

Report of the 2nd Taskforce Meeting of the Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution

Geneva, Switzerland, 13-14 February 2024

Introduction

The Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution (FICAP) was established following a decision of the 41st Executive Body meeting of the UNECE Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP).

The Forum promotes international collaboration towards preventing and reducing air pollution to improve air quality globally. It is a forum for the international exchange of information and mutual learning on both the scientific/technical and policy levels. It seeks to complement ongoing efforts by making the Air Convention's experience, tools, methods, and expertise available to other countries and regions.

The Taskforce is the governing body for the Forum to advise the Chairs on the activities that the forum could undertake in relation to the overall Workplan. The 2nd meeting of the Taskforce was co-hosted by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and held at their headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland on 13- 14 February 2024. This report sets out the main discussion and outputs from this meeting. The meeting brought together Task Forces, ICPs and Centres under the Air Convention and international/global organisations with the aim to review ongoing capacity building activities and global initiatives and discuss how the Air Convention can support international and global initiatives to tackle air pollution and by that guiding the Chairs on the continued work of the Forum.

The meeting was conducted in a hybrid format with both in-person and online participation.

Opening remarks

Opening remarks were given by Professor Celeste Saulo, Director General for the WMO. Professor Saulo highlighted the detrimental impacts of air pollution and reaffirmed the WMO's commitment to international cooperation and particular support for the Forum under the CLRTAP

Session 1: Capacity building and information sharing

The first session focused on ongoing and past capacity building and outreach activities, lessons learned and future opportunities.

Jesper Bak, Chair of the Working Group on Effects and Laurence Rouil, Chair of the EMEP Steering Body gave brief overviews of the capacity building and outreach activities under the respective groups and commented on priority issues for the revision of the Gothenburg protocol. Both groups and their subgroups are involved in a range of capacity building activities, mainly in the EECCA region but also beyond the UNECE, and cooperate with other Conventions, organisations, and processes. There is currently no collated overview of which Taskforces, ICPs, groups, or individuals are engaged in or planning capacity building initiatives, or where, both within the UNECE region and beyond. This was identified as a gap that the Forum could investigate further to explore synergies and complementarities of coordinated capacity building initiatives. The Co-Chairs also highlighted that there is a wealth of information that ICPs, Task forces and other groups have that could be shared and a desire from other regions to engage with and learn from others.

Till Spranger, Chair of the Working Group on Strategies and Review, updated participants on the timeline and priorities for the revision of the Gothenburg protocol. The aim is to conclude negotiations within three years, which was noted as a challenging timeline. The Chair highlighted that one of the aims of the revision is to increase cooperation with countries and regions outside UNECE to explore ways to reduce transboundary emissions where more efforts from outside the UNECE region would help reduce regional air pollution.

Other important key topics for the revision include flexibilities that will allow non-parties to the current protocol to ratify; new emission reduction commitments for the substances included in the current protocol; increased ambition on ammonia emission reductions; whether and how to address methane and; how to contribute to further reductions of Black Carbon.

Participants stressed the importance of the Air Convention enhancing communication on the revision process and regularly updating on progress made in the negotiations. The Co-chairs agreed that this is a relevant activity that could be communicated through future FICAP events and meetings with our regions.

The discussions with Air Convention groups in the first session were guided by the following questions:

- What activities are Task Forces, ICPs and Centers already doing on Capacity Building? – And where?
- What lessons learned have you experienced in carrying out capacity building activities?
- What is the demand from countries/regions on capacity building? – On which subjects? Sectors? Tools? Technical data?
- What could we in turn learn from other regions/Conventions that would be useful for our region, especially in relevance to the Gothenburg Protocol revision?

Most of the groups under the Air Convention have experience of capacity building and outreach activities, mainly within the UNECE region but also in other parts of the world. Key factors for success identified were:

- In-person meetings in a region/country are necessary to build relations, trust, and design and conduct programmes effectively. These meetings could be organised around other in-person air pollution related meetings. Language is also important, as direct communication works better than interpretation.
- Projects must be co-designed with the recipients to ensure it targets their true needs, working with local anchor points (e.g. an appointed lead) so they are empowered to ensure the right people are communicating with each other.
- Continuity and long-term engagement are needed to build a stable base that will last beyond the project lifetime. A 5-10 year timeframe is recommended to prevent an abrupt finish to the project, including a plan to wind down and provide aftercare.
- Clear goals of the project are essential, with commitments from the counterparts needed to ensure successful outcomes. Do not overload a project, and start with incremental steps with clear milestones.
- The institutional infrastructure needs to be in place to make best use of any training. This involves identifying the right counterparts and building capacity in institutions to reduce loss of corporate knowledge when personnel turnover occurs.
- Achievements and progress need to be measured, followed up and recognised. Any progress is positive; “aim for progress, not perfection!”

Capacity building is often conducted on a case-by-case basis and based on funding opportunities. It was discussed that FICAP could have a role in creating a more coordinated approach to capacity building and outreach from the Convention by creating an overview of ongoing activities to avoid overlap and promote complementary projects by other groups, where possible. FICAP, with the help of other Air Convention groups, could act as facilitators for contacts between the Convention and other initiatives, countries and regions. By collecting and systematising information about experience and competence, FICAP can also help groups to be prepared for when opportunities for capacity building projects arise.

The Air Convention secretariat has produced two self-paced e-learning courses, one on air pollutants and the Convention and one on emission inventories. These are freely available from the UNECE homepage. The Forum could also consider, with the secretariat, on promotion activities for use of these courses. The secretariat has also gained experience in capacity-building within the UNECE region, in the areas of emission inventory development, legislation analysis, and BAT implementation, among others. Future activities beyond the UNECE region will be closely coordinated with FICAP.

The meeting considered that voluntary agreements can often be more effective and easier to implement than binding agreements and that a progress chart of building blocks to manage air pollution could be useful. Instruments such as the *Batumi Action for Cleaner Air* are a good option for many countries and regions and should be revisited. Capacity building activities could also assist here in implementing overall goals or targets arising from voluntary agreements.

Several believed that in many regions there is a need to understand how regional cooperation on air pollution could be built up and maintained, how countries with different industrial structures, governance systems and conflicting national priorities have been able to cooperate under the Convention over the years. There was a suggestion for FICAP to build a module on the Air Convention and how it came about, which would be available to present on demand.

One participant reminded the meeting of the importance to reflect on how policies in one region may affect one another (e.g. stricter vehicle regulations in one region leads to car dumping in another). There could be greater links between the benefits of air quality and international discussions on the circular economy.

Session 2: International and global initiatives

The second session focused on international and global initiatives and how the Air Convention groups can contribute to and cooperate with those initiatives.

The session started with presentations by international organisations.

The Climate and Clean Air Coalition presented their recently launched clean air flagship. The flagship is a three-year campaign (2024- 2026) with the overall aim to elevate the air quality agenda by promoting partnership and cooperation, strengthen communication and mobilise financing through establishing a knowledge platform for air quality managers. The goal is that the infrastructure developed under the flagship will remain in place after the campaign period.

As part of the project, it is essential to identify the needs in different regions and countries and the way to address them. It was proposed that FICAP could help in identifying these needs. FICAP could also help structure and feed information from the Air Convention to the knowledge platform.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) updated participants on the planning of the 2nd Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health to be held on the 29 – 31 October in Accra, Ghana. Key objectives of the Conference are to accelerate action to reduce air pollution and climate change as well as actions for increased access to clean energy. The conference also aims to share the latest evidence on the health risks of air pollution and take stock of global progress since 2015. The roadmap from the 2016 World Health Assembly Resolution WHA69.18, that expired in 2019 will be updated in connection with the conference. Countries, regions, and cities will continue to be invited to join the BreatheLife campaign and commit to air pollution reductions by 2030 and beyond. A series of briefs called Science and Policy Snapshots (SPS) will be produced for the conference.

The WHO proposed three activities by which the Air Convention could contribute to the conference: leading the preparation of a SPS on the Convention and its activities; supporting the organisation of a session on the Air Convention at the conference and; contributing to communication for the BreatheLife Campaign.

In the discussion that followed the presentation the lack of follow-up on commitments from the previous conference were highlighted. The meeting agreed that any commitments require follow-up in order to be credible and have practical significance.

The WMO presented some of their international activities related to climate change and air pollution. Since the late 1950s they have played an important role in the work against stratospheric ozone depletion by supporting and co-ordinating high-quality measurements of stratospheric ozone and UV radiation and providing policy-relevant scientific information to the policy process under the Montreal Protocol. Under the Global Atmosphere Watch (GAW) programme, activities for measurement-model fusion for global atmospheric deposition were started, aiming to create global deposition maps. The fusion is a complicated process, but is for example carried out in Sweden, UK, Canada and the US.

A new science for services initiative of the WMO GAW programme – Global Air Quality Forecasting and Information System (GAFIS) will help support the health community, international partners and society, with globally consistent air quality forecasting and information systems that operate from the global to regional to urban scale. The WMO regularly publishes several newsletters that could be of interest to this group, including the *Air Quality and Climate Bulletin*, the *Airborne Dust Bulletin* and the *Greenhouse Gas Bulletin*.

The draft UNEA-6 Air Quality Resolution ‘On promoting regional cooperation on air pollution to improve air quality globally’ proposed by the US and Canada was presented by Kimber Scavo. The resolution intends to establish a global framework for regional and sub-regional cooperation by bringing together existing regional networks and key international organizations to build on and develop existing structures. It also seeks to promote regional cooperation in areas where it is currently lacking and to strengthen existing regional/sub-regional cooperation platforms and communities of practice. The resolution should promote global knowledge and training and expand United Nations Environment Programme’s platform for information sharing between member states and relevant organizations as envisioned in UNEA resolution 3/8 on preventing and reducing air pollution to improve air quality globally.

The Air Convention is one of the existing regional platforms to help implement the resolution and CCAC, WHO and WMO will all be key organisations for its execution.

The resolution ‘On promoting regional cooperation on air pollution to improve air quality globally’ has since been agreed by consensus at the Sixth United Nations Environment Assembly, which provides political buy in amongst states to have more inter-regional cooperation through a dedicated network and online platform for sharing of best practises, guidance and technical information amongst interested member-states, regional agreements, and other relevant stakeholders.

An overview of four key regional agreements on air quality was presented by John Salter, co-chair of FICAP. These were the Clean Air Program in Africa, the Regional Action Plan on Air Quality 2022 – 2025 in Latin America and Caribbean, the Regional Action Plan on Air Pollution (RAPAP) in Asia, and the Malé Declaration in South Asia. He summarised the current status of the agreements and provided an update on recent activities. In terms of needs, a number of common themes across all of these regional agreements can be identified, notably there are calls for not only increased regional cooperation, but also increased cooperation with UN bodies and international agencies and organisations. Three overarching common themes identified were air quality monitoring and inventories; impacts, modelling and communication; and cooperation on target setting and legislation. The meeting noted that the Air Convention has knowledge to share on all these themes.

A discussion on what the Air Convention can offer those initiatives was guided by the following questions:

- What information, experience, materials, skills, tools, guidance and technical information from the Air Convention would be useful to other international and global initiatives?
- To what extent are Task Forces / ICPs / Centres already contributing to global initiatives and sharing information with non-UNECE countries?
- How can the Air Convention best contribute to and enhance cooperation with those initiatives?

The meeting noted that the Air Convention uses on a variety of tools, methods, knowledge, and experiences on scientific and technical issues, but also on policy issues to support international and global processes. Several of the emerging regional collaborations could greatly benefit from exchanging experiences with the Air Convention on how regional collaborations can be built up and maintained. The strength of the close collaboration between science and policy in the Air Convention was mentioned as particularly important to convey. Also, the system thinking and multi-pollutant, multi-effect approach used by the Convention could be of interest to other regions.

It was pointed out that the evidence base exists to take action on air pollution regardless of a country's development. All progress matters and can be useful even if there are future scientific and technical developments.

Air Convention groups discussed tools and methods that could be adapted for use in other regions. For example, an annex could be added to the EMEP emission inventory guidebook where sources for developing countries could be included, making the guidebook applicable on a global level. The mapping manual on ozone effects on crops developed by ICP Vegetation was mentioned as another example that could be adapted for use on a wider scale. The integrated assessment model GAINS has been developed for and used in several other countries/regions like India and China and could be also adapted for use elsewhere.

Air Convention groups regularly produce and update guidance documents on numerous topics that could be used globally, either as they are or with slight adaptation. The documents are generally available in English, French and Russian but could also be translated into other languages. Webinars could be an efficient way to introduce that guidance to other countries and regions.

Some Convention groups cooperate with global processes on the technical and scientific side, however, it seems that cooperation and information exchange on the policy side and around the building of a functioning regional cooperation agreement can be improved and expanded, which participants saw as a role for FICAP.

The CCAC mentioned that they have budget for five regional workshops in the coming years and FICAP could contribute to one or more of these workshops. The contribution would be narrative-based rather than technical.

Conclusions and next steps

Several recent initiatives and processes point to the importance of increasing cooperation inter-regionally and between regions, not least the UNEA 6 resolution calls for better coordination and increased cooperation. As the world's first regional environmental convention that assembles the largest amount of air quality expertise today, the Air Convention can and should contribute to these initiatives and take a greater global responsibility.

It is difficult for outside actors to find their way in the Air Convention's knowledge bank and network of groups. Collecting, systematizing, and making information available as well as creating connections between those in need and those who have something to share is a vital role for FICAP. The discussions at this Task Force meeting have helped identify next steps for the further development of FICAP.

Those next steps include:

- In cooperation with Task Forces, ICPs and Centres under the Air Convention, complete a prospectus on what the Air Convention has to offer with tools, methods, and expertise available and communicate to international partners.
- Produce a FICAP/Air Convention module on how to build up a regional agreement on tackling common air pollution challenges for use on request.
- Organise a session on the Air Convention at the 2nd WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health, based on the FICAP/Air Convention module (in cooperation with WHO).
- Lead the preparation of a Science and Policy Snapshot (SPS) on Convention tools, activities, and successes for the 2nd WHO Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health with a target publication date of September 2024 (in cooperation with the WHO).
- Revisit and update the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air.
- Structure and feed information from the Air Convention to the CCAC flagship knowledge platform (in cooperation with the CCAC)
- Help identify needs in different regions and countries in support of the CCAC Flagship.