

# Economic Commission for Europe

## Committee on Environmental Policy

### Twenty-ninth session

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

### Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

Information paper No. 13

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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**

#### *Summary*

At its twenty-eighth session (1–3 November 2023), the Committee on Environmental Policy took note of the proposal made to convert the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators into a joint working group and decided to defer its decision until the present session.

The present document provides substantive justification for such a change, as well as confirming that it would not have financial implications.

The Committee is invited to consider the proposal. If the Committee would be in favour of such a change, terms of reference for the new body would be presented to the Committee at its next session, in November 2025.

### **Introduction**

1. At its nineteenth session (2–3 November 2022), the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators 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.
2. 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.
3. At its twenty-eighth session (1–3 November 2023), the Committee on Environmental Policy took note of the proposal made to convert the Joint Task Force into a joint working group and decided to defer its decision until the present session of the Committee.
4. To support a decision by the Committee, this document provides additional information on what such a change would imply, particularly related to the financial implications of such a change, as requested by delegations at the twenty-eighth session of the Committee.
5. The justification of such a change and the procedural and resource implications are discussed below. An explanation of the types of bodies under sectoral committees is provided in annex, together with a description of the relationship between the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the proposed joint working group.
6. 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 was established by the Executive Committee (like a working group) in 2009 and has been extended biennially since then; its longevity is characteristic of a working group.

## **I. Justification for a change**

7. The reasons for the proposed extended membership and geographical scope that would accompany a change to a joint working group include the following (see also table 1):

(a) The topics discussed, such as statistics and indicators on circular economy, sustainable infrastructure, disasters, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, are pertinent for all members of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians. They should all have a say in the development of statistics and indicators relevant for all countries;

(b) The change will strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation for all members of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians and would allow for a comprehensive approach to environmental statistics, combining the technical expertise of statisticians with the policy insights of environmental ministries or agencies.

(c) Emerging issues could be addressed more effectively, and the production of statistics could be better aligned with policy needs and be integrated into broader national and international policy frameworks and decision-making.

(d) Broader membership and scope will help environmental statistics be more robust and harmonized in support of national, regional and global assessment and instruments, including for the pan-European environmental assessment, Environmental Performance Reviews and the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and international agreements beyond the environment, such as those related to transport;

(e) Current members of the Joint Task Force are from the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (countries with economies in transition). Though welcome to participate, other countries may be discouraged from participating as they are not members of the Joint Task Force and cannot participate in decision-making;

(f) Broader geographical ownership of the resulting norms will support their adoption beyond the ECE region;

(g) Ideas and experiences will flow across the region and beyond, supporting levelling up and harmonization;

(h) Broader membership will increase the capacity-development value for current members of the Joint Task Force;

(i) Broader membership will support outreach and awareness raising of results and lead to more effective collaboration with international organizations like the European Environment Agency, Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

8. Such a change would also provide a “home” for environmental statistics, including oversight – by the constituencies of both the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians – of ad hoc expert groups developing new areas of work. It would allow for longer-term planning of emerging work areas, such as circular economy, sustainable infrastructure, disaster-related statistics and implementation of the United Nations System of Environmental Economic Accounting.

9. A joint working group could suggest creation of expert groups and oversee their work, subject to decision by the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians.

**Table 1: Overview of key changes resulting from a broader membership**

<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 countries other than countries with economies in transition	Regular participation possible of all member States of the Conference of European Statisticians and Committee on Environmental Policy, including in decision-making
Primarily sharing of experiences between countries with economies in transition	Flow of ideas and experiences between all member States, leading to levelling up
Presentation of practices in advanced countries in the European Environment Agency and OECD	Enhanced influence of all member States on the design of international indicator sets and statistics, leading to harmonization

## II. Resource implications of a change

10. 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, to increase the efficiency of the work. Financial support would continue to be limited to eligible countries with economies in transition or those for whom the secretariat receives earmarked contributions. Table 2 summarizes resource requirements.

11. Converting the Joint Task Force into a Joint Working Group would enhance its standing within the United Nations system, as a working group holds a higher priority than a task force. This elevated status would increase the likelihood of securing resources from the United Nations regular budget to provide more stable and consistent support for the joint body's activities.

**Table 2: Resource requirements**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Secretariat staffing	Regular budget staff, with no significant change in the burden
Financial support	Financial support would continue to be provided to countries with economies in transition according to criteria set by the Committee on Environmental Policy, or with earmarked extrabudgetary contributions. Other member States are not eligible for financial support. (The Conference of European Statisticians does not provide financial support to its members outside ECE.)
Administrative burden	Regular budget staff. No change for Environment Division, unless requested by the Committee on Environmental Policy
Translation and interpretation	Regular budget. The joint working group would normally decide on the working language(s). The Committee on Environmental Policy could impose a limit

### **III. Procedural implications of a change**

12. 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” (see annex I);
- (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 the current 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.

13. Reporting to the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians would be unchanged.

## Annexes

### I. Bodies under sectoral committees

The Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has established Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of Working Parties within ECE (ECE/EX/1) and Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of Teams of Specialists within ECE (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1).

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”.

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”.

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

The current Joint Task Force works in synergy with the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment. The table compares that Working Group with the proposed Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, with the former focusing on monitoring, assessment and reporting, whereas the latter would continue the Joint Task Force’s focus on the design and improvement of statistics and indicators.

**Table: Areas of work compared**

<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, emerging policy themes
Area 3: Strengthening of Partnerships	Area 3. Enhance capacities of target countries for production of high-quality environmental statistics and indicators, particularly in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia
Area 4: Engage in capacity-development assistance	
Cross-cutting activities (annual sessions, drafting of the annual timetable of activities, terms of reference, evaluations, resource mobilization, etc.)	Cross-cutting activities (annual sessions of the body, drafting of workplans, terms of reference, evaluations, resource mobilization, etc.)