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## Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Conference of European Statisticians

### Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators

**Eighteenth session**

Geneva, 18 and 19 October 2021

## Report of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators on its eighteenth 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 and the Conference of European Statisticians to support countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to produce, share and use environmental information following international standards and guidelines, including the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (2013) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting. The aim of the work being carried out by the Joint Task Force is to strengthen environmental reporting and make environmental statistics available and comparable throughout the pan-European region in the long term. The Joint Task Force also supports the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment.
2. The terms of reference of the Joint Task Force<sup>1</sup> were approved by the ECE Executive Committee on 4 July 2018<sup>2</sup> to be reviewed in 2021.
3. The Joint Task Force held its eighteenth session in Geneva, in a hybrid format, on 18 and 19 October 2021.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. Attendance

4. The meeting was attended by environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries: Albania, Austria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uzbekistan.

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<sup>1</sup> See ECE/CEP/2017/12, annex.

<sup>2</sup> See ECE/EX/2018/L.7.

<sup>3</sup> All documents and presentations of the eighteenth session are available at <https://unece.org/info/Statistics/events/357762>.



5. Representatives of the European Environment Agency, the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations University, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ukrainian Scientific Research Institute of Ecological Problems, Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University (Ukraine) and the Tonkin+Taylor environmental and engineering consultancy<sup>4</sup> and a researcher in environmental statistics and accounting also attended the meeting.

6. The meeting was serviced by the ECE secretariat.

## **II. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs**

7. The Joint Task Force members were invited to elect a new chair and vice-chairs, following a consultation process carried out among the Joint Task Force members and the procedure stated in the terms of reference.<sup>5</sup>

8. The following proposals were received: Ms. Ševala Korajčević (Bosnia and Herzegovina) as Chair and Ms. Marina Klevakina (Russian Federation) and Mr. Oleg Prokopenko (Ukraine) as Vice-Chairs of the Joint Task Force.

9. The candidates were supported by Joint Task Force members.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

10. The Joint Task Force elected for a period of two years Ms. Korajčević as its Chair and Ms. Klevakina and Mr. Prokopenko as its Vice-Chairs.

## **III. Adoption of the agenda**

11. The Chair invited the Joint Task Force to adopt the agenda of the eighteenth session.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

12. The Joint Task Force adopted the agenda of its eighteenth session as set out in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/1.

## **IV. Adoption of the report of the seventeenth session**

13. The secretariat summarized the outcomes of the seventeenth session of the Joint Task Force (Geneva, 26 October 2020) as contained in the corresponding report (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2020/2) and invited the Joint Task Force to adopt the report.

14. The secretariat informed the Joint Task Force about the status of implementation of the decisions and recommendations made at the seventeenth session.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

15. The Joint Task Force adopted the report of its seventeenth session and took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the seventeenth session of the Joint Task Force.

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<sup>4</sup> Mention of a commercial company, service or product does not imply endorsement by the United Nations or its States Members.

<sup>5</sup> ECE/CEP/2017/12, annex, para. 8.

## V. Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

16. The secretariat informed the meeting that the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy had approved the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force to continue the work until 2021.<sup>6</sup> At its twenty-sixth session (Geneva (hybrid), 9 and 10 November 2020), the Committee on Environmental Policy had extended the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until mid-2023 in alignment with the Environment for Europe process.<sup>7</sup> Considering the close links of the Joint Task Force with the work of the Working Group, it was proposed that the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators be extended until June 2023.

17. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians had approved the extension of the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force at its meeting on 17 and 18 February 2021.<sup>8</sup>

18. The Joint Task Force members were invited to endorse the extension of the terms of reference until 2023.

### Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

19. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Endorsed the extension of the Joint Task Force mandate and terms of reference until mid-2023 (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/3);

(b) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the Joint Task Force's wish to extend its current mandate and terms of reference until mid-2023;

(c) Decided to consider further whether it might best be converted into a standing body on environmental statistics and indicators, open to all ECE member States.

## VI. Ongoing developments with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force

20. The discussions on the agenda item were structured in relation to ongoing developments at the ECE, national and international levels.

21. For ECE, the secretariat presented the progress made on the next pan-European environmental assessment and the planned next steps in finalizing the assessment for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022). ECE consultants presented progress made on the chemicals and waste, environmental financing and sustainable infrastructure sections of the assessment. All three sections had been submitted for comments to Joint Task Force members.

22. The secretariat presented the development of training materials on the revised ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators<sup>9</sup> to support and advance national capacities to report and produce environmental indicators.

23. Furthermore, the secretariat updated the Joint Task Force on the recommendations and conclusions of the ECE nexus report entitled *Measuring and Monitoring Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals*,<sup>10</sup> which reviewed progress and challenges at the national, regional and international levels for the production and dissemination of Sustainable Development Goal statistics and indicators.

<sup>6</sup> ECE/CEP/2017/5, paras. 51 and 52 (a).

<sup>7</sup> ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 38 (c).

<sup>8</sup> ECE/CES/BUR/2021/FEB/8/Add.1, available at [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/08\\_add1\\_ToR\\_JTF%20Environment%20extension\\_appr.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/08_add1_ToR_JTF%20Environment%20extension_appr.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://unece.org/guidelines-application-environmental-indicators>.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.36.

24. The secretariat summarized the latest developments concerning the second edition of the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>11</sup> and the Dashboard for Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>12</sup> the release of the Russian-language<sup>13</sup> database version of the Dashboard and the Conference of European Statisticians Waste Statistics Framework (ECE/CES/2021/4). Furthermore, the activities and objectives of the new Conference of European Statisticians Task Force on Measuring Circular Economy, the main outcomes of the Expert Forum on Climate Change-related Statistics (online, 31 August–3 September 2021) and the publication of the *Conference of European Statisticians' Set of Core Climate Change-related Indicators Using the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting*<sup>14</sup> were presented.

25. At the national level, representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan shared their countries' progress in producing and disseminating environmental indicators, with reference to the ECE environmental indicators, the Shared Environmental Information System, the Green Growth Indicators and the Sustainable Development Goal environment-related indicators.

26. At the international level, representatives of several organizations with activities relevant for the Joint Task Force presented ongoing developments and further steps. The representative of the European Environment Agency presented the revision of the Agency's European Environment Information and Observation Network indicators, emphasizing the selection and prioritization procedure and collaboration with other international organizations. The representative of UNSD provided an update on the status of the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics and the contributions of Joint Task Force members thereto, as well as presenting the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators. The representative of OECD summarized the progress made on measurement of circular economy and of fossil fuel subsidies and the International Programme for Action on Climate, launched in May 2021.<sup>15</sup> The representative of UNEP provided updates on: the activities related to the production and sharing of environmental statistics and indicators, in particular the Sustainable Development Goal environment-related indicators, and those indicators for which the data were presented for the first time; and circular economy activities and the UNEP Road Map on Environment Statistics, Accounting and Analysis.

## Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

27. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Welcomed the draft elements of the next pan-European environmental assessment set out in documents ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/5–8;

(b) Took note of the progress made, timeline and next steps for the finalization of the assessment;

(c) Agreed to provide further feedback by 30 November 2021 on the draft elements of the seventh pan-European environmental assessment set out in documents ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/5–8;

(d) Welcomed the presentations of thematic sections of the assessment by the authors;

(e) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy and its Bureau of the outcomes of the agenda item;

<sup>11</sup> English- and Russian-language versions available at, respectively, [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/ECE\\_CES\\_2021\\_6-2104750E.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/ECE_CES_2021_6-2104750E.pdf) and [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/ECE\\_CES\\_2021\\_6-2104750R.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/ECE_CES_2021_6-2104750R.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Available at <https://w3.unece.org/SDG/en>.

<sup>13</sup> Available at <https://w3.unece.org/SDG/ru/Contents>.

<sup>14</sup> ECE/STAT/NONE/2021/1, available at <https://unece.org/statistics/publications/CES-set-of-core-climate-change-related-indicators>.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.oecd.org/climate-action/ipac/](http://www.oecd.org/climate-action/ipac/).

(f) Thanked the presenters for sharing their experience in implementing and sharing environmental statistics and indicators at the national and international levels, and encouraged its members to share that information further among national stakeholders;

(g) Took note of the progress made on developing training materials and agreed to provide further feedback by 30 November 2021 on their structure;

(h) Took note of the information and recommendations presented in the nexus report entitled *Measuring and Monitoring Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals*, and encouraged its members to review and possibly apply the recommendations of the report nationally.

## VII. Review of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators

28. At the request of the Joint Task Force, the secretariat had begun the review of the ECE set of environmental indicators and the associated guidelines.<sup>16</sup> At its seventeenth session, the Joint Task Force had agreed to the proposal by the secretariat to make a distinction between indicators and underlying data and statistics using the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics as the overall framework and structure. Furthermore, the Joint Task Force emphasized the importance of harmonizing the indicators with the indicator system used by the European Environment Information and Observation Network of the European Environment Agency.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the Guidelines were harmonized with other relevant indicators frameworks, such as those of the European Environment Agency and OECD, the global and European Union Sustainable Development Goal indicators, and the Conference of European Statisticians Set of Core Climate Change-related Statistics (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/4).

29. The Joint Task Force members decided to follow up on the revision in two parallel ways:

- (a) By updating the metadata for finalized indicators;
- (b) By reviewing the list of indicators.

30. To follow up on reviewing the list of indicators, the secretariat had organized an informal consultation as a survey in July–August 2021, consisting of three parts: in the first part, countries had been asked for their opinions on keeping, modifying or removing indicators from the ECE Guidelines; in the second part, the focus had been on adding indicators to the Guidelines; and in the third part, countries had been asked for their ideas regarding priority indicators. “Priority” in that regard meant that all respondents considered those indicators to be relevant for their countries and that they should be prioritized for production and sharing. For the secretariat, priority indicators meant priority in finalizing and sharing the metadata. Experts of eight countries had completed the questionnaires.<sup>18</sup> The secretariat, together with the consultants, had reviewed the answers and considered the comments and proposals received during the consultation. The reviewed list included 185 indicators with 24 additions, 22 proposals for modification and 27 proposals for discarding. The modifications had been proposed based on the latest international recommendations or specificities of the countries of the region.

31. The completed parts of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, the process of organizing the information consultations and the feedback received were available in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/4.

32. Members of the Joint Task Force welcomed the revision and updating of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators. During the discussions, the representatives

<sup>16</sup> ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2018/2, paras. 31–40.

<sup>17</sup> ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2020/2, para. 24 (a)–(b).

<sup>18</sup> Experts from Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkmenistan and Ukraine shared their opinions on the list of indicators, provided suggestions for changing some of the indicator names, emphasized the need for clear methodological guidance and described the challenges in producing some of the indicators. Some of the indicators would need a subtitle for better understanding by all involved national authorities and stakeholders but also for better understanding for further policy action. The finalized list of indicators should be accompanied by clear metadata to allow all involved national stakeholders to understand data sources, calculation method and the coverage of the indicators.

33. The Joint Task Force pre-approved a list of priority indicators that had been selected by the secretariat on the basis of the results of the informal consultation. Final approval would follow after a 21-day silence procedure, which would start when the secretariat sent the list of indicators to the Joint Task Force, after taking into account comments received during the current session.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

34. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Welcomed the progress made towards reviewing and finalizing the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators;

(b) Pre-approved the finalized parts of the Guidelines and the proposed list of priority indicators, with final approval following after 21 days of silence procedure and taking into account comments received from members of the Joint Task Force;

(c) Agreed that relevant indicators (for example, those needed for the pan-European environmental assessment) might be added at a later stage, after consultation with the Joint Task Force;

(d) Took note of the ongoing work to update and finalize the remaining parts of the Guidelines;

(e) Decided that it would follow a silence procedure for lists of indicators;

(f) Agreed that metadata would be completed in the English and Russian languages for all the approved indicators and provided to its members under a silence procedure.

## **VIII. Ongoing and planned capacity development activities**

35. The secretariat summarized the main outcomes of the Fifth Expert Meeting and Workshop on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (online, 29 March–1 April 2021) and presented the upcoming Expert Meeting and Workshop on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (29 March–1 April 2022) and the Joint European Free Trade Association/ECE Webinars on Climate Change-related Statistics for the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (19–20 January 2022).<sup>19</sup> The representative of UNEP presented updates on the status of capacity development activities under a United Nations Development Account project entitled “Improved environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus” and other ongoing and planned capacity development activities related to environmental statistics and indicators, the Shared Environmental Information System and Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

36. The representatives of Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia thanked the ECE secretariat, UNEP and Environment Agency Austria for organizing five thematic webinars (December 2020–May 2021) and welcomed such initiatives as platforms to share experience, develop capacities and foster and improve national and international cooperation in the areas of environmental indicators production and dissemination.

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<sup>19</sup> Information on the webinars is available at <https://www.efta.int/Statistics/ClimateChange-relatedStatistics2022>.

## Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

37. The Joint Task Force took note of the information provided on ongoing developments with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force and invited its members and representatives of international organizations and other initiatives and projects to provide it with regular updates on recent developments in the implementation of their activities.

## IX. Data needs, statistics and indicators on environment and health in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

38. The secretariat provided a brief overview of data needs, statistics and indicators on environment and health in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and emphasized links between environment and health issues that had become even more obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had shown the need for quick interventions that required accurate and up-to-date statistics to support decisions. Representatives of various organizations presented their experiences, challenges and solutions from the perspectives of data needs and availability for measuring the impact of the pandemic response on environment and health indicators.

39. The representative of WHO gave a presentation on the use of statistics and available data to support management of the pandemic response. Given the complexity of the COVID-19 crisis, the pandemic required a comprehensive, multilayered response. Accordingly, data and statistics had to be provided, but also disseminated and communicated to all stakeholders, according to their needs and areas of expertise. To do so, none of the involved institutions could face the challenges alone, which was why partnerships and collaboration among various stakeholders had become vital, both in compiling and producing statistics and targeting interventions.

40. Relevant to the topic, the secretariat had conducted two studies: on environmental indicators affected by the pandemic response; and on sharing and use of environmental data and indicators for environment and health assessments in the target countries of the United Nations Development Account project referred to in paragraph 35 above.<sup>20</sup> The reviews had been conducted by consultants with guidance from the secretariat and with the support of national focal points in the countries to provide data and statistics. Depending on the study's perspective, several indicator frameworks had been given priority: the ECE set of environment indicators; the Conference of European Statisticians Set of Core Climate Change-related Indicators; and relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The first study had revealed the impact of the pandemic response on selected environment indicators. The second study had revealed that data availability, dissemination and automatic sharing options had improved over time (2000–2019), in particular for the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. Nonetheless, coordination still remained a challenge as data flows were spread among various national stakeholders.

41. A representative of the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub presented a report assessing the links between air pollution, climate and health, and exploring holistic solutions with a set of policy interventions for major economic activities such as industry, transport and health-care, as well as domestic activities such as heating and cooking.

42. A representative of Environment Agency Austria presented the results of a country-wide project on a wastewater epidemiological early warning and “de-warning” system for viral ribonucleic acid in Austria to support national and regional COVID-19 task forces for public health decision-making.

43. A representative of the United Kingdom Health Security Agency presented international frameworks and definitions and classifications of hazards and disasters relevant to the pandemic and environmental issues.

<sup>20</sup> The United Nations Development Account project target countries are Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and Tajikistan.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

44. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Welcomed the work of the secretariat and took note of the information provided on data needs, statistics and indicators on environment and health in response to the pandemic related to the activities of the Joint Task Force;

(b) Thanked presenters for sharing their knowledge and experience in that field;

(c) Invited its members, international organizations and partners to provide it with regular updates on recent developments related to environment and health statistics, indicators and data.

### **X. Other business**

45. The Joint Task Force members did not propose or raise any other issues for discussion.

### **XI. Closure of the meeting**

46. The Chair, with the assistance of the secretariat, summarized the conclusions of the Joint Task Force, presented the decisions and closed the meeting. It was announced that the report of the meeting would be finalized by the secretariat after the meeting and would be posted on the web page of the meeting in due course.

### **Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force**

47. The next session of the Joint Task Force was scheduled to be held in Geneva on 3 and 4 November 2022.

48. The Joint Task Force adopted the decisions taken during the session.

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