

The Aarhus Centres Network

SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

Albania
Aarhus Information Centres in Tirana, Shkodra, and Vlora (aic.org.al)

Montenegro
Aarhus Centre in Podgorica

Serbia
Aarhus Centres in Kragujevac (aarhusk.rs) and Subotica (aarhussu.rs)

SOUTHERN CAUCASUS

Armenia
Aarhus Centres in Yerevan, Gavar, Gyumri, Goris, Dilijan, Idjevan, Kapan, Hrazdan, Vanadzor, Yeghegnadzor, Yeghvard, Aparan, Stepanavan, Alaverdi, Ararat (aarhus.am)

Azerbaijan
Aarhus Centre in Baku

Georgia
Aarhus Centre in Tbilisi (aarhus.ge)

CENTRAL ASIA

Kazakhstan
Aarhus Centres in Astana and Atyrau (aarhus.kz)

Kyrgyzstan
Aarhus Centre in Osh

Tajikistan
Aarhus Centres in Dushanbe, Khujand, Kurgan Tyube, and Khorog

Officials of Georgia's Ministry of Environment Protection being trained at the Aarhus Centre in Tbilisi, Georgia



If you want to know more, contact us,
or visit the websites below:



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**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

UNECE Aarhus Convention
unece.org/env/pp



Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative
envsec.org

AARHUS CENTRES osce.org/eea
SNAPSHOT



Aarhus Centres and sustainable development

The Rio Declaration, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, is a landmark document setting the agenda for international efforts towards sustainable development. With its Principle 10, it identifies participatory environmental governance as vital for sustainable development:

„At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment [...], and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. [...] Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.“

Twenty years after the Rio Conference, sustainable development is again high on the international agenda. At the Rio+20 Summit, the international community will meet to review the progress that has been made over the past two decades. Good environmental governance will be a key topic at Rio+20, and progress in this area will be an important indicator of success.

The Aarhus Convention is the only internationally binding instrument embodying the principle of good environmental governance. Aarhus Centres proved to be an effective tool for putting this principle into action. They promote good environmental governance through facilitating access to information, promoting public participation in decision-making, and enhancing access to justice in environmental matters.

Rio+20 will introduce a new approach to marrying economic development and environmental sustainability. The transition to this new “Green Economy” will have direct ramifications for the lives of citizens. The transition process will require deep reforms of economic and environmental policy, tax codes, production regulations, public procurement patterns, and investment strategies.

To make this reform process a success, public participation will be crucial, and this will require an efficient flow of information between government agencies, the private sector and the wider public.

The Aarhus Centres will be instrumental in this transition. With the OSCE’s support, they stand ready to play their part.

How it all began: the Aarhus Convention

The network of Aarhus Centres as they exist in many countries in the OSCE region have been set up to support the implementation of the Aarhus Convention adopted on 25 June 1998 in the Danish city of the same name. The Convention, which entered into force in 2001, embraces three pillars:

- the right of access to environmental information
- the right to participate in environmental decision-making, and
- the right of access to justice in environmental matters

These principles broke new ground in defining the relationship between citizens and the authorities on the environment as they spelled out citizens’ concrete environmental rights.

The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs), which was adopted on 21 May 2003 and entered into force in 2009, enhances the impact of the Convention by further strengthening the level of public access to environmental information. PRTRs are pollutant inventories from industrial sites and other sources. By regulating the access to information about the release of pollutants, the Parties to the Protocol advocated for a policy of transparency, encouraging governments and private actors to accept responsibility for their behaviour.

A team convened by the Aarhus Centre in Osh monitoring the radiation of uranium waste in Kyzyl Jar, Kyrgyzstan



Volunteers organized by Eco-Club Permet and the Aarhus Information Centre in Vlorë collecting waste for recycling in Vlorë, Albania



Reinforcing the Convention: the Aarhus Centres

To turn the Convention’s principles into concrete action, the OSCE, through its field operations and the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, kick-started in 2002 the establishment of Aarhus Centres and Public Environmental Information Centres. Working closely with the host governments among its participating States, the Aarhus Convention Secretariat at UNECE and its partners in the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, the OSCE helped set up individual Centres across its region. Provided with continuous support by the Organization, these quickly developed into a recognized network of Aarhus Centres that oversee a wide array of activities. Today the Aarhus Centres:

- raise public awareness on the environment;
- disseminate environmental information;
- organize public hearings on strategies and projects that have environmental implications;
- monitor local environmental hotspots;
- support local environmental planning processes;
- provide legal advice on environmental matters;
- promote implementation of the PRTR Protocol; and
- act as public outreach facilities for the ENVSEC Initiative.

Sustaining the effort: the support for the Centres

Currently, the Governments of Canada, Finland and Norway, directly or through the ENVSEC Initiative, provide the financial support for the Aarhus Centres. Their contributions are crucial to sustaining the important role of the Centres and to further developing their activities.