

Romania – Country Report



© The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

1. Key Findings

- Comprehensive regimes are in place for monitoring environmental status but inspectorates perform this according to their own requirements;
- Little data sharing occurs between inspectorates and national ministries, though new legislation in 2002 has called for integrated pollution monitoring;
- New laws on access to information ensure freedom to request and receive, but at cost. State of the environment reports are published annually;
- Eighty three percent of NGOs felt responses to requests ‘needs improvement,’ the majority are dissatisfied with the range of topics and documentation available, and all wished to see weekly or bi-weekly updates accessible online;
- Future priorities include developing an “Integrated Information System,” standards and methodologies, and investing in technological infrastructure and staff to utilize data and communicate useful information to stakeholders.

2. Current Status of Environmental Information Systems

Data Collection and Management

Environmental monitoring in Romania is carried out by a variety of institutions. The most important today are the 42 Local Environmental Protection Inspectorates, established according to the administrative division of Romania (which includes 41 counties plus Bucharest). The inspectorates supervise and coordinate the collection and storage of data on environmental quality, relying on their own laboratories, related departments, and the National Water Company. They track the levels and location of waste, toxic and hazardous substances, and natural/man-made disasters.

Comprehensive regimes are in place for the monitoring of air, water, noise and radioactive pollution. In addition, changes in biodiversity (endangered species populations, protected areas) and soil quality are monitored but much data collection remains paper-based. Inspectorates typically monitor point source pollution, line-pollution (e.g. CO₂ emissions along highways), and non-point source pollution also

(e.g. through groundwater sampling, to assess the potability of aquifers). A variety of information on industrial, municipal and specialized waste and municipal sludge is also stored electronically, by the National Research and Development Institute for Environmental Protection, in line with the standards of the European Waste Catalogue.

Interagency Cooperation

Those agencies involved in data collection and management tend to undertake these responsibilities according to their own requirements. Gathering practice at the local level is thus quite different to that at the national level and limited information exchange occurs between inspectorates and ministries - except where bound by legislation. Therefore, use of this data is limited in the decisionmaking process. Ordinance 243/2000 addressing atmospheric protection for instance, mandates data sharing on air pollution in accordance with the creation of an Integrated Air Quality National Monitoring System. Further legislation has called for the consolidation of environmental data in other areas. Ordinance 34/2002 supports the integrated monitoring of pollution and Ministerial Order 1144/2002 concerns the establishment of a pollutant register.

Regarding cooperation between government bodies with an interest or impact on the environment, this is limited. However, a European Commission PHARE project is supporting the implementation of so-called strategic environmental assessments (which thereby promotes inter-ministerial cooperation).

Public Accessibility

Romania is a signatory of the Aarhus Convention¹ and its agencies respond to its requirements in a variety of ways. An annual 'state of the environment' report is made available by the environment ministry, in both hardcopy and electronically via its website at: <www.mappm.ro>. More timely data is available from the individual agencies involved in monitoring, via fax, e-mail, or on their own websites. Some local authorities publish mini-reports on the state of the environment, in the local press for instance, and through their Directorates for Public Relations. In some cities (Baia Mare, Bacau, Ploiesti, Calarasi, Giurgiu and Turnu Magurele), there are electronic panels displaying air quality information, with five other cities set to follow in 2003. While these directorates serve as clearinghouses, they typically lack complete information and/or capacity or the necessary skills to disseminate it effectively.

Through new legislative measures (e.g. Law 544/2001 regarding free access to public information and Decree 1115/2002 regarding free access to environmental information), requested data must be provided within one month. However, authorities are entitled to charge a fee, to cover the cost of copying and its processing. In practice, overworked staff and decentralised data storage and management lead to a high number of unfulfilled requests (see box below). Usually, information requests are received at the helpdesk of the environment ministry by fax and email.

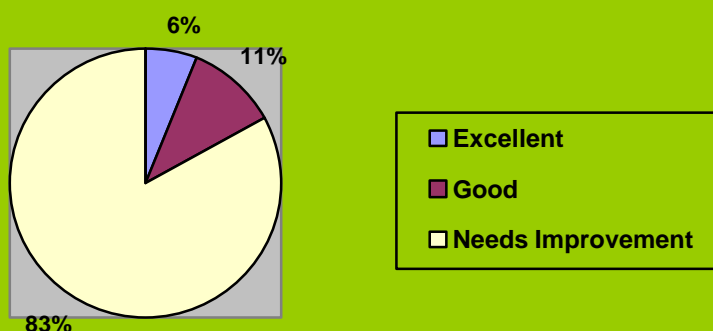
Decree 918/2002 and Ordinance 860/2002 relates to permitting and performance of environmental impact assessment, and establishes free access to every EIA report and obliges the publication (especially in newspapers) of requests for environmental

¹ UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

permits. Refusals to provide information are to be the exception and must be justified in writing.

What NGOs had to say about the usefulness, accessibility and reliability of official environmental information

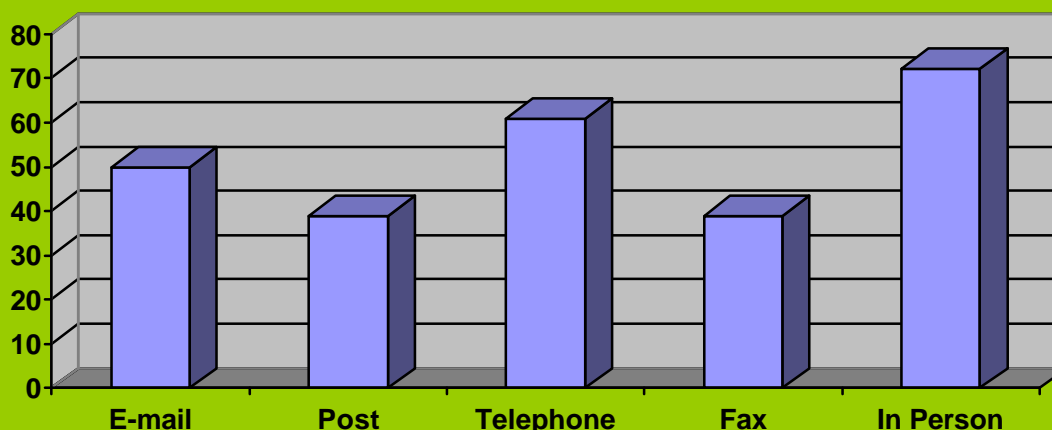
NGOs depend on ministries for current and reliable environmental information. Ninety four percent have requested information from the environment ministry or other relevant authority at one time or another, and 27 percent submit ten or more requests per year. Eighty three percent of NGOs felt, however, that authorities' responses 'needs improvement' while only 6 percent rated these services as 'excellent' (see pie chart below). Among the concerns highlighted, 30 percent indicated they have been denied information, and had been told this was primarily due to a lack of personnel to process the request. More positively, 61 percent said that responses were generally provided in time, though 83 percent of NGOs subsequently surveyed in 2003 noted procedures were complex and time-consuming, and the same number commented official staff were "unfriendly." One NGO also commented that libraries and bookshops were not reliable sources for environmental information.



As regards the range of topics available, half of the surveyed NGOs were dissatisfied, and half were semi-satisfied, while 66 percent were dissatisfied with the range of documentation available. Improvements in coverage were requested regarding water quality and biodiversity, traffic pollution and nature protection. On documentation, more case studies and good practices on pollution management and public participation, urban development plans, development policy and strategic plans, e.g. on NATURA 2000 networks were requested.

Concerning the quality of information, 50 percent of those surveyed considered it to be "somewhat useful," and informative, though 66 percent considered information to be poorly presented. All NGOs felt the available information to be "somewhat up-to-date," and all wished to see information updated weekly or bi-weekly, especially regarding authorities' decisions. Other qualitative improvements suggested included the development of products based on diverse sources, including NGOs besides scientific institutions, and greater sampling, especially for water quality and biodiversity. Most NGOs wished to receive updated information via email, but also suggested more public briefings should be held.

Regarding the methods used to request environmental information, the following chart indicates more than 72 percent of NGOs submit their requests in person, 61 percent via telephone, and 50 percent via email. For the future, 50 percent of NGOs wished to be able to access information online via the Internet, and in easily downloadable or searchable form (via keywords).



3. Obstacles and Challenges for the Future

A lack of facilities and equipment for database entry and for the dissemination of information (especially at local inspectorate level) typically constrains those institutions involved in environmental monitoring and data management.

Shifting from the adoption of the EU's *acquis communautaire* (or environmental legislation) to implementation, will require skilled personnel (e.g. software programmers) and comprehensive training programmes, to ensure compliance with Directives, and the monitoring of this. However, limited numbers of staff, many of whom are ill-equipped with the necessary faculties to keep pace with the changing external environment, hinders this progress.

At the same time, few staff are accustomed to sharing information with the public via websites, publications, and through public relations directorates. Techniques for disseminating environmental facts and figures in easy-to-understand and accessible formats have yet to be integrated into every day working practices, and this contributes to a lack of public awareness and concern for the environment, and limited participation within the decision making process.

4. Needs and Priorities

The Framework Law on Environmental Protection (137/1995) called for the development of an “**Integrated Monitoring System**” at the national level. The system should be administered by a specialized structure within the environment ministry. The planned establishment of a new National Environmental Protection Agency presents an opportunity for it to assume responsibility for its coordination. The Agency regardless, will be expected to process and store the data gathered by each responsible inspectorate and agency, as well as to disseminate it. The system's main functions would be to:

- Integrate water, air and soil quality data into a unified system;
- Monitor legal compliance and emergency situations;
- Disseminate information to all stakeholders (including the public) on the state of the environment, emergency contingencies, and regional and global perspectives; and
- Facilitate of data exchange at the national and international levels.

This system will require the adoption of **standards and methodologies** among all environmental inspectorates, as well as the other environmental information gatherers and holders, if it is to make monitoring more efficient and the resulting data more accessible. Responsibilities must be clearly defined for all parties to the system (as has already happened with air quality monitoring). This will require **cooperation** and leadership, especially on behalf of the ministries concerned.

Improvements in the **technological infrastructure** (IT and communications) are also required, both within the environment ministry and local inspectorates. Computers, servers and internal networks need to be purchased, so as to facilitate the rapid exchange of documents and data between the ministries, local inspectorates, National Research and Development Institute for Environmental Protection and other stakeholders. The current priority (as of June 2003) is to ensure Internet connections exist for all departments and related bodies. This will allow much improved

collaboration with the local inspectorates and their integration, and lay the ground for the system's further development.

Training of staff at both the central, regional and local level within environmental protection inspectorates is necessary, to ensure they have the technical skills to:

- turn raw data into meaningful information, for internal and public use;
- format data, to comply with international requests (EUROSTAT, EEA, etc.);
- utilize new database infrastructures, software, and manipulation software;
- deal with the public and deliver clear, comprehensive and timely information;
- apply the Aarhus convention/EC directives regarding the right to information.

Information products that contain environmental information in easy-to-understand formats for the general public. Reports produced at both the central or local level should contain explanations of the data presented, using simple terminology. They should begin to provide some context in terms of the potential consequences of the findings. The quality of raw data and very technical information should be more focused, so as to be usable upon the request of different expertise (research institutes, NGOs etc).

Continued **international assistance** through donor and government support for the following suggestions:

- Funding of approximately EUR 1.7 million;
- Leadership and guidance, as the Integrated Monitoring System takes shape, both through legislation and ministerial backing;
- Commitment to strengthening those bodies that will undertake new responsibilities in data collection, management, manipulation, and presentation.

Further details on priorities and foreseen actions drafted together with the REReP 1.8 project team, are detailed in the National Action Plan included overleaf.

Case Study on Donor Funding

Objectives

Romania is implementing EU standards for environmental information and compliance reporting. The use of electronic monitoring equipment, data storage tools, and data dissemination systems is central to ensuring the effectiveness of this process. Seed funding from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs was therefore invested in the deployment of *network apparatus*: high quality telecommunications lines for Internet connectivity, to enable interaction with Local Environmental Protection Inspectorates, other ministries, and with the outside world.

In addition, the environment ministry realised a *public environmental awareness campaign*. This introduced the information system and services of the environment ministry to the media, and to various stakeholders, through the environmental inspectorates. It produced a brochure and CD-Rom (in both Romanian and English), that provided key contact information for bodies at all levels dealing with environmental issues; details on the transposition of the environmental acquis and environmental programmes etc. Two thousand five hundred brochures and 1,500 CDs were produced, and many were also distributed at conferences and meetings.

In parallel, an interactive website was launched at: <http://www.mappm.ro/gardamediu> where site visitors can post environmental problems, suggestions, or legal violations they have witnessed. Issues raised are investigated, and responses or suggestions are posted online. The site also contains an Intranet, for internal communications and a password-protected 'action groups' area.

INSERT SCREENSHOT

Expenditures

ITEM	SUM (Eur)
Equipment	18,200
Brochure and CD-Rom	8,060
TOTAL	26,260

Benefits

Prior to the installation of the network equipment, extremely slow and unreliable Internet connections prevented effective data exchange. With the improved setup, internal information access and exchange is bettered, and provision to the public enhanced. Combined with the new website and the media/publications campaign, awareness and use of the Ministry's services has improved. The immediate impact of these investments still cannot be assessed, but the gain is substantial when considering the ground has been prepared for the development of different systems, an aspect which has been widely accepted by ministry officials, whose future support has been assured. The new website is expected to contribute to a sound debate on environmental issues, as well as raise awareness, and in turn, participation in decisionmaking processes.

Contact Person

Alberto Simion, Directorate for International Programs and Projects
Ministry of Waters and Environmental Protection
Bd. Libertatii No. 12, Sector 5, 70005 Bucharest
Tel: (40 1) 312 2599, Fax: (401) 335 0067
Email: alberto@mappm.ro

Romania – Action Plan for National Environmental Information System Development

(prepared by Alberto Simion, Ministry of Environment, Emilian Burdusel, NGO representative, Anca Tofan, REC Country Office)

PRIORITY NEEDS	CURRENT STATUS	FORESEEN ACTIONS	EXPECTED BENEFITS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	REQUIRED RESOURCES	MATCHING RESOURCES	TIMELINE
Establishment of the Environmental Information System	Existing monitoring systems (for air, waste, water, soil, biodiversity, and radiation) are at different stages of development, but do not communicate effectively, nor provide information to the public	<p>Authorities responsible for disparate monitoring systems need to agree on parameters of system.</p> <p>NGOs need to be part of the process, representing public demand for info</p>	<p>Comprehensive, integrated environmental information system accessible to the user community</p> <p>Better dialogue and cooperation among agencies supplying data</p>	Creation of formal Romanian environmental information network	Meeting of key authorities and NGOs to discuss integrated environmental information system (supply and demand side both need to be represented)	REReP 1.6 REReP 1.7 REReP 1.15 REReP 2.5	2002
Legal framework	No specific national legislation is in place supporting the implementation of the environmental information system	A regulation or law needs to be enacted providing a legal basis for the system	Compliance with EU requirements and conventions, such as Aarhus, LRTAP, Basel, Ramsar, and CITES	Law published in official journal	<p>Political will and firm recommendation from stakeholder meeting</p> <p>Expert consultation to draft the legislation</p>	REReP 1.9 REReP 1.12 REReP 2.2	2003 at earliest
Data collection and management	Data collection on water quality, soil quality and biodiversity are paper-based	<p>PCs for data acquisition (priority is county-level environmental protection inspectorates)</p> <p>Monitoring officers need training on the automated system</p>	<p>Enhanced flow of data from counties to national level</p> <p>Better communications between environmental protection inspectorate offices and the user community</p> <p>Better environmental reporting at local and national levels</p>	<p>Technical network fully operational</p> <p>Automated collection and management of data in each county</p> <p>Involvement of municipalities in data flows</p>	Hardware and software as outlined in the needs section of this report	REReP 1.6 REReP 1.15	2002 onwards
Information dissemination	Level of dissemination varies from place to place	Synthesis and repackaging of information in a	Better public awareness of environmental issues	National environmental information system	<p>IT experts</p> <p>Web servers</p>	REReP 1.15 REReP 2.1 REReP 2.3	2002 onwards

**Snapshot of Environmental Information Systems in South Eastern Europe:
Current Progress and Future Priorities**

	and agency to agency	format suitable for public Web interface providing the synthesised data and information Hard copy reports for different stakeholders	and state of the environment	portal Published State of the Environment reports Involvement of municipalities in dissemination	County level access points Training for county PR officers		
Use of environmental information in policy and decision-making	Environmental information is not used in decisionmaking to its full potential because information is not easy to digest	Trends need to be presented in easy-to-understand formats (e.g. GIS) to decision makers	Better decision making and environmental management	Published maps, graphics and executive summaries Involvement of municipalities (county and local councils)	Financial resources for DTP	REReP 1.15	2002 onwards

REReP 1.6: Continuation of Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and FYR Macedonia and Extension to Croatia

REReP 1.7: Strengthening National Environmental Protection Agencies and their Inspectorates in the South Eastern European Region

REReP 1.8: Developing National Environmental Information Systems in the SEE Countries

REReP 1.15: Regional Environmental Information Portal for South Eastern Europe

REReP 2.2: Support Developing Strategies for Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in South Eastern Europe

REReP 2.3: Promoting Networking and Cooperation of Environmental NGOs: Establishment of Electronic Computer Networks on a National and Regional Level