

NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS OF THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY ROLE DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The initial definition of the National Focal Point (NFP) role in the European Environment Agency (EEA) Regulation is the following: *“Member States may in particular designate from among the institutions referred to in paragraph 2 or other organisations established in their territory a ‘national focal point’ for coordinating and/or transmitting the information to be supplied at national level to the Agency and to the institutions or bodies forming part of the network including the topic centres referred to in paragraph 4.”*

Experience since many years has shown that the NFP role is much broader and vital than the provision in the EEA Regulation suggests. Instead of concentrating merely on the information transmission from the country, the main NFP activities focus on the coordination of the national cooperation and the transmission of all kinds of information between EEA and the national network and, on ad hoc basis, also the actors outside the national network. For a successful coordination at the national level, the NFP needs to be actively connected to all parts of Eionet and EEA.

The NFP role has evolved with the development of the EEA. This description, updated in 2014 and acknowledged by Management Board, is presented below addressing both the general and the specific activities of a NFP.

The aim of the description is to provide a clear picture of the NFP role, tasks and activities as well as of the required skills and expertise for the purpose of organisational and resource considerations.

General description

The National Focal Point (NFP) is the organisation nominated and funded by an EEA Member or collaborating country to be the primary link and contact between the country and EEA, other Eionet members and other relevant actors. Persons to whom the NFP organisation has assigned the management of the NFP duties and responsibilities may be referred to as NFP representatives, NFP contacts, NFP teams, NFP staff or even NFP.

The NFPs coordinate the national contribution to the implementation of the EEA Multi Annual Work Programme, the more detailed Annual Work Programmes and support relevant activities at country level. Their organisational set-up and working methods differ from country to country. This partly reflects the diverse nature of the national structures established for the environmental administration and the related national information systems and networks. The NFPs may be environmental Ministries, Agencies or other institutions in a centralised national administration or operate in a decentralised, federal, or other structure.

Skills, expertise and position

The NFP of a country should preferably cover the following skills:

- *Managerial skills enabling effective management and coordination of the network of National Reference Centres (NRCs)*
- *Communication skills for the communication within the national network and Eionet as well as with other national and international stakeholders*
- *Good command of spoken and written English and the national language(s)*
- *At least basic IT skills such as to be able to use the office software, Internet and Eionet specific applications*
- *Expertise or familiarity with most of the following*
 - *Environmental monitoring, data/statistics, indicators, assessment and reporting*
 - *Policy and legislation*
 - *General knowledge of technological developments including those associated with spatial data*

Moreover, in order to be able to fulfil its duties, the NFP, should also be in a position to enable the following:

- *Close relations with the country's EEA Management Board Member(s)*
- *Adequate resources and budget to carry out NFP tasks*
- *Secretarial support and support from environmental, legal and Information and Communication Technology experts in-house*
- *Nationally accepted coordinating role*
- *Good communication/dialogical connection with the environmental organisations and other stakeholders including the political level. Access to environmental information*

Main tasks and activities

A National Focal Point has a number of tasks, activities and responsibilities. The situation from NFP to NFP may vary considerably depending, for example, on the agreed distribution of work and responsibilities between the NFP and the National Reference Centres (NRCs), the resources at the NFP's disposal, and possibly also to some degree on the administrative position of the NFP. Some of the activities belong to the everyday routines whereas some are rarely undertaken. The list below provides a spectrum of duties and responsibilities a NFP might perform.

I Tasks and activities in connection with the national network¹ and other actors in the country

1. Establishment, development and maintenance of the national network on the basis of the actual Eionet structure² and other requirements

¹ National network is the part of the Eionet consisting of the NFP and the NRCs in a country.

² Eionet structure is the agreed set of such topics (e.g. Climate Change, Marine and Coastal Environment, Transport) where the countries are expected to provide sufficient national expertise to take care

- 1.1. *Selection of the appropriate institutes for the national network*
- 1.2. *Establishment of agreements, either written or oral, with these institutes*
2. *Coordination of the activities in the national network:*
 - 2.1. *Agreement on the distribution of work and responsibilities between the network members, i.e. the NFP and the NRCs*
 - 2.2. *Coordination of or support to the delivery of reports and other data/information to EEA, and awareness of reporting to other European and international bodies*
 - 2.3. *Coordinate the delivery of feedback on (draft) products of the EEA and European Topic Centres (ETCs); reports, indicators, processes, tools, web contents etc.*
 - 2.4. *Quality checks of the translations of EEA products*
 - 2.5. *Agreements with the network members on participants in the Eionet workshops, webinars and other events*
3. *Supporting the national network members by:*
 - 3.1. *Informing the network on the activities and their requirements by consulting the Eionet Planner and other sources of information*
 - 3.2. *Encouraging, supporting or possibly controlling timely high-quality responses to the requests*
 - 3.3. *Encouraging participation in the Eionet workshops and other events*
 - 3.4. *Encouraging and guiding the use of the basic Eionet tools like Forum, Reportnet, Eionet Planner*
 - 3.5. *Informing the network of Eionet working practices (e.g. Code of Conduct)*
 - 3.6. *Arranging of network meetings and workshops*
 - 3.7. *Disseminating information to the network by a newsletter or other means*
4. *Taking care of the everyday routines*
 - 4.1. *Receiving copies of all correspondence to the national network*
 - 4.2. *Ensuring that relevant network members are aware of the correspondence*
 - 4.3. *Keeping track of the ongoing activities and the outcomes in the network*
 - 4.4. *Replying to or forwarding EEA-Eionet related enquires and information requests sent from outside the Eionet*
5. *Cooperation with the national EEA Management Board (MB) member(s) to*
 - 5.1. *Reach common national positions*
 - 5.2. *Prepare for the MB meetings and seminars*
 - 5.3. *Arrange the country visits and prepare country visit reports*
6. *Improve the sharing of data, information and assessments at European, national and global levels together with the national network*
 - 6.1 *Supporting or raising awareness about processes like the development of a knowledge base for the 7th Environment Action Programme (and SEIS in general), Inspire, Copernicus, together with MB and Scientific Committee (SC) members, other stakeholders and policy makers*

of the anticipated activities within the topic. The structured is revised regularly. For the period 2014 to 2018 there were 24 topics.

7. Cooperate with stakeholders and networks beyond Eionet at national level
 - 7.1. *National representatives of other international networks: e.g. Eurostat, Inspire, Copernicus and GEO/GEOSS, OECD, UNEP, UNECE*
 - 7.2. *Main environmental organisations and related stakeholders in the country*
 - 7.3. *Other stakeholders and actors outside the national network*
8. Communication actions at national level
 - 8.1. *Coordination and promotion of EEA products (e.g. SOER)*
 - 8.2. *Dissemination of the information on EEA products*
 - 8.3. *National launches, press releases etc. to support the dissemination of the EEA products in cooperation with NRC Communication*
 - 8.4. *Arrangements for the translation of the products which the country wishes to have in the national language(s) when they are not translated by the EEA*
 - 8.5. *Dissemination of the general information on the EEA, Eionet and their activities and plans*
90. Follow up the national developments in the environmental monitoring, research, publications and other relevant fields to ensure the use of up-to-date information.

II Tasks and activities in connection with the EEA, ETCs, Eionet & other actors

10. Consultations with the EEA on
 - 10.1. *EEA Multi Annual Work Programme (MAWP) and Annual Work Programmes (AWPs)*
 - 10.2. *Major products and processes like SOER, Priority data flows, knowledge development within Eionet*
 - 10.3. *EEA indicators and indicator reports*
 - 10.4. *EEA Communication Strategy, Data policy and other strategies*
 - 10.5. *EEA/ETC products in general such as reports, processes, tools, web content*
11. The cooperation with the EEA and the ETCs by participating in
 - 11.1. *NFP/Eionet group meetings and webinars several times per year*
 - 11.2. *Management Board seminars*
 - 11.3. *Eionet events, sub-groups, projects and ad hoc working groups e.g. Eionet reviews, Eionet tools development, Copernicus, NFP Troika*
 - 11.4. *Participation in the NRC Eionet workshops instead of or in addition to the NRC representative(s) when needed*
 - 11.5. *EEA/ETC/Eionet evaluations*
 - 11.6. *Projects on Eionet infrastructure like the SENSE projects, SOE on line*
 - 11.7. *Selection processes for committee members, project contractors etc. (e.g. ETC review)*
 - 11.8. *Training courses with regard to Eionet and Eionet activities (e.g. ICT tools)*
 - 11.9. *Liaise with Copernicus coordination at national level and if requested provide assistance for the provision of in-situ data*

12. Cooperation at European level with

12.1. Relevant DGs such as Environment, Climate Action, Eurostat and the Joint Research Centre (JRC)

12.2. International and EU environment related information processes like the development of a knowledge base for the 7th Environment Action Programme (and SEIS in general), Inspire, Copernicus

12.3. Regional activities like in the Mediterranean, Arctic, Black Sea

13. Maintenance of the national information in the Eionet Directory

13.1. Assigning, updating and removing the national network members to the appropriate topics and institutions

14. Connections to and cooperation with the fellow NFPs

14.1. Participating in the NFP pre-meeting to develop common NFP positions and taking a turn at chairing/organising these meetings as part of the NFP troika

15. Dissemination of the national information to national and international requests

15.1. Information about the national developments and information sources like links with national institutions, data bases, reports and products, web sites and portals, media contact information, events (e.g. SERIS)

16. Communication of national activities at the international level like national SOE and other reports, major network developments and the EU-presidency