

UNECE

Air Pollution and Human Rights

1. Please provide specific examples of constitutional provisions, legislation, regulations, standards, policies and programmes in relation to preventing, reducing, or eliminating air pollution, both outdoor and indoor. Please include, inter alia, any instruments that refer directly to the right to a healthy environment and/or the right to breathe clean air.

In 1979, countries in the UNECE region signed the [Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution](#), creating the first international treaty to deal with air pollution on a broad regional basis. The Convention entered into force in 1983, laying down the general principles of international cooperation for air pollution abatement and setting up an institutional framework which has since brought together research and policy.

Since its entry into force, the Convention has been extended by 8 [protocols](#) setting emission reduction targets for several pollutants, such as, among others, sulphur, nitrogen oxides, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, and particulate matter, including black carbon. Today, the Convention has [51 Parties](#) in UNECE region. The Convention's [Gothenburg Protocol](#) is the first legally-binding agreement containing obligations to reduce the broader spectrum of short-lived climate pollutants, including ground-level ozone precursors and black carbon, and is thus an example of an integrated approach tackling both air pollution and climate change.

2. Please provide specific examples of good practices in preventing, reducing, or eliminating air pollution, both outdoor and indoor. These examples may occur at the international, national, sub-national, or local level. Examples may involve air quality monitoring; guaranteeing procedural rights (e.g. public access to air quality information, public participation in decision-making about air pollution, access to remedies); air quality legislation, regulations, standards, and policies; initiatives to reduce air pollution from specific sectors (e.g. electricity generation, industry, transportation, indoor cooking, heating, and lighting); laws, policies and programmes to protect vulnerable populations from air pollution; laws, policies, or programmes to concurrently address air pollution and climate change; and effective enforcement of rules governing air pollution.

The UNECE [Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution](#) is a good example of preventing and reducing air pollution at the regional level. The results of this collective effort by Parties so far have been significant: [Emission reductions](#) by 70 percent for sulphur and to 40 percent for nitrogen oxides since 1990 in Europe and North America.

The Air Convention is unique in that it provides an international legally binding agreement, which sets emission reduction targets for several pollutants that are harmful to the environment and human health. It provides a platform for countries to discuss policies to reduce air pollution and to negotiate new emission targets. Science plays a very important role in the Convention. Over the last 40 years, the scientific network under the Convention has covered a lot of ground in the domain of air pollution, from atmospheric monitoring and modeling; deposition; integrated assessments; cost-effective scenario development (see [Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe \(EMEP\)](#)); and work on the [effects of air pollution](#) on various receptors, such as human health, forests, lakes, cultural monuments, and crops, to name just a few.

The Convention also monitors [compliance of Parties with their reporting obligations under the Convention and its Protocols](#). In addition, it supports countries in [capacity building and awareness raising at the national level](#).

In addition to emission reduction targets, the protocols under the Convention also set emission limit values for stationary sources, such as industrial plants, for mobile sources, and for agriculture. To assist Parties in implementing these emission limit values, the Convention has developed a number of [guidance documents](#) that identify best abatement options, with particular reference to best available techniques (BAT).

Besides the obligations in the protocols, the Convention is also looking for innovative ways to further encourage countries to reduce air pollution. For example, the [Batumi Action for Cleaner Air \(BACA\)](#), which was endorsed at a Ministerial Conference in 2016, is a voluntary initiative supporting countries' efforts in improving air quality.

The experience of the Air Convention has shown that regional cooperation is key to reduce air pollutant emissions. Air pollutants know no borders and are travelling long distances from their point of emission. This means that the problem cannot be solved at the local or national level alone. Reducing emissions has to be done at all scales, the local, national, and importantly, the regional and global ones.

3. Please identify specific challenges that your government, business, or organization has faced in attempting to address air pollution and its impacts on human rights.
4. Please specify ways in which additional protection is provided for populations who may be particularly vulnerable to air pollution (e.g. women, children, persons living in poverty, members of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, older persons, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, and national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities).
5. Please provide specific examples related to the regulation of businesses and other non-State actors in relation to the protection of human rights from air pollution and the fulfilment of their obligations in this regard.
6. How do you ensure that the rights of environmentalists working on air quality issues (environmental human rights defenders) are protected? What efforts has your Government or business made to create a safe and enabling environment for them to freely exercise their rights without fear of violence, intimidation, or reprisal?