

Meeting of the 2020/2021 Bureau
Geneva (online), 17-18 February 2021

Item III (e) of the Provisional
Agenda

**EXTENSION OF TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE JOINT TASK FORCE ON
ENVIRONMENTAL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS FOR EECCA AND SOUTH-
EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

Note by the Secretariat

The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators was set up by the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in 2009. The work of the Task Force is closely linked with the CEP Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, assisting countries with methodological challenges related to the environmental indicators used for assessment.

The main objective of the Joint Task Force is to assist the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in their efforts to produce, share and use environmental information following international standards and guidelines, including the Framework for Development of Environment Statistics and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting. In October 2015, the CES Bureau extended the mandate of the Task Force until 2021, to be reviewed in February 2021.

In October 2020, CEP extended the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until June 2023 in alignment with the Environment for Europe process. Taking into account the close links of the Task Force with the work of the Working Group, the secretariat proposes to extend the terms of reference and mandate of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators also until June 2023.

The Bureau approved the extension of the mandate and the updated terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (presented as addendum) until June 2023.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, previously named “Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators”, was set up in 2009 jointly by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) with the aim to improve environmental statistics and strengthen environmental reporting in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.¹ The Joint Task Force held 17 meetings in the period 2009–2020. During this time, it gradually revised the indicators covered by the *Guidelines for*

¹ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, North Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (Indicator Guidelines) prepared by the CEP Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and endorsed at the Belgrade Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in 2007. The Joint Task Force updated the Guidelines and added important indicators that were initially not included.

II. CURRENT WORK OF THE JOINT TASK FORCE

2. A new revision process of the Guidelines has started in 2019 to take into account the new global policy environment and its information needs (e.g. indicator frameworks of the 2030 Agenda, Sendai Framework, Global Biodiversity Framework) and updates in technical reference documents, including environmental questionnaires of Eurostat, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and new or revised statistical frameworks and guidelines, such as the *Framework for Development of Environment Statistics*, the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting* and the *CES Set of Core Climate Change-related Indicators and Statistics*.

3. Another focus of work of the Joint Task Force is to support countries in the production and online sharing of environmental data. The aim is to establish regular data flows for effective reporting according to international monitoring and assessment requirements, including the obligations under the relevant UNECE multilateral environmental agreements, the pan-European environmental assessment and in accordance with the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS).

4. The Joint Task Force has been instrumental in building up close cooperation between the national statistical offices and the environmental agencies in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and with the relevant international organizations. The work has benefitted from financial support by the European Environment Agency, Eurostat and several donor countries to enable the participation of country representatives at the meetings of the Joint Task Force.

5. In October 2015, the CES Bureau approved the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force to continue the work until 2021. CEP at its 23rd session in November 2017 approved the same terms of reference until 2021.

6. CEP and CES planned to review the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force at their first meetings in 2021.

7. The work is closely linked with the Environment for Europe process and the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Ministerial Conference has been postponed to October 2022, among others due to impacts of COVID-19. Therefore, in October 2020, the 26th session of CEP extended the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until mid-2023 with a planned renewal thereafter to reflect the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference. As the work of the Joint Task Force is closely aligned with the CEP Working Group and the Environment for Europe process, its timing and terms of reference should be in accordance with these processes. Therefore, it is proposed to extend the mandate of the Task Force also until June 2023.

8. The updated terms of reference for the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators are presented in the addendum. The text is updated to reflect developments since the Task Force was last approved by the CES Bureau. The tasks remain largely the same with one

additional task: reviewing the *Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*, as explained in para 2.

III. FUTURE PLANS ON ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

9. Since establishing this Joint Task Force, countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia have made significant progress in developing environment statistics and environmental indicators following international standards and guidelines. However, **environment statistics remains to be one of the weakest statistical domains in most countries, including both countries with developed and less developed statistical systems.**

10. Climate change and sustainable management of environmental resources are highly prioritised on the national, regional and global policy agendas, but often this is not matched with adequate capacity of national statistical offices (NSOs) and related agencies to produce the required information. Lack of resources and knowledge for producing environment statistics, including environmental-economic accounts and related indicators, has become a challenge for many CES countries, resulting in insufficient quality of these statistics and data gaps. For example, the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*² mentions significant country-level data gaps in areas related to sustainable production and consumption (Goal 12) and to climate action (Goal 13). Relatively new policy initiatives, such as measuring circular economy, provide challenges for NSOs, Ministries of Environment and other related governmental agencies of all CES member countries.

11. In view of the common challenges in environment statistics for all countries of the region, after expiration of its mandate in June 2023 the existing mechanism of the Joint Task Force could be **extended to provide a useful platform for experts from NSOs and Ministries of Environment** (or similar government agencies) **of all CES member countries.** The Joint Task Force follows the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System that covers all EU countries, therefore there are common issues to discuss. Some countries who are not members of the Task Force are already participating in the meetings but information about the meetings could be distributed more widely, to all UNECE countries. This platform can be used to share knowledge and experience on:

- a) Production of environment statistics to inform new policy areas;
- b) Continuous improvement of data quality and overcoming data gaps;
- c) Use of new or alternative data sources (e.g. remote sensing, “big data”, citizen science, etc.);
- d) Data sharing;
- e) Dissemination of policy-relevant information products.

12. The work of the Task Force since 2009 has showed a continuous need for a platform for countries to support improvement of environment statistics. Therefore, CES and CEP may consider converting the Joint Task Force into a standing body on environmental statistics and indicators. If this idea is supported by CES and CEP, the UNECE Secretariat will submit a proposal and draft terms of reference for such a body in 2023.

² <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>

IV. PROPOSAL TO THE BUREAU

13. The CES Bureau is invited to:

- a) approve the extension of the mandate and the updated terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until June 2023;**
- b) express views on the future plans described in section III about the possibility of extending the Joint Task Force to all countries after June 2023.**

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