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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

Extension of the mandate of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), at its eighteenth session in April 2012, highly appreciated the work of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators and adopted the renewed mandate of the Task Force for 2013–2014 (ECE/CEP/2012/2, annex IV).

The present document contains brief information on Task Force accomplishments for the current period, and presents a proposal on the renewal of its mandate for a period of four years (2015–2018), for the consideration of CEP at its twentieth session.



Accomplishments of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators in 2009–2014

1. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators was set up by the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in 2009 to improve environmental data collection, reporting and assessments in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (the target countries)¹ and to promote comparability of environmental statistics and indicators in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region.

2. The Joint Task Force will have held 10 meetings in the period 2009–2014. During this period it completed the revision of all the indicators covered by the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (Indicator Guidelines) prepared by the CEP Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and endorsed at the Belgrade (2007) Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Joint Task Force also considered several indicators that are important but were initially not included in the Indicator Guidelines.²

3. The Joint Task Force has commenced revision of the production and sharing through the Internet of the indicators by the target countries, having started with eight indicators selected from the Indicator Guidelines. These are: emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air; ambient air quality in urban areas; consumption of ozone-depleting substances; greenhouse gas emissions; biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and concentration of ammonium in rivers; nutrients in freshwater; protected areas; and waste generation.

4. The Joint Task Force noted that, due to the methodological discrepancies in the production of the indicators, some countries need support to address production challenges. Support is also necessary to improve the online sharing and presentation of data.³ The aim is to establish regular data flows for effective reporting and assessments according to international monitoring and assessment requirements, including the obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements. This work will support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the pan-European region.

5. The members of the Joint Task Force expressed unanimous support to continuing the work to improve the production and sharing of the indicators from the Indicator Guidelines and to developing the necessary detailed guidance material to that end.

6. Taking into account the remaining tasks for ensuring the production and sharing of all ECE environmental indicators, the secretariat, in consultation with the Task Force, prepared new terms of reference for the Task Force, which are annexed to this note. CEP is invited to adopt these terms of reference.

¹ I.e., Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

² See *Environmental indicators and indicator-based assessment reports: Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*, Part One, United Nations publication, Sales No. E 07.II.E.9. The revised Guidelines, which also include countries in South-Eastern Europe, are available in the form of an online database from <http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html>.

³ Data presentation and online sharing includes aspects such as: availability of easily accessible individual or thematic web pages on indicators in the national language(s) and English and/or Russian, availability of metadata on those web pages (such as information on indicator methodologies, brief interpretation of data linked to policy targets, links to data validation procedures, specification date of last update, etc.).

Annex

Terms of Reference of the of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (2015–2018)

I. Mandate and reporting

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) renews the mandate of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators for the period 2015–2018.
2. The objective in the work of the Joint Task Force is to assist national statistical agencies and institutions responsible for the production of national state-of-the-environment reports in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (the target countries) in further improving their environmental statistics and the production and sharing of the agreed indicators. This work should support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the pan-European region as the basis for regular reporting and assessments under the international monitoring and assessment requirements, including the obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).
3. The Joint Task Force will continue to report on its accomplishments to its parent bodies, CEP and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).
4. CEP will review the present terms of reference in four years' time (i.e., in 2018).

II. Planned activities and outputs

5. To achieve its objectives, the Joint Task Force will undertake the following activities:
 - (a) Review production and online sharing of indicators in common agreed formats to gradually cover all the environmental indicators in the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (Indicator Guidelines);⁴
 - (b) Discuss challenges in data collection, processing and validation as well as online sharing of the indicators and provide and adapt the relevant guidance material;
 - (c) Continue to strengthen, in cooperation with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and other relevant institutions, the capacities of the countries concerned in the production and sharing of environmental data, including statistical data, and indicators by providing technical assistance and training, in a manner coherent with the principles of SEIS and regular environmental reporting and assessments;
 - (d) Consider additional environmental indicators for inclusion in the Indicator Guidelines, as required to meet policy demands;
 - (e) Maintain a network of environmental experts in statistical offices and Government agencies dealing with environmental assessments to further broaden the exchange of experiences and approaches.

⁴ The revised Guidelines are available in the form of an online database from <http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html>.

6. The Task Force will prepare the following outputs:
 - (a) Data and indicators are produced and shared in common agreed formats on the websites of national agencies, with links to the national websites made available on the Joint Task Force website;
 - (b) Methodologies, papers and presentations with recommendations for data collection, processing and validation are developed and shared online;
 - (c) The capacities of the target countries to produce and share environmental statistical data and indicators are improved;
 - (d) Additional indicators are included in the Indicator Guidelines, as necessary;
 - (e) Networks of environmental experts and statisticians are in place to ensure effective exchange of experiences and approaches.

III. Timetable

7. The mandate of the Task Force will cover the period from 2015 to the end of 2018.

IV. Method of work

8. The Joint Task Force is expected, subject to the availability of donor support, to have regular face-to-face meetings (two per annum) as well as workshops focusing on specific issues during its mandate. The Joint Task Force will also work via e-mail and other electronic means. It will closely cooperate with the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to support the establishment of SEIS for regular reporting and assessments applying the SEIS principles. Donors will be invited to provide voluntary contributions to support the work of the Joint Task Force.

V. Membership

9. The Joint Task Force will be open to all United Nations Economic Commission for Europe countries. Other interested countries are also welcome to participate. EEA, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the International Energy Agency, the Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Health Organization European Centre for Environment and Health and the secretariats of relevant MEAs and other institutions will be invited to participate.

VI. Secretariat support

10. The Environment Division and the Statistical Division will jointly service the Task Force. This will include:
 - (a) Servicing the Joint Task Force meetings (with interpretation and translation), including the preparation of meeting agendas and reports;
 - (b) Preparing background documents and compilation papers for the Joint Task Force at its request;

- (c) Mobilizing financial support for members of the Joint Task Force to facilitate their participation in the meetings and workshops;
 - (d) Helping the target countries, under projects with EEA and other interested institutions, to improve their capabilities for producing indicators.
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