



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

Item 4 of the provisional agenda**Implementing the mandate and terms of reference****Extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint
Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators****Note by the Secretariat**

The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators was set up by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians in 2009.

The main objective of the Joint Task Force is to assist the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in their efforts to produce, share and use environmental information following international standards and guidelines, including the *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES 2013)* and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting. The Joint Task Force also supports the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment. Specifically, it assists target countries with methodological challenges related to the environmental indicators used for assessment.

In October 2015, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians extended the mandate and terms of reference of the Task Force until 2021, to be reviewed in February 2021. In November 2017, the Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the renewed mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force for 2018–2021 and requested the secretariat to submit the renewed mandate to the ECE Executive Committee for approval.

In November 2020, the Committee on Environmental Policy extended the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until June 2023 in alignment with the Environment for Europe process. Considering the close links of the Joint Task Force with the work of the Working Group, the secretariat proposes to also extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until June 2023.

The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians approved the extension at its meeting on 17 and 18 February 2021. The Joint Task Force is invited to endorse the extension.



I. Introduction

1. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, previously named the “Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators”, was set up in 2009¹ jointly by the Conference of European Statisticians and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy with the aim of improving environmental statistics and strengthening environmental reporting in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.² The Joint Task Force held 17 meetings in the period 2009–2020. During this period, it gradually revised the indicators covered by the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators³ (Indicator Guidelines) prepared by the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and endorsed at the Sixth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007).⁴ The Joint Task Force updated the Indicator Guidelines and added important indicators that were initially not included. It continues to work closely with the Working Group.

II. Current work of the Joint Task Force

2. A new process of revision of the Indicator Guidelines was started in 2019 to take into account the new global policy environment and its information needs (for example, the indicator frameworks of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the anticipated post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework) and updates in technical reference documents, including environmental questionnaires of Eurostat, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and new or revised statistical frameworks and guidelines, such as the *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES 2013)*,⁵ the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and the Set of Core Climate Change-related Indicators and Statistics of the Conference of European Statisticians.

3. Another focus of work of the Joint Task Force is to support countries in the production and online sharing of environmental data. The aim is to establish regular data flows for effective reporting according to international monitoring and assessment requirements, including the obligations under the relevant ECE multilateral environmental agreements, the pan-European environmental assessment and in accordance with the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System.

4. The Joint Task Force has been instrumental in building close cooperation between national statistical offices and environmental agencies in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and with the relevant international organizations. The work has benefited from the financial support of the European Environment Agency, Eurostat and several donor countries to enable the participation of country representatives at the meetings of the Joint Task Force.

5. In October 2015, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians approved the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force to continue the work until 2021.⁶ The Committee

¹ ECE/CEP/S/152, para. 19.

² Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

³ Available at <https://unece.org/guidelines-application-environmental-indicators>.

⁴ Ministerial Declaration (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8, para. 7) and monitoring and assessment recommendations (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/11/Add.1, para. 4), respectively available at <https://unece.org/belgrade-conference> and <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.11.add.1.e.pdf>.

⁵ United Nations publication, Sales No. 14.XVII.9.

⁶ See document entitled “ToR JTF on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for EECCA” (ECE/CES/BUR/2015/OCT/9, para. 3). Available at <https://unece.org/info/Statistics/events/19545>.

on Environmental Policy at its twenty-third session (Geneva, 14–17 November 2017) approved the same terms of reference until 2021.⁷

6. The Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians planned to review the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force at their first meetings in 2021.

7. The work is closely linked with the Environment for Europe process and the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Ministerial Conference has been postponed to October 2022, due to the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Therefore, at its twenty-sixth session (Geneva (hybrid), 9 and 10 November 2020), the Committee on Environmental Policy extended the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until mid-2023,⁸ with a planned renewal thereafter to reflect the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference. As the work of the Joint Task Force is closely aligned with the Working Group and the Environment for Europe process, its timing and terms of reference should be in accordance with these processes. Therefore, it is proposed to also extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Task Force until June 2023.

8. The updated mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators are presented in the annex to the present document. The text is updated to reflect developments since the mandate and terms of reference of the Task Force were last approved by the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians. The tasks remain largely the same with one additional task: reviewing the Indicator Guidelines (see para. 2 above).

9. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians approved the extension at its online meeting on 17 and 18 February 2021.⁹ There was also support expressed by countries for extending the Joint Task Force to all interested members of the Conference of European Statisticians and converting it into a standing working group on environmental statistics and indicators under the Conference after 2023.

III. Future plans on environmental statistics and indicators

10. Since the establishment of the Joint Task Force, countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia have made significant progress in developing environmental statistics and environmental indicators following international standards and guidelines. However, environmental statistics remains one of the weakest statistical domains in most countries, including both countries with developed and less developed statistical systems.

11. Climate change and sustainable management of environmental resources are given high priority on national, regional and global policy agendas, but often this is not matched by adequate capacity of national statistical offices and related agencies to produce the required information. Lack of resources and knowledge for producing environmental statistics, including environmental-economic accounts and related indicators, has become a challenge for many countries that are members of the Conference of European Statisticians, resulting in insufficient quality of these statistics and data gaps. For example, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*¹⁰ refers to significant country-level data gaps in areas related to sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). Relatively new policy initiatives, such as measuring circular economy, provide challenges for national statistical offices, ministries of environment and other related governmental agencies of all member countries of the Conference of European Statisticians.

⁷ ECE/CEP/2017/5, para. 52 (a).

⁸ ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 38 (c).

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.I.7. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>.

12. In view of the common challenges in environmental statistics for all countries of the region, after the expiry of its mandate in June 2023, the existing mechanism of the Joint Task Force could be extended to provide a useful platform for experts from national statistical offices and ministries of environment (or responsible government agencies) of all member countries of the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy. The Joint Task Force follows the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System that covers the pan-European region. Therefore, there are common issues to discuss. Some countries that are not members of the Joint Task Force are already participating in its meetings but information about the meetings could be distributed more widely. This platform could be used to share knowledge and experience on:

- (a) Production of environmental statistics to inform new policy areas;
- (b) Continuous improvement of data quality and overcoming data gaps;
- (c) Use of new or alternative data sources (for example, remote sensing, “big data” and citizen science);
- (d) Data sharing;
- (e) Dissemination of policy-relevant information products.

13. The work of the Joint Task Force since 2009 has showed a continuous need for a platform for countries to support improvement of environmental statistics. Therefore, the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy may consider converting the Joint Task Force into a standing body on environmental statistics and indicators. If this idea is supported by the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy, the ECE secretariat will submit a proposal and draft a mandate and terms of reference of such a body in 2023.

IV. Possible decision

14. The Joint Task Force is invited to:

- (a) Endorse the extension of its mandate and terms of reference until mid-2023;
- (b) Express views on the possibility of extending the Joint Task Force to all interested countries after June 2023;
- (c) Request 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.

Annex

Mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators

I. Background

1. In October 2015, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians approved the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for the period 2016–2021.¹ The Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-third session (Geneva, 14–17 November 2017) approved the same mandate and terms of reference until 2021.² A review of the mandate and terms of reference was planned at the first meetings of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy in 2021.

2. The work of the Joint Task Force is closely linked with the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, a subsidiary body to the Committee on Environmental Policy, and the Environment for Europe process and the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Ministerial Conference has been postponed to October 2022, among other things, due to the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Therefore, at its twenty-sixth session (Geneva (hybrid), 9 and 10 November 2020), the Committee on Environmental Policy extended the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until mid-2023,³ with a planned renewal thereafter to reflect the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference. As the work of the Joint Task Force is closely aligned with the Working Group and the Environment for Europe process, its timing and terms of reference should be in accordance with these processes. Therefore, it is proposed to also extend the mandate of the Task Force until June 2023.

3. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators continues the work of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (2009–2015). The Joint Task Force has revised all indicators covered by the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators⁴ (Indicator Guidelines) prepared by the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and endorsed at the Sixth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007).⁵ The Joint Task Force updated the Indicator Guidelines and added important indicators that were initially not included.

4. The current focus of the work of the Joint Task Force has shifted from reviewing the indicators to the production and online sharing of data. The aim is to establish regular data flows for effective reporting according to international monitoring and assessment requirements, including the obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements. This work will support the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System in the pan-European region beyond 2021.

II. Mandate

5. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators shall serve under the oversight and guidance of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of

¹ See document entitled “ToR JTF on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for EECCA” (ECE/CES/BUR/2015/OCT/9, para. 3). Available at <https://unece.org/info/Statistics/events/19545>.

² ECE/CEP/2017/5, para. 52 (a).

³ ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 38 (c).

⁴ Available at <https://unece.org/guidelines-application-environmental-indicators>.

⁵ Ministerial Declaration (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8, para. 7) and monitoring and assessment recommendations (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/11/Add.1, para. 4), respectively available at <https://unece.org/belgrade-conference> and <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.11.add.1.e.pdf>.

European Statisticians. It will report to both the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians. These terms of reference are valid until June 2023. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat will present a new mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force to the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians for their review in 2023.

III. Objective

6. The aim of the Joint Task Force is to assist the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (target countries) in their efforts to:

- (a) Correctly apply the Shared Environmental Information System data methodologies in line with statistical standards;
- (b) Analyse and communicate environmental data;
- (c) Implement the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting;
- (d) Apply environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development and green economy initiatives.

7. The Joint Task Force will also assist the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in evaluating the application of the internationally accepted methodologies and statistical standards in data production according to the requirements of the Shared Environmental Information System.

IV. Planned activities and outputs

8. The Joint Task Force shall:

(a) Provide advice to the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment on the application of the Shared Environmental Information System data production methodologies by the target countries;

(b) Address specific challenges related to methodology and data quality in producing environmental data and indicators in line with the ECE online Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, international statistical standards and guidelines, the Shared Environmental Information System requirements and the recommendations made by the Working Group;

(c) Build capacity in the target countries for the compilation and integration of environmental data in support of measuring sustainable development and green economy initiatives;

(d) Provide a forum for sharing experience on the communication of environmental information to users, in line with the ECE recommendations on statistical communication and the recommendations made by the Working Group;

(e) Assist countries in developing capacity for the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting;

(f) Revise the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators to take into account recent policy developments and new guidelines for production of environmental statistics and indicators.

9. The following outputs will be achieved:

(a) Advice on the application of the Shared Environmental Information System data production methodologies is provided;

(b) Capacity in the target countries is gradually strengthened for applying the Shared Environmental Information System data production methodologies;

(c) Capacity in the target countries is gradually strengthened for the compilation and integration of environmental data in support of measuring sustainable development and green economy initiatives;

(d) Capacity in the target countries is strengthened for communicating environmental information;

(e) Implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting is gradually improved;

(f) Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators are available.

V. Timetable

10. The activities of the Task Force planned for the period from February 2021 to June 2023 are described in the table below.

Tentative time schedule of activities of the Joint Task Force from February 2021 to June 2023

<i>Tentative schedule</i>	<i>Planned activity</i>
Feb.–Sept. 2021	Continuation of the review of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and preparation of a draft document for the eighteenth session of the Joint Task Force
Oct. 2021	Eighteenth session of the Joint Task Force
Nov. 2021–Sept. 2022	Implementation of recommendations and decisions of the eighteenth session of the Joint Task Force; continuation of the review of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and preparation of a final draft
Oct. 2022	Nineteenth session of the Joint Task Force
Nov. 2022–Feb. 2023	Finalization of the review of the Guidelines and submission to the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment
Nov. 2022–June 2023	Implementation of recommendations and decisions of the nineteenth session of the Joint Task Force; preparation of a revised mandate and terms of reference for the period after mid-2023

VI. Methods of work

11. The Joint Task Force shall continue to meet at least once annually. The Joint Task Force will also communicate through email and other electronic collaboration platforms, such as wikis, during the period between meetings.

VII. Membership

12. The Joint Task Force shall be composed of experts representing national statistical offices and ministries or agencies dealing with environmental statistics and assessment from the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Representatives of ministries and agencies dealing with economic issues may be invited to participate in the meetings. Other ECE countries are welcome to participate in the work.

13. The Joint Task Force shall elect its Chair and Vice-Chair for a term of two years, and these officers shall be eligible for re-election for one additional term.

VIII. Secretariat support and resources

14. The ECE Environment and Statistical Divisions will provide the joint secretariat for the activities of the Joint Task Force.
 15. The work will be supported by the European Environment Agency, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization.
 16. Donors will be invited to provide support for the activities of the Joint Task Force.
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