
Revised terms of reference for the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators for 2013-2014

As approved by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its 18th session in April 2012

I. Background

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 and reporting in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe, and to promote comparability of environmental statistics and indicators in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region.
2. The Joint Task Force will have held seven meetings in 2009–2012. It will have reviewed, to a various extent, all indicators covered by the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (Indicator Guidelines) that were 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 will have also considered indicators that are important but are currently not included in the Indicator Guidelines.
3. The Joint Task Force noted that methodological discrepancies in producing the indicators required further examination with the aim of achieving data comparability and providing a better basis for making informed decisions on environmental policy.
4. The members of the Joint Task Force expressed a unanimous support to continue the work, in particular, to review and revise the indicators from the Indicator Guidelines, to clarify further definitions and to develop detailed guidance, possibly in the form of data tables, on the production of indicators. Continuation of data reporting on indicators was considered of high importance for identifying gaps and opportunities for filling those gaps.

II. Mandate and reporting

5. The Joint Task Force will continue to report to its parent bodies, CEP and CES. It will submit a report on its accomplishments to both bodies.

III. Objective

6. The objective 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 Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe to further improve environmental statistics and produce the agreed indicators, strengthen environmental reporting and promote comparability of environmental statistics and indicators in the pan-European region.

IV. Planned activities and outputs

7. To achieve its objectives, the Joint Task Force will undertake the following activities:

(a) Review further and revise, when necessary, the indicators covered by the Indicator Guidelines to better explain the methodologies, clarify concepts and definitions and develop detailed guidance, possibly in the form of data tables, on the production of indicators;

(b) Provide guidance on primary data collection, including statistical data, as a basis for indicators in the Indicator Guidelines through data exchange on indicators and the subsequent evaluation of gaps and opportunities to fill them;

(c) Propose additional environmental indicators to be included in the Indicator Guidelines;

(d) Continue strengthening, in cooperation with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and other relevant institutions, the capacity of the countries concerned to produce environmental data, including statistical data, and indicators through providing technical assistance and training, in coherence with the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System and regular environmental assessments;

(e) Provide and adapt to the needs of the countries concerned relevant guidance materials available at the international level;

(f) 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.

8. The Task Force will prepare, in particular, the following outputs:

(a) Reviews of the application of environmental indicators from the Indicator Guidelines in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe. Analysis of the results of these reviews will help to identify priority work areas where further improvement is most needed in these countries and where training courses and workshops may have a maximum effect. The reviews may also help international donors to identify potential areas for technical assistance;

(b) Further improvement of Indicator Guidelines on the texts of indicators;

(c) Agreed texts of additional indicators to be included in the Indicator Guidelines;

(d) Methodological documents, presentations and recommendations on data collection and production of indicators.

V. Timetable

9. The mandate of the Task Force will cover the period from 2013 to the end of 2014.

VI. Method of work

10. The Joint Task Force is expected, subject to availability of donor support, to have four face-to-face meetings 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. Donors will be invited to provide voluntary contributions to support the Joint Task Force.

VII. Membership

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

VIII. Secretariat support

12. 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) Arranging for financial support for members of the Joint Task Force from countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and SEE, so that they can participate in the Joint Task Force meetings;

(d) Helping the above-mentioned countries, under projects with EEA and other interested institutions, to improve their capabilities for producing indicators.

