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**Economic Commission for Europe****Committee on Environmental Policy****Working Group on Environmental  
Monitoring and Assessment****Twenty-second session**  
Geneva, 27 October 2020**Report of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring  
and Assessment on its twenty-second session****I. Introduction****A. Background**

1. At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25–27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the new mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 32 and annex II). The mandate set out objectives leading up to 2021 that followed up on the ministerial declaration (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1) adopted at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016).
2. The mandate of the Working Group states that the Working Group should review progress made by countries in Europe and Central Asia in establishing a Shared Environmental Information System by 2021. The Working Group should also identify and explore options for establishing a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks and, as part of that process, develop an inclusive platform for countries to discuss the integration of environmental, economic and social considerations regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the green economy and other related areas of work. Moreover, the Working Group should 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 engage in capacity-building assistance regarding specific challenges in environmental monitoring and assessment.
3. The twenty-second session of the Working Group was held in Geneva in a hybrid format, on 27 October 2020.

**B. Attendance**

4. Environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries attended the meeting: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.



5. Representatives of the European Commission, the European Environment Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also attended the meeting.

6. Furthermore, the Institute for Sustainable Innovation (Russian Federation) and the University of Geneva participated in the meeting.

### **C. Procedural matters**

7. In the absence of the Chair, Ms. Maia Javakhishvili (Georgia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

8. The secretariat reminded the Working Group that, in 2021, it would be expected to elect its new Chair and two Vice-Chairs. In compliance with the terms of reference, the Working Group should 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 should be eligible for re-election for one additional term. The current Chair and Vice-Chairs had already been elected for two terms and could not be re-elected. Members were invited to start consultations on possible candidates prior to the next session, paying attention to gender balance and the empowerment of women during the nominations.

9. The Acting Chair informed the members of the Working Group about special procedures adopted by the ECE Executive Committee on decision-making for formal meetings with remote participation, including the meeting of the Working Group. The Acting Chair explained that the decisions of the Working Group would therefore be considered as having been agreed *ad referendum*, meaning that they would be subject to agreement by the Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva. That agreement would be sought through a silence procedure that would conclude on 6 November 2020, with the secretariat informing the members of the Working Group if the silence was broken.

#### **Working Group decisions and recommendations**

10. The Working Group adopted the agenda for its twenty-second session (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/1/Rev.1).

## **II. Adoption of the report of the twenty-first session of the Working Group**

11. The secretariat summarized the outcomes of the twenty-first session of the Working Group (Geneva, 6 and 7 May 2019) as contained in the report of that session (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2019/2) and informed the Working Group of the status of implementation of the decisions and recommendations that had been made at the twenty-first session, as well as of the consideration of the Working Group's activities by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019).

12. The secretariat invited the Working Group to adopt the report.

#### **Working Group decisions and recommendations**

13. The Working Group adopted the report of its twenty-first session and noted the information provided by the secretariat on the status of implementation of decisions and recommendations from its twenty-first session.

## **III. Implementing the mandate and terms of reference**

14. The Working Group's terms of reference required that it prepare an annual timetable of activities and achievements (ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II, para. 5).

15. The secretariat had shared a draft timetable of activities for 2021 with members of the Working Group for written feedback in May 2020. No amendments had been requested by

the members of the Working Group at that time. The Working Group was therefore invited to approve the revised draft annual timetable of activities for 2021 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/3/Rev.1).

16. The secretariat provided informal information on the financial resources available to support meetings of the Working Group and its other activities.

17. The secretariat provided an overview of several international projects related to the activities of the Working Group.

18. In addition, international organizations were invited to report briefly on extrabudgetary projects related to the activities of the Working Group, as appropriate. A representative of UNEP presented the outcomes and results of its projects on “Environmental Information in Central Asia: Lessons Learned from UNEP’s capacity-building in support of SEIS”.

19. The secretariat reminded the Working Group that its current terms of reference were valid for a period of five years until the regular session of the Committee on Environmental Policy in 2021. The secretariat had shared draft new terms of reference for the period 2022–2026 with members of the Working Group for written feedback in May 2020. Based on feedback received, the secretariat presented a revised draft of the terms of reference for the period 2022–2026 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/4/Rev.1), for discussion and consideration by the Working Group.

### **Working Group decisions and recommendations**

20. The Working Group:

(a) Adopted the revised draft annual timetable of activities for 2021 as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/3/Rev.1, while recognizing that it might need to be adjusted in the light of a possible change to the timing of the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

(b) Requested the secretariat to prepare an informal document for the next session of the Committee on Environmental Policy setting out the necessary changes to the annual timetable of activities 2021 should the next Ministerial Conference be rescheduled to 2022;

(c) Took note of the financial resources available for the implementation of activities under the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme;

(d) Requested its members and the secretariat to continue their fundraising efforts to enable the full implementation of activities planned for 2021, including for preparation of the pan-European environmental assessment;

(e) Took note of information provided on other international projects related to the activities of the Working Group;

(f) Invited its members and representatives of other projects to provide regular updates to the Working Group on recent developments in project implementation;

(g) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the Working Group’s wish to extend its current mandate and terms of reference until at least 2022 should the next Ministerial Conference be rescheduled to 2022;

(h) Also requested the secretariat to prepare a document setting out the extension of the current mandate and terms of reference and to present it at the next session of the Working Group.

## **IV. Reporting on the Shared Environmental Information System to support a regular process of environmental assessment**

21. The terms of reference for the Working Group specified that it should: regularly evaluate the performance of ECE countries in establishing and implementing the Shared Environmental Information System against the Shared Environmental Information System

targets and performance indicators adopted by the Committee; and prepare a mid-term and a final report for the Committee on the establishment and implementation of the System leading up to 2021 (ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II, para. 3 (a) (iii) and (v)).

22. During its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had invited the Working Group to oversee the preparation of a final review report on the establishment of the System in Europe and Central Asia for consideration by the Committee, with a view to its subsequent forwarding to the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference as an information document. It had also encouraged all member States in Europe and Central Asia to report on their progress in establishing the System, using the online reporting tool developed for that purpose (ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 37 (i) and (j)).

23. At its twenty-first session, the Working Group had requested the secretariat to prepare a draft outline of the final review of progress in establishing the System, to be considered by the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators at its sixteenth session (Geneva, 28 and 29 October 2019) (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2019/2, para. 29 (c)). The Joint Task Force, at its sixteenth session, had taken note of the draft outline of the progress report (ECE/CEP/GE.1/2019/2, para. 40).

24. The secretariat had subsequently shared the draft of the outline with members of the Working Group for written feedback in May 2020. The Working Group was invited to approve the revised final draft outline of the final review report further developed by the secretariat (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/5/Rev.1).

25. A representative of UNEP then presented the Shared Environmental Information System online reporting tool, developed with the support of UNEP, and used for the final progress review.

26. The secretariat subsequently presented a first draft of the final progress review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/7), reported on lessons learned and presented the tentative timeline for the finalization of the review of the establishment of the System by 2021.

27. The members of the Working Group were invited to report on their experiences in the use of the online reporting tool and to agree on a process for the finalization of the progress review. Austria, Georgia and Serbia reported on lessons learned in using the online tool and informed the Working Group about the usefulness of the regular reporting process on the Shared Environmental Information System.

28. The secretariat informed the Working Group about the finalized publication “Guidelines on the Shared Environmental Information System reporting mechanism”.<sup>1</sup>

## **Working Group decisions and recommendations**

29. The Working Group:

(a) Adopted the revised outline of the final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/5/Rev.1);

(b) Took note of the revised timeline due to the limited number of self-assessments submitted for the Shared Environmental Information System final progress review and requested all member States to submit their self-assessments by 15 December 2020 at the latest to the secretariat through the use of the Shared Environmental Information System online tool;

(c) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the outcomes of the Working Group’s discussion on the Shared Environmental Information System final progress review and sought the Committee’s support in mobilizing member States to submit their self-assessments;

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://unece.org/environment-policy/publications/guidelines-shared-environmental-information-system-reporting-0>.

(d) Requested the secretariat to prepare a revised version of the document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/7, based on additional self-assessments submitted by member States for the Working Group's next session;

(e) Took note of the finalized publication "Guidelines on the Shared Environmental Information System reporting mechanism".

## **V. Regular pan-European environmental assessment supported by the Shared Environmental Information System**

30. The Working Group had been tasked with leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment (ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II, para. 2 (b)) for consideration by the Committee on Environmental Policy and leading up to the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

31. During its twenty-first session, the Working Group had considered the draft concept for the next pan-European environmental assessment (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2019/6) and had recommended that option 2 – an indicator-based and thematic assessment – be used as a basis for preparing a detailed proposal on the pan-European assessment. The Working Group had also requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its twenty-fifth session, of the outcome of the agenda item and of the recommendation made regarding the pan-European assessment, and to share the detailed proposal with potential donors prior to the Committee's session (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2019/2, paras. 37–39).

32. During its twenty-fifth session, the Committee had welcomed the information provided by the secretariat and UNEP on the next pan-European assessment and had selected option 3 from among the options for the next pan-European environmental assessment, as contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2019/6, subject to the availability of resources. It had requested the secretariat and UNEP, in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency, to prepare a limited indicator-based and thematic assessment, and to regularly inform the Bureau of progress made. The Committee had encouraged all member States to provide the necessary funding to enable the preparation of the assessment (ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 37 (k) (i)–(iii)).

33. The secretariat had subsequently shared the updated draft outline of the pan-European environmental assessment with members of the Working Group for written feedback in May 2020.

34. The secretariat presented the revised updated draft outline of the next pan-European assessment (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/6/Rev.1), as prepared by the secretariat and UNEP and based on comments received from members of the Working Group. The Working Group was invited to consider the revised updated draft outline.

35. The secretariat provided an overview of the latest developments related to the assessment, as well as a timeline for producing the next pan-European environmental assessment.

36. A consultant hired by ECE then presented the preliminary selected indicators and findings related to the "Biodiversity and ecosystems" section of the assessment.

37. In addition, the Working Group was invited to identify partners, institutions and experts who could contribute to the development and review of specific parts of the next pan-European assessment and discuss how to mobilize additional financial and in-kind support for the assessment.

### **Working Group decisions and recommendations**

38. The Working Group:

(a) Approved the final outline of the pan-European assessment set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2020/6/Rev.1, while noting that it might not be possible to address all

environmental themes listed, themes needed to be addressed in an integrated manner and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic should be considered;

(b) Took note of the status of and timeline for the next pan-European environmental assessment;

(c) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the outcomes of the agenda item and the suggestions made regarding the pan-European assessment;

(d) Requested its members to provide information on partners, indicators and case studies to the secretariat by 15 November 2020;

(e) Requested an update on the assessment at its next session.

## **VI. Sharing and integration of economic, social and environmental data with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

39. One objective of the Working Group was to discuss interlinkages between environmental, economic and social considerations regarding the 2030 Agenda, the green economy and other related areas of work.

40. In the light of the shortened meeting due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting time constraints, members of the Working Group were invited to submit proposals in written form to the secretariat by 15 November 2020 on:

(a) How the work on environmental information, data, indicators, including green growth indicators of international partners (OECD, UNEP, etc.), and national reports on green growth would support the development of the pan-European environmental assessment, including for the selected themes of the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

(b) How the Working Group could continue its work on integrating economic, social and environmental data into the Shared Environmental Information System;

(c) Topics to consider for the twenty-third session of the Working Group (Geneva, 3 and 4 May 2021).

### **Working Group decisions and recommendations**

41. The Working Group invited its members to submit suggestions and answers to the questions on agenda item 6 related to “Sharing and integration of economic, social and environmental data with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in written form to the secretariat by 15 November 2020.

## **VII. Progress in environmental monitoring and assessment, including institutional and regulatory mechanisms and infrastructure at the national level**

42. Members of the Working Group, and especially those representing countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, were invited to report in written form on major actions taken at the national level to strengthen environmental monitoring and assessment since the twenty-first session of the Working Group, which could then be uploaded to the website of the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme. The secretariat had circulated a template to member States prior to the meeting.

43. A representative of the European Environment Agency reported on the lessons learned from the European Neighbourhood Instrument Shared Environmental Information System II East project.

## VIII. Other business and closure of the meeting

44. The Acting Chair informed the Working Group about the dates for its next session in 2021.

45. The Acting Chair, with the assistance of the secretariat, summarized the conclusions and decisions of the Working Group. The secretariat informed the Working Group that the report of the meeting and the list of participants would be finalized by the secretariat for circulation to the Working Group after the meeting. Those documents would be posted on the meeting website.

46. The Working Group noted that its next session was scheduled to be held in Geneva, on 3 and 4 May 2021.

47. The Working Group welcomed a summary of conclusions and recommendations and approved the decisions made *ad referendum* during the twenty-second session.

48. The Acting Chair closed the meeting.

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