NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030

1. Introduction: Institutional Context

1.1 Subregional Environmental Cooperation in East and North-East Asia

Over the past decades, air pollution has emerged as one of the pressing environmental challenges in East and North-East Asia. The North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) has provided a vital platform for the member States[1] in addressing common environmental issues in the subregion including air pollution.

Launched in 2018 under NEASPEC, the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) responds to the thematic priorities of NEASPEC on air pollution, fostering science-based policy collaboration among member States. It plays a pivotal role in linking scientific research with policy dialogues and promotes a cooperative approach to mitigating air pollution in the subregion. By anchoring NEACAP within NEASPEC's strategic priorities, the partnership ensures alignment with broader sustainable development objectives, in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and enhances coordination and cooperation on policy issues of common interest.

In 2023, NEASPEC marked its 30th anniversary, reaffirming the member States' commitment through the "*Commemorative Statement on Promoting Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia*".[2] Moving forward, the member States envisaged accelerating the progress of NEASPEC's activities, projects and platforms in the five programmatic areas, including air pollution, by optimizing its operation of coordination and decision-making processes, developing joint actions, promoting science-policy linkages, utilizing innovative tools and resources of implementation.

[1] China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

[2] https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/NEASPEC_30th%20Commemorative%20Statement.pdf.

1.2 Clean Air Partnership in East and North-East Asia

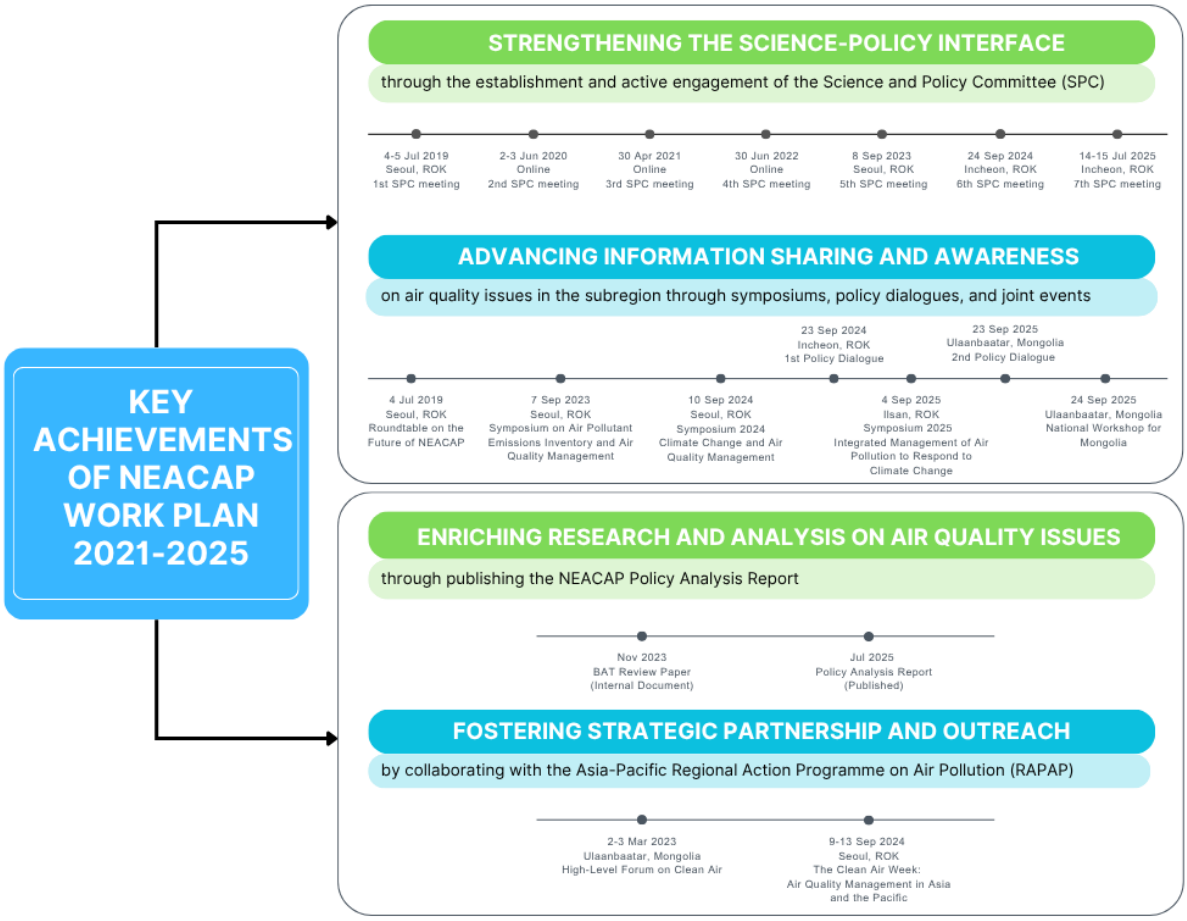
Since its inception, NEACAP has made notable progress implementing its Work Plan 2021-2025.[3] Key achievements include:

- strengthening the science-policy interface through the establishment and active engagement of the Science and Policy Committee (SPC).
- advancing information sharing and broadening awareness on air quality issues in the subregion through symposiums, policy dialogues, and joint events, providing a regular platform for engagements among policymakers and stakeholders.
- enriching research and analysis on air quality issues through publishing the NEACAP Policy Analysis Report titled "*Success and Challenges in Addressing Air Pollution in North-East Asia: A Call to Strengthen Regional Collaboration*", a joint research effort among the member States which synthesizes policy experiences and scientific assessments for policy recommendations in the subregion. NEACAP also supported the review and compilation of Best Available Techniques (BAT) through a review paper on air pollution control and management in North-East Asia.
- fostering strategic partnership and outreach, including through strengthening linkages with the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution (RAPAP).

These accomplishments (illustrated further in Figure 1) demonstrate NEACAP's value in fostering collaboration, informing policy recommendations, and promoting coordinated approaches to air pollution mitigation in East and North-East Asia.

[3] https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/NEACAP%20Work%20Plan%202021-2025_0.pdf

Figure 1: Strengthening NEACAP: Implementation of the NEACAP Work Plan 2021-2025



2. Backgrounder: Policy Landscape on Air Pollution

2.1 Successes and Challenges in Addressing Air Pollution in East and North-East Asia[4]

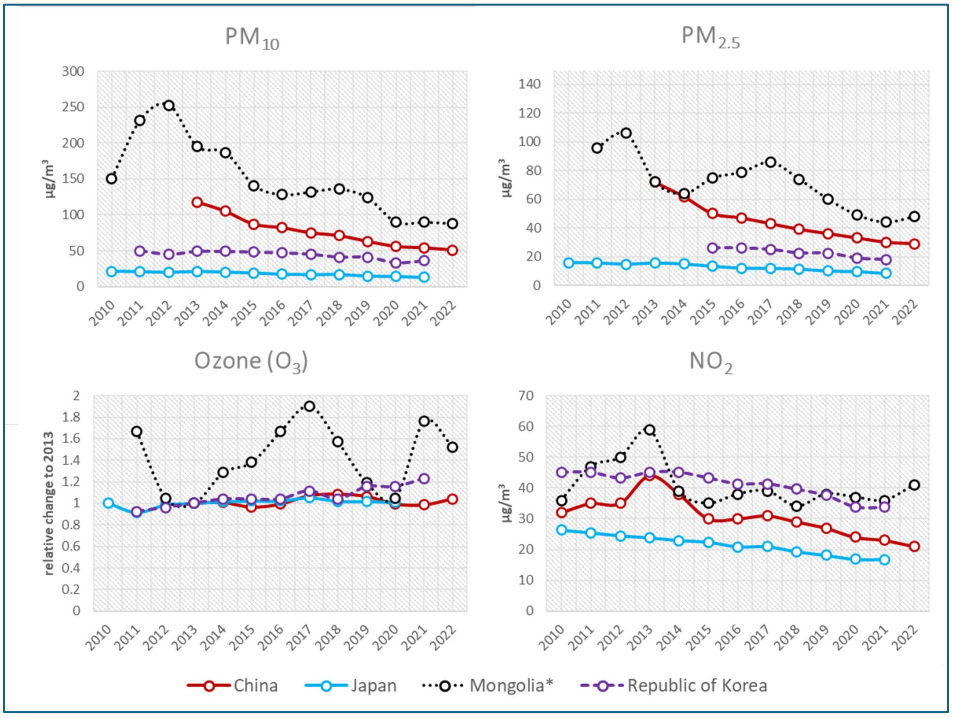
Addressing North-East Asia has made remarkable progress in reducing key air pollutants such as $PM_{2.5}$ and NO_2 through comprehensive policies targeting emissions from industrial, transportation, and residential sectors. The degree of improvement has varied across countries with China and Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar)

[4] Source: NEACAP Policy Analysis Report "*Success and Challenges in Addressing Air Pollution in North-East Asia: A Call to Strengthen Regional Collaboration*", as also reflected in the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

experiencing the most significant reductions over the last decade as $PM_{2.5}$ levels fell by over 60%. In Japan and the Republic of Korea, $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations decreased by approximately 45% and 30% respectively, as both countries strengthened compliance with national air quality standards.

Over the same period, emissions of key precursors of $PM_{2.5}$ and ozone were reduced. The largest reductions were achieved for SO_2, NO_X, and primary $PM_{2.5}$ driven by the implementation of policies and measures aimed at controlling emissions from power plants, large industrial facilities, road transport, and household and heating.

Figure 2: Annual Average Concentrations and Trends of Key Air Pollutants: PM_{10}, $PM_{2.5}$, Ozone, and NO_2 from 2010 to 2022



Nearly all the countries in North-East Asia have set ambient air quality standards, aiming to progressively align them with WHO guidelines. These countries have also implemented source-oriented emission regulations that have been progressively updated, considering economic conditions. These regulations address both stationary and mobile sources, targeting emissions of SO_2, NOx, and PM, and are supported by robust legal enforcement frameworks. Major urban and political centres, including capital cities, have often led the way by implementing ambitious policies that have significantly reduced pollution, paving the way for similar national-level initiatives.

Despite the decline in $PM_{2.5}$ levels, ozone concentrations remain high. This leads to significant health impacts and economic burdens, including reduced agricultural yields. Rising ozone levels are primarily driven by changes in atmospheric composition and climate conditions (e.g. frequent higher temperatures). Policies aimed at reducing ozone precursors (i.e., VOCs, NOx) should be effectively strengthened.

A considerable proportion of urban residents continue to experience pollution levels that exceed national air quality standards and remain far above the WHO guidelines for $PM_{2.5}$ and ozone. A substantial share of urban pollution originates from outside city boundaries, highlighting the need for collaboration with neighboring provinces or prefectures and engagement with diverse stakeholders to address domestic pollution sources. In addition, cooperation and technical support for better air quality monitoring is needed, leveraging from the good practices and technical expertise from the member States in the subregion.

Climate change exacerbates air pollution-related challenges, with increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves and wildfires enabling the conditions for prolonged high pollution episodes that deteriorate air quality. Addressing these emerging challenges requires enhanced understanding and policy coherence. As it is, the efficient implementation of current policies and development of further actions are still hampered by several barriers (i.e., socio-economic, technological, institutional).

2.2 Other Regional and Global Collaborations on Improving Air Quality

In recent years, regional and global efforts to address air pollution have intensified, reflecting the growing recognition of its transboundary nature and profound health and environmental impacts.

In the East Asian subregion, initiatives such as the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET) have expanded scope beyond acid deposition to include broader air pollution issues, emphasizing the importance of robust monitoring and data sharing. The Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) among China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea continues to strengthen cooperation on sharing technologies and best practices to reduce air pollution.

At the regional level, the Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership (APCAP), led by UNEP, is a platform for knowledge exchange and policy advocacy across Asia-Pacific. Additionally, the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution (RAPAP)

launched in 2023 facilitated by ESCAP fosters coordinated regional action, providing a framework for enhancing policy coherence and capacity building. These initiatives not only aim to tackle traditional air quality challenges but also increasingly focus on the synergies between air pollution control and climate change mitigation, recognizing the need for integrated approaches.

Globally, the sixth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in 2024 adopted a new resolution on air pollution, which underscores the urgency of strengthened international collaboration. The resolution calls for the establishment of a Global Air Quality Network to promote standardized data collection, sharing, and joint policy responses. Together, these developments illustrate a dynamic shift toward more comprehensive, collaborative, and science-driven approaches to air pollution governance, reinforcing the relevance and importance of subregional mechanisms like NEACAP within the evolving international framework.

3. NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030: Objectives and Outputs on Air Pollution[5]

3.1 Objective

By 2030, NEACAP, supported by the Science and Policy Committee and designated Technical Centers, is developed as a fully functioning platform facilitating strategic and effective cooperation in addressing air pollution challenges in North-East Asia.

3.2 Outputs

- Strengthened information exchange through cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation to support member countries improve air quality
- Increased technical collaboration and capacity building assistance through designated Technical Centers
- Strengthened collective and transformative actions through joint research focusing on coordinating strategy for improving air quality management and its synergies with climate change
- Strengthened synergies with existing collaborative programmes and mechanisms (multilateral, regional, global) on air pollution through joint projects

[5] Source: NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

4. NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030 [6]

4.1 Priority Areas

4.1.1 Air Quality Management and its Synergies with Climate Change

Air pollution is still a common challenge faced by member States. Exchanging policies is still a priority for member States to tackle the problem of air pollution. Given the interlinkages between air pollution and climate, some air pollutants also contribute both to air quality degradation and to climate change. Conversely, climate change can worsen air quality by altering meteorological conditions, increasing the frequency and intensity of wildfires and dust storms. These interactions present both challenges and opportunities for coordinated policy approaches and research into the impact of climate change on air quality.

NEACAP will support member States in the exchange of policies and experiences relating to air quality, which remains a key challenge to member States. Considering the co-benefits of mitigating air pollutants and CO_2, NEACAP will promote the understanding of the impacts of climate change on air pollution, including synergy between air pollution control and carbon emissions reduction.

4.1.2 Clean Technologies and Low-Emission Policy Measures

Promoting the adoption and diffusion of clean technologies and low-emission policy measures is critical for achieving substantial improvements in air quality. NEACAP will facilitate the exchange of policy experiences, technological innovations, and best practices across the member States to support sectoral transitions, including cleaner industrial processes, sustainable urban transport, and energy-efficient solutions.

4.1.3 Policy Support and Collaboration

Robust, and science-based policy advice is fundamental to supporting effective air quality management in North-East Asia. Recognizing the diversity of environmental, economic, and institutional contexts across the subregion, NEACAP will strengthen its role as a policy support platform through the generation and dissemination of targeted analytical outputs. These will help inform

[6] The NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030 builds on the achievements and lessons learned from the previous work plan (2021-2025), while operationalizing the envisaged objective and expected outputs agreed in the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030. The identified priority areas find basis from the: Policy Analysis Report, NEASPEC Stakeholder Survey, and Technical Centers Survey.

decision-making at the national and subregional levels and contribute to the implementation of SDGs and relevant environmental agreements.

To maximize impact and avoid duplication, NEACAP will deepen collaboration with relevant regional platforms and UN bodies. This collaboration will leverage expertise and outreach channels to produce more relevant knowledge products.

4.1.4 Capacity Building

Recognizing differences in national contexts and capacities among the member States, NEACAP will facilitate activities to enhance technical and institutional capabilities for effective air quality management through trainings, workshops, seminars, symposiums, and technical exchanges, which would leverage from the resources of the Technical Centers.

The NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030 is illustrated in **Table 1**. Correspondingly, the NEACAP Activity Plan for 2026 is summarized in **Table 2.**

4.2 Institutional Roles

The implementation of the Work Plan will be supported by the following:

- **Member Governments:** Designate SPC members and Technical Centres, engage actively in NEACAP activities, share information, and consider the recommendations from NEACAP-related work.

- **Science-Policy Committee (SPC):** Continue to serve as the principal advisory, steering the work programme.

- **Technical Centres (TCs):** Deliver technical expertise and contribute to NEACAP activities.

- **Secretariat:** Provide overall coordination, logistical support, and technical assistance for the implementation of the NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030.

    - The work on Priority Areas will be undertaken in close consultation with member States on the topic and modality and in collaboration with existing mechanisms and platforms.

    - The secretariat will prepare the budget plan for the planned activities in accordance with NEASPEC practices. The budget and its execution

will be reported to the SPC meeting for review and to the SOM for approval.

The implementation and monitoring of activities will be coordinated by the SPC and overseen by SOM in accordance with the NEACAP Terms of Reference and SPC Rules of Procedure. In addition to the regular review of the work, the SPC will have a mid-term review in 2028 of the Work Plan's implementation with a view to making necessary adjustments.

4.3 Finance

The financial support for the implementation of the NEACAP Work Plan will be primarily drawn from the NEASPEC Core Fund and available resources of the NEASPEC secretariat. In-kind contributions and co-financing arrangements with partners will be actively sought to enhance resource mobilization and ensure effective delivery of activities.

Table 1: NEACAP Work Plan 2026-2030: Objective – Outputs – Priority Areas – Activities

Objective	By 2030, the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership, supported by the Science and Policy Committee and designated Technical Centres, is developed as a fully functioning platform facilitating strategic and effective cooperation in addressing air pollution challenges in North-East Asia.		
Outputs	**Activities (linked with Priority Areas)**	**Timelines**	**Roles**
1. Strengthened information exchange through cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation to support member countries improve air quality	1.1 Organize the NEACAP Policy Dialogue (4.1.1. and 4.1.2)	2026 – 2030, as appropriate and as an associated event in conjunction with NEASPEC Senior Officials meeting	Member States (SOM hosting government); secretariat
	1.2 Organize Symposium(s) (4.1.1 and 4.1.2)	2026 – 2030, as appropriate	Technical Centres; secretariat
2. Increased technical collaboration and capacity building assistance through designated Technical Centres	2.1 Conduct capacity building activities (e.g. trainings, seminars, workshops, etc.) (4.1.1, 4.1.2, and 4.1.4)	2026 – 2030, based on analytical work developed under Output #3 and planned activities of Technical Centres, as appropriate	Technical Centres; secretariat
3. Strengthened collective and transformative actions through joint research focusing on coordinating strategy for improving air quality management and its synergies with climate change	3.1 Undertake analytical work on air quality management and its synergies with climate change (4.1.1 and 4.1.3)	2026-2027; 2028-2029	SPC members; secretariat; external partners
4. Strengthened synergies with existing collaborative programmes and mechanisms (multilateral, regional, global) on air pollution through joint projects	4.1 Co-organize events/activities with partners (i.e., RAPAP, EANET, UNEP, etc.) at regional events (4.1.3 and 4.1.4)	2026 – 2030, as appropriate	SPC members; Technical Centres; secretariat