

Background note

Capacity building workshop

Advancing effective Multilateral Environmental Agreements implementation in Central Asia: Promoting synergies and rights-based approaches to combat pollution

17-18-19 June 2025

Almaty, Kazakhstan

I. Background: the case for synergies and rights-based approaches in MEA implementation

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) provide an important framework to address the interconnected environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, which threaten ecosystems, human health, economic and social stability. MEAs play a fundamental role towards sustainable development, with their objectives and obligations being mutually supportive of many SDG environmental goals and targets.¹ Advancing their effective implementation is crucial to deliver the SDGs with a catalytic and multiplier effect that spans across the environmental, economic and social dimension of the 2030 Agenda.

The challenges faced by countries in implementing the many commitments and policy directions set under the MEAs in a coherent manner are well documented.² In this context, the need to advance synergies in the implementation of MEAs – both within and across clusters in areas of common interest – has emerged in recent years as a cornerstone of environmental governance,³ which can guide countries towards: 1) strengthening domestic coordination and cooperation for planning and implementation; 2) enhancing the necessary enabling conditions (policies, laws and institutional arrangements) for their effective implementation; and 3) promoting policy coherence at all levels.

In the multilateral pollution agenda, advancing synergies and cooperation across MEAs has gathered increasing recognition, as evidenced by several decisions from MEA governing bodies and/or existing cooperation mechanisms and working groups under the purview of relevant international Conventions. Two notable examples calling for coordination and cooperation to advance effective and synergetic MEA implementation include: 1) the [cooperation between the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm \(BRS\) Conventions and the Minamata Convention](#);⁴ and 2) the [cooperation between the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers \(PRTRs\) of the UNECE Aarhus Convention and the Air Convention, BRS and Minamata](#)

¹ [UNEP/EA.6/INF/6](#) - Background note to support the discussions on agenda item "Cooperation with Multilateral Environment Agreements" - Note by the Secretariat.

² Id.

³ As evidenced by various exploratory studies, decisions from governing bodies of MEAs as well as recommendations from other international events, such as the [Bern III Conference](#) held in January 2024.

⁴ Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal; Rotterdam Convention on the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade; Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs); Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Conventions.⁵ Furthermore, the adoption of the [Global Framework on Chemicals](#) (GFC) in 2023 has created significant momentum to promote synergies and cooperation across the cluster of pollution-related MEAs. The Framework presents a comprehensive plan to guide countries and stakeholders in jointly addressing the lifecycle of chemicals and reducing emissions and releases of chemicals and waste to the environment, which *inter alia* are a [significant source of air pollution](#) and an obstacle to the realization of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment recognized by [UNGA resolution 76/300](#).

In response to these overarching needs and recognitions, the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in 2024 tasked the UN Environment Programme with: promoting synergies, cooperation or collaboration for the national implementation of MEAs ([UNEA 6/4](#)); facilitating the coherent and effective implementation of the MEAs at the regional and national levels, on a Member State-driven basis, including through the [Fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law](#) and in cooperation with United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) ([UNEA 6/6](#)); and cooperating with relevant MEAs to raise awareness and foster national and regional action to address the multiple and transboundary impacts of air pollution and improve air quality globally ([UNEA 6/10](#)).

UNEP, in cooperation with UNECE and other partners organizations, provides [substantive support to countries](#) with the development and implementation of effective national policies, legislation and governance frameworks to strengthen coordination and cooperation in the domestic implementation of MEAs. Since 1982, UNEP's environmental law activities have been organized and coordinated through its flagship [Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law \(Montevideo Programme\)](#). Renewed every 10 years, this programme has guided the international community in the development of environmental laws that transform science-based policies into action-orientated rules and standards of conduct, supporting the implementation of MEAs as well as the advancement of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment at all levels.

UNEP's approach to building country capacities for the synergetic implementation of MEAs involves enhancing cooperation between the national focal points of different Conventions, as well as promoting their cooperation with national Montevideo Focal Points. This aims to help countries achieve a more integrated, effective and inclusive national environmental governance system - one paved with synergies and benefits, which strives to balance domestic policy objectives with effective laws and regulations to advance coherent MEA implementation.

The full and effective implementation of the [UNECE Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs](#) is a crucial step towards the advancement of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment globally, as well as the achievement of synergies with other MEAs, including in the pollution agenda.⁶ This is supported

⁵ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters; Kyiv Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers; Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

⁶ Objective II.6 of the [Strategic Plan of the Aarhus Convention 2022-2030](#), adopted in 2021, recognizes that "The Parties to the Convention, both in their participation in international policymaking and in their national implementation activities, achieve synergies between the Convention and other international environmental and human rights agreements (mainly target 17.14 of the Sustainable

by the explicit recognition of the linkage between the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and MEA implementation in international law and several relevant international frameworks on pollution, such as: the [Global Framework on Chemicals](#), which recognizes it amongst its principles, approaches and targets with respect to all human rights; [the Bonn Declaration for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste](#); and the [UNGA resolution 76/300](#), which affirms that “the promotion of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment requires the full implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements under the principles of international environmental law.” The promotion of a rights-based approach to environmental governance, including through the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs, thus contributes to creating effective governance conditions for sustainable development, which are rooted in rule of law, participatory approaches in decision-making and long-term considerations that look at the benefit of present and future generations.⁷ This helps ensuring that MEAs are not only implemented with a “whole of government” approach, but also with a “whole of society” approach that strives for inclusivity and policy coherence at all levels.

II. Promoting MEAs implementation across the UN Development System

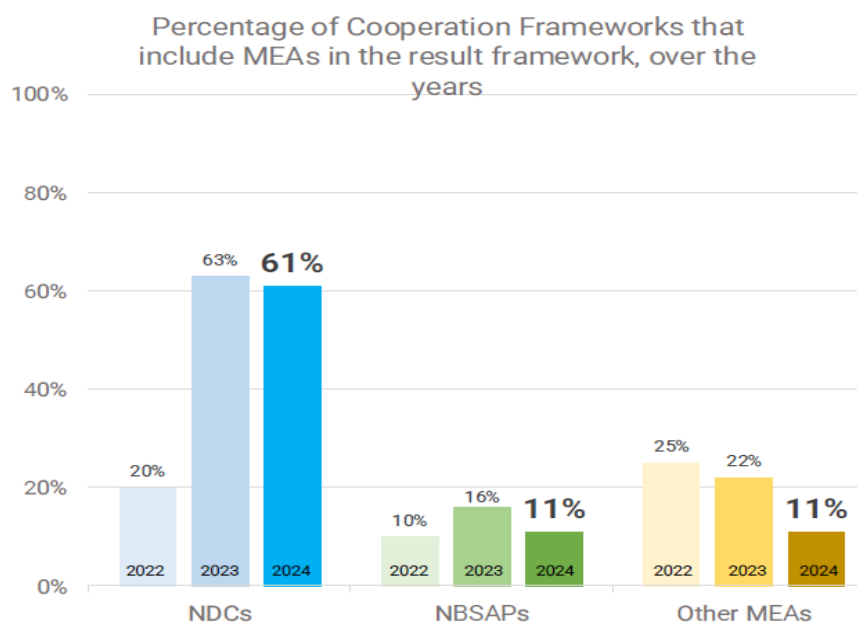
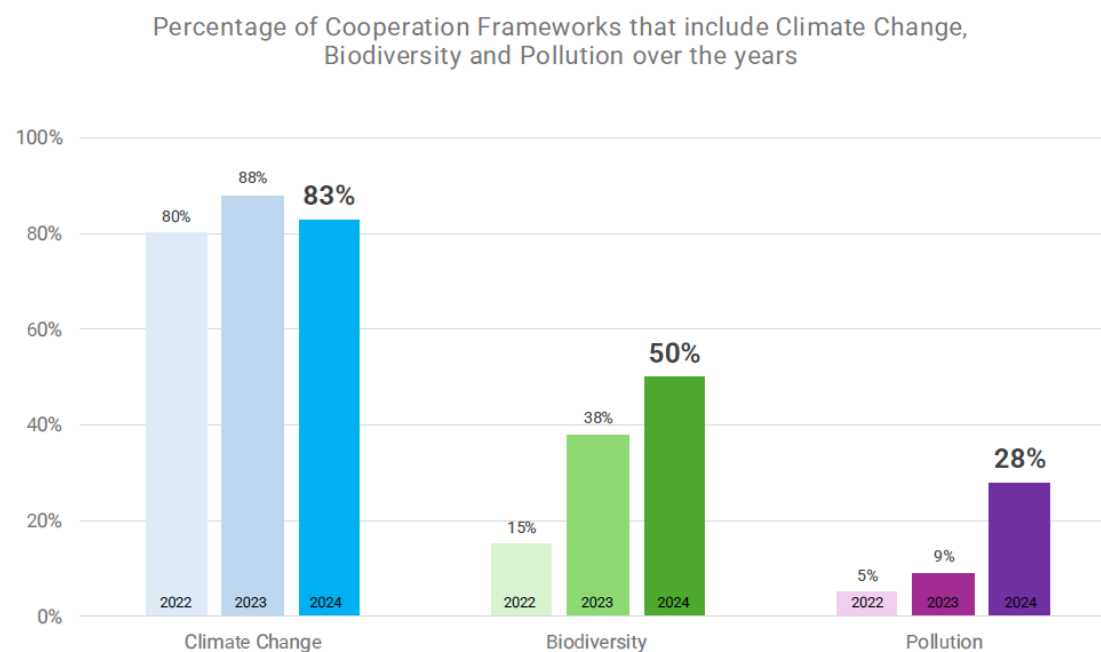
UNEP works with Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) to progressively support the mainstreaming of MEAs in UN Country programming processes (Country Analyses/CAs and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks/UNSDCFs). To deliver on the 2030 Agenda, UNCTs can leverage the synergies and comparative advantages of MEAs to: embed MEA implementation across national sustainable development planning and policy processes, linking these with relevant policy tools and strategies; break siloes across government departments working on different MEAs and sustainable development issues; and offer regional peer learning opportunities to encourage countries to learn from one another to advance on their national priorities, especially in geographical contexts with similar needs.

Particularly in the pollution agenda, a 2024 UNEP analysis of CAs and UNSDCFs revealed that pollution is significantly less included in UNSDCFs, compared to climate change or biodiversity loss, with the same conclusion also applying to the inclusion of pollution-related MEAs strategies and action plans in UNSDCF results frameworks (see figures below)

Development Goals).” To achieve that, it aims to: at national level, promote the coordinated implementation of the Convention and the provisions on access to information and public participation of other MEAs and human rights agreements; at international level, to organize joint activities with other MEAs. The topic of pollution from chemicals and waste has been prominently addressed in the work under the Convention between 2021-2025 (see e.g. outcomes of the [meetings](#) of the Task Force on Access to Justice and 2023 Judicial Colloquium; the [meeting](#) of the Task Force on Access to Information and the [meeting](#) of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making) and the [work](#) under the Protocol on PRTRs.

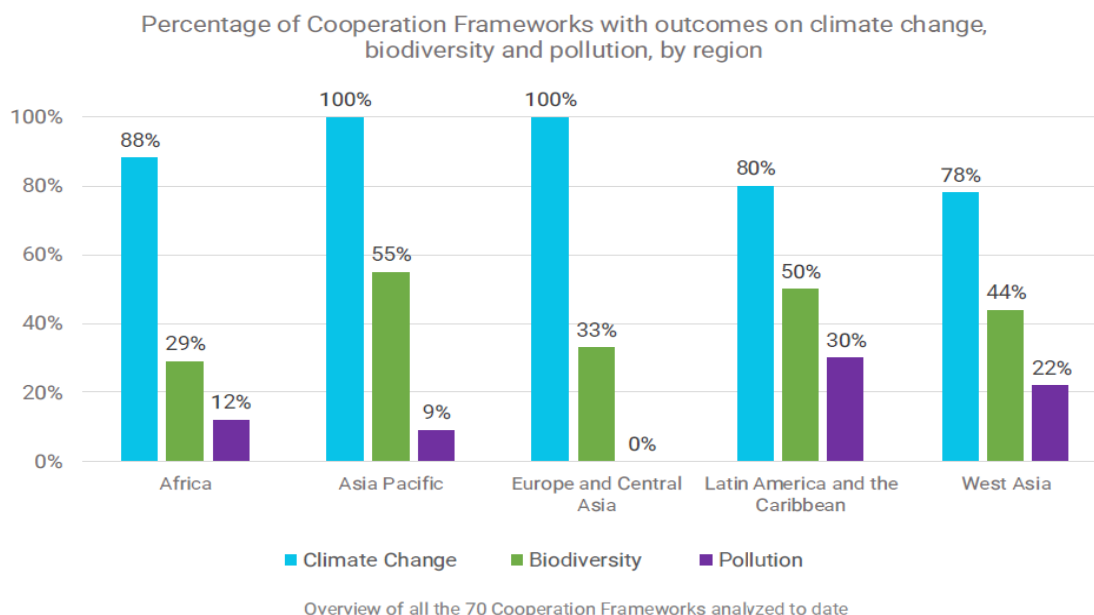
⁷ United Nations Environment Programme (2024), Handbook for SDG Indicator 17.14.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Nairobi, available here:

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/45891/Policy_Coherence_Handbook_indicator_17.14.pdf?sequence=3



Source: UNEP review of Cooperation Frameworks (CFs) developed in 2023

Furthermore, particularly in the Europe and Central Asia Region, an overview of the 70 UNSDCFs analysed by UNEP between 2022-2024 revealed that, to date, none include specific outcomes on pollution (see figure below).



Source: UNEP review of Cooperation Frameworks (CFs) developed in 2023

To support these aspirations, it is crucial to advance coherent narratives at country level, which can account for system-wide perspectives for the best country support that connects various strategic areas of work of the UNCT, such as the environmental agenda with the governance, justice, rule of law and human rights agendas at country level. The [UN Common Approach towards a Pollution-free Planet](#) can help address this important need, representing a “One-UN” voice that can promote the strategic and coherent inclusion of pollution issues across the work of RCs and UNCTs and influence horizontal policy processes as well as vertical integration at country level.

III. The need for a sub-regional capacity-building workshop in Central Asia

Recent UNEP analyses combined with the findings of relevant UNECE [Environmental Performance Reviews](#) suggest that countries in the Central Asia region face significant environmental challenges related to chemicals, waste management and air pollution, many of which have transboundary implications.

Industrial activities, mining and unsustainable waste disposal practices contribute to the release of hazardous chemicals and pollutants that cross national borders, affecting air quality, water resources and public health across the region. The dispersion of persistent organic pollutants (POPs), heavy metals like mercury and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), moreover, exacerbates respiratory diseases, soil degradation, and water contamination. Given the shared river basins, mountain ecosystems and transboundary air currents, regional cooperation is essential to effectively manage these issues. Strengthening synergies in the implementation of international agreements such as the BRS and Minamata Conventions, the UNECE Air Convention, Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs can therefore help Central Asian countries address pollution sources collectively, improve monitoring systems, and implement harmonized policies and legislation that advance

effective environmental governance. A coordinated approach will not only protect human health and biodiversity but also support sustainable economic growth and regional stability.

In addition, although all five countries in the region have explicitly entrenched the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment or variations thereof in their constitutional frameworks or legislation, there are still several implementation challenges due to persisting normative, capacity and awareness gaps. These include the need to improve coordination and synergies across national policies, laws and institutional frameworks, compounded by capacity gaps of legislators and the judiciary to effectively secure and enforce their implementation. In this context, promoting the effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs across the region remains an important mechanism to close the information, normative and capacity gaps and strive for the full implementation of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

This context offers an important opportunity for UNEP to extend its assistance to other countries in Central Asia and promote a regional approach to the effective implementation of the BRS Conventions, Minamata Convention, Air Convention, as well as the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs. This is responsive to the needs outlined in the previous sections, including advancing the recommendations of the [UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews](#) for all five countries in the Central Asia region.

In response, the UNEP Law Division and Central Asia Office will facilitate the capacity building workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan from 17th to 19th June 2025 “Advancing effective Multilateral Environmental Agreements implementation in Central Asia: Promoting synergies and rights-based approaches to combat pollution.”

IV. Objectives of the workshop

The overall objective of the workshop is to strengthen the coherent and effective implementation of selected MEAs (BRS Conventions, Minamata Convention, Air Convention, Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs) at the national level in the Central Asia region. The workshop will focus on synergetic entry points for the implementation of the selected pollution-related MEAs, including in the context of the GFC (e.g. enabling policy, legal and institutional frameworks to support integrated pollutant monitoring, development and management of integrated pollution registries and avoidance of negative emissions or releases to prevent air, soil and water pollution). Furthermore, it will include dedicated discussions on how the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and particularly its procedural elements of the right to access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs can serve as key enabling conditions for the effective implementation of these MEAs.

By adopting a regional approach, the workshop will be an opportunity to foster peer learning across regional country representatives, to exchange information on best practices and experiences in implementation, thereby facilitating improved and consistent implementation within the Central Asia region. The focus will be on strengthening whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches through improved cooperation and coordination among the focal points and other government experts working across the selected MEAs.

In this regard, opportunities for obtaining support through the UNEP Montevideo Programme will be elaborated.

The workshop is expected to achieve the following specific objectives:

- a) Strengthen the capacities of the five countries in Central Asia to advance the implementation of the selected MEAs, integrating relevant mutually supportive obligations and provisions across national sustainable development and pollution-related strategies and facilitate the effective preparation of national implementation plans.
- b) Strengthen national coordination and cooperation across government departments to foster the interministerial and multi-stakeholder perspectives necessary to advance a “whole of government” and “whole of society” approach towards the implementation of the selected MEAs and the GFC.
- c) Increase understanding on how access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters can serve as key enabling conditions for the effective implementation of the selected MEAs and the GFC.
- d) Strengthen capacities to develop, implement and enforce national legal frameworks that advance MEA implementation whilst strengthening cooperation between the MEA focal points and National Montevideo Focal Points.
- e) Promote regional peer learning across the five countries.
- f) Enhance awareness and engagement of selected UNCT Focal Points from the region in MEA and GFC implementation, to yield insights and perspectives that can inform efforts in mainstreaming MEAs in relevant Country Analyses and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

V. Expected outcomes

- a) Increased awareness and practical understanding of how the synergies and interlinkages between the chemicals, waste, air pollution and human rights clusters can be promoted and effectively implemented at the national level through strengthening coordination and collaboration across the respective national focal points.
- b) Participants improve their technical skills and knowledge of how to integrate MEA implementation into national policy processes with greater policy coherence that advances economic and social shifts, leading to more effective implementation strategies that account for all three dimensions of sustainable development.
- c) Increased understanding of how the development of national policy and legal frameworks can ensure the implementation of the MEAs and the effective advancement of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; and how the strengthened cooperation between the MEA focal points and the National Montevideo Focal Points can enhance MEA implementation.
- d) Increased understanding of the current reporting systems and obligations under the selected MEAs and of the tools and approaches which support/could support more effective and coordinated reporting to MEAs.
- e) Enhanced engagement between national MEA focal points, MFA focal points, Montevideo and UNCT Focal Points generates lessons and perspectives that UNCTs can bring back to their contexts to enhance MEA mainstreaming across Country Analyses and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, including operationalizing the UN Common Approach on Pollution.

VI. Target audience and modality

The workshop will target the following five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to benefit from a regional approach based on peer-learning. The countries have been selected as they are Parties to the selected MEAs covered in this workshop, or in the process of consideration of accession to the same MEAs.

Participants from all five countries will be invited to the workshop, including:

- National Focal Points for BRS Conventions, Air Convention and Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs.
- Other government experts working on mercury, chemicals and waste and air quality issues (in cases where no National Focal Points have been officially nominated)
- National Montevideo Focal Points.
- National Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) Focal Points working on multilateral cooperation or environmental cooperation.

In addition, representatives from selected UNCTs working on environmental, development or human rights issues in the region (e.g. UNECE, OHCHR, UNDP) as well as other international organizations (e.g. OSCE) operating in the region will be invited to contribute to the discussions. Invitation letters will be sent to the target countries as well as selected UNCTs asking for nominations.

The workshop will be fully in-person with simultaneous interpretation between English and Russian. The programme will be comprised of presentations, moderated discussions (including presentations by the country focal points themselves), and break-out groups. A desktop questionnaire to obtain background information and to guide the planning of the workshop may be developed and sent to the participants in advance of the workshop.

VII. Partners

The workshop is being organised by UNEP in close collaboration with the BRS Secretariat, the Minamata Secretariat and the UNECE Secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and Air Convention.