

Issue 7, August 2020





COVID-19 pandemic

Nowadays it seems that no article or newsletter can avoid beginning with the acronym “COVID-19”. The pandemic has inevitably interrupted and disrupted our work in the field of environmental monitoring and assessment.

At the same time, the pandemic has amply demonstrated that informed decision-making in times of crisis requires integrated, relevant, timely, comparable and easily accessible information, robust data and indicators, and their appropriate assessment. To have these in place, and to ensure that necessary measures are taken on time to protect the most vulnerable, adequate monitoring programmes, data and information management systems, assessment and reporting routines and methods must be in place.

This has been the focus of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment since its establishment.

22nd session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

The imposition of travel bans and quarantine rules prevented a face-to-face meeting of the Working Group back in May 2020, as planned and it was therefore postponed to October 2020.

Because of the now-crowded calendar of meetings organized from the Palais des Nations in Geneva and the continuing restrictions on how, for example, interpreters work, among other constraints, we have limited possibilities to organize fully serviced meetings.

Nonetheless, it is likely that two meetings under the UNECE Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme will take place this autumn:

- 17th session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (26 October 2020) – for latest updates and full documentation see <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54323>
- 22nd session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (27 October 2020) – see <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51963>

Each meeting is being reduced from two days of six hours each to one day of four hours. These arrangements are still pending confirmation, but the time available to go through the agendas will be heavily curtailed.

The Working Group will be asked to consider the draft annual timetable of activities for 2021 and draft mandate and terms of reference for the period 2022–2026, approve the outline for the SEIS final progress review report and consider a first draft of the report, and discuss the development of the pan-European environmental assessment.

Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS)

Some countries in the UNECE region have completed online reports on their progress in implementation of SEIS. These reports will be used to generate a final review report on the establishment of SEIS in Europe and Central Asia for consideration by the Committee on Environmental Policy, with a view to its subsequent forwarding to the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (likely to be held only in 2022) as an information document. However, for now, we have rather few such reports and the extraction of the reports from an online reporting platform is also limiting the scope of information. Still, a partial draft review report should be presented to the Working Group in October.

Please keep going with the reporting!



Pan-European Environmental Assessment

The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment has been tasked by the Committee on Environmental Policy with leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment. UNECE has begun, in consultation with UNEP, to work on a limited indicator-based and thematic assessment, which would become the 7th pan-European environmental assessment under the Environment for Europe Ministerial Process.

To date, resources are limited, with only one significant financial contribution earmarked for the assessment. Financial contributions are therefore very much required to produce even the most basic of assessments.

The secretariat is giving priority to the two Conference themes – Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure; and Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism – and then to the key environmental challenges – biodiversity protection and climate change.

Progress will be reported to the Working Group in October.

United Nations Development Account project “Improved environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus”

The UNDA project has also been slowed by the pandemic. It has now been redesigned to achieve as much as possible in the remaining period to the end of 2021, using electronic tools and virtual events. These should begin in the coming months.

Further information can be provided to the Working Group in October.



Upcoming relevant events (with all dates subject to change)

17th session of Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators

26 October 2020, online

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54323>

22nd session of Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

27 October 2020, online

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51963>

Task Force on Target-Setting and Reporting under the Protocol on Water and Health

3 November 2020

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=52847>

17th meeting of Task Force on Access to Information under the Aarhus Convention

16-17 November 2020

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53318>

8th meeting of Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs

16-17 December 2020

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53322>

26th session of Committee on Environmental Policy

9-11 November 2020

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54631>

The **Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment** was established in 2000 by the Committee on Environmental Policy to serve as an instrument for UNECE member States to provide recommendations, propose action plans, and improve coordination of international initiatives concerned with environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting.

For more information on the Working Group please visit:

<https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/environmental-monitoring-and-assessment/envema.html>

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