

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twenty-eighth session

Geneva, 1–3 November 2023

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

Information paper No. 13

18 October 2023

Eighth pan-European environmental assessment

Note by the secretariat – *for information only*

This document is intended to share information on early thinking regarding an eighth pan-European environmental assessment. The Committee on Environmental Policy is not being asked to take any decision at this stage.

I. Background

1. The series of assessments of the state and trends of the environment in the pan-European region provide up-to-date and policy-relevant information on interactions between the environment and society. The assessments were a consistent feature of the Environment for Europe process from 1995 to 2016. The 2009 reform of that process identified the pan-European assessment as one of the three substantive documents to be prepared for each Ministerial Conference, together with up to two theme-specific reports (ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, para. 12 (a) and (d)).
2. Following the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nur-Sultan, 2011), responsibility for drafting the assessment shifted from the European Environment Agency (EEA) to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNECE. During the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, 2016), the launch of the European regional assessment of the Global Environment Outlook as the regular pan-European environmental assessment was welcomed.
3. Following the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the revised mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2017–2021. The Working Group was tasked by the Committee with leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment for consideration by the Committee and leading up to the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.
4. At its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the Committee on Environmental Policy requested the secretariat and UNEP, working in close cooperation with the EEA, to prepare a limited indicator-based and thematic assessment, subject to availability of resources. The Committee encouraged all Member States to provide the necessary funding to enable the preparation of the assessment.
5. Two publications were made available to the Ministers at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022): *Europe's Environment: The Seventh Pan-European Environmental Assessment*;¹ and a brochure that presented the key

¹ Available at <https://unece.org/info/Environment-Policy/Environmental-Monitoring-and-Assessment/pub/370327>.

messages and recommendations of the pan-European assessment and to address remaining gaps in the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System.²

6. The Ministers adopted a declaration that acknowledged the importance of regular, indicator-based environmental assessments, and confirmed their commitment to keeping the pan-European region under regular review in support of sustainable development and the transition to a circular, green and sustainable economy. Ministers also took note of the key findings of the seventh pan-European assessment, produced by UNECE and UNEP.

II. Possible approaches to an eighth assessment based on lessons learned from the seventh assessment

7. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, at its twenty-fifth session (Geneva and online, 2–3 May 2023) considered the issues set out below and requested the secretariat, together with the Working Group members, to develop a draft concept to be presented at the next session of the Working Group (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/2, para. 60(a).

8. In terms of content, the following approaches and ideas were considered:

(a) The indicator-based assessment proved to be useful and welcome in the seventh assessment. A similar set of indicators could be used to track progress, but new ones could also be included to monitor emerging themes and the transition to a circular economy and sustainable development;

(b) Gaps revealed in the seventh assessment needed to be closed;

(c) Besides addressing traditional themes (states and trends of air, biodiversity, water ...), integrated chapters could also be included (health, nexus ...);

(d) The next assessment could monitor progress towards policy targets and seventh assessment recommendations;

(e) A foresight chapter (with scenario building) could be included;

(f) It was also underlined the use should be made of the Shared Environmental Information System.

9. In terms of process, the following were considered:

(a) Sufficient financial resources would be needed at an early stage as there were very limited resources for the seventh assessment, which prevented having more integrated chapters, a foresight chapter, etc.;

(b) The timeline is until the next Ministerial Conference scheduled for about 2027, meaning that preparation of the next assessment should start in about 2025;

(c) Working Group experts should be involved in drafting and review;

(d) Organizations to be involved would include UNECE and UNEP, possibly also EEA and OECD. There was support for the involvement of EEA and reference to the relevant work of OECD;

(e) The possibility to link with the seventh edition of the UNEP Global Environment Outlook (GEO 7). There was support for creating synergies with other international reports. UNEP clarified that no regional GEOs are foreseen;

(f) The production of only a digital product might be considered, or of printing only a summary for policymakers.

² The latter part is extracted from the final report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/8).