

Capacity Building to Put the Aarhus Convention into Action and Support Development of PRTR Systems in Selected South Eastern European Countries



Background

The Aarhus Convention (AC) adopted in 1998 in Aarhus, Denmark, is ratified by 45 countries and the European Community, including the five project countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (*further Macedonia*). Interest has also been shown by Kosovo (*as defined by UNSCR 1244; further Kosovo*) to implement the principles of the AC. Despite of the progress, numerous problems still exist in the implementation of the public participation and the access to justice requirements in these countries. Also the PRTR system is still not fully functional (with the exception of Serbia).

Project goals

- to strengthen the implementation capacities of officials responsible for public participation in environmental decision-making, and build capacities of NGOs to gain and use participatory skills in order to be able to influence the decision-making process and thereby improve the quality of

participatory processes and the environmental decisions,

- to increase the awareness and knowledge of the judiciary, authorities and NGOs on access to justice in environmental matters and contribute to reducing or removing barriers to access to justice,
- to provide knowledge for authorities, operators and NGOs to understand their role and responsibilities in developing functioning PRTRs, and understand and use the PRTR reporting requirements,
- to improve the practical implementation of the AC and the ratification/ implementation of the PRTR Protocol.

Highlights of the **Public Participation Component**

- A model participation process was designed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia together with the local decision-makers,
- Practical capacity building training for officials responsible for the (model) participation activities and for other important stakeholders (operators, local CSOs) of the selected process were developed, and
- Public Participation Toolkits were drafted and published according to the respective country needs in the national languages, focusing on the public participation requirements and offering a range of practical advices and experiences to the officials, operators and developers who manage development and have responsibility for decision-making.

Impact

- The knowledge and skills of the officials trained during the public participation trainings have improved on how to design

and implement participatory processes which helps to increase the quality of the decision-making and provide solutions which are better for the environment, last longer, and increase the openness and democracy in the society,

- The Toolkits which aim to promote an open and inclusive decision-making, contribute to achieve well informed decisions based on citizens' input and preferences, build ownership of the public over decisions made, address real problems, avoid or better manage conflicts, reduce costs, change relationships between the public and authorities, and strengthen and support mutual learning through the participatory exercises,
- The selected pilot projects have addressed concrete local environmental problems and contributed to find solutions for them.

Highlights of the ***Access to Justice Component***

- Roundtable meetings held in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia for the representatives of judiciary, ministries of environment and justice, legal professionals, NGOs, discussing about the situation of access to justice, identifying the difficulties and gaps in implementation and possible removal of existing barriers,
- Trainings held for NGOs in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, acquainting them with access to justice rights and opportunities under the AC and national legislation, discussing strategies and methods for using administrative and court procedures and overcoming major difficulties and barriers in implementation,
- Trainings for judges and prosecutors held in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia in cooperation with

Magistrate Schools or Judicial Training Centers, acquainting them with the access to justice requirements of AC, EU and national legislation, court practices and other means of justice, using case studies, discussing common problems and solutions for the removal of barriers to access to justice.

Impact

- Improved awareness, knowledge and better comprehension by the judiciary, authorities and NGOs of the current situation and barriers to access to justice, and of opportunities to remove or reduce them as a result of the discussions and trainings,
- Dialogue and network of judiciary, different respective authorities, NGOs and legal professionals established which could be continued and further utilized,
- Cooperation with the Judicial Training Centers, Magistrate Schools, ministries of justice and environment which could be further enhanced in order to include into their training curricula the AC access to justice topics and the related EU and national legislation and practices.

Highlights of the ***PRTR Component***

- Installation and adaptation of the free German reporting software for PRTR in Macedonia, user manuals for authorities and operators assisting with the use of the software, tested with pilot facility,
- Web portals developed in Serbia and in Macedonia for the better public access and dissemination of PRTR data, linked with the reporting software and the databases,
- Capacity building and local language guidance materials for operators, authorities and other stakeholders.

Impact

- The conditions for launching the practical PRTR reporting procedure in Macedonia from 2014 are created,
- Public access to the PRTR data is improved via the web portals in Macedonia and in Serbia integrated in the ongoing reporting process,
- Better understanding and dialogue established between the competent authorities, operators and NGOs about the roles and responsibilities in developing and operating PRTRs, providing opportunities to continue the dialogue and mobilize them for joint actions in the future.

Target country/region: Selected Western Balkan countries

Duration: 04/2011 - 10/2013

Beneficiary: environmental authorities, environmental civil society organisations, the judiciary, operators of PRTR, developers in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo (as defined by UNSCR 1244)

Implementing organisation[s]: The Regional Environmental Center (REC), Szentendre, Hungary, www.rec.org, in cooperation with Aarhus and PRTR Focal Points in the project countries

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