



Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change
Regional workshop on environment and climate change
issues in the implementation of UNSDCFs
12-14 SEPTEMBER 2023 | İSTANBUL | TÜRKİYE

EXECUTIVE MEETING SUMMARY

Introduction

Responding to the needs of Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), the [UN Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change \(IBC\)](#) for Europe and Central Asia convened its first in-person regional capacity building and knowledge exchange workshop in Istanbul from 12-14 September 2023. The workshop focused on effective mainstreaming of environment and climate change programming in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), with specific emphasis on seven topics: (1) Coordinated UN Action; (2) Climate and energy; (3) Air pollution; (4) Water, including transboundary cooperation; (5) Early Warning Systems for All; (6) Biodiversity; and (7) Just transitions towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.

The IBC on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia serves as a regional UN platform supporting RCOs and UNCTS through knowledge and policies on environment and climate change to help catalyze Member States' action towards the 2030 Agenda.

Topic 1: Coordinated UN Action

Joint Programming and Joint Programmes at the country level means tackling the interconnected nature of environmental and climate challenges, with significant impact of the UN development system by delivering results at scale. Joint UN actions are achieved by: improving understanding through analysis and research; advocating and creating the momentum for the "One UN" approach; and implementing initiatives at the grassroots level.

The 'Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes' reflects a re-thinking about the rationale, value added, and approach of Joint Programmes. It is intended to make Joint Programmes lighter, more effective, catalytic and user friendly for rapid implementation and fewer transaction costs.

Among the challenges identified in Joint Actions were: difficulties in working across different systems; lack of resources and competition for funds; lack of incentives for coordination mechanisms, which often rely on good will; and limited awareness and communication and unclear mapping of UN led initiatives.

Among the opportunities, the following were mentioned: resource mobilization; greater impact at country level; leveraging different expertise and networks; and opportunities for complementary programming to achieve economies of scale and distribute the risks.

Participants identified areas requiring increased support for coordinated action, such as more information at the country level; understanding what countries are doing; access to joint funding (and how to prepare a proposal); joint workshops and informal channels; and making the process of inter-agency cooperation easier.

Topic 2: Climate Change & Energy

Regarding global and regional climate outlooks, experts highlighted that while the region benefits from the European Union Green Deal and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, many countries still have high levels of energy intensity and resource inefficiency with up to 96% of total primary energy supply coming from fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas). It was emphasized that given the return of climate skepticism, it is important to focus on intersectoral approaches and just transition to leave no one behind and address inequalities.

The session also discussed how to voice regional needs in the global climate agenda (i.e., COP 28) and understand the significant challenges for taking climate action in the region. Participants discussed how Central Asian countries can leverage their geographical position and energy resources to play a pivotal role in regional and global efforts to transition towards a low- carbon, sustainable energy future.

Participants also identified ways to scale and speed up the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) at the country level. The discussions confirmed previous findings, highlighting the importance of inclusive policies and platforms and incentives for investments for green and just transitions, including through the private sector.

The discussion underscored challenges and opportunities to decarbonize the energy sector, including: the need for policies to have long-term implications; linking environmental strategies to social and economic strategies; regional collaboration; and support for countries' understanding of gaps in reporting emissions through horizontal exchange and a focus on how to report and improve. Experts also highlighted the green opportunity for post-war reconstruction.

To address the climate finance gap in the region, experts highlighted the following: The Bridgetown Agenda, which proposes expanding the mandate for multilateral development banks to meet financial demands, pivot away from fossil fuels, and adopt green technologies; Loss & Damage finance (L&D) and a need for a clearer definition and scope; Carbon pricing; Debt instruments including sustainable bonds, which are a good instrument to finance just transition; Transition finance deployed by the private sector to implement their net-zero transition objectives; Blended finance; and Philanthropic finance.

Topic 3: Air pollution

Air pollution comes from sources including transport, industry, energy and agriculture, and affects human health and the environment. Air pollution and climate change are closely linked as all major air pollutants have an impact on the climate and most share common sources with greenhouse gases.

The session showcased regional examples of improving air quality. In December 2022, Serbia adopted the 'National Air Pollution Programme', a UN Joint Programme involving UNDP, UNOPS, UNEP, UNICEF, WHO, UN WOMEN, and UNICEF. In Georgia, the Joint Programme on 'Better Air Quality for Citizens' was supported by UNDP in partnership with WHO, UNECE, and UNEP. It was discussed that air pollution programming could be used as an entry point to achieve more challenging goals related to just transition and decarbonisation where citizen skepticism is limiting progress.

Cooperation under the 'UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution' was discussed, where emissions have been reduced by 40-80% since 1990 in the region, with an estimated 600.000 lives saved annually, and one additional year added to life expectancy in the region. The importance of the science-policy interface under this convention was emphasized, along

with the role of data for monitoring, modeling and understanding effects. Cooperation in Kyrgyzstan under the 'Development Partners Cooperation Group's Subgroup on Air Pollution' was also discussed, including its more than 15 development partners. This cooperation, despite challenges in convening and cooperating across 15 sectors, significantly enhanced donor coordination, prioritisation of key issues, synergetic direction of funding, and information sharing.

Regarding the health impacts of air pollution, the UNICEF report 'Breathless Beginnings' highlighted that children are physiologically a vulnerable group, making air pollution a children's rights issue.

Topic 4: Water Including Transboundary Cooperation

This session highlighted that for some SDG 6 target areas, a fourfold increase is needed to achieve targets by 2030. Through breakout group discussions, participants explored regional examples to help highlight gaps and next steps for transboundary cooperation in different domains, such as health, environment, climate change, biodiversity, agriculture, and country level planning.

Next steps were discussed for the **Western Balkans** to address needs and implement Joint Programmes on transboundary water in the region, including: more access to finance and clear understanding of which entities are financing specific initiatives; establish coordination mechanisms between development partners and donor communities; use Joint Programmes to engage donors that take a regional approach; create a sub-group on transboundary water; and UN system support in garnering political support to overcome political issues.

Critical gaps were identified in the **Central Asia** region, including: financing and fundraising; fragmentation; lack of common understanding of "water for health"; limited integration in Common Country Assessment (CCAs); capacity gaps; and quality data and data sharing. Important next steps were suggested on transboundary water cooperation, namely: rights-based advocacy; clear definition of UN-added value; capitalize on the role of the Resident Coordinator to advance water for health; and create a common chapter on CCA.

Among the gaps identified in **Eastern Europe** were water management not being sufficiently reflected in CCAs, limited data, quality and disaggregation, and limited financial resources for implementation. Critical next steps for the region were also identified, including joint proposals for vertical funds (Global Environment Facility (GEF), and Green Climate Fund (GCF) and creating incentives for donors to support joint projects.

Among the challenges mentioned for the **South Caucasus** region were policy advocacy, data sharing, and climate finance. Regarding current projects and the way forward, discussions emphasized the importance of monitoring and forecasting the impacts of climate change and undertaking a joint UN study on the status of water reserves in the sub-regions.

Gaps identified for **Türkiye** included: optimizing water usage and addressing knowledge gaps related to water efficiency; insufficient awareness within the community, underscoring the need for a robust information dissemination system; addressing data gaps; and promoting water reuse. Regarding Joint Programming, gaps were identified in the following sector: marine pollution; invasive alien species; and water resource for energy production.

Topic 5: Early Warning Systems for All

In 2022, the 'Early Warnings for All (EW4All)' initiative was launched by the UN Secretary-General to address the challenge that globally one-third of citizens are still not covered by early warning systems. The 'Executive Action Plan 2023-2027 for Early Warnings for All' initiative summarizes the

initial actions required to ensure early warning systems protect everyone on Earth within the next five years.

The action plan for implementation of the EW4All in WMO Region VI – Europe was shared during the session. UNDRR, WMO, ITU, and IFRC are collaborating with other UN partner agencies across the four pillars of EW4All to create an overall regional plan.

Key risks, challenges, and sustainability aspects related to early warnings were identified in this session, including related to funding, infrastructure, capacity building, inadequate understanding of the early warning system by the public, cultural factors, and government support. Overall, it was discussed that the effective implementation of the EW4All Road Map and Action plan requires a combination of suitable infrastructure, funding, technical knowledge, public participation and engagement, and government support, among other factors.

Good practice examples across Central Asia were highlighted. For example, Tajikistan was among the first countries to receive support as part of the UN Secretary-General's EW4All initiative, with the objective of improving the country's resilience to natural hazards. The project on 'Enhancing Multi-Hazard Early Warning System to Increase Resilience of Uzbekistan Communities to Climate Change Induced Hazards' was highlighted, along with the 'Early Warning System for Lake Sarez' in Tajikistan, the national integrated system of information and warning in the Kyrgyz Republic, and the earthquake and mudflow Early Warning System in the City of Almaty in Kazakhstan.

Topic 6: Biodiversity

UNCTs, led by UN Resident Coordinators (RCs), are uniquely positioned to advance implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Inter-agency efforts were highlighted concerning the UN common approach to biodiversity, including the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG), which brings together the 51 specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the UN including the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), which is an intergovernmental scientific programme that aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments.

Related to protecting biodiversity through Joint Programming, examples were shared on sustainable tourism by the Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group, including a case study from the Amu Darya River Basin, in Uzbekistan, Khorezm Region, and in Albania's Vjosa national park. As well, the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) was shared, bringing together five UN agencies (UNEP, ILO, UNDP, UNIDO, and UNITAR) to foster community-based eco- and cultural tourism.

Building on recent attention to biodiversity finance, the workshop highlighted the need for the financial and business sectors to address the loss of nature as a material risk affecting a company's operational costs, reputation, and profitability, as well as the potential implications for financial stability at the macro-level. Importantly, the business and finance sectors have already called for governments to step up to create public policies that can support biodiversity (e.g., Task Force on Nature Related Disclosure).

At UNEA, Resolution 5/5 of 2 March 2022 on "Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development" was adopted. Nature-based solutions (NbS) represent a clear and practical way for addressing the climate change and biodiversity crises simultaneously, through the sustainable use of nature. NbS also deliver many benefits for food and micro nutritional security, as well as resilience to ecological shocks and providing livelihoods, clean air and drinking water, among others.

Topic 7: Just Transitions

This session outlined the fundamentals and practice of a Just Transition for greening the economy that is fair and inclusive to all, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. Importantly, in 2015, the ILO adopted the "Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all" which have been reinforced as the central reference for policymaking at the global level.

The importance of translating standard setting instruments and technical documents, such as the ILO policy framework, into an actionable and localized approach was stressed in this session. The case of Kyrgyzstan was shared, where the country is making progress on NDCs, with a need to tailor these commitments to the world of work. Particularly important is the greening of small and medium-sized enterprises through capacity building and developing sectoral and thematic approaches to generate inclusive and decent employment opportunities to foster social cohesion.

It was also noted that the education sector is not well equipped for a just transition. For UNICEF, moving this sector forward is important, recognizing the specific vulnerabilities of children and youth, along with solutions to leave no one behind.

From a gender perspective, it was noted that many documents guide the energy transition but there is no mention of women and gender equality. In achieving a just energy transition, it is important to address gender bias and bring gender equality to energy policies and vice-versa.

The session concluded with a discussion on ideas for future Joint Programmes and resource mobilization at the country level, aiming to ensure green transitions are just. Discussions underscored the importance of compensating individuals who are most vulnerable to the transition's impacts and highlighted the necessity of integrating just transition considerations into macro-economic policies. The discussion stressed the need for a shared understanding of a just transition, breaking down silos and positioning it as a cross-cutting concern in policy and projects and emphasized the critical role of social dialogue throughout the process.

Key Takeaways

In concluding the workshop, the IBC workshop convenors emphasized the value-added of gathering diverse expertise, experiences and topics in one space, enabling a shift from a singular agency-focused mindset to a collaborative one. The workshop emphasized how UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes have joined forces to respond to a number of challenges, and the important role of IBCs as a key enabler for inter-agency coordination and in fostering holistic approaches to address co-mingled challenges such as the triple-planetary crisis.

Participants from RCOs and UNCTs recognized the hurdles to collaboration, yet they viewed it as an opportunity rather than a challenge. They emphasized that collaboration spanning across sectors and disciplines and leveraging diverse experiences and knowledge is crucial to effectively address the interconnected challenges the world is facing, and to accelerate action towards the necessary transitions required to fulfill the promises of the 2030 Agenda.

Participants commented that the many good examples of joint projects featured and discussed would inform their work over the coming year, and that there would be continued liaising with colleagues from other countries as well as better engagement with non-resident agencies and application of transformative and just systems thinking approaches to programming. Furthermore, Results Groups would be used more efficiently for strategic planning and analytic work, as would joint resource mobilization with RC support.