



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Working Group on Environmental
Monitoring and Assessment****Twenty-fourth session**
Geneva, 11–12 April 2022**Report of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring
and Assessment on its twenty-fourth session****I. Introduction****A. Background**

1. At its twenty-sixth session (Geneva, 9–10 November 2020), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy decided to extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (ECE/EX/2017/L.2, annex) 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 (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022), and requested the secretariat to submit that decision on extension to the ECE Executive Committee for approval.¹
2. The Executive Committee approved, during its 114th meeting (Geneva, 12 February 2021), the extension of the current mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group,² as contained in the annex to document ECE/EX/2017/L.2 and the annex to document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/4, until 30 June 2023.
3. The mandate of the Working Group states that it should review progress made by countries of 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

¹ See ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 38 (c).

² See Chair's conclusions from the 114th meeting of the Executive Committee (EXCOM/CONCLU/114, para. 12). Available at <https://unece.org/115th-excom-meeting-5-march-2021>.



engage in capacity-building assistance regarding specific challenges in environmental monitoring and assessment.³

4. The twenty-fourth session of the Working Group was held in Geneva in a hybrid format, on 11 and 12 April 2022.⁴

B. Attendance

5. Environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries attended the meeting: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uzbekistan.

6. Representatives of the European Commission, the European Environment Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also attended the meeting.

7. Furthermore, representatives of the Eurasian Economic Commission, the Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Change – Regional Development Agency (Albania), the Institute for Sustainable Innovation (Russian Federation), Zoë Environment Network (Switzerland) and the Ukrainian Scientific Research Institute of Ecological Problems participated in the meeting.

C. Procedural matters

8. The Chair informed the members of the Working Group about the special procedures adopted by the ECE Executive Committee on decision-making for formal meetings with remote participation,⁵ including the meeting of the Working Group. She 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 21 April 2022, with the secretariat informing the members of the Working Group if the silence had been broken.

II. Adoption of the agenda

9. The Chair of the Working Group provided an overview of the agenda of the Working Group as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/1 and asked the Working Group for comments.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

10. The Working Group adopted the agenda as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/1.

III. Adoption of the report of the twenty-third session

11. The secretariat summarized the outcomes of the twenty-third session of the Working Group (Geneva, 4–5 May 2021) as contained in the report of that session

³ See ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/4, annex, para. 3.

⁴ Meeting documents and other information, including informal documents and presentations, are available on the session web page at <https://unece.org/info/events/event/363942>.

⁵ See ECE/EX/2020/L.12, para. 3. Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/EXCOM_111_05_Oct/ECE_EX_2020_L.12-2013121E.pdf.

(ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/2), and informed the Working Group of the status of implementation of the decisions and recommendations made at the twenty-third session.

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

Working Group decisions and recommendations

13. The Working Group adopted the report of the twenty-third session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/2.

IV. Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

14. The Working Group's terms of reference require that it prepare an annual timetable of activities and achievements.⁶

15. The secretariat informed the Working Group that the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its twenty-seventh session (Geneva (hybrid), 3–5 November 2021), had taken note of the annual timetable of activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment⁷ in 2022 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/3).

16. The secretariat also reported on other decisions made by the Committee at its twenty-seventh session related to the environmental monitoring and assessment programme, including on the status of the development of the pan-European environmental assessment, the Shared Environmental Information System, and reported that the Committee had decided to extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until mid-2023,⁸ a decision that had subsequently been approved by the ECE Executive Committee.⁹

17. The secretariat then presented the draft annual timetable of activities for 2023 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/3), as shared with the Working Group prior to the session. No amendments had been requested by the members of the Working Group. The Working Group was therefore invited to approve the draft annual timetable of activities for 2023.

18. The secretariat then provided informal information on the financial resources available to support meetings of the Working Group and other activities of the ECE Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme.

19. The Working Group then benefited from a presentation on the experience of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) regarding gender mainstreaming, by a consultant of the secretariat, and an intervention on the importance of data disaggregation and integrating gender into environmental statistics by the Statistical Division.

20. The secretariat subsequently presented draft elements for the new mandate and terms of reference for the period mid-2023 to mid-2028, which was followed by a discussion and a survey using an application for real-time feedback.

21. The members of the Working Group voted informally for the following draft elements, presented in percentages, or individual responses to open questions:

(a) Overall, the Working Group's main objective and role should remain being the environmental knowledge and assessment network for the ECE region (98 per cent);

(b) Specific objectives of the Working Group in the future should include support to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (23 per cent), green economy (19 per cent),

⁶ ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/4, annex, para. 5.

⁷ ECE/CEP/2021/2, para. 47 (d).

⁸ List of decisions (as adopted by the silence procedure completed on 18 November 2021), available at [27th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy | UNECE](#).

⁹ Chair's conclusions from the 119th meeting (EXCOM/CONCLU/119, para. 32), available at <https://unece.org/120-excom-meeting-26-january-2022>.

circular economy (19 per cent), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (7 per cent), the implementation of the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (16 per cent), the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (16 per cent), the development of environmental monitoring and information systems in line with the principles and pillars of the Shared Environmental Information System (26 per cent), the development of regular pan-European environmental assessments (18 per cent), the development of regular state-of-the environment reporting (20 per cent), the development of capacity to tackle specific challenges in environmental monitoring and assessment (18 per cent), the strengthening of partnerships including with UNEP, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Health Organization, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the Group on Earth Observations, among others (18 per cent). Other issues mentioned as relevant were the importance of gender mainstreaming, the bilateral support of specific needs of countries, the development of uniform guidance on climate change monitoring similar to the guidance for the Shared Environmental Information System, a closer link with the activities and focus of the Joint Task Force to be ensured for future indicator-based assessments, a report at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (Nairobi, 26 February–1 March 2024), giving a voice to civil society on national pan-European policies, the consideration of draft laws on environmental protection and close coordination with the European Environment Agency;

(c) Proposed future programme areas should include: support to the development of environmental monitoring and information systems in line with the Shared Environmental Information System (29 per cent); support to the development of regular assessments and streamlining of regular state-of-the environment reporting (23 per cent); strengthening of partnerships between ECE member States, partner organizations, multilateral environmental agreements, international financial institutions and others (24 per cent); and engagement in capacity development assistance on monitoring and assessment (24 per cent). Other areas that should be supported in the future included institutional strengthening and legislative improvement (23 per cent), promotion of the use of new technologies and tools and data integration (28 per cent), regular reviews of environmental monitoring systems in line with the Shared Environmental Information System (27 per cent) and the implementation of the main outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (22 per cent);

(d) The Working Group should help to address monitoring gaps (ranked according to their importance), including for: biodiversity and ecosystems; air and climate change; fresh water; chemicals and waste; land and soil; coastal waters, marine ecosystems and seas; and monitoring. Further priorities listed included monitoring of sustainable infrastructure, monitoring circular economy and sustainable tourism, monitoring of environmental financing and environmental reporting. One participant also mentioned that there should be a focus on the consequences of the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on the environment and in particular the regional implications of that invasion. Other suggestions were to assess the overall achievements in the last three to five pan-European declarations and where the priorities identified were still not achieved, and to increase cooperation for making renewable energy sources a common policy for the region;

(e) Gender mainstreaming (35 per cent) and data disaggregation (65 per cent) should be included in the new terms of reference;

(f) Other areas where the Working Group should engage included: timely and relevant operational information for monitoring and steering effective implementation of environmental regulations; environmental degradation; “green corruption” and environmental governance; digital aspects of analyzing and visualizing environmental data; energy efficiency and renewable energies; climate protection; monitoring oil and gas exploration and development; and sharing more often good models of monitoring and assessment. One participant also noted that capacity development should not be the core work of the Working Group, but that such activities should be addressed by dedicated projects and multilateral environmental agreements.

22. During the subsequent discussion, the representative of Switzerland mentioned that, regarding the ambitious ideas and elements presented, a continued technical discussion by the Working Group should take place, as well as a strategic discussion at the level of the

Committee on Environmental Policy to decide on the new mandate and terms of reference and the financial resources required to ensure that the work until 2028 was not implemented on an ad-hoc basis. The representative of Switzerland also highlighted the need to adjust the new terms of reference to the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, underlining that the Working Group should continue its current work, including to engage in implementing a Shared Environmental Information System, by using various tools including the work on harmonized data and indicators and the ECE Guidelines on Application of Environmental Indicators, in preparing pan-European assessments and capacity development. In addition, it was highlighted that the Working Group needed to address gaps, new challenges and emerging themes, such as circular economy or sustainable infrastructure, and ensure needed data flows. A discussion needed to take place on the engagement of relevant international partners in the implementation of the new and ambitious mandate and terms of reference. The representative of Switzerland added that a more holistic use of the ECE Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators for future pan-European environmental assessments was one activity that could be prioritized.

23. The representative of Austria then confirmed the agreement of Austria with the statement made by the representative of Switzerland that the Working Group needed to move ahead to address new challenges and new subjects such as circular economy. The representative of Austria also highlighted the need for integration of the Working Group's work with that performed by the European Environment Agency, and that cooperation was required from both sides. Past and planned capacity development activities were already heading in that direction.

24. The secretariat then informed the Working Group about the timeline for the development of the new terms of reference and that an elaborated draft would be presented at the next session of the Working Group. Thereafter, the terms of reference would be forwarded to the Committee on Environmental Policy and the ECE Executive Committee for approval before the session of the Working Group in 2024. The secretariat also stated that it would welcome any guidance from the Working Group on priorities, whether to cut out any of the elements proposed as long as resources were limited, and whether to request additional resources considering the relevance of the work of the Working Group and emerging needs to be able to address more of the gaps identified.

25. The representative of the European Environment Agency stated that, due to resource limitations on all sides, the Agency had no or only limited data on sustainable tourism for the pan-European assessment. The Agency would agree that the Working Group's focus should be on areas where environmental data were coherent and supported across the pan-European region. The representative of the Agency also mentioned that it would be worthwhile, in terms of shaping the future mandate, if the Working Group were to take into consideration the outcomes, elements and commitments of previous Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences, including various initiatives, and take stock of how many of the initiatives and conference outcomes had fulfilled the purpose for which they have been created, whether they had been fully implemented and how they had contributed to a coherent knowledge base for the region. The representative then mentioned that further synergies with the Joint Task Force should be sought in producing future indicator-based pan-European assessments.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

26. The Working Group:

- (a) Took note of the decisions made by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-seventh session;
- (b) Requested the secretariat to continue to brief the Committee on the activities on environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting;
- (c) Adopted the timetable of activities for 2023 as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/3;

(d) Expressed appreciation to those countries and organizations currently supporting financially the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme – Austria, the European Union and Switzerland;

(e) Also expressed appreciation to those countries that had supported the preparation of the pan-European environmental assessment to date – Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Serbia and Switzerland;

(f) Requested its members and the secretariat to continue their fundraising efforts to enable the full implementation of activities planned for 2022–2023, including the finalization of the pan-European environmental assessment and the holding of the next sessions of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group;

(g) Welcomed the draft elements presented for the renewal of the mandate and terms of reference for the Working Group for mid-2023 until mid-2028;

(h) Requested the secretariat to integrate the results from the survey and the discussion during the session and to present a draft version of the mandate and terms of reference at its next meeting.

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

27. 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 System’s 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 2021.¹⁰

28. At its twenty-third session, the Working Group adopted the final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/6) and suggested the continued use of the Shared Environmental Information System reporting tool and assessment framework for upcoming reviews for selected indicators and in support of pan-European environmental assessments.¹¹

29. During its twenty-seventh session (Geneva (hybrid), 3–5 November 2021), the Committee welcomed the final review report, prepared by the Working Group with the support of the secretariat and UNEP, expressed appreciation for the fact that, overall, a Shared Environmental Information System had been successfully established in Europe and Central Asia but noted that countries still needed assistance in fully implementing the pillars and principles of the System and in the regular production and sharing of relevant data flows associated with the ECE environmental indicators, and forwarded the final review report to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.¹² The Committee also mentioned that, when forwarding the report to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, all key messages and recommendations related to the Shared Environmental Information System could be made available at the beginning of the document.

30. During the current session, the secretariat presented key messages and policy recommendations, including some stemming from the pan-European environmental assessment, to be forwarded to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, the final review report on the establishment of the System, and the draft ministerial declaration for the Conference related to the Shared Environmental Information System.

31. Meeting participants then discussed the key messages and provided some comments.

¹⁰ See ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/4, annex, para. 3 (a) (iii) and (v).

¹¹ ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/2, para. 30 (b).

¹² ECE/CEP/2021/2, para. 47 (e)–(g).

32. The secretariat provided an introductory presentation on the future use of a Shared Environmental Information System and regular reporting on the System's implementation and invited meeting participants to participate in a real-time survey.

33. Members of the Working Group replied to the questions as follows:

(a) Regarding the open question on how the system should be used in the future, participants suggested continuing its regular and continuous use, sharing data and exchanging good practice experience. They indicated that the Shared Environmental Information System should be linked to all multilateral environmental agreements and should support a yearly environmental assessment. Participants also suggested regularly checking the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System for specific environmental themes, and that it was necessary to develop the system further, including at the national level. The Shared Environmental Information System should continue to provide environmental information in an open and transparent manner in support of a coherent and streamlined assessment process at the regional level. Other suggestions were made on the modernization of the online reporting system, including (human-controlled) artificial intelligence support;

(b) As to the second question, 93 per cent of participants in the poll (29 in total) agreed to annually review a limited number of environmental themes and indicators based on the Shared Environmental Information System assessment framework and all 28 of those voting agreed that the ECE indicator guidelines currently being revised should be implemented and used starting from 2022;

(c) The next question on which environmental theme should be reviewed in 2023 (open question) was answered by 31 participants according to the following priorities (highest priority first):

- (i) Air pollution and air quality;
- (ii) Waste, including e-waste;
- (iii) Energy, including renewable energy;
- (iv) Biodiversity, water and green and circular economy;

(d) In all, 83 per cent of the 28 participants replied positively to the question on whether the Shared Environmental Information System online reporting tool should be used for future reviews, though it was clarified that such use would be possible at the current stage only using spreadsheets;

(e) According to participants, countries could be motivated to regularly report for enhancing their environmental information systems by:

- (i) Focusing on specific themes;
- (ii) More capacity development and training;
- (iii) Sharing good practice examples from the region on a regular basis;
- (iv) An easy-to-complete questionnaire with clear instructions;
- (v) Simplification of reporting and by asking only questions with an explanatory value of the Shared Environmental Information System and its implementation;
- (vi) Making it mandatory in one platform;
- (vii) Monitoring;
- (viii) Financial support;
- (ix) With technical support from the secretariat;
- (x) Invitation and more information;

(f) For the last question, 25 out of 27 participants in the survey expressed their interest to receive training on the revised ECE environmental indicators.

34. The discussion on the future use of the System was followed by a presentation by the secretariat and discussion by the Working Group on a possible side event on the Shared

Environmental Information System during the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The idea of organizing a side event was welcomed by various members of the Working Group and Austria expressed interest in leading the preparation of the event.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

35. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the key messages and recommendations from the final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System as contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/6 and the draft pan-European environmental assessment;¹³

(b) Decided to provide additional comments on the proposed additional key messages and recommendations within two weeks and, if comments were provided, requested the secretariat to circulate a revised version for approval by a silence procedure over a further period of two weeks;

(c) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the outcomes of the agenda item and to forward the key messages and recommendations to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, together with the Shared Environmental Information System final review report and the pan-European environmental assessment;

(d) Suggested reviewing the environmental theme “air” in 2023, by using the Shared Environmental Information System assessment framework and possibly the online reporting tool, while employing the revised ECE environmental indicators;

(e) Requested the secretariat to assess the possibility of organizing a regional training event on the revised indicators, particularly those related to the air theme, possibly within the framework of the new European Union-funded programme “EU4Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data”;

(f) Welcomed the proposal to organize a side event during the upcoming Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference on the topic of the Shared Environmental Information System;

(g) Welcomed the offer of Austria to take the lead in organizing the side event in cooperation with the European Environment Agency, ECE and UNEP;

(h) Requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the outcomes of the agenda item.

VI. Regular pan-European environmental assessment supported by the Shared Environmental Information System

36. The Working Group had been tasked with leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment¹⁴ for consideration by the Committee on Environmental Policy and leading up to the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

37. During the twenty-third session of the Working Group, the secretariat and consultants presented progress and draft elements of the next pan-European assessment (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/5), which were welcomed by the Working Group, while requesting the secretariat to provide an update on the assessment at its next session, for final clearance.¹⁵

38. During its twenty-seventh session, the Committee on Environmental Policy expressed its appreciation to those member States that had provided financial contributions to support

¹³ Provided as an informal document, available on the session web page at <https://unece.org/info/events/event/363942>.

¹⁴ ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II, para. 2 (b).

¹⁵ ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/2, para. 39 (a) and (h).

the preparation of the next pan-European environmental assessment, and to the individual authors of the draft elements of the assessment, welcoming those. The Committee also took note of the progress made, timeline and next steps for the completion of the assessment, requested the secretariat to submit the full draft of the pan-European assessment and the draft summary for policymakers for consultation with ECE member States at the latest by 15 February 2022, and decided to provide comments to the secretariat within one month of receipt. It also requested the secretariat to continue to inform the Bureau of progress made.¹⁶

39. In the current session, the secretariat provided an overview of the status and latest developments related to the pan-European environmental assessment and next steps.

40. Consultants hired by ECE then presented draft findings related to:

(a) Chapter III (Environmental state and trends), thematic section C. “Fresh water”;

(b) Chapter IV (Themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference), thematic section A. “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”.

41. The secretariat then presented an overview of comments received from member States on the draft summary of the assessment and the draft key findings, policy messages and way forward from the pan-European environmental assessment to be forwarded to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

42. The Working Group was then invited to discuss the full draft and the next steps.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

43. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the full draft of the seventh pan-European environmental assessment and its summary for policymakers;

(b) Took note of the final steps needed and the timeline for completion;

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

(d) Requested the secretariat to forward the summary for policymakers to the Committee on Environmental Policy once all comments had been incorporated;

(e) Requested an update on the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference related to the assessment at its next session.

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

44. A representative of the European Environment Agency presented developments related to the promotion of the Data Sharing and Management Principles of the Group on Earth Observations and on digitalization and green data.

45. The secretariat provided an overview of upcoming and ongoing regional environmental events and initiatives promoted in 2022 with relevance to the Working Group. Events presented included: the Second Forum of Mayors (Geneva, 4–5 April 2022), the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region (Geneva, 6–7 April 2022), the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, the extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice (Aarhus Convention) (Geneva, 23–24 June 2022), the Sixth session of the Meeting of the

¹⁶ ECE/CEP/2021/2, para. 27.

Parties of the Protocol on Water and Health (Geneva, 16–18 November 2022) and the Nineteenth session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (Geneva, 3–4 November 2022).

46. A representative of the secretariat then presented ongoing work in the ECE Statistical Division on measuring circular economy. A representative of the European Environment Agency then gave a presentation on “Investments on circular economy monitoring at the European Environment Agency: Innovation and complementarity with established monitoring frameworks”.

47. In addition, representatives of international and regional organizations were invited to report briefly on initiatives and extrabudgetary projects related to the activities of the Working Group. A representative of UNEP summarized the relevant outcomes of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, followed by a presentation by a representative of OECD on relevant activities under the European Union “EU4Environment” programme, in particular on the work on green growth indicators. Other presentations included a presentation by a representative of UNEP on support to countries in reporting on the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals, a new online Sustainable Development Goal indicators course and recent and planned capacity-building in Serbia on Sustainable Development Goal 12 and indicator 12.c.1. Representatives of UNEP and Environment Agency Austria presented the knowledge-sharing platform and e-learning course implemented under the 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”.

48. Other presentations included an overview of the “EU4Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data” programme presented by a representative of Environment Agency Austria and a video presentation by a representative of the secretariat on the status of the revision of the ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators.

49. The agenda item also included presentations on new technologies, big data, artificial intelligence and Earth observation used in projects by international and regional organizations. Those projects aimed to enhance the full use of data, technology and digitalization to complement and potentially replace established monitoring practices and information sources. A representative of the Environment Agency Austria presented activities on landcover under the “EU4Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data” programme followed by a video presentation by a representative of OECD on pollutant release and transfer registers and on green growth indicators in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

50. The agenda item concluded with a discussion on possible topics for the twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group. Participants discussed how the work on environmental information, data and indicators, including in relation to a green and circular economy, gender and digitalization, could support the development of integrated assessments, reporting on and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

51. As for the data and work on green economy, the representative of Austria mentioned that the work on green growth indicators for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine conducted and presented by OECD could also be interesting and relevant for other countries. It might be particularly relevant to look at the different input data needed and their fitness in the countries to calculate the more complex indicators, and whether the data needed to be further checked and developed also in view of national policies. The representative of Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of national priorities for the fulfillment of commitments towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and stated that a high-quality environment and sustainable energy were development priorities. The country supported projects for the transition to circular economy, use of clean technologies and energy sources and cleaning of polluted areas. Azerbaijan also highlighted the importance of support from international organizations and partners.

52. After the presentations and the discussions, the Working Group adopted the conclusions and recommendations listed below.

Working Group conclusions and recommendations

53. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of information provided on upcoming regional events and initiatives promoted in 2022 by international and regional organizations that were related to the activities of the Working Group and invited the members of the Working Group to participate and contribute as appropriate and relevant;

(b) Invited representatives of regional and international organizations to provide regular updates to the Working Group on upcoming events and initiatives of relevance including on circular economy and digitalization to complement environmental monitoring;

(c) Took note of the suggestions on topics for the twenty-fifth session of the Working Group and invited further suggestions in writing within two weeks, that was to say, by 26 April 2022.

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

54. Members of the Working Group, especially those representing countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, were invited to present and report on major actions taken at the national level to strengthen environmental monitoring and assessment since the twenty-third session of the Working Group, including institutional and regulatory mechanisms, infrastructure at the national level, and efforts and remaining challenges in enhancing digitalization of environmental information. The secretariat had circulated a reporting template to member States prior to the meeting.

55. Representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Czechia, Georgia, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine reported on progress in environmental monitoring and assessment and efforts in enhancing digitalization since the twenty-third session of the Working Group.

Working Group conclusions and recommendations

56. The Working Group welcomed the presentations by the representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Czechia, Georgia, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on environmental monitoring and assessment and expressed appreciation for the progress made by them.

IX. Other business

57. The Chair invited the Working Group to discuss the relevance of digitalization and digital transformation in the area of environment for member States and how the Working Group and international partners could support the countries in their efforts. Members of the Working Group were also invited to discuss that issue in upcoming meetings.

58. The Chair, with the assistance of the secretariat, briefly summarized the conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group and informed participants 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 web page.

59. The Working Group noted that its next session was scheduled to be held in Geneva, on 2 and 3 May 2023.

60. The Chair invited the Working Group to take part in the evaluation of the meeting.

Working Group conclusions and recommendations

61. The Working Group welcomed a summary of conclusions and decisions and approved the decisions made *ad referendum* during the hybrid meeting of the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group on 11 and 12 April 2022.

X. Closure of the meeting

62. The Chair closed the meeting.
