

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS OF EASTERN EUROPEAN, CAUCASIAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES FOR THE APPLICATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS AND THE PREPARATION OF INDICATOR-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Prepared by the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment at its 7th session, held on 27-29 November.

Taking into account that environmental indicators play an important role as a key tool for environmental assessment, reporting and improved policy-making;

Underlying that appropriately chosen indicators based on sufficient time-series data can show key trends, help to describe causes and effects of environmental conditions and make it possible not only to track and evaluate environmental policy implementation but also to update environmental policy and policies in environmentally significant economic sectors, to set priorities and quantitative targets and to assess compliance with international commitments adopted;

Acknowledging an important role that the Guidelines for the Preparation of Governmental Reports on the State and Protection of the Environment, endorsed by the Kiev (2003) Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, played in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) in building capacities in environmental information management, and *stressing*, at the same time, that recent changes in environmental reporting in the UNECE region have led to new requirements towards the preparation of State environmental reports in the EECCA countries; including the need for transforming reports into a policy message for the assessment and improvement of environmental policy.

Endorsing the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and the Guidelines for Indicator-based Assessment Reports on the Environment, prepared by the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency and other international organizations;

The Governments of the EECCA countries are recommended to implement effective measures for the adaptation of their systems for environmental monitoring, data collection and environmental reporting in accordance with these documents including the following:

Policy context

1. Use the above-mentioned Guidelines to:
 - (a) Improve national systems for environmental reporting for the purpose of environmental decision-making and public information;
 - (b) Compare national environmental assessments with those of other UN member countries, and
 - (c) Facilitate data gathering for future pan-European environmental assessment reports.
2. Use environmental indicators contained in the Guidelines to:

- (a) Identify driving forces of environmental changes;
- (b) Measure pressure on the environment;
- (c) Assess the state of the environment and its individual components;
- (d) Assess the impact of environmental pollution on human health and biota;
- (e) Evaluate the effectiveness of environmental response measures and improve environmental policymaking;
- (f) Improve information management systems in the field of environment.

Institutional framework

3. Develop or improve the legal and regulatory basis relating to the production, collection and handling of data for the Guidelines' environmental indicators as well as to their use for the environmental assessment reports. It relates, in particular to:

- a) Legal status of reports as official documents submitted to Governments and the Parliament;
- b) Designation of a specially authorized state body responsible for the preparation, publication and dissemination of reports which should be supported by inter-sectoral group of experts from key ministries and State administration bodies, scientific institutions and public organizations;
- c) Financing of preparation, publication and distribution of environmental reports should be carried out from the state budget or (in the case of territorial reports) from the budgets of territorial governments;

4. Ensure that public authorities responsible for environmental monitoring and protection; public health; sustainable use of water, land, forest and other biological resources; as well as for energy, agriculture, transport and housing policies undertake, in coordination, the adaptation or development of relevant programmes providing for measuring, calculating and regularly collecting data for each of the environmental indicators included in the Guidelines.

5. Where necessary, define and designate institutions responsible for the collection, processing and treatment of the data on each indicator in the Guidelines, and for the publication of indicators in environmental assessment reports and statistical compendiums in accordance with the Guidelines; and adapt the existing coordination mechanisms among these institutions or set up new ones as needed.

6. Ensure that institutions, responsible for data collection and the treatment and management of databases dealing with the application of environmental indicators, regularly transmit the information collected to institutions designated for the publication and dissemination of assessment reports on the environment and the use of natural resources. Improve assessment reports based on environmental indicators for more efficient use by policy- and decision-makers, academic community and the general public.

7. In countries where this has not yet been done, ensure that state statistical services develop and introduce into practice classifications corresponding to those of the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) of All Economic Activities of the United Nations and its derivatives. International standard classifications should be recognized and used by all institutions

dealing with the collection and treatment of data and the publication of environmental and statistical reports.

8. Ensure the continuous functioning of national environmental monitoring systems to produce data on environmental indicators and the regular use of indicators in environmental policy.

9. Spread the use of the Guidelines' environmental indicators to the subnational (Oblast, city, etc.) level with central governmental authorities providing consultative support and assistance.

10. Conduct regular training of national experts on the application of environmental indicators for environmental assessments, improvement of environmental policy and the production of environmental publications for the general public.

11. Ensure that ministries responsible for environmental policy initiate the regular publication of data collections based on the indicators contained in the Guidelines or use these indicators in current publications.

12. Set up national electronic data banks (databases) on environmental indicators and ensure free access to these via modern information technologies, including the Internet.

Follow-up

13. Regularly review the lists of indicators that are applied at the national level to incorporate indicators that are not covered by the Guidelines but are country-specific. In revising the existing indicators and selecting additional ones, apply the following criteria:

(a) Relevance to national environmental priorities: indicators should be assessed in terms of their relevance to the goals and objectives of national strategy documents on environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources (national strategies for environmental protection, sustainable development and biodiversity, and national environmental action plans);

(b) Relation to international environmental policy: indicators should be assessed in terms of their relation to the implementation of international agreements and obligations and to their comparability at the international level;

(c) Measurability: indicators should be assessed in terms of the availability of (preferably internationally agreed) cost-effective methods and methodologies for obtaining the necessary data (measurements and/or calculations);

(d) Forecasting ability: indicators should be assessed in terms of their capacity to accurately forecast the implementation environmental policy targets and the effectiveness of environmental protection measures;

(e) Communication tool for public awareness: indicators should be assessed in terms of their clarity for the general public and their ability to raise awareness about the state of the environment;

(f) Reliability.

14. When selecting additional indicators, aim to ensure that they produce time-series data to demonstrate trends and evaluate progress in an easy to read format.

15. Participate actively in international cooperation in the field of environmental monitoring and reporting that assist in comparing national environmental indicators with those of other countries. Review periodically, in close co-operation the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators to update it by new methodologies and standards developed by relevant international forums, to add new agreed indicators and to adapt it to practical experience obtained during its application.