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Committee on Environmental Policy

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Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

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Revised outline of activities leading up to 2021

Note by the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

Summary

At its twenty-second session (25–27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy renewed the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for a five-year period (2017–2021) (ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II). The terms of reference require the Working Group to prepare annual timetables of its activities. In addition, the Committee requested a more detailed outline of its activities leading up to 2021.

At its nineteenth session (27–28 June 2017), the Working Group considered and approved a draft outline of its activities leading up to 2021 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2017/4). However, the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its twenty-third session (Geneva, 14–17 November 2017), requested the Working Group to revise and streamline the outline, as presented in document ECE/CEP/2017/13, by including measurable outcomes and giving priority to its core activities in accordance with the financial resources available.

At its twentieth session (3–4 September 2018), the Working Group considered a draft revised outline, asked the secretariat to add a column to the main table to indicate priorities and include a summary of activities and priorities by year. In addition, the expected achievements should be toned down. As requested by the Working Group, the secretariat circulated the further revised outline and gave two weeks for concrete changes to be suggested. Once further revised, the secretariat sent it again to participants for approval by a written silence procedure. The written silence procedure was completed on 26 October 2018.

Introduction

1. At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25–27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy renewed the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for a five-year period (2017–2021) (ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II). In addition, the Committee asked the Working Group to take into account the financial and human resources available in developing its yearly detailed plans of activities, and to develop a more detailed outline of activities leading up to 2021 (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 32 (b)).

2. The terms of reference of the Working Group provide for continued cooperation with the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including in its work on environmental statistics and indicators, associated data sets and accompanying environmental information and data necessary to establish the Shared Environmental Information System. The Working Group is also mandated to cooperate with the Joint Task Force on the development of a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks in order to ensure that all planned and future activities are synergetic and streamlined.

3. In 2017, in order to comply with the foregoing requirements, the secretariat, in consultation with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), drafted an outline of the activities to be carried out by both the Working Group and the Joint Task Force in the period leading up to 2021. The outline of activities took into consideration the Batumi Ministerial Declaration (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 10) and the Task Force's renewed mandate and terms of reference and provided a road map of activities to facilitate achievement of the objectives of the Working Group.

4. At its nineteenth session (Geneva, 27–28 June 2017), the Working Group considered and approved the draft outline of its activities leading up to 2021 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2017/4). It also approved an annual timetable of activities for 2018 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2017/3).

5. However, the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its twenty-third session (Geneva, 14–17 November 2017), requested the Working Group to revise and streamline the outline of its activities in the period leading up to 2021, as presented in document ECE/CEP/2017/13, by including measurable outcomes and giving priority to its core activities in accordance with the financial resources available. The present document responds to that request. Nonetheless, it is a living document and will be updated, monitored and refined as needed based on inputs from member States and involved organizations. 6. The Working Group will implement the activities set out in the Table 2 below with support from the secretariat and in close collaboration with national and international governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including other relevant ECE bodies such as the Joint Task Force. The objectives and activities listed are as defined in the terms of reference of the Working Group. The necessary tasks and events have been added to the table in order to operationalize activities and reach objectives.

7. At its twentieth session (Geneva, 3–4 September 2018), the Working Group considered the draft revised outline of activities leading up to 2021 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2018/3) and the annual timetable of activities for 2019 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2018/4). It was agreed that further revision was necessary and the secretariat was requested to add a column to the main table in the draft outline of activities leading up to 2021 and the annual timetable of activities for 2019 to indicate priorities, including a summary of activities and priorities by year as set out in Table 1. Following revisions, both documents have been approved by the Working Group through written silence procedure.

8. Implementation of the activities set out in this document is conditional on mobilization of the necessary extrabudgetary resources. To date, funds have been made available by Norway, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, the European Union (through the European Environment Agency) and the United Nations Development Account. The Working Group will support the secretariat in its continuing efforts to mobilize resources and assistance from regional and international organizations and member States in order to enable the Working Group to fulfil its mandate.

9. The most critical remaining resource requirement is funding for the travel and subsistence of experts participating in sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force and members of the secretariat, totalling approximately \$55,000 per annum. The resource requirements for development of a next pan-European environmental assessment will depend on its scope, nature and institutional arrangements. All of the financial resource requirements listed, which exclude the funding of secretariat staff time, are indicative and subject to standard United Nations programme support costs.

Table 1.
Summary of activities by objective, priority and year^a

| Year | Priority | Objective | | | |
|------|----------|--|--|--|--|
| | | <i>A. Assist in the establishment and operation of national information systems in line with SEIS in Europe and Central Asia</i> | <i>B. Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2020</i> | <i>C. Initiate a process of consultation on the development of a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks [...]</i> | <i>D. Engage in capacity-building assistance addressing specific challenges related to environmental monitoring and assessment [...]</i> |
| 2018 | High | A.1, A.2, A.3, A.4, A.5 | B.2 | C.2 | - |
| | Medium | A.6 | B.1, B3 | C.3 | D.1, D.2, D.3 |
| | Low | - | - | C.4 | - |
| 2019 | High | A.1, A.2, A.3, A.5 | B.2 | C.2 | D.4 |
| | Medium | A.6 | B.1, B3 | C.3 | D.1, D.2, D.3 |
| | Low | - | - | C.4, C.5 | - |
| 2020 | High | A.1, A.2, A.3, A.5 | B.2 | C.2 | D.4 |
| | Medium | A.6 | B.1, B3 | C.3 | D.1, D.2, D.3 |
| | Low | - | - | C.4, C.5 | - |
| 2021 | High | A.1, A.2, A.3, A.5 | B.2 | C.2 | D.4 |
| | Medium | A.6 | B.1, B3 | C.3 | D.1, D.2, D.3 |
| | Low | - | - | C.4, C.5 | - |

^a Detailed descriptions for all activities regarding objectives, implementations tasks or events, available resources and required financial resources as well as measurable outcomes or outputs noted in the summary of activities are available in Table 2.

Table 2.

Outline of activities leading up to 2021

| <i>Objective</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Activity priority</i> | <i>Implementation task or event^a</i> | <i>Available and required financial resources</i> | <i>Measurable outcome or output</i> |
|---|--|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| A. Assist in the establishment and operation of national information systems in line with SEIS in Europe and Central Asia | 1. Continue supporting the establishment of SEIS with regard to its specific content and principles in support of regular environmental assessment processes and reporting | High | Capacity-building activities at annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force and during projects (2018–2021) | Largely funded through UNDA ^b and EEA ^c projects (excluding the travel and subsistence of expert participants) | Progress in SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia, described in the reports on Working Group and Joint Task Force sessions (2018–2021) Assistance provided to target countries for SEIS establishment in order to support regular environmental assessments and reporting (2018–2021) |
| | | | Development of a SEIS e-learning platform (2019–2021) (ECE with UNEP) | Largely funded through the UNDA project | SEIS e-learning platform established (2021) |
| | 2. Continue cooperating with the Joint Task Force in its work on environmental statistics and indicators, associated data sets and accompanying environmental information and data necessary to establish SEIS | High | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force (2018–2021) | Approximately \$50,000 per annum required to support travel and subsistence of eligible experts | Progress on environmental statistics and indicators described in the reports on Working Group and Joint Task Force sessions (2018–2021) |
| | | | In support of SEIS, review and amendment of the ECE <i>Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators</i> (2018–2019) | Possible consultancies required in order to support review and amendment of the <i>Guidelines</i> | ECE <i>Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators</i> reviewed, amended and published as appropriate (2019) |

| <i>Objective</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Activity priority</i> | <i>Implementation task or event^a</i> | <i>Available and required financial resources</i> | <i>Measurable outcome or output</i> |
|------------------|---|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| | 3. Regularly evaluate the performance of ECE countries in establishing and implementing SEIS against the SEIS targets and performance indicators adopted by the Committee | High | Development of a SEIS assessment framework (2018) | - | Progress in SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia through regular performance evaluations Issuance of the SEIS assessment framework as an official document (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2018/5) and publication (2019) |
| | | | Development of an online SEIS reporting tool (ECE with UNEP) (2018) | - | SEIS online reporting tool available (2018) |
| | | | Regular reporting by countries on progress in the establishment of SEIS (2018–2021) | - | Compilation of production tables for ECE environmental indicators or links thereto Compilation of completed questionnaires on the establishment of SEIS |
| | 4. Contribute to the process of the Environment for Europe mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes in 2018 | High | Prepare a draft mid-term review report on the establishment of SEIS (2018) | - | Issuance of the draft mid-term review report on the establishment of SEIS (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2018/6) |
| | 5. Prepare a mid-term and a final report for the Committee on the establishment and implementation of SEIS leading up to 2021 | High | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force (2018–2021) and of the Committee on Environmental Policy (2019 and 2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Issuance of the mid-term review report on the establishment of SEIS as an official document (draft in 2018) Issuance of the final review report on the establishment of SEIS (2021) |

| <i>Objective</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Activity priority</i> | <i>Implementation task or event^a</i> | <i>Available and required financial resources</i> | <i>Measurable outcome or output</i> |
|---|--|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| | 6. Provide annual recommendations on how SEIS can be further strengthened in European and Central Asian countries | Medium | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force and reports issued and events conducted within the framework of projects (2018–2021) | Largely funded through projects (excluding the travel and subsistence of expert participants) | Recommendations and advice provided to ECE countries in order to improve their SEIS performance Recommendations uploaded to SEIS e-learning platform (2021) |
| B. Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2020 | 1. Bring together experts involved in the UNEP Global Environment Outlook process and the EEA European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) to discuss and oversee the regular pan-European environmental assessment | Medium | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force and meetings between ECE, UNEP and EEA, as appropriate (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Proposals on the next pan-European environmental assessment (2019) Concept of regular pan-European environmental assessment and oversight thereof, as appropriate, described in the reports on Working Group and Joint Task Force sessions (2018–2019) |
| | | | Support the preparation of a pan-European environmental assessment, supported by SEIS, with its nature, scope and leadership to be determined by the Committee on Environmental Policy (2020–2021) | Resource needs will depend on the nature and scope of the assessment but may be significant | Contributions towards the next pan-European environmental assessment supported by SEIS (2021) |
| | 2. Discuss and detail regional priorities concerning the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting | High | Annual sessions of the Working Group (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Regional priorities described in the reports on Working Group sessions (2018–2021) |

| <i>Objective</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Activity priority</i> | <i>Implementation task or event^a</i> | <i>Available and required financial resources</i> | <i>Measurable outcome or output</i> |
|---|--|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| | 3. Oversee the implementation of proposed recommendations and guidance provided through the consultation process on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting | Medium | Annual sessions of the Working Group (2018–2021) and preparation of an overview of recommendations made and how they were addressed (2019–2021) Capacity-building and advisory missions conducted in order to assist in the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reports (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 Largely funded through the UNDA project | Implementation of recommendations supported, including through capacity-development activities and guidance Capacity-building activities implemented and advisory missions conducted (2018–2021) |
| C. Initiate a process of consultation on the development of a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks and, as part of this process, develop an inclusive platform to discuss the integration of environmental, economic and social considerations regarding the 2030 Agenda, the System | 1. Coordinate a consultative process to elaborate the working modalities of a regional network of networks | Low | Done in 2017 | - | Regional environmental information and assessment network of networks progressing Document on modalities for the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks (ECE/CEP/2017/14) and decisions of the Committee on Environmental Policy (November 2017) |
| | 2. Cooperate with the Joint Task Force to ensure that all planned and future activities are synergetic and streamlined | High | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Coordination described in the reports on Working Group and Joint Task Force sessions (2018–2021) |

| <i>Objective</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Activity priority</i> | <i>Implementation task or event^a</i> | <i>Available and required financial resources</i> | <i>Measurable outcome or output</i> |
|--|--|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the green economy and other related areas of work | 3. Develop capacities to engage other communities and networks to discuss how environmental, social and economic information and data can be integrated and utilized in decision-making | Medium | Annual sessions of the Working Group (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Participation by other communities and networks described in the reports on Working Group sessions (2018–2021) |
| | 4. Operationalize proposed recommendations and guidance provided through the consultative process to ensure the sustainable implementation of a regional network of networks (optional) | Low | Annual sessions of the Working Group (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Participation by other communities and networks described in the reports on Working Group sessions (2018–2021) |
| | 5. Publish outcomes from the Working Group’s collaborative activities | Medium | Publication of guidelines, etc. (2019–2021) | Possible consultancies required in order to support drafting | Publications, guidelines, lessons learned, as appropriate (2019–2021) |
| D. Engage in capacity-building assistance addressing specific challenges related to environmental monitoring and assessment and environmental knowledge maintained through national monitoring systems in the European and | 1. Detail regional and national capacity gaps in information and data needed for producing the ECE set of environmental indicators, the EEA core set of indicators, OECD green growth indicators and Sustainable Development Goal indicators | Medium | Drafting of national gap analyses on environmental data and information needs and SEIS establishment (2018–2019) Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force (2018–2021) | Largely funded through EEA and UNDA projects See above under activity A.2 | Capacities further developed in selected countries National gap analyses on data production (2018–2019) |
| | 2. Support countries in the development of regional and national indicator | Medium | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | Progress described in the reports on Working Group sessions (2018–2021) |

| <i>Objective</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Activity priority</i> | <i>Implementation task or event^a</i> | <i>Available and required financial resources</i> | <i>Measurable outcome or output</i> |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Central Asian countries | frameworks to monitor the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, and activities to support their implementation | | Capacity-building and advisory missions (2019–2021) | Largely funded through the UNDA project | Capacity-building events held (2019–2021) Training materials (2019) |
| | 3. Engage and liaise directly with other relevant actors working on capacity-building in related areas of work | Medium | Annual sessions of the Working Group and Joint Task Force (2018–2021) | See above under activity A.2 | |
| | | | ECE secretariat engagement with other actors, e.g., UNEP, EEA and OECD (2019–2021) | Approximately \$5,000 per annum required to support the travel and subsistence of members of the ECE secretariat, with further costs dependent on the activities organized | Participation of the ECE secretariat in meetings of other actors and vice versa Reports on joint activities, e.g., capacity-building workshops |
| | 4. Implement capacity-building activities to provide assistance in accordance with priority areas of action | High | Capacity-building and development of training materials (2019–2021) Several national training sessions on data production (2019) and capacity-building workshops on data collection (2019) Regional capacity-development workshops and advisory missions (2019–2021) | Largely funded through EEA and UNDA projects | Capacity-building events held (2019–2021) Training materials (2019) Training materials on the production of regional or international environmental indicators (2018) Monitoring guidelines (2020) |

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|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | | Thematic conferences, meetings and workshops in order to prepare publications that address the integration of environmental, social and economic data, subject to the availability of funding (optional) | Resource needs will depend on the nature and scope of the events and publications but will have to cover travel and subsistence costs and consultancies | Publications on the integration of environmental, social and economic data, subject to the availability of funding |

Abbreviations: EEA = European Environment Agency; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; SEIS = Shared Environmental Information System; UNDA = United Nations Development Account; UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme.

^a Common tasks for all meetings include organizing logistics (venue, interpretation, programme of work, etc.), overseeing the conduct of the meetings and preparing related documentation and promotional activities. For all meetings of the Working Group and the Joint Task Force, common tasks will include preparing an agenda and a meeting report as official United Nations documents. Other targeted tasks (such as the preparation of reports on specific themes or training materials) are detailed in this table.

^b “Improved environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus”.

^c “Support production and regular update of the regional set of indicators and strengthening environmental statistics and accounting in the six Eastern Partnership countries under ENI SEIS II East project”.