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Committee on Environmental Policy

Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

Twenty-third session

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

Decision approving the extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

I. Background

1. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment is a subsidiary body of the Committee on Environmental Policy, first established in 2000. The body serves all member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) as a platform to exchange good practice and information in the areas of environmental monitoring and assessment and related areas, as well as to develop action plans and strengthen initiatives. These activities support environmental decision-making and help to streamline international environmental reporting in the region. The Working Group's terms of reference are strongly linked to the Environment for Europe Ministerial process.
2. The Working Group's current mandate and terms of reference in annex are for the period 2017–2021 and were approved by the ECE Executive Committee at its ninety-first meeting (Geneva, 24 March 2017) (ECE/EX/2017/L.2).
3. The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference was expected to be held in Nicosia in 2021. However, due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Committee on Environmental Policy decided at its twenty-sixth session (Geneva, 9 and 10 November 2020) to reschedule the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference for 5–7 October 2022. The Committee also decided to extend the current mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group until mid-2023, to allow the Working Group to prepare a new draft mandate and terms of reference after the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, and requested the secretariat to submit this decision on extension to the ECE Executive Committee for approval as contained in document ECE/EX/2017/L.2.¹
4. The Executive Committee approved, during its 114th meeting on 12 February 2021, the extension of the current mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on

¹ See List of Decisions (as adopted by the silence procedure completed on 19 November 2020). Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-sixth-session-committee-environmental-policy>.

Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, as contained in the annex and in document ECE/EX/2017/L.2, until mid-2023.

5. The mandate and terms of reference available in annex were developed in 2016. Many of the activities contained in document ECE/EX/2017/L.2 are still valid for 2022–mid-2023 and will be continued or completed during this period, including the pan-European environmental assessment. The mandate and terms of reference will furthermore be complemented by a detailed annual timetable of activities for 2022, as well as for 2023. The draft annual timetable of activities for 2022 as contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/3 will be presented at the twenty-third session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and forwarded to the Committee on Environmental Policy for approval.

Annex

Mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment¹

I. Mandate

1. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment shall serve as the environmental knowledge and assessment network for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, under the oversight of the Committee on Environmental Policy. It shall report annually to the Committee on its achievements and the implementation or modification of the objectives and activities set out herein. These terms of reference are valid for a period of five years, until the Committee's regular session in 2021.²

II. Objectives

2. The aim of the Working Group, under the oversight of the Committee, is to:

(a) Assist in the establishment and operation of national information systems in line with the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in Europe and Central Asia by 2021;

(b) Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2020;

(c) Initiate a process of consultation between ECE member States and other institutions and networks with relevant expertise in the area, as appropriate, on the development of a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks and, as part of this process, develop an inclusive platform for countries to discuss the integration of environmental, economic and social considerations with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the green economy and other related areas of work;

(d) Engage in capacity-building assistance with regard to specific challenges in environmental monitoring and assessment, including the development and improvement of national environmental monitoring systems, their technical specifications and modernization, and the collection of environmental knowledge through national monitoring systems in the ECE countries. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (Joint Task Force) will continue to carry out all activities relating to statistical capacity development for countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

III. Planned activities and outputs

3. The Working Group shall:

(a) Assist in the establishment and operation of national information systems in line with SEIS in Europe and Central Asia, and in particular:

¹ Annotated version of document ECE/EX/2017/L.2 approved by the ECE Executive Committee at its ninety-first meeting.

² Extended to June 2023 by decision of the ECE Executive Committee at its 114th session.

- (i) Continue supporting the establishment of SEIS with regard to its specific content and principles in support of regular environmental assessment processes and reporting;
 - ii) Continue cooperating with the Joint Task Force in its work on environmental statistics and indicators, associated data sets, and accompanying environmental information and data necessary to establish SEIS;
 - (iii) Regularly evaluate the performance of ECE countries in establishing and implementing SEIS against the SEIS targets and performance indicators adopted by the Committee;
 - (iv) Contribute to the process of the Environment for Europe mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes in 2018;
 - (v) Prepare a mid-term and a final report for the Committee on the establishment and implementation of SEIS leading up to 2021;
 - (vi) Provide annual recommendations on how SEIS can be further strengthened in European and Central Asian countries;
- (b) Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2020, and in particular:
- (i) Bring together experts involved in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Environment Outlook process and the European Environment Agency's European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET), including interested parties, to discuss and oversee the regular pan-European environmental assessment;
 - (ii) Discuss and detail regional priorities concerning the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting, involving also other thematic networks, including those under the multilateral environmental agreements, in the discussion;
 - (iii) Oversee the implementation of proposed recommendations and guidance provided through the consultation process on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting;
- (c) Initiate a process of consultation on the development of a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks and, as part of this process, develop an inclusive platform to discuss the integration of environmental, economic and social considerations regarding the 2030 Agenda, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the green economy and other related areas of work, and in particular:
- (i) Coordinate a consultative process, involving all relevant thematic networks and interested parties, including secretariats of conventions and other institutions, at both the regional and national levels, to elaborate the working modalities of a regional network of networks;
 - (ii) Cooperate with the Joint Task Force to ensure that all planned and future activities are synergetic and streamlined;
 - (iii) Develop capacities to engage other communities and networks, such as the Group on Earth Observations, to discuss how environmental, social and economic information and data can be integrated and utilized in decision-making and how to present environmental information on geospatial platforms;
 - (iv) Operationalize proposed recommendations and guidance provided through the consultative process to ensure the sustainable implementation of a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks;
 - (v) Publish outcomes from the Working Group's collaborative activities (e.g., best practices, guidelines and lessons learned) to share outputs and guide future activities in the area;

(d) Engage in capacity-building assistance addressing specific challenges related to environmental monitoring and assessment and environmental knowledge maintained through national monitoring systems in the European and Central Asian countries. The identification of specific challenges (e.g., air quality, water and waste monitoring) will depend on regional and national capacity gaps and the identification of priority areas for action to be defined by the Working Group members. In particular, the implementation of all subsequent activities will depend on the mobilization of resources to enable the Working Group to organize and offer additional capacity-building assistance to enhance environmental monitoring and assessment capabilities. Such activities include:

(i) Detailing regional and national capacity gaps, in collaboration with the Joint Task Force, in information and data needed for producing the ECE set of environmental indicators, the European Environment Agency core set of indicators, OECD green growth indicators and Sustainable Development Goal indicators. This will include identifying data and information gaps in the target countries;

(ii) Supporting countries in the development of regional and national indicator frameworks to monitor the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, and activities to support their implementation, including the review and establishment of national reporting mechanisms, procedures and methodological approaches associated with the Sustainable Development Goal indicators in all ECE countries;

(iii) Engaging and liaising directly with other relevant knowledge-sharing actors working on capacity-building in related areas of work, such as the Group on Earth Observations, Global Environment Facility-funded Cross-Cutting Capacity Development projects and UNEP Live, throughout the pan-European region;

(iv) Implementing capacity-building activities to provide assistance in accordance with priority areas of action identified for targeted ECE countries.

4. The following outputs will be achieved leading up to 2021:³

(a) SEIS data sets, as contained in the ECE Online Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, will be gradually reviewed in collaboration with the Joint Task Force and as part of refining SEIS progress reporting;

(b) Assistance will be provided to target countries for reporting on SEIS establishment and starting preparations for the mid-term and final SEIS performance reports in 2018 and 2021, respectively;

(c) Recommendations and advice will be provided to ECE countries to improve their SEIS performance;

(d) Working modalities of the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks will be defined and operationalized;

(e) Assistance will be provided in the preparation of the regular pan-European environmental assessment and other relevant state-of-the-environment reports;

(f) Support will be given for the preparation of regional and national indicator frameworks to monitor the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and the establishment of national reporting mechanisms, procedures and methodological approaches associated with Sustainable Development Goal indicators;

(g) Thematic conferences, meetings and workshops will be organized to prepare publications that address the integration of environmental and economic data, subject to the availability of funding;

(h) Focused capacity-building activities will be carried out to address specific national priorities, including the preparation of training materials and the provision of advisory services, subject to the availability of funding.

³ To be continued until mid-2023.

IV. Timetable

5. The Working Group shall prepare an annual timetable of activities and achievements, as an official document, and regularly report to the Committee. This will ensure that the Working Group can accommodate new demands over time and allow the Committee to comment and monitor ongoing and future activities. The Working Group shall also endeavour to submit a mid-term review of progress of its work to the Committee as a stocktaking exercise.
6. During 2017 the Working Group shall:⁴
- (a) Assist in the review of the ECE core environmental indicators and associated data sets identified as priority areas by the Joint Task Force and taking into account the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting;
 - (b) Operationalize the online SEIS reporting application through UNEP Live, in collaboration with UNEP, and present the outcomes to the Committee at its twenty-third session;
 - (c) Present the working modalities of the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks to the Committee at its twenty-third session;
 - (d) Organize a consultation and workshop to detail regional and national priorities regarding monitoring and assessment capabilities needed for compiling environmentally related Sustainable Development Goal indicators as part of defining priority areas of action for the Working Group for 2018;
 - (e) Organize a thematic workshop that addresses how environmental and economic data can be integrated, and engage other communities and networks, such as the Group on Earth Observations, in these activities;
 - (f) Continue efforts to mobilize resources and support from regional and international organizations to enable the Working Group to increase its capacity-building assistance.
7. The new mandate of the Working Group will be reviewed and amended by the Committee following the Environment for Europe mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes in 2018.

V. Methods of work

8. The Working Group shall meet at least once annually. It shall also communicate through email and other electronic collaborative platforms, such as its newsletter and social networks, in the period between meetings.
9. Additional meetings, workshops and capacity-building activities will be organized subject to the availability of funding.

VI. Membership

10. The Working Group shall be composed of members from all of the ECE member States. They should represent the national institutions dealing with environmental monitoring, knowledge and assessment.
11. The Working Group shall also involve representatives of programmes and policies and multilateral environmental agreements dealing with the collection of environmental data

⁴ This paragraph was included in the document approved by the ECE Executive Committee at its ninety-first meeting in 2017. For the years 2021 and 2022, detailed annual timetables of activities will be prepared as usual by the Working Group and forwarded to the Committee on Environmental Policy for approval.

and information and the generation of environmental assessments — whether covering the environment as a whole, or only certain themes — as well as expert teams.

12. The Working Group shall elect a chair and two vice-chairs for a term of up to two years, ensuring a regional balance in the nominations. The chair and vice-chairs shall be eligible for re-election for one additional term.

VII. Secretariat support and resources

13. In its operation, the Working Group shall be serviced by the ECE secretariat, supported by UNEP and the European Environment Agency, and guided by the relevant procedures established by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

14. Donors will be invited to provide support for the Working Group's activities.
