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**Economic Commission for Europe**

Committee on Environmental Policy

Conference of European Statisticians

**Joint Task Force on Environmental  
Statistics and Indicators**

Nineteenth session

Geneva, 3 and 4 November 2022

**Report of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics  
and Indicators on its nineteenth session****I. Introduction****A. Background**

1. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators was established by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians to support countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to produce, share and use environmental information following international standards and guidelines, including the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (2013) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting. The aim of the work being carried out by the Joint Task Force is to strengthen environmental reporting and make environmental statistics available and comparable throughout the pan-European region in the long term. The Joint Task Force also supports the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment.
2. The terms of reference of the Joint Task Force<sup>1</sup> were approved by the ECE Executive Committee on 4 July 2018,<sup>2</sup> to be reviewed in 2021.
3. The Joint Task Force held its nineteenth session in Geneva, in a hybrid format, on 3 and 4 November 2022.<sup>3</sup>

**B. Attendance**

4. The meeting was attended by environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Mexico, North

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<sup>1</sup> See ECE/CEP/2017/12, annex.

<sup>2</sup> See ECE/EX/2018/L.7.

<sup>3</sup> All documents and presentations of the nineteenth session are available at <https://unece.org/statistics/events/nineteenth-session-joint-task-force-environmental-statistics-and-indicators>.



Macedonia, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Ukraine.

5. Representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Zoi Environment Network, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Statistics Division/Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, as well as three independent experts including a researcher in environmental statistics and accounting and a science communications coordinator, attended the meeting.

6. The meeting was serviced by the ECE secretariat.

## **II. Adoption of the agenda**

7. The Chair invited the Joint Task Force to adopt the agenda of the nineteenth session.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

8. The Joint Task Force adopted the agenda of its nineteenth session as set out in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2022/1.

## **III. Adoption of the report of the eighteenth session**

9. The secretariat summarized the outcomes of the eighteenth session of the Joint Task Force (Geneva, 18–19 October 2021) as contained in the corresponding report (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/2) and invited the Joint Task Force to adopt the report.

10. The secretariat informed the Joint Task Force about the status of implementation of the decisions and recommendations made at the eighteenth session.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

11. The Joint Task Force adopted the report of its eighteenth session and took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the eighteenth session of the Joint Task Force.<sup>4</sup>

## **IV. Implementing the mandate and terms of reference**

12. The secretariat informed the meeting that the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its special session (Nicosia, 3–4 October 2022), had extended the current mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force until the end of 2023.<sup>5</sup>

13. The secretariat provided an overview of the proposed new mandate and terms of reference beyond 2023 and information on the proposed conversion of the Joint Task Force into a standing body, named the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, with a wider geographical and substantive coverage in order to address, among other things, challenges of emerging policy themes.

14. The secretariat invited the Joint Task Force to complete an online survey on the proposed standing body. The results of the survey showed that all survey participants agreed on the conversion of the Joint Task Force into a standing body, named the Joint Working

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<sup>4</sup> ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/2, para. 10.

<sup>5</sup> See Summary of the outcomes of the special session and the decisions taken (unedited, as approved by the Committee on 4 October 2022), point (q). Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/special-session-committee-environmental-policy-3>.

Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, which should serve as the ECE platform for experts from ministries of environment (or relevant other agencies) and national statistical offices for improving environmental statistics and indicators to inform policies. All survey participants except one agreed that the new Joint Working Group would include all members of the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy. The participants then ranked the objectives of the new Joint Working Group. The continuous improvement of data quality and the overcoming of data gaps were given highest priority, followed by the production of environmental and related integrated statistics and indicators and their application. The production of environmental and health-related statistics, the correct application of Shared Environmental Information System and open data methodologies, the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics followed in the ranking. The analysis and communication of environmental data and the dissemination of information products were ranked lower than the other objectives.

15. Participants also mentioned that the application of the fundamental principles of official environment statistics in order to assess the quality of environmental statistics in countries and the linking of financial instruments to the measurement of a low-carbon transition would be important.

16. With regard to the importance of activities that the Joint Working Group should implement, the participants in the survey voted for: address methodology and data quality challenges (ranked with highest importance); advice on the application of indicator production methodologies; develop new statistics/indicators for emerging themes; support implementation of outcomes of Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences; and develop capacity to inform various policy areas (ranked with lowest importance).

17. Another question in the survey dealt with the importance of addressing specific areas of the pan-European environmental assessment. “Air and climate change” was the area listed as most important, followed by “circular economy and tourism” and “chemicals and waste”, then by “environmental financing”, “fresh water”, “coastal waters, marine ecosystems and seas” and “biodiversity and ecosystems and land”. “Noise” was given the lowest priority. One participant also noted that it would be important for the Joint Working Group to support the application of remote sensing data for environmental statistics. The representative of the Agency on Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan expressed interest in leading one of the programme areas. The representative of Austria indicated that, subject to internal approval, Austria would be interested in taking the lead on green finance.

18. The secretariat then invited the Joint Task Force to initiate a discussion on the new mandate and terms of reference, the possible strengthened and broadened mandate in terms of geographic coverage and content beyond the end of 2023 and the possible conversion of the Joint Task Force to a standing body.

19. The representative of Switzerland expressed support for the newly proposed mandate and terms of reference and the conversion of the Joint Task Force into a standing body, and asked the secretariat to maintain a focus on capacity development, in particular for countries in transition. The speaker stated that synergies with other international and regional organizations (e.g., EEA and OECD) should be sought. The speaker also requested that the implementation and use of the Shared Environmental Information System should continue to feature prominently in the future. The speaker further requested the secretariat to prepare short annual workplans to aid with fundraising, as well as to clear up any ambiguity about the proposed activities of the standing body.

20. The representative of Ireland welcomed the proposal on the establishment of the Joint Working Group and emphasized the need to strengthen the policy-related side of statistics, including on taxes and goods and services. The representative also mentioned that it was important that activities continue both for countries in transition and for countries with more service-oriented economies where the current priority was more on moving away from fossil fuels and less on monitoring of traditional environmental themes such as water. Strengthening of capacity in terms of statistics in order to be able to measure, for example, whether taxes were having an impact, would be important to include in the objectives of the new Joint Working Group to also enhance its own impact and usefulness.

## Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

21. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Supported the conversion of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators into a standing body with a broadened mandate, scope and geographical coverage, named the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators;

(b) Requested the secretariat to incorporate the comments made at the nineteenth session and to circulate a revised version of the mandate and terms of reference by 11 November 2022 for approval through a 14-day silence procedure;

(c) Also requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians of the outcomes of the agenda item;

(d) Further requested the secretariat to support the new body in preparing a work plan for the next five years, taking into account the outcomes of the discussion at the meeting, and in assessing resource requirements and to inform the Committee and the Conference of European Statisticians of the outcomes of the discussion on the agenda item;

(e) Took note of the limited resources currently available for servicing the Joint Task Force and for supporting countries in addressing challenges related to environmental statistics and indicators to inform existing and emerging policies holistically;

(f) Invited its members, international organizations and partners to support both the activities of the new body and the mobilization of funds for implementation of its work plan.

## V. Ongoing developments with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force

22. The agenda item was structured according to ongoing developments with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force at the international, regional and national levels.

23. The secretariat summarized the main outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) with relevance for the Joint Task Force, including those related to the pan-European environmental assessment and the Final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System, which had been launched in Nicosia, followed by an overview of the main outcomes of the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva (hybrid), 11–12 April 2022), the Seventh Joint OECD/ECE Seminar on the Implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (Geneva (online), 28 and 30–31 March 2022), the Sixth Expert Meeting on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (Geneva, 5–6 May 2022), the Second Expert Forum for Producers and Users of Disaster-related Statistics (Beirut, 6–8 September 2022), the related outcomes of the seventieth plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (Geneva, 20–22 June 2022) and the Expert Forum for Producers and Users of Climate Change-related Statistics (Geneva, 29–30 September 2022).

24. The representative of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research then presented the progress of the Regional E-Waste Monitor for the Western Balkans project, which showcased the importance of e-waste data and statistics and activities on strengthening subregional and national capacities in the field of e-waste monitoring and reporting, followed by a presentation by the representative of UNEP, who provided an update on global work on environmental statistics including Sustainable Development Goal-related data collection and indicator evaluation, new tools and training for capacity-building.

25. Other presentations from international and regional organizations under the agenda item included a presentation by a representative of the United Nations Statistics Division, who presented updates on global work in environment and climate change statistics, mainly focusing on developing strong implementation support recommendations. A representative of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity provided updates on the status of the global Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework and representatives of UNEP and Zoë Environment

Network shared lessons learned from the implementation of a project on the Shared Environmental Information System principles in Central Asia in 2022.

26. At the national level, representatives of Georgia, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan shared their countries' progress in producing and disseminating environmental indicators, with reference to the ECE environmental indicators, the Shared Environmental Information System, the Green Growth Indicators and the Sustainable Development Goal environment-related indicators with a focus on sustainable infrastructure, biodiversity, chemicals and waste and/or circular economy and tourism, as identified in the seventh pan-European environmental assessment as priority themes.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

27. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and decided to integrate those outcomes, as appropriate, into its work;

(b) Took note also of the information provided by the secretariat on the outcomes of the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment;

(c) Invited the Working Group to regularly inform the Joint Task Force on relevant outcomes of its sessions and activities;

(d) Took note of ongoing developments with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force at the international, regional and national levels and thanked all speakers for their valuable contributions;

(e) Requested international and regional organizations and its members to provide it with regular updates on recent developments in the implementation of their activities.

## **VI. Review of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators**

28. At its eighteenth session, the Joint Task Force had approved the completed parts of the Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/4). As requested by the Joint Task Force, the secretariat had continued with that work and introduced the latest developments related to the completion of the revision of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2022/4) for discussion and approval.

29. A representative of Mexico shared the country's experience in using environmental data produced with the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, which also provided the foundations for the Revised Guidelines, together with the 2020 population census to develop Sustainable Development Goal indicators. That example showcased the usefulness of using the Framework for multiple purposes, and how environmental data could be integrated and disaggregated.

30. The Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the representative of Austria then presented lessons learned and gaps identified in the pan-European environmental assessment that would be of relevance for the revision of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators.

31. The representative of EEA expressed appreciation for the indicator revision that ECE was carrying out, as well as the Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and the chosen approach to follow the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics. The speaker presented the recent revision of the list of EEA-European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) indicators. The speaker discussed how the revised list was used to provide short information packages that combined a European picture with national-level data and key strategic messages. The speaker also

mentioned further opportunities and challenges related to the implementation and use of EEEA-Eionet indicators, and planned developments, including the increased use of Copernicus-based data and citizen science.

32. The representatives of Armenia and Kazakhstan presented feedback on the Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, including suggestions on the re-allocation of some indicators in the Guidelines (e.g., related to air emissions) and the combining or replacement of some indicators (e.g., related to greenhouse gas emissions).

33. The secretariat thanked the countries for reviewing the Guidelines and providing feedback. The secretariat invited the members of the Joint Task Force to complete an online survey on priority indicators and discuss the next steps regarding the review process. The results of the survey showed that:

(a) The majority of the respondents supported adding indicators on extreme events and disasters to the Guidelines. Since a dedicated task force was working on identifying a set of core indicators, that list should be considered;

(b) No consensus had been reached on whether to identify more priority indicators. There had been some comments that it might be useful to check the balance of priority indicators across the different themes of the Revised Guidelines, and perhaps to “upgrade” indicators related to important policy areas, such as biodiversity (Convention on Biological Diversity indicators), climate change, energy and disaster-risk reduction.

34. During the discussions, the representatives of Armenia, Austria, Kazakhstan and Switzerland shared their opinions on the list of indicators, provided suggestions for changing some of the indicator names, emphasized the need for clear methodological guidance maintaining both the stability and flexibility of indicators, and distinguishing between the definitions of indicators and statistics. The finalized list of indicators should be accompanied by clear metadata to allow all involved national stakeholders to understand the rationale of the indicators, potential data sources, calculation methods and existing recommendations and guidelines. The representative of Austria proposed reviewing the indicators, in particular the air pollution part.

35. The Joint Task Force agreed to add a chapter discussing important aspects of disaggregation, such as gender, ethnicity and income level.

36. The secretariat took note of all comments made on the Revised Guidelines and would update them accordingly.

37. The secretariat presented proposed decisions and next steps after taking into account comments received during the session for approval.

## **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

38. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Welcomed the progress made towards reviewing and finalizing the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators;

(b) Pre-approved the finalized parts of the Guidelines and the proposed list of indicators;

(c) Requested the secretariat to make final updates to the document, taking into account the discussions at the nineteenth session of the Joint Task Force, lessons learned from the seventh pan-European environmental assessment and the latest developments with the EEA-Eionet indicators by the end of 2022;

(d) Decided on a 21-day silence procedure for final approval of the Guidelines, to be completed by the end of January 2023;

(e) Also decided that metadata would be completed in English and Russian for all the approved indicators and provided to its members under a silence procedure;

(f) Requested the secretariat to present an updated version of the Revised Guidelines as an official document, as well as completed metadata sheets, to the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators at its twentieth session;

(g) Also requested the secretariat to prepare the Revised Guidelines as an official publication in English, French and Russian in electronic and paper editions.

## VII. Ongoing and planned capacity development activities

39. Representatives of OECD, the Environment Agency Austria and the secretariat presented progress in implementing projects on green economy and water resources and environmental data under the umbrella of the European Union for Environment Programme, in particular on applying environmental data, green growth and ECE indicators in support of a green transition in the European Union Eastern Partnership countries.

40. The representative of Serbia presented progress made in measuring selected environment-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators, and challenges related specifically to waste statistics.

41. The representative of Ukraine provided updates on the country's progress in sharing new data on the website of the State Statistics Service, and, in particular, challenges related to improving methodologies for statistics on waste management.

42. During the discussion, the representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova shared their countries' experiences on producing environmental data, future development plans and related challenges for which external support might be needed. The representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation expressed their shared concerns regarding the current inadequate capacities of their countries in producing data, developing indicators and using them to inform policies. They welcomed further activities of experience exchange and international cooperation in the areas of environmental indicators production and dissemination.

### Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

43. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Took note of the information provided on ongoing and planned capacity development activities with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force;

(b) Invited its members and representatives of international organizations and other initiatives and projects to provide it with regular updates on recent developments in the implementation of their activities.

## VIII. Data needs, statistics, and indicators to manage environment-related human health issues

44. A representative of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe gave a presentation on air pollution and health data requirements for air quality impact assessments using the AirQ+ methodology – a user-friendly software package designed to estimate the magnitude of the most important and best recognized effects of air pollution in a given population.

45. A representative of UNDRR then presented the publication *Hazard Definition and Classification Review: Technical Report*,<sup>6</sup> which provided a review of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 hazard terminology and classification for partners addressing the all-hazards paradigm.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (Geneva, 2020).

46. The secretariat reported on the work of the ECE Task Force on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters, which supported UNDRR in reviewing the presented hazard classification from a statistical point of view. Joint Task Force members were invited to express their interest in participating in online workshops in which measurement challenges related to selected hazards would be discussed and needs for practical explanations or guidelines identified.

47. A consultant employed by UNEP, speaking in a pre-recorded presentation made available to participants after the session, presented air quality indexes in Central Asia, the UNEP/United Nations Development Programme air pollution assessment in Bishkek and respective data gaps.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

48. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Thanked the presenters for sharing their knowledge and experience on data needs, statistics and indicators to manage environment-related human health issues;

(b) Invited its members, international organizations and partners to provide it with regular updates on recent developments related to environment and health statistics, indicators and data.

## **IX. Other business**

49. The Joint Task Force discussed activities in 2023, including:

(a) The finalization of the new mandate and terms of reference and their submission to the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians for approval;

(b) The finalization of the revision of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators;

(c) Continued provision of support to the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System and production of the revised indicators in the target countries;

(d) Provision of support to address gaps identified in the seventh pan-European environmental assessment.

## **X. Closure of the meeting**

50. The Chair, with the assistance of the secretariat, summarized the conclusions of the Joint Task Force, presented the decisions and closed the meeting. It was announced that the report of the meeting would be finalized by the secretariat after the meeting and would be posted on the web page of the meeting in due course.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

51. The next session of the Joint Task Force was scheduled to be held in Geneva, on 16 and 17 October 2023.

52. The Joint Task Force adopted the decisions taken during the session.

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