

The Environment Programme 1999–2000

Background

The Environment Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Environment Policy Committee (EPOC) which it supports, has been working on environmental policy issues for over 25 years. It is a principal contributor to the OECD's horizontal project on sustainable development, and acts as co-ordinator within the OECD secretariat for the elements of this work on climate change and on the reform of subsidies and taxes. The Directorate has a substantial work programme, which is designed to respond to the *Shared Goals for Action*¹ agreed upon by Environment Ministers of OECD countries when they met in Paris in April 1998. Ministers agreed upon four major goals:

- to promote strong national policies and effective regulatory structures on the protection of the natural environment and human health;
- to promote an integrated policy approach which encourages coherence among economic, environmental and social policies;
- to strengthen international co-operation in meeting global and regional environmental commitments;
- to strongly support participation, transparency, information and accountability in environmental policy-making at all levels.

Work Programme

The Environment Directorate work programme for the 1999–2000 biennium has twelve main activities, which are consistent with these goals as well as with the strategic priorities of the Organisation, including the high priority attached to work on sustainable development. Three of the activities are entirely new, and are of a cross-cutting nature. The first is an *Environmental Outlook and Strategy*, which aims to establish a conceptual and quantitative foundation for the environment pillar of the OECD's programme on sustainable development, including quantitative projections and qualitative assessments of environmental developments in OECD Member countries. It will identify gaps between current trends and those required for "environmentally sustainable development", focusing on specific sectors and types of environmental problem. The draft Strategy is intended for discussion at the next EPOC Ministerial meeting in 2001.

A second cross-cutting activity is on *Sustainable Consumption Patterns*. The aim here is to support OECD Member countries in their efforts to promote and achieve more sustainable patterns of consumption, and to support and influence the international work programme being co-ordinated by UN Commission on Sustainable Development on sustainable consumption. The new activity, which will focus strongly on influencing demand, builds on several years of work on this subject in the OECD.

The third new cross-cutting project, which is founded upon recent work on Eco-efficiency, deals with *Increasing Resource Efficiency*, an issue which is of growing importance for OECD and non-OECD countries as they try to develop approaches to managing both renewable and non-renewable resources more sustainably. It was an issue singled out by the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on the Environment, as well as by Environment Ministers in their *Shared Goals for Action*.

The rest of the programme builds upon past and continuing activities on a range of topics. Work on *economic and environmental policy integration* is designed to help promote the compatibility and mutual reinforcement of economic and environmental policies by: identifying market and intervention failures and how to remove them; analysing policy instruments for achieving environmental objectives at least cost; and developing tools and strategies for integrating economic and environmental policies (in particular in sectors such as agriculture, or tax policy). It is at the core of the Environment Programme of the OECD, and has been the subject of extensive work over many years, notably in the areas of the use of economic instruments, such as environmental taxes and charges, and the impact of subsidies on the environment.

Other parts of the work programme deal with many of the most difficult policy challenges faced by OECD member countries: *climate change*, where the Environment Programme is contributing a major element towards the horizontal programme on sustainable development mentioned above, and is supporting the development of policy in Annex I parties to the UN FCCC with wide-ranging analysis; the promotion of *environmentally sustainable transport* (see boxed section below); and, the *management of transfrontier movements of waste*. ➤

An important element of the programme also focuses on *chemicals and biotechnology*, specifically the prevention and reduction of risks to health and the environment from chemicals, the harmonisation of policies and regulations relating to chemicals, and the promotion of integrated approaches to chemical testing, data and management. There are several OECD instruments, or Council Acts, dealing with chemicals and waste management (as well as other subjects), which Member countries are committed to implement.

Globalisation is one of the central issues being addressed across the Organisation, and the environment programme plays an important part in helping to examine the links between the *globalisation of trade and investment, and the environment*. This, and many other aspects of the work, calls for the active engagement of *non-member countries* in policy analysis and dialogue. As part of this, the OECD Environment Directorate provides the secretariat for the Environmental Action Programme (EAP)

Task Force of the Environment for Europe process, which focuses on encouraging the integration of environmental concerns into the economic restructuring process in the Central and Eastern European Countries and in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS).

A final, but essential part of the work programme deals with *environmental data, indicators* – the OECD regularly publishes a core set of environmental indicators – and measurement of performance, with a programme of *Environmental Performance Reviews* of all the OECD countries nearing the completion of its first complete cycle. These “peer reviews”, in which other OECD Member countries as well as the Secretariat are actively involved, have also been undertaken for several non-member countries in central and Eastern Europe, and most recently for Russia. (OECD) □

Reference

1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, April 1998, *OECD Environment Ministers: Shared Goals for Action*, SG/COM/NEWS(98)39, OECD, Paris.