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**Economic Commission for Europe**

Committee on Environmental Policy

Conference of European Statisticians

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

Twentieth session

Geneva, 16 and 17 October 2023

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

**Draft five-year outline of activities (workplan) for the period  
2024–2028****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The Committee on Environmental Policy, at its special session held in Nicosia, from 3 to 4 October 2022, extended the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until the end of 2023. The Committee took note of the proposal made to convert the Joint Task Force into a standing body and decided to have an in-depth discussion based on detailed information provided by the secretariat at the twenty-eighth session of the Committee (Geneva, 1–3 November 2023).<sup>a</sup> In particular, the Committee requested further details on the proposed new standing body, including a workplan. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee approved the extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force at its 126th meeting (Geneva, 13 January 2023).<sup>b</sup>

At its nineteenth session (Geneva, 3–4 November 2022), the Joint Task Force supported its conversion into a standing body with a broadened mandate, scope and geographical coverage, named the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, and approved the mandate and terms of reference through a 14-day silence procedure.<sup>c</sup> The secretariat incorporated additional comments received from member States into a revised version of the draft mandate and terms of reference. As an indication of interest of a wider group of countries, 11 countries from outside Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia participated in the meeting.

The meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (Geneva, 15–16 February 2023) and the Conference of European Statisticians at its seventy-first plenary session (Geneva, 22–23 June 2023) endorsed the mandate and terms of reference for a Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators as a standing body under the



Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy, pending approval also by the Committee.<sup>d</sup> The Conference also requested the secretariat to submit the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Working Group to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee for approval once endorsed by the Committee on Environmental Policy.

The present document provides a draft outline of activities (workplan) for 2024–2028 for consideration by the Joint Task Force at its twentieth session and is based on the proposed mandate and terms of reference for the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators. The outline will be made available to the Committee on Environmental Policy for information at its twenty-eighth session.

<sup>a</sup> ECE/CEP/S/2022/6, para. 31 (advance edited copy).

<sup>b</sup> ECE/EX/2023/L.2, para. 4.

<sup>c</sup> ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2022/2, para. 21 (a)–(b).

<sup>d</sup> ECE/CES/BUR/2023/FEB/23, para. 37.

## Introduction

1. The present document outlines activities proposed to be carried out by the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators in the period 2024–2028 (see table below).
2. The outline is based on the proposed new mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Working Group (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2023/3).
3. The Joint Working Group will implement the activities in close collaboration with national and international governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, other relevant United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and other international and regional organizations including the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
4. With the assistance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat, member States and organizations that agree to lead any of the activities outlined below will facilitate their implementation and report to the Joint Working Group on the progress made and challenges faced.
5. Implementation of activities set out in this document is conditional on mobilization of the necessary (extrabudgetary) resources. Funds from the regular budget are available only for the intergovernmental platform and process considered as “core activities”, in particular the provision of a meeting room and interpretation for the holding of the annual Joint Working Group session (as was previously the case for the Joint Task Force), secretariat services for implementing cross-cutting issues such as the elaboration of official documents, workplans, terms of references, promoting the production of integrated statistics and data disaggregation, coordinating necessary evaluations or the partial revision of the Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators.
6. Critical resource requirements (from extrabudgetary sources) include funding for the travel and subsistence of experts from countries in transition to allow their in-person participation in sessions of the Joint Working Group, and members of the secretariat, totalling approximately \$44,000 per annum (two participants per country for countries in transition). The costs for the optional provision of hybrid sessions for the annual meetings of the Joint Working Group, in particular for a remote simultaneous interpretation platform to allow online participation, would amount to an additional \$5,000–\$15,000 (the exact amount depending on the future cost of the service provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva).
7. The annual 2-day session of the Joint Working Group will provide a platform to, among other things, promote the production and use of environmental indicators in line with

the ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and Shared Environmental Information System and open data principles, promote the use of new or alternative data sources (e.g., remote sensing, “big data” and citizen science), provide recommendations on how to improve data quality, how to overcome data gaps and the integration of environmental data and statistics, including through showcasing good practice examples. Furthermore, the regular meetings of the Joint Working Group will include discussions on: the production of environmental and health-related statistics; the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and the United Nations Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics; and, the need for the establishment of thematic expert groups or task forces for specific environmental or cross-cutting themes. The Joint Working Group sessions will provide an inclusive platform for countries to discuss recent developments in the area of environmental statistics and indicators and to continue the process of consultation between ECE member States, members of the Conference of European Statisticians, partner organizations and other institutions and networks, international financial institutions and the private sector with relevant expertise in the area.

8. Funds have been made available in recent years by a limited number of ECE member States including Austria, Portugal and Switzerland, as well as the European Union, to support the intergovernmental process of holding annual meetings, as well as some capacity-development activities. Resource requirements remain for various activities considered an integral and important part of the work of the Joint Working Group (as identified by the previous Joint Task Force), as well as for projects supporting the implementation of the workplan, and are estimated in the table below. The Joint Working Group will work with the secretariat in its continuing efforts to mobilize resources and assistance from regional and international organizations and member States in order to enable the Joint Working Group to operate fully.

9. Considering the growing complexity and number of activities that need to be implemented under the programme, additional staff resources are required to ensure continuous support to the servicing of the Joint Working Group and its activities, including for the organization of capacity-development activities on a regular basis, addressing also emerging themes.

## Outline of activities (workplan) for 2024–2028

<i>Main overall objective and activity</i>	<i>Priority</i>	<i>Task or event</i>	<i>Tentative timing</i>	<i>Required financial resources</i>	<i>Indicator of achievement</i>
<b>Overall objective: Assist member States of the Committee and the Conference of European Statisticians in their efforts to produce relevant information and statistics and to share knowledge and experience and provide support to countries to:</b>					
<b>(a) Area 1: Produce environmental and related integrated statistics and support countries to:</b>					
(i) Apply ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and SEIS and open data production methodologies in line with statistical standards and guidelines and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in the area of environment	High	Promote use of ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, statistical standards, SEIS and open data principles during annual Joint Working Group sessions and thematic workshops <sup>a</sup>	Throughout 2024–2028	Approximately \$50,000 per 2-day capacity-development workshop on specific environmental indicator themes and categories required to support travel and subsistence of eligible experts (1 participant per country in transition), as well as remote simultaneous interpretation platform for online participation and consultancies	ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators promoted through annual sessions of Joint Working Group, thematic workshops and capacity-development activities  Indicators produced and available online on national platforms
(ii) Continuously improve data quality and advise how to overcome data gaps	Medium	Provide recommendations on how to improve data quality and how to overcome data gaps and showcase good practice examples during annual Joint Working Group sessions  Provide support through dedicated projects <sup>a</sup>	Annual sessions of Joint Working Group 2024–2028	Approximately \$44,000 per annum required to support travel and subsistence of eligible experts (2 participants per country in transition) as well as \$5,000–\$15,000 for remote simultaneous interpretation platform for online participation <sup>a</sup>  Approximately \$100,000 to provide technical support (consultancy, training, etc.) for up to 5–7 countries through dedicated project	Recommendations and good practices provided during annual sessions of Joint Working Group  Number of dedicated projects <sup>a</sup>

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(iii) Produce environmental and related integrated statistics to inform new or challenging policy areas such as circular economy, sustainable infrastructure and sustainable tourism, and to link financial instruments to measurement of a transition to a low-carbon economy	High	Support development of common definitions, e.g., of the term “sustainable infrastructure”, to allow quantification of progress, and set up expert groups or engage in groups set up by international partners <sup>a</sup>	2024–2026	Approximately \$30,000 for travel and participation in inter-agency expert group meetings, consultancies and publication.	Options to develop common definitions explored (e.g., by suggesting and supporting establishment of task forces, consultancies, etc.) and support provided <sup>a</sup>
	High	Develop guidance to support countries in producing integrated statistics, including for new or challenging policy areas <sup>a</sup>	2024–2028	Approximately \$60,000 to develop guidance material, including for expert travel and consultancy	Guidance developed
	High	Promote use of new or alternative data sources (e.g., remote sensing, “big data” and citizen science); and integration of environmental data and statistics through showcasing good practice examples during annual Joint Working Group sessions	Annual sessions of Joint Working Group, 2024–2028	See above under area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group	Annual session of Joint Working Group held and new technologies promoted  Number of good practice examples provided
	Medium	Support Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in development of guidance on use of Earth observation data and geospatial information in national environmental monitoring and assessment systems <sup>a</sup>	2024–2025	Approximately \$50,000 for consultancy, organization of expert review, publication and translation	Guidance drafted <sup>a</sup>
(iv) Produce environmental and health-related statistics to derive actions that serve both the health of the environment and people	Medium	Provide advice and include an item on this topic in agenda of annual sessions of Joint Working Group	2024–2028	See above under area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group	Progress report by member States and annual session of Joint Working Group held,

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					and progress presented and discussed
(v) Implement SEEA and FDES	High	Promote production of SEEA accounts and their utilization in context of implementation of ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators. Support development of basic environmental statistics following FDES. Identify areas for capacity development, in particular in countries of EECCA and SEE subregions	2024-2028	See above under area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group  Work on promoting SEEA will be complemented with annual “Joint OECD/ECE Seminars on SEEA Implementation” which provides a platform for all United Nations Member States to share knowledge and experience  Identified capacity-development needs: see area 3 (ii) below	Number of SEEA accounts and number of countries producing SEEA accounts continuously growing (can be measured through regular UNCEEA/UNSD Global Assessment)  Number of countries producing basic environment statistics following FDES and ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators continuously increasing  Capacity-development needs identified
(vi) Regularly revise ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators to take into account recent policy developments (e.g., by suggesting updates or new indicators on emerging themes) and support production thereof	Medium	Lead revision of ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators as needed <sup>a</sup>	2024–2028	Approximately \$70,000 for consultancy, organization of expert review, publication and translation	ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators – 2028 Edition developed

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<b>(b) Area 2. Support the application of environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development, green and circular economy initiatives, the outcomes of the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences and emerging policy themes:</b>					
(i) Provide advice to Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, Committee on Environmental Policy and Conference of European Statisticians on application of data and indicator production methodologies by the target countries for the ECE environmental indicators, including for regular reviews of SEIS and other relevant indicator frameworks such as environmental and health-related data and indicators	High	Suggest including relevant agenda item in annual sessions of Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, Committee on Environmental Policy and Conference of European Statisticians, as needed	2024–2028	Approximately \$50,000 for consultancies and expert travel to support advisory services	Annual sessions of intergovernmental meetings held
(ii) Assist Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in evaluating application of internationally accepted methodologies and statistical standards in data production to support regular assessments and reporting and according to principles of SEIS and open data initiatives	High	Include relevant agenda item in annual sessions of Joint Working Group	2024–2028	See above under area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group	Annual session of Joint Working Group held  Regional priorities on application of methodologies and statistical standards described in report on Joint Working Group session and forwarded to Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment
(iii) Provide forum for sharing experience on communication of environmental information to users, in line with ECE recommendations on statistical communication and recommendations made by Working	High	Include relevant agenda item in annual sessions of Joint Working Group  Support analysis, sharing and communication of environmental data <sup>a</sup>	2024–2028	See above under area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group  Approximately \$100,000 for consultancy and projects to support analysis, sharing and	Annual session of Joint Working Group held  Communication products developed and disseminated

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Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment		Produce and disseminate policy-relevant information products <sup>a</sup>		communication of environmental data	
(iv) Establish thematic expert groups or task forces, or recommend establishment of such groups under umbrella of Committee on Environmental Policy and/or Conference of European Statisticians	Medium	Provide advice to Committee and Conference on need for expert groups or task forces and establish them as needed <sup>a</sup>  Include relevant agenda item in annual sessions of Joint Working Group, Committee and Conference	2024–2028	Approximately \$50,000 for consultancies and expert travel to support expert groups or task forces  See above under programme area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group	Annual sessions of Joint Working Group held
(v) Provide inclusive platform for countries to discuss recent developments in area of environmental statistics and indicators and continue process of consultation between ECE member States, members of Conference of European Statisticians, partner organizations and other institutions and networks, international financial institutions and private sector with relevant expertise in the area	High	Include relevant agenda item in annual sessions of Joint Working Group  Organize joint workshops and suggest joint expert groups as needed <sup>a</sup>	2024–2028	See above under programme area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of Joint Working Group	
<b>(c) Area 3. Enhance capacities of target countries for production of high-quality environmental statistics and indicators, in particular in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.</b> The specific challenges to be addressed will depend on regional and national capacity gaps and be defined by the Joint Working Group members. The implementation of capacity-development activities will depend on the mobilization of resources. Such activities might include:					
(i) Develop capacity in countries, including in countries of SEE and EECCA, for compilation and production of integrated statistics and of environmental data in support of measuring sustainable development, to inform circular and green economy initiatives, to link financial instruments to measurement of a	High	Assess gaps in environmental statistics and indicators and organize capacity development <sup>a</sup>	2024–2028	Approximately \$20,000 for consultancy to support gap analysis and approximately \$50,000 per 2-day capacity-development workshop on specific environmental statistics and indicator themes required to support travel and subsistence of eligible experts (1 participant per	Gap analysis reviews developed and capacity-development activities organized



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transition to a low-carbon economy and policy outcomes of Environment for Europe process, including on sustainable infrastructure and tourism, and to support development of regular environmental assessments				country in transition), as well as remote simultaneous interpretation platform for online participation and consultancies	
(ii) Assist countries in developing capacity for implementation of SEEA and data for other sectors, including health and transport in accordance with ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and FDES	High	Support to SEEA development and statistics for other sectors	2024–2028	Approximately \$50,000 per 2-day capacity-development workshop required to support travel and subsistence of eligible experts (1 participant per country in transition), as well as remote simultaneous interpretation platform for online participation and consultancies	Training on SEEA and other sectors organized
(iii) Strengthen capacities of countries in using new or alternative data sources (e.g., remote sensing, “big data” and citizen science)	High	Include relevant agenda item in annual sessions of Joint Working Group  Organize joint capacity-development workshops and activities, including with other actors, e.g., EEA, ESA, ITU, OECD, UNEP or WHO <sup>a</sup>	2024–2028	See above under area 1 (ii) regarding annual sessions of the Joint Working Group  Approximately \$50,000 per 2-day capacity-development workshop required to support travel and subsistence of eligible experts (1 participant per country in transition), as well as remote simultaneous interpretation platform for online participation and consultancies	Annual session of Joint Working Group held  Joint capacity-development activities held <sup>a</sup>
<b>(d) Cross-cutting activities</b>	Low	Draft new mandate and ToR of reference for Joint Working Group for 2029–2033	2027–2028		New mandate, ToR and timetable approved by Joint Working Group in 2028
	Medium	Evaluate performance and activities of Joint Working Group as required <sup>a</sup>	As required	Approximately \$10,000	Evaluation report issued

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	Medium	Mainstream gender and importance of data disaggregation into activities of Joint Working Group, e.g., in dedicated capacity-development events or sessions, election of chairs, participation in events, and strengthen collection and use of disaggregated data	2024–2028		Report of annual sessions of Joint Working Group and/or outcomes of capacity-development activities
	High	Mobilize resources to ensure that Joint Working Group can implement all needed tasks to support informing policy through high-quality data and statistics	2024–2028		Additional resources mobilized (amount and number of contributions)
	High	Present outcomes and relevant documents of Joint Working Group (workplans, ToR, progress reports, etc.) at sessions of Committee on Environmental Policy and Conference of European Statisticians	2024–2028		Mandate and ToR of Joint Working Group for 2029–2033 approved by Committee and Conference

<sup>a</sup> Activities and their achievement that are subject to the availability of additional resources.

*Abbreviations:* EECCA, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia; ESA, European Space Agency; FDES, United Nations Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics; ITU, International Telecommunication Union; SEE, South-Eastern Europe; SEEA, System of Environmental-Economic Accounting; SEIS, Shared Environmental Information System; ToR, terms of reference; UNCEEA, Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting; UNSD, United Nations Statistics Division.