



Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Conference of European Statisticians

**Joint Task Force on Environmental
Statistics and Indicators**

Twentieth session

Geneva, 16 and 17 October 2023

**Report of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics
and Indicators on its twentieth session****I. Introduction and opening****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 in producing, sharing and using 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 extension of the terms of reference of the Joint Task Force until 31 December 2023 was approved by the ECE Executive Committee on 13 January 2023.¹
3. The Joint Task Force held its twentieth session in Geneva, on 16 and 17 October 2023.²

B. Attendance

4. The meeting was attended by environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.
5. Representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Investment Bank, the Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the

¹ ECE/EX/2023/L.2, para. 7 (d).

² All documents and presentations of the twentieth session are available at <https://unece.org/info/Statistics/events/381384>.



International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe attended the meeting, together with a representative of Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid) and two independent experts.

6. The meeting was serviced by the ECE secretariat and opened by Ms. Tiina Luige (Officer in Charge, ECE Statistics Division) and Mr. Marco Keiner (Director, ECE Environment Division).

7. In the opening session, the Chair invited the Joint Task Force to adopt the agenda of the twentieth session.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

8. The Joint Task Force adopted the agenda of its twentieth session as set out in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2023/1.

II. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs

9. Following the opening of the session and the adoption of the agenda, the Joint Task Force members were invited to elect a new Chair and up to two Vice-Chairs.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

10. The Joint Task Force re-elected Ms. Ševala Korajčević (Bosnia and Herzegovina) as its new Chair and elected Mr. Irakli Apkhaidze (Georgia) as its new Vice-Chair, both for a period of up to two years.

III. Adoption of the report of the nineteenth session

11. The secretariat summarized the outcomes of the nineteenth session of the Joint Task Force (Geneva, 3–4 November 2022) as contained in the corresponding report (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2022/2) and invited the Joint Task Force to adopt the report.

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

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

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

IV. Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

14. The Chair recalled that, during its nineteenth session, the Joint Task Force had supported its conversion into a standing body with a broadened mandate, scope and geographical coverage, to be named the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, and had requested the secretariat to support the new body in preparing a workplan for the next five years.³ The Chair also informed the meeting that, at its seventy-first plenary

³ ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2022/2, para. 21 (a) and (d).

session (Geneva, 22–23 June 2023), the Conference of European Statisticians had endorsed the mandate and 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

15. The secretariat presented an overview of the draft five-year outline of activities (workplan) (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2023/5) for the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for the period 2024–2028, based on the proposed new mandate and terms of reference. The secretariat also outlined the four proposed programme areas related to: (a) the production of environmental and related integrated statistics and provision of support to countries thereon; (b) support to the application of environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development, green and circular economy and the outcomes of Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences and emerging policy themes; (c) capacity development for target countries, with a particular focus on Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia; and (d) cross-cutting activities, as well as more specific activities to be implemented within each programme area.

16. The presentation of the outline was followed by a discussion. Members of the Joint Task Force emphasized that the overall nature of its work would remain unchanged, even with the transition to a standing body, but that new policy areas would need to be supported with statistics and indicators for which it would be beneficial to broaden the membership of the body. The members of the Joint Task Force also highlighted that the spirit of collaboration among experts from different backgrounds and countries remained a key strength. To address the specific needs of the original target countries, i.e., countries with economies in transition, the third programme area would focus on capacity development, ensuring that no country would be left behind.

17. A representative of North Macedonia pointed out the value of sharing not only successes but also challenges and problems faced by countries in the region, highlighting the importance of mutual support and learning.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

18. The Joint Task Force:

(a) Approved the draft five-year outline of activities (workplan) of the Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for the period 2024–2028, as set out in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2023/5;

(b) Requested the secretariat to forward the outline of activities to the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians for consideration;

(c) Invited its members, international organizations and partners to support the activities of the new body and the mobilization of funds for implementation of its workplan.

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

19. The agenda item was structured according to ongoing developments with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force at the international, regional and national levels.

20. The secretariat presented a summary of activities to support the implementation of the main outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) with relevance for the Joint Task Force. Those outcomes included observations and recommendations from the pan-European environmental assessment and the Final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/6), which had been launched at the Nicosia Ministerial Conference.

⁴ ECE/CES/105, para. 46.

The secretariat also presented an overview of the main outcomes of the twenty-fifth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva (hybrid), 2–3 May 2023) and the outcomes of recent activities of the ECE Statistics Division.

21. A representative of UNEP provided an update on the global work on plastic statistics and in particular the process of developing statistical guidelines on measuring flows of plastic throughout its lifecycle, which would be based on international statistical standards and classifications.

22. The Chair reported that a scheduled presentation by a representative of UNCTAD on trade and biodiversity statistics was intended to be a preliminary introduction to the topic. A side event on the topic was to be held during the lunch break of the second day of the Joint Task Force session, during which further details could be discussed by interested participants. A representative of UNCTAD then presented an overview of ongoing work on statistics related to trade in biodiversity-based products.

23. A representative of the United Nations Statistics Division presented updates on global work on environment and climate change statistics, mainly focusing on methodological development, especially pertaining to the global set of climate change statistics and indicators, but also to capacity development and data collection.

24. A representative of OECD provided an overview of OECD activities on climate-related tax revenues and expenditures and the Classification of the Functions of Government.

25. The Chair referred to the outcomes of the Nicosia Ministerial Conference, including the need to establish a common definition of “sustainable infrastructure” that would allow the setting of national targets and the monitoring and measurement of progress. She emphasized that work in that area was already ongoing.

26. A representative of UNEP presented ongoing pilot activities under the draft Green Economy Progress Sustainable Infrastructure Index, its application and the evaluation of national progress towards sustainable infrastructure.

27. A representative of UNITAR presented the advance findings of its Regional E-waste Monitor for the Western Balkans, which showcased the importance of e-waste data and statistics and activities on strengthening subregional and national capacities in the field of e-waste monitoring and reporting. The Chair highlighted that said work was also relevant for supporting the implementation of the outcomes of the Nicosia Ministerial Conference, since the Ministerial Declaration referred to the need to establish a resource-oriented, pan-European e-waste management partnership. The Declaration also noted the need to further broaden access to reliable, detailed information on chemicals and waste in order to achieve their sound management.⁵

28. The agenda item concluded with various presentations that showcased national developments in the production and sharing of environmental indicators and statistics. Presentations focused on: environmental indicators of the quality of life and the methodology for calculating a composite index characterizing the ecological condition of Yerevan and the country’s regions (Armenia); the Austrian Green Finance Agenda and the development of its monitoring and evaluation scheme (Austria); the development of environmental indicators and statistics in the past decade, the main lessons learned and recommendations for the future (Azerbaijan); national environmental indicators (Ireland); ongoing developments related to air indicators and the Shared Environmental Information System (Turkmenistan); and the development of the waste management sector (Republic of Moldova).

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

29. The Joint Task Force:

⁵ ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/L.1, para. 16, seventh bullet.

(a) Committed to support the implementation of the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, subject to the availability of resources, and decided to integrate the outcomes into its work;

(b) Requested the secretariat to brief the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians on the activities implemented to support the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

(c) Took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the outcomes of the twenty-fifth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment;

(d) Invited the Working Group to regularly inform the Joint Task Force of relevant outcomes of its sessions and activities;

(e) Took note of ongoing developments with relevance for its work at the international, regional and national levels and thanked all speakers for their valuable contributions;

(f) Also took note of the information provided on the priority areas of sustainable infrastructure, an e-waste management partnership, plastic waste and green finance, and would consider those areas to be priorities with regard to its work programme;

(g) Requested international and regional organizations and its members to continue to provide it with regular updates on recent developments in the implementation of their activities.

VI. Review of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators

30. At its nineteenth session, the Joint Task Force had requested the secretariat to present an updated version of the Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators as an official document, as well as completed metadata sheets, at its next session.⁶

31. The secretariat therefore presented developments since the nineteenth session and the final version of the Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators: 2023 Edition (ECE/CEPCES/GE.1/2023/4). The secretariat also informed the meeting about the planned next steps in developing the official publication and presented its draft outline.

32. A representative of EEA provided an update on recent developments at EEA related to the work on environmental indicators, their relevance to policy monitoring and their contributions to monitoring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at the European Union level. She also highlighted the importance of data and indicators in supporting policy development and discussed recent cooperation between EEA and ECE. A representative of Austria welcomed said cooperation and noted the need to address data gaps when working with countries outside the European Union.

33. Joint Task Force members were then invited to share their views and provide feedback on the indicator metadata sheets. The focus was on ensuring that said sheets effectively served the needs of users, policymakers and stakeholders, and that they were aligned with international standards and best practices.

34. The comments made during the discussion by members of the Joint Task Force emphasized the importance of enhancing the comprehensiveness of the metadata sheets by including details such as temporal coverage, data limitations, consistent definitions and additional parameters for decision-making.

35. The secretariat took note of the comments made on the Revised Guidelines and metadata sheets, and confirmed that the suggested improvements would be made to the extent possible before publishing. Other suggestions would be considered in a future review of the

⁶ ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2022/2, para. 38 (f).

Guidelines and in the metadata sheets for non-priority indicators, which would be gradually developed and published.

36. The Chair concluded the agenda item by announcing an informal lunch event on trade and biodiversity statistics.⁷ The representative of UNCTAD provided information about practical arrangements for the event.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

37. The Joint Task Force:

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

(b) Approved the minor improvements made, including in the list of indicators and indicator metadata sheets;

(c) Requested the secretariat to continue work on the final version of the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators: 2023 Edition, taking into account discussions at the current session of the Joint Task Force, and requested the secretariat to prepare the final version of the Guidelines as an official publication in English, French and Russian in electronic and paper editions.

VII. Ongoing and planned capacity-development activities

38. A representative of the Environment Agency Austria and the secretariat presented activities implemented within the European Union-funded project “EU4 Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data”. The speaker focused on activities relating to the enhancement of environmental data and statistics, including support for fulfilling international reporting obligations and the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System. In that context, the importance of applying the Revised Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators was highlighted to ensure comparable data across the pan-European region.

39. A representative of Armenia, together with an international expert, presented the main findings of a sectorial review of environment statistics in the country. The review highlighted various strengths in the Armenian statistical system, such as ongoing efforts to align with global statistical standards, but also challenges such as persistent resource limitations. The review had also led to recommendations on strengthening environment statistics, such as through reinforcing the legal framework and further adopting international standards. The review had also suggested that capacity be developed and underlined the importance of reliable statistics and robust data infrastructure at the national level.

40. A representative of Georgia then provided insights into the planning process of an upcoming sectorial review of environment statistics in Georgia and informed Joint Task Force members about the expectations regarding the review but also the challenges. He also highlighted key data sources for environment statistics such as statistical surveys and administrative data from the country’s Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. The speaker also emphasized the importance of training and skills development in the relevant institutions and the need for accurate data validation and accessible platforms to ensure high quality statistics that were made available to the public.

41. The secretariat introduced ongoing and planned capacity-development activities by the ECE Statistics Division, including upcoming seminars and webinars focused on the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, climate change and energy statistics, as well as training on ECE indicators related to air and waste and circular economy.

⁷ See <https://unctad.org/meeting/informal-lunch-event-trade-and-biodiversity-statistics>.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

42. The Joint Task Force:

- (a) Took note of the information provided on ongoing and planned capacity-development activities with relevance for the work of the Joint Task Force;
- (b) Asked international organizations to take into account specific capacity-development needs identified during the discussions at the current session of the Joint Task Force in the planning of future activities;
- (c) Invited its members and representatives of international organizations and other initiatives and projects to continue to provide it with regular updates on recent developments in the implementation of their activities.

VIII. Data needs, statistics, and indicators to manage environment-related human health issues

43. A representative of the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) introduced data needs and statistics related to disaster risk reduction. The speaker highlighted the significance of data throughout the disaster risk reduction cycle. She referred to an example of interinstitutional collaboration within which, in 2020, research had been conducted on the monitoring of levels of severe acute respiratory syndrome and for which a dedicated working group had been established by the country's Office for National Statistics and Joint Biosecurity Centre. The speaker also highlighted a programme that sampled wastewater across England, emphasizing the potential of wastewater surveillance in early detection of health risks.

44. A representative of the WHO Regional Office for Europe presented the health-related targets and indicators within the Global Framework on Chemicals, aiming for a world safe from chemical hazards. The Global Framework emphasized the need for robust surveillance systems and proposed a global health data collection network. Two main goals by 2030 were highlighted:

- (a) Ensuring universal access to poison centres with essential capabilities;
- (b) Urging stakeholders to provide data on chemical concentrations in humans and the environment.

45. The speaker also informed the meeting about the indicator selection process and criteria to support the implementation of the Global Framework. She also briefly outlined advantages and challenges related to human biomonitoring and referred in that context to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

46. The Co-Chair of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics presented the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction/International Science Council Hazard Definition and Classification Review and its Hazard Information Profiles. The speaker emphasized the importance of Hazard Information Profiles and stated that guidelines were being developed to support harmonized data collection on disaster impacts. In that context, she also referred to a special pilot project that evaluated feedback from a statistical point of view on the applicability of the Hazard Information Profiles, which was being carried out in close collaboration with the ECE Task Force on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters, OECD and other partners. The results of that project would be used in the development of the guidelines and future reviews of the Hazard Information Profiles.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

47. The Joint Task Force:

- (a) Took note of the country experience provided by the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the ongoing indicator-related work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe further to the Global Framework for Chemicals;

(b) Would consider future work on health and chemicals, as well as on disaster-related statistics in its future work programme;

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

IX. Other business

48. A representative of UNEP informed the meeting about the Russian-language version of the joint UNEP/United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific/UNITAR online course on “Environmental Sustainable Development Goal Indicators”.⁸

49. The secretariat then conducted a survey on the preferred format of future meetings: in-person, in-person with presenters online without interpretation, or hybrid with interpretation. Among the delegates participating in the survey, more than half expressed a preference for fully in-person meetings.

X. Closure of the meeting

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

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

51. The Joint Task Force took note of the results of the survey on the format of future sessions and requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians about the outcome of the survey.

52. The next session of the Joint Task Force was scheduled to be held on 17 and 18 October 2024.

53. The Joint Task Force adopted the decisions taken during the current session.

⁸ See <https://event.unitar.org/full-catalog/environmental-sdg-indicators>.