

# **Economic Commission for Europe**

## **Committee on Environmental Policy**

### **Twenty-eighth session**

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

### **Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting**

Information paper No. 11

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## **Proposed replacement of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators with a Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators**

### **Note by the secretariat**

1. The current mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators will expire at the end of 2023.
2. The Joint Task Force supported its conversion into a standing body with a broadened mandate, scope and geographical coverage, named the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, at its nineteenth session (Geneva, 2–3 November 2022), and approved the revised version of the mandate and terms of reference through a 14-day silence procedure, as presented in document with symbol ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2023/3.
3. At its seventy-first plenary session (22–23 June 2023), the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed the terms of reference for a Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators as a standing body under the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Environmental Policy pending approval also by the Committee.
4. This document provides additional information on what the change would imply.
5. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to endorse the mandate and terms of reference and forward them to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee for approval.

### **I. Bodies under sectoral committees**

6. The Executive Committee of UNECE has established Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of Working Parties within UNECE (ECE/EX/1) and Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of Teams of Specialists within UNECE (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1).
7. A “working party” (or working group) is subordinate to a sectoral committee. It is established by the Executive Committee and is considered a “standing body”, subject to review every five years. It benefits from full interpretation and translation, unless the members of the working party decide otherwise. Its document symbol includes WP or AC.
8. A “team of specialists” (or “advisory group”, “ad hoc group”, “task force” etc.) is supervised by a sectoral committee or a working party. It is established by a sectoral committee, normally for a two-year duration and can be extended. Its document symbol includes GE

9. The Joint Task Force is unique in that it brings together experts from statistical offices and environmental ministries or agencies and is supervised by two sectoral committees and linked to one working group (the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment). It has been established by the Executive Committee (like a working party). It exists since 2009 and has been extended for periods of two to four years; its longevity is characteristic of a working party. It benefits from English and Russian interpretation and translation. Its document symbol includes GE (like a team of specialists).

## II. Procedural implications of a change to a joint working group

10. A change from the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators to a Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators would imply:

- (a) Clarification of its nature, which is closer to a “working party” than a “team of specialists”;
- (b) Reflecting the reality of a long-term challenge that the body addresses – not an ad-hoc group addressing a short-term challenge;
- (c) Raising its priority in scheduling meetings – not an “advisory group”;
- (d) Maintaining interpretation and translation languages, unless it decides otherwise;
- (e) Setting a clear five-year cycle of review – it is not permanent;
- (f) Reducing the burden of processing extensions.

11. The procedural change from an ad-hoc task force to a working group will not in itself lead to a need for increased resources. Already, the frequency of meetings of the Joint Task Force was halved in 2018, from two to one meeting each year.

## III. Geographical scope

12. Besides a change in the nature of the body, its membership would change, with the admission of all members of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians. Nonetheless, issues of importance to countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia would continue to receive adequate attention. The change is explained further in the table below.

<b>Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators</b>	<b>Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators</b>
Focus on countries with economies in transition	Engagement of all member States but with continued attention to the needs of countries with economies in transition
Ad hoc participation of other countries	Regular participation (possible) of member States of the Conference of European Statisticians and Committee on Environmental Policy
Primarily sharing of experiences between countries with economies in transition	Flow of ideas and experiences between member States, leading to <b>levelling up</b>
Presentation of practices in advanced countries in the European Environment Agency and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	Enhanced influence of all member States on the design of international indicator sets and statistics, leading to <b>harmonization</b>

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## VI. Objectives of support

13. A Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators would aim to update the support it provides, as shown in the table below.

Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators	Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators
Alignment with statistical standards	Explicit alignment <b>also</b> with the <i>Fundamental Principles of Statistics</i> in the area of environment ( <i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i> )
Implement the <i>System of Environmental-Economic Accounting</i>	Explicitly implement <b>also</b> the United Nations Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics ( <i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i> )
Apply environmental indicators in the context of green economy	<p>Apply <b>also</b> in the context of circular economy (<i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i>)</p> <p>Produce environmental and related integrated statistics to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inform new or challenging policy areas such as the circular economy, sustainable infrastructure and sustainable tourism</li> <li>• link financial instruments to the measurement of a transition to a low-carbon economy</li> </ul> <p>Produce <b>environmental and health-related statistics</b> to derive actions that serve both the health of the environment and humanity (<i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i>)</p> <p>Continuously improve <b>data quality</b> and advise how to overcome data gaps (<i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i>) including through use of the UNECE Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators</p> <p>Use new or <b>alternative data sources</b> (e.g., remote sensing, “big data” and citizen science) (<i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i>)</p> <p><b>Share</b> data (<i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i>) and <b>Disseminate</b> policy-relevant information products (<i>already being done in practice, to some extent</i>)</p>

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## V. Relationship with the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

14. The table below compares the two bodies, with the focusing on monitoring, assessment and reporting, whereas a Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators would continue the Joint Task Force’s focus on the design of statistics and indicators.

<b>Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment</b>	<b>Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators</b>
Area 1: Support development of environmental monitoring and information systems	Area 1: Produce environmental and related integrated statistics
Area 2: Support the development of regular pan-European environmental assessments and regular state-of-the-environment reporting	Area 2. Support application of environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development, green and circular economy initiatives, outcomes of Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences and emerging policy themes
Area 3: Strengthening of Partnerships	Area 3. Enhance capacities of target countries for production of high-quality environmental statistics and indicators, in particular in countries of Eastern & South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia
Area 4: Engage in capacity-development assistance	
Cross-cutting activities (annual sessions of the body, drafting of annual timetable of activities, ToR, Environment for Europe mid-term review, evaluations, resource mobilization, etc.)	Cross-cutting activities (annual sessions of the body, drafting of workplans, ToR, evaluations, resource mobilization, etc.)

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