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Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators

Eleventh session

Geneva, 30 June – 1 July 2016

Report of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators on its Eleventh 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 (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) to support the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia¹ on improving their environmental statistics and indicators. The work aims in the long term at strengthening environmental reporting and making environmental statistics available and comparable throughout the pan-European region. The Terms of Reference for the Joint Task Force (ECE/CEP/2015/12) were approved by the ECE Executive Committee on 31 March 2015 (ECE/EX/28).

2. The eleventh session of the Joint Task Force was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 30 June - 1 July 2016.

B. Attendance

3. Environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries attended the meeting: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan,

¹ The countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The countries of South-Eastern Europe include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

4. Representatives of the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), International Center for Environmental Research (ICFER), Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme Tajikistan, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) also attended the meeting.

5. The non-governmental organizations Covalence and Zoï Environmental Network were also represented at the meeting.

C. Organizational matters

6. The Joint Task Force (JTF) elected Ms. A. Yepbayeva (Kazakhstan) as Chair and Ms. N. Shashlova (Russian Federation) as Vice-Chair of the Task Force. Ms. Yepbayeva chaired the meeting.

7. The JTF adopted the report of its tenth session (ECE/CEP CES/GE.1/2015/2).

8. The JTF adopted the agenda for its eleventh session (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2016/1).

9. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:

- (a) Revised Terms of Reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators;
- (b) Implementation of the recommendations for the production and online sharing of the selected environmental indicators;
- (c) Waste statistics;
- (d) Environmental indicators in the context of current policy initiatives;
- (e) Measuring the Green Transformation;
- (f) Other business.

II. Revised Terms of Reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators

10. The secretariat presented the revised Terms of Reference of the JTF. The main objectives of the JTF are to assist countries in their efforts to apply the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) data methodologies in line with statistical standards, analyse and communicate environmental data, implement SEEA and apply environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development and green economy initiatives. The JTF will also assist the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) in evaluating the application of the internationally accepted methodologies and statistical standards in SEIS data production.

11. The new name of the JTF now also includes environmental statistics, as this takes into account that environment statistics and the UN Framework for Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) provide the fundamental basis for the work on environment-related indicators in the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), and other environment-related information products.

12. At its 21-22 October 2015 meeting, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians approved the JTF mandate until 2021 (ECE/CES/BUR/2015/OCT/21).

13. The Committee of Environmental Policy extended at its Twenty-first Session (27-30 October 2015) the JTF mandate for two years, until end 2017 (ECE/CEP/2015/1).

14. The secretariat explained the different mandates of the JTF and the WGEMA and how their activities are connected. The JTF is focussing on methodological issues and capacity building for the countries from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia whereas the WGEMA supports and reviews the establishment of SEIS for the entire pan-European region (ECE/CEP/2015/12).

Decisions and recommendations by the JTF

15. The JTF agreed to propose to the Committee on Environmental Policy at its next session to extend the mandate of the JTF to bring the timing of the work in line with the decision of the Conference of European Statisticians. The proposal for an extended mandate for the WGEMA will be submitted at the same time..

III. Implementation of the recommendations for the production and online sharing of the selected environmental indicators

16. The secretariat informed JTF about the Report on progress in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System in the pan-European region (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/8), focusing on the core indicators agreed by JTF. The report demonstrates a positive impact of SEIS data harmonization at the pan-European level. It shows the increasing capacities of countries to meet environmental reporting obligations and to provide comparable environmental information on national websites.

17. JTF suggested that countries should not limit themselves to the existing core indicators but also produce and share additional indicators from the ECE Indicator Guidelines to meet national requirements.

18. Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation presented the status of the implementation of the two core indicators ambient air quality (A2) and GHG emissions (B3).

19. Air quality monitoring in Belarus is done by the Hydrometeorological Institute. The results are available in interactive form on the website of the Institute and statistics on air quality are published on the website of Belstat. Statistics and indicators on greenhouse gas emissions are produced in accordance with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidelines, but land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) is not yet taken into account. There is a need to improve the used coefficients and quality control. Training on both indicators would also be needed.

20. In the Republic of Moldova all relevant air pollutants are measured by a network of 19 monitoring stations with the exception of PM10 and ground-level ozone. The results are made available in the form of indicators (e.g. number of days of exceedance of the norms) on the governmental portal and the website of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. There is a legal obligation for measuring PM10 and ground level ozone, but there are some problems with the technical infrastructure. Indicators on greenhouse gas emissions are available from the national greenhouse gas inventory from 2013 and onwards.

21. In the Russian Federation there are multiple laws controlling the collection of information on these two indicators. Information on air quality is available online since 2007 on the webpage of Roshydromet and is also shared through the National State of Environment Report. Time series of the greenhouse gas inventory started in 2006 and annual data according to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is available. The information on greenhouse gas emissions is published on the website of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, also in an interactive format.

22. The secretariat presented accessibility and data quality issues of selected indicators. The data presentation formats used by countries are still not harmonised. Based on the example of the *Data quality framework for environment statistics of Statistics New Zealand* it was shown that quality of environment statistics can be improved by a set of actions taken before and after data collection. Metadata is important in all steps of the production chain for ensuring high quality data. The JTF agreed that more capacity building is needed to train staff and to improve data quality. National legislation is important to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation.

23. Belarus mentioned that environmental information covering all the UNECE core indicators is now available in both English and Russian in an Excel format on the web.

24. Azerbaijan informed about annual intergovernmental meetings to discuss quality issues on environment statistics.

25. Tajikistan reported that the number of produced environmental indicators will be increased. Tajikistan also noted that an annual survey is conducted to check the satisfaction among users of statistics.

26. The Republic of Moldova informed about a revision of the data production tables. All necessary information will be available by the end of the year.

27. United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) presented the *United Nations Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES)*. FDES defines the scope of environment statistics, and provides a hierarchical presentation of data items. It also includes a set of recommended statistics for priority implementation. FDES is accompanied by the *Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT)*, and the *Manual for the Basic Set of Environment Statistics*. The purpose of ESSAT is to help NSOs in stocktaking of existing environment statistics and potential data sources. It supports the development of environment statistical programmes. UNSD informed that a *Manual on the Basic Set of Environment Statistics* is currently being developed. It will give practical guidance on producing and disseminating environmental statistics.

Decisions and recommendations by JTF

28. Countries are encouraged to use the UNSD Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) for self-assessment of the progress in implementing the ECE core set of environmental indicators and their underpinning statistics. The Eurasian-Economic Commission offered to translate ESSAT into Russian.

29. Subject to the availability of funding, the Joint Task Force proposed to organise sub-regional and national training workshops to exchange experiences and get guidance on the development of online databases, sharing of environmental information and SEIS data production methodologies. UNECE and UNEP are looking for funds for such activities (e.g. via UN Development Account). These capacity building activities should be aligned with the recently launched ENI-SEIS II (2016-2020) project of the European Environment

Agency in the 6 countries of the EECCA sub-region, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

30. JTF encouraged all member countries to provide the possibility of downloading data for the ECE core set of indicators using the production tables of the UNECE Online Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators². In addition to the national language the data should also be made available in English. Provision of more detailed information, metadata, download possibilities in different formats and use of interactive tools is also encouraged in accordance with SEIS performance indicators and the recommendations made by the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment.

31. The need for specific guidelines for quality assurance (QA) of environment statistics and metadata as part of the SEIS self-assessment was highlighted. The Joint Task Force called for further action towards producing such guidelines, which should complement existing QA frameworks used in countries and by international bodies. Countries asked for case studies and examples of good practices in quality assurance of environment statistics. The integration of simple validation tools into the UNECE production table (similar to validation tools already used by Eurostat and UNSD) could be a first practical step to support quality assurance.

IV. Waste statistics

32. The secretariat recalled the decision of the tenth session of the Joint Task Force to continue addressing the challenges related to waste statistics. It was noted that current waste statistics do not tell the full story and that concepts are sometimes confusing. It was proposed to the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES Bureau) to establish an international task force for the development of a waste statistics framework. A comprehensive framework on waste statistics should take into account existing concepts and classifications used by UNSD, Eurostat and OECD. It should complete the picture in particular with non-managed waste, including informally and illegally collected waste. In addition, more work is needed to harmonise terms and definitions. The waste tables of the *UNECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators* should be fully aligned with the tables of the UNSD/UNEP waste questionnaire, taking into account regional aspects. It was also noted that emerging issues (e.g. electronic waste (e-waste), food waste, waste recovery by informal sector etc.) should be addressed in the future.

33. UNSD informed JTF about the two environmental data collections (waste statistics and water statistics) which are carried out in cooperation with UNEP. The presentation focussed on response rates and data quality issues related to the UNSD/UNEP waste questionnaire. Data completeness and data quality remain a challenge (in particular for developing countries) and national capacity constraints (financial, human, technical) continue to be a concern for many countries. Inadequate institutional setups and lack of collaboration between different national data providers are additional constraints. Capacity building is key to improve statistics on both waste and water. Given the importance of producing high quality official statistics for informed decision-making, it is critical to improve the production of these environment statistics.

34. Four country presentations on waste statistics were given by Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Netherlands and Ukraine, followed by a presentation of the United Nations University (UNU) on electronic waste.

² <http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html>

35. In Armenia the Ministry of Environment and the NSO are responsible for waste statistics. The good institutional cooperation is based on a legal framework. The Ministry of Environment prepares different sets of information for different users, including general aggregated data, multifunctional analyses, databases and monitoring data. The main problems in waste statistics are unregistered parts of waste and not enough information on landfill sites. Another problem is the use different terms, such as urban waste, domestic waste and municipal waste by different organisations.

36. In Azerbaijan the production of waste statistics is regulated by law. Azerbaijan produces time series of waste generated by different economic activities and households. Azerbaijan currently cannot produce statistics on municipal waste as there is no agreed definition. Another important problem is the use of conversion factors, in particular the conversion from volume to weight.

37. The Netherlands have more than 40 years of experience on waste statistics, but still consider this as a difficult topic. To have the full set of statistics on waste generation and waste management there is still a time lag of 2 years. Many data sources are used to produce waste statistics. One concern is the problem of comparing waste indicators between countries. The main reason for this problem is the different use of terms and definitions (e.g. for waste and by-product). For example, Denmark produces 700 kg municipal waste per capita per year, the similar economy Sweden only 400 kg. Measuring only waste generation, waste collection and treatment might not tell the complete story. There are significant amounts of generated waste of which the destination is unknown (in particular for electronic waste).

38. Ukraine presented its legal framework, waste classification and some figures on waste data. It was suggested to include mineral waste in international waste statistics as this can be a dominating type of waste in some countries. Difficulties with understanding the concept “waste”, such as the boundary between secondary materials and waste were highlighted. This can lead to situations where figures on the amount of waste managed exceed the amount of waste generated. Problems related to conversion from volume to weight were also mentioned. In addition, the presentation showed some problems related to institutional cooperation.

39. Georgia gave an example on the difficulty to produce waste statistics with data received from different data sources. To address this problem, Georgia set up a joint group with participants from the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection and the National Statistical Office.

40. Statistics on electronic waste, global trends and societal impacts were presented by the representative of the United Nations University (UNU). UNU had conducted a survey on e-waste in EECCA countries on which half of the countries have responded. Results from this survey indicate that there is lack of data at the national level.

Decisions and recommendations by the JTF

41. JTF will bring conceptual and methodological problems related to waste statistics to the attention of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES Bureau). Waste is one of the two SEIS priority areas for the current Joint Task Force activities period.

42. It was proposed to harmonise all UNECE waste tables with the current version of the UNSD waste statistics tables, taking into account regional aspects.

V. Environmental indicators in the context of current policy initiatives

43. The secretariat informed about developments of global policy initiatives, which require environmental statistics, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Climate Agreement.

44. The secretariat presented links between the indicators from the *UNECE Guidelines on Environmental Indicators* and indicators for SDGs and OECD Green Growth (GGI). Twelve out of the fourteen core indicators from the *UNECE Guidelines on Environmental Indicators* support the production of SDG indicators and/or GGIs. Seventeen of the other (non-core) environmental indicators also support SDG and GGI. The greatest overlaps are for indicators on energy (G1, G2, G3 and G4) and waste (I3 and I4).

Decisions and recommendations by the JTF

45. As information on energy supply and consumption is important for several indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals and for some of the OECD Green Growth Indicators, the JTF decided to add the following energy indicators to the list of 14 core indicators for priority production and sharing: final energy consumption (G1), total primary energy supply (G2), energy intensity (G3) and renewable energy consumption (G4).

VI. Measuring the Green Transformation

46. OECD informed the Joint Task Force about the report *Measuring the Green Transformation of the Economy: A Guide for EaP Countries*. The report will be published by the end of 2016 as part of the EaP GREEN project. OECD talked about aligning the OECD GGI and the SDG indicators. Key steps for devising a set of GGIs, including the use of GGIs in practice, were discussed.

47. Kazakhstan made a presentation on the implementation of GGIs and the SDG indicators in the country. Kazakhstan is currently developing GGIs for all fields suggested by OECD. Most of the required indicators have been implemented.

48. Ukraine informed the JTF about the usage of OECD GGIs in Ukraine. From the 100 indicators proposed by OECD, 65 are now being collected in Ukraine. The priority indicators for Ukraine are related to energy and resource efficiency, waste collection and emissions. From the list of 65 indicators, 22 have been proposed for regular monitoring.

Decisions and recommendations by the Task Force:

49. The JTF agreed to continue to work on Green Economy in this forum.

VII. Adoption of decisions and recommendations

50. The decisions and recommendation were adopted during the closing session.

51. The next meeting of the JTF will be held on 17-18 November 2016 in Geneva.

VIII. Other business

52. The secretariat informed about the two upcoming meetings *Joint OECD/UNECE Seminar on the Implementation of SEEA* (3-4 October 2016 in Geneva) and the *Expert Forum on climate change-related statistics* (5-7 October in Geneva).

53. The JTF thanked donors — Norway, the Russian Federation and Switzerland — for the financial support provided to organize the eleventh session. The Chair then closed the meeting.
