

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

Meeting of the 2015/2016 Bureau
Geneva (Switzerland), 21-22 October 2015

Item 4 (d) of the Provisional
Agenda

**REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE JOINT TASK FORCE ON
ENVIRONMENTAL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS FOR EECCA COUNTRIES**

Note by the secretariat

*The Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators for EECCA countries was set up by the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in 2009. In October 2014, the CES Bureau approved the terms of reference for the continuation of work until 2018. However, CEP extended the group's mandate only for one year, planning to come back to the issue in October 2015 with revised terms of reference. **The Bureau approved the revised terms of reference for the Task Force on Environment Statistics and Indicators.***

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Task Force on Environmental Indicators was set up in 2009 jointly by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) with the aim to improve environmental statistics and strengthen environmental reporting in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe¹. The Joint Task Force held 11 meetings in the period 2009–2015. During this time, it revised all indicators covered by the *Guidelines for 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 (2007) Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Joint Task Force (JTF) updated the Guidelines and added important indicators that were initially not included.

2. During the last two years, the focus of the work of the Task Force has shifted from reviewing the indicators to the production and online sharing of 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. This work will support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the pan-European region.

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

3. The Task Force has been instrumental in building up close cooperation between the national statistical offices and the environmental agencies in EECCA countries, 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 Task Force.
4. The Joint Task Force noted that the target countries need support to address production challenges and methodological discrepancies, and to improve the online sharing and presentation of data. The members of the Joint Task Force expressed unanimous support to continuing the work to improve the production and sharing of the indicators from the Indicator Guidelines and to developing the necessary detailed guidance material to that end.
5. In October 2014, the CES Bureau approved new terms of reference of the Task Force to continue the work until 2018.
6. However, at its meeting on 28-31 October 2014, CEP extended the mandate of the Task Force for only one year. One of the main reasons for not extending it longer was a suggestion to possibly merge the Task Force with another group operating under CEP, namely the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA). WGEMA serves as the environmental knowledge and assessment network for the whole UNECE region. Its objective is to oversee and manage the establishment and operation of the Shared Environmental Information System, and lead the regular process of environmental assessments to keep the pan-European environment under review.
7. CEP requested the Secretariat to present a proposal to streamline the work of the two groups, and identify the advantages and disadvantages of merging WGEMA with the Joint Task Force.
8. The secretariat prepared a proposal for the next CEP meeting on 27-30 October 2015 (document ECE/CEP/2015/12). It is proposed that the two groups continue to operate under separate mandates. The terms of reference of both groups were revised to address the CEP request to streamline the work.
9. There are several reasons for not merging the groups: differences in geographical coverage, the involvement of different national agencies and the fact that there are no overlapping tasks. WGEMA targets all UNECE countries while JTF targets the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe with a strong capacity building component. Members of WGEMA are mainly the representatives of Environment Ministries and environmental agencies in countries, while JTF includes also representatives of national statistical offices.
10. Furthermore, merging the two groups would create a governance issue. WGEMA operates under the auspices of the Committee on Environmental Policy, while the JTF is operating under CEP and CES. By merging the two bodies, the policy-related tasks of the WGEMA, such as the environmental assessments, would be placed under the guidance of CES. This is not in accordance with the impartial and independent nature of official statistics according to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.
11. The revised Terms of Reference of the Joint Task Force took into consideration new and emerging issues such as the implementation of SEEA and supporting measurement of

sustainable development and green economy initiatives. The Joint Task Force will also assist WGEMA in evaluating the application of the internationally accepted methodologies and statistical standards in SEIS. The timeframe of JTF is aligned with SEIS which is planned to be fully operational for the Environment for Europe meeting in 2021.

12. It is also proposed to rename the ‘Task Force on Environmental Indicators’ to ‘Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators’. The new name takes into account that environment statistics and the UN Framework for Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) provide the fundamental basis for the work on SEEA, environment-related indicators and other environment-related information products.

13. The updated terms of reference for the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators are presented in the Annex.

ANNEX
TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE
JOINT TASK FORCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Joint Task Force (JTF) on Environmental Statistics and Indicators is the continuation of work of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (2009-2015). The group has revised all indicators covered by the Guidelines for 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 (2007) Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Joint Task Force (JTF) updated the Guidelines and added important indicators that were initially not included.

2. The current focus of the work of the Task Force has shifted from reviewing the indicators to the production and online sharing of 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 multilateral environmental agreements. This work will support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the pan-European region.

II. MANDATE

3. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators shall serve under the oversight and guidance of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of the European Statisticians (CES). It will report regularly to both CEP and CES. These terms of reference are valid for the period 2016–2021. CEP and CES will review the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force at their first meetings in 2021.

III. OBJECTIVE

4. The aim of the Joint Task Force is to assist the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (target countries) in their efforts to:

- (a) correctly apply the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) data methodologies and in line with statistical standards;
- (b) analyse and communicate environmental data;
- (c) implement the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA); and
- (d) apply environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development and green economy initiatives.

5. The Joint Task Force will also assist the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in evaluating the application of the internationally accepted methodologies and statistical standards in SEIS data production.

IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

6. The Joint Task Force shall:

(a) Provide advice to the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment on the application of SEIS data production methodologies by the target countries;

(b) Address specific challenges related to methodology and data quality in producing environmental data and indicators in line with the ECE Online Indicator Guidelines, international statistical standards, SEIS requirements and the recommendations made by the Working Group;

(c) Build capacity in the target countries for the compilation and integration of environmental data in support of measuring sustainable development and green economy initiatives;

(d) Provide a forum for sharing experience on the communication of environmental information to users, in line with the ECE recommendations on statistical communication and the recommendations made by the Working Group;

(e) Assist countries in developing the capacity for the implementation of SEEA.

7. The following outputs will be achieved:

(a) Advice on the application of SEIS data production methodologies is provided;

(b) Capacity in the target countries is gradually strengthened in applying SEIS data production methodologies;

(c) Capacity in the target countries is gradually strengthened for the compilation and integration of environmental data in support of measuring sustainable development and green economy initiatives;

(d) Capacity in the target countries is strengthened for communicating environmental information;

(e) Implementation of SEEA is gradually improved.

V. TIMETABLE

8. The Joint Task Force will prepare its annual time table of activities and regularly report to CEP and CES.

9. During 2016 the Joint Task Force will:

(a) Address challenges faced by the target countries in the application of data production methodologies related to any of the 67 initial data sets agreed to constitute SEIS. These data sets refer to the following environmental priorities: air pollution and ozone depletion; climate change; water; biodiversity; land and soil; and energy and waste. Specific challenges in two specific priority areas will be addressed;

(b) Inform the Working Group about the deficiencies in applying the data production methodologies by the target countries with regard to the SEIS data sets;

(c) Share experience and good practice between the target countries in the practical application of environmental indicators and SEIS for measuring progress in the transition to green economy gathered through pilot projects led by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);

- (d) Discuss the potential challenges facing target countries related to the production of indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (e) Discuss and share good practice for data communication in at least one priority area;
- (f) Formulate the specific support needed for the implementation of SEEA.

VI. METHODS OF WORK

10. The Joint Task Force shall meet at least once annually. The Task Force will also communicate through e-mail and other electronic collaboration platforms, such as wikis, during the period between meetings.

VII. MEMBERSHIP

11. The Joint Task Force shall be composed of experts representing national statistical offices and ministries or agencies dealing with environment statistics and assessment from the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Representatives of ministries and agencies dealing with economic issues may be invited to participate in the meetings. Other ECE countries are welcome to participate in the work.

12. The Joint Task Force shall elect its Chair and Vice-Chair for a term of two years, and these officers shall be eligible for re-election for one additional term.

VIII. SECRETARIAT SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

13. The ECE Environment and Statistical Divisions will provide the joint secretariat for the activities of the Joint Task Force.

14. The work will be supported by the European Environment Agency, OECD and the United Nations Environment Programme.

15. Donors will be invited to provide support for the Joint Task Force's activities.

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