 2) and the state of negotiations, the Working Group on Strategies and Review should address remaining negotiation items in 2026. These could include further negotiations on annex II and technical annexes, including level of ambition and technicalities, as well as possible flexibilities or new approaches for non-Parties.

18. In accordance with decision 2023/5, the Executive Body plans to conclude the negotiations on all items at its forty-sixth session. Considering the detailed timeline and interdependencies of negotiations on individual items, this necessitates clear and early positioning and constructive negotiations by Parties and non-Parties.

Table 2
Tentative timeline for Protocol revision

<i>Year</i>	<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Topics covered (see text for elucidation)</i>	<i>Recommendations and decisions anticipated</i>
2024	WGSR, sixty-second session	Plan for renegotiations Discussion of full scope and priorities/gaps in knowledge and timing. Initial discussion of scope and indicator(s) for item (g), base and target years for item (a), scope for item (d), and scope for item (b) in combination with item (f)	Recommendations by WGSR on full scope, priorities and timeline; Report on initial discussions
	Informal meeting	Informally continue discussion of scope, priorities and timing	Not applicable
	Executive Body, forty-fourth session	Plan for renegotiations Discussion on framework for negotiations, inter alia, on items (a), (g)/(h), (d), (b) and/or (f) (see para. 14)	Adoption of plan for re-negotiations Allocation of tasks to subsidiary bodies, as needed Possible decision on framework for negotiations on items discussed

<i>Year</i>	<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Topics covered (see text for elucidation)</i>	<i>Recommendations and decisions anticipated</i>
2025	WGSR, sixty-third session	Items (a)–(b) in connection with (f); and (d)	WGSR recommendations to Executive Body on topics covered
	WGSR, sixty-fourth session	Thematic meeting on certain pollutants: Items (c)–(e) Initial negotiations on item (a)	WGSR recommendations to Executive Body on topics covered
	Executive Body, forty-fifth session	First set of revisions to text of Protocol for discussion, decisions on how to deal with items (a)–(h)	
2026	WGSR, sixty-fifth session	Updates to items (b) and (f) Thematic meeting on: Items (g)–(h), also in relation to item (a)	
	WGSR, sixty-sixth session	Updates to technical annexes, annex II and text of Protocol	
	Executive Body, forty-sixth session	Second set of revisions to text and annexes (subject to previous decisions)	

19. Naturally, the uncertainty regarding which items will be covered by which sessions of the Executive Body and the Working Group on Strategies and Review will significantly increase with time. It is recommended that both bodies reflect any need for a revised plan in their reports and recommendations.

20. Parties may decide that some issues need to be discussed first by technical groups (i.e. task forces or international cooperative programmes), or that new ad-hoc expert groups need to be created in order to address certain issues.

V. Capacity-building and mutual learning

21. In its paragraph 10, Executive Body decision 2023/5 provides for taking action to enhance capacity-building, awareness-raising and cooperation within and outside of the ECE region. The decision further urges current non-Parties to the Protocol to be involved in discussions on revising it, with the aim of ensuring that any revisions take into account the different circumstances of current non-Parties to further facilitate their possible ratification of a revised Protocol.

22. In the above-mentioned decision, the Executive Body acknowledges that, to ensure that revisions of the Protocol are successful for existing Parties and current non-Parties, there is a need to enhance capacity-building and assistance to non-Parties, to understand capability gaps within the Convention in order to help non-Parties, and, through mutual learning with other regions, to maximize the options for countries to implement air quality measures pursuant to ratifying an amended Protocol.

23. Parties in a position to provide support are requested to provide voluntary contributions and bilateral technical assistance, such as for emission inventory improvements, emission projections, air quality monitoring networks and support for action plans within the current non-Parties.

24. In addition, task forces and international cooperative programmes already provide expertise and capacity-building to Parties to improve domestic implementation of measures towards ratification of the protocols to the Convention. As noted in the informal document entitled “New approaches for EECCA countries, Western Balkan countries and Türkiye” and

other relevant informal documents for the forty-third session of the Executive Body,⁵ many current non-Parties to the Gothenburg Protocol face several common issues that prevent them from ratifying the current Protocol. These include the quality and provision of national emission inventories for non-Parties, insufficient monitoring to support pollutant and source identification, and the status of institutional domestic regimes responsible for creating and enforcing regulation on sectors.

25. While task forces and international cooperative programmes, including the Task Force on Techno-economic Issues, the Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling, the Task Force on Emission Inventories and Projections and the Centre for Integrated Assessment Modelling, provide considerable support to non-Parties, greater coordinated efforts could be considered to offer more complete support packages to non-Parties to help facilitate their ratification of an amended Protocol.

26. Capacity-building should not only aim to help non-Parties in ratifying a future revised Protocol, but also spur national voluntary activities to make progress on reducing emissions and effects of the pollutants referred to in the current Protocol.

27. In addition to the Gothenburg Protocol negotiations, Parties' attention should be drawn to certain global initiatives that will be ongoing during said negotiations and that may be able to support Parties through capacity-building and/or mutual learning opportunities:

(a) The Climate and Clean Air Coalition Clean Air Flagship will run until 2026 and will support all countries and regions around the world with a dedicated platform of guidance, technical information and policy options. This may be of use to all Parties, as it offers the opportunity to consider out-of-region approaches on issues affecting the ECE region. The platform may also allow current non-Parties to gain access to a central repository of relevant information, which may help national policymakers to generate options for themselves for the revision process;

(b) The World Health Organization Second Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health (Accra, 28 October–1 November 2024) will set the direction regarding responding to health impacts caused around the world by air pollution. The Second Global Conference will focus on the health impacts of air pollution and will be a follow-up to the First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health (Geneva, 30 October–1 November 2018). The intention of the Second Global Conference will be to define new global commitments towards improving health outcomes for the world's population. These commitments may be of interest to the negotiations of the Gothenburg Protocol, including any complementary or synergistic commitments. Parties may want to consider the Second Global Conference and ongoing health impact work on air pollution by the World Health Organization in relation to the item referred to in paragraph 2 (g) of decision 2023/5;

(c) The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (Nairobi, 26 February–1 March 2024) adopted a new resolution on promoting regional cooperation on air pollution to improve air quality globally,⁶ which requests the formation of a global network for interregional cooperation and an associated platform to hold relevant information for policymakers (to be delivered by the Climate and Clean Air Coalition Flagship). The resolution allows the ECE region to link up with other regions on areas of mutual interest. This may be relevant to areas of the negotiations, especially concerning pollutants such as methane that require action by all regions;

(d) The Convention on Biological Diversity; Parties may wish to consider the implementation of the recently agreed Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in relation to the revision of the Gothenburg Protocol. In particular, there are synergies for effects-based work on plants, ecosystems and wider biodiversity impacts from air pollution. As well as the implementation of targets under the Global Biodiversity Framework, in particular target 7 concerning pollution. Parties may wish to consider the ecosystem aspects

⁵ Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/executive-body-forty-third-session>.

⁶ UNEP/EA.6/L.13.

of the item referred to in paragraph 2 (g) of Executive Body decision 2023/5 in relation to the Global Biodiversity Framework.

28. Parties may agree that revisions to the Gothenburg Protocol could be enhanced by out-of-region innovations that help more countries achieve higher levels of air quality management and represent innovations useful for Parties and non-Parties to the current Protocol.

29. The Executive Body may wish to instruct subsidiary bodies, such as the Working Group on Strategies and Review and/or the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe Steering Body and the Working Group on Effects, to make further connections with other regions or the above-mentioned global initiatives, to understand: the scientific, technical and/or policy innovations being considered in other regions or at a global level; whether these initiatives affect negotiations under the Gothenburg Protocol; and/or whether there are benefits in these initiatives being considered from the perspective of the Protocol for the ECE region.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

30. Parties and non-Parties need to work expeditiously to develop positions and make proposals on the items laid out in this plan, in order to conclude the revision process by the forty-sixth session of the Executive Body.

31. The scope of the negotiations is not exhaustive, and new ideas and issues may be brought up during negotiations, depending on the will of the Parties. Thus, the negotiation timeline may also change, depending on whether new topics need to be addressed.

32. The timeline assumes that some decisions will be made in parallel: interdependencies between negotiation items (a)–(h) will require Parties to make decisions in consideration of other items. This will be essential to maintain the logic of the multi-pollutant and multi-effect approach of the current Protocol.

33. Parties are encouraged to take a holistic approach to negotiations and consider building positions on multiple issues, in readiness to discuss multiple topics at each meeting. Current non-Parties to the Protocol are encouraged to consider their needs and/or wishes regarding revisions of the Protocol and to have positions prepared on approaches that could facilitate easier routes to implementation of air quality measures and ratification of a revised Protocol. Discussions could also include the issue of the capabilities needed for non-Parties to be in a position to form positions on certain topics.

34. Parties should consider especially the timeline presented in table 2 and consider any necessary changes thereto.
