

Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Aarhus Centres



What are Aarhus Centres?

Environmental degradation, competition over natural resources and climate change can threaten political stability. Good environmental governance and co-operation on the other hand help to build trust. This is where Aarhus Centres come in, engaging citizens, governments and the private sector in a dialogue on environmental challenges.

The work of the Aarhus Centres is based on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) of 1998.

The Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR) jointly help to address many of the challenges within the OSCE region: from climate change to disaster risk reduction, from water pollution to hazardous waste management. They also support governments to engage the public in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our mandate

OSCE participating States have committed to promoting environmental good governance, including through the Aarhus Centres, in various documents, starting with the 1999 Istanbul Charter for European Security. Since then, participating States have underscored the importance of processes and institutions for providing timely information about economic and environmental issues of public interest (OSCE Maastricht Strategy 2003); of raising awareness of the potential impact of environmental challenges on security (Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security 2007); and of engaging Aarhus Centres in improving the environmental footprint of energy-related activities (Ministerial Decision 05/13) and in disaster risk reduction (Ministerial Decision 06/14).

The Aarhus Convention provides for:

Access to environmental information

The right of citizens to receive environmental information from public authorities.

Public participation in environmental decision making

The right of citizens to participate in decision-making during the preparation of plans, programmes, policies and legislation relating to the environment.

Access to justice

The right of citizens to have access to review procedures when their rights on access to information or public participation in environmental matters are violated.

The PRTR Protocol regulates public access to information by establishing inventories of pollution from industrial sites and other sources.

THE THREE PILLARS OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION

Access to environmental information

Public participation in environmental decision making

Access to justice



Faced with the dangerous legacies of uranium mining, the Aarhus Centres in Osh, Kyrgyzstan and Khujand, Tajikistan, increase the awareness among the local population about the risks of uranium legacy sites and remediation options.

What do Aarhus Centres do?

The Aarhus Centres assist governments in implementing the Aarhus Convention and citizens to better understand and exercise their rights as specified by the Convention.

The OSCE through its field operations and the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) has supported the establishment and operation of Aarhus Centres since 2002.

In close co-operation with the host countries and the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat, the Aarhus Centres network has been rapidly growing over the years.

Activities

Aarhus Centres enable platforms where public institutions, local administrations, civil society organizations and the private sector jointly address environmental challenges in their localities and seek solutions. The Centres are a bridge between citizens and authorities, working on a range of activities, including:

Aarhus Centres are also becoming more and more engaged at the regional and international levels through their joint activities across borders, and their active participation in international meetings, transboundary consultations and decision-making processes.

- raising public awareness on environmental issues,
- disseminating environmental information,
- organizing public hearings,
- monitoring local environmental hotspots,
- providing legal advice to citizens and NGOs on environmental matters,
- engaging youth and women in environmental initiatives.

More than 60 OSCE-supported Aarhus Centres have been established and operate in 14 countries in four regions.

South-Eastern Europe	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia
Eastern Europe	Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine
South Caucasus	Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan



Aarhus Centre Network volunteers explain the importance of implementing the Aarhus Convention to local citizens in Zrenjanin, Serbia.

What do Aarhus Centres do? (continued)

The specific priorities of each Aarhus Centre vary depending on the local needs.

The main thematic areas of their work are:

- Water resources management
- Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)
- Climate change
- Hazardous waste management including uranium tailings

- Urban waste management
- Extractive industries including mining
- Sustainable development
- Green economy
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Gender mainstreaming
- Eco-journalism
- Environmental legislation
- Youth empowerment

More information is available at aarhus.osce.org



The first Aarhus Centre was established in 2002 in Armenia. Today, the country's network of 15 Aarhus Centres, like the Hrazdan Aarhus Centre, encourages the participation of NGOs and the community in addressing environment and security issues.

Partners

The OSCE closely co-operates with the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat.


The Aarhus Centres have received significant support through the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, which is a partnership of OSCE, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNECE and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe. More details can be found at www.envsec.org



The Aarhus Centres of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia signed a Joint Declaration for Co-operation in June 2015. Such agreements are important in facilitating dialogue between civil societies across borders, and in more effectively addressing common environmental concerns.

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