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Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators

Tenth session
Geneva, 12 and 13 May 2015

Report of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators on its tenth session

I. Introduction

A. Background

1. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators was established by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians to support the efforts of countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia[1] (the target countries) to improve their environmental statistics and produce agreed indicators. The work aims in the long term at strengthening environmental reporting and making environmental statistics available and comparable throughout the pan-European region. The Joint Task Force's activities in 2015 were governed by its mandate for that period, as approved by the parent bodies (see ECE/EX/28).

2. The tenth session of the Joint Task Force was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 12 and 13 May 2015.

B. Attendance

3. Environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries attended the meeting: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia,

[1] The countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The countries of South-Eastern Europe include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

4. Representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Union programme on Environmental Monitoring in Central Asia (MONECA), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme Tajikistan, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the United Nations Statistics Division also attended the meeting.

5. The non-governmental organizations Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia and Zoï Environmental Network were also represented at the meeting.

C. Organizational matters

6. The Joint Task Force elected Ms. Aigul Yepbayeva (Kazakhstan) Chair and Ms. Natalia Zharkina (Belarus) Vice-Chair for its current 2015 mandate.

7. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Aigul Yepbayeva (Kazakhstan).

8. The Joint Task Force adopted the agenda for its tenth session, as contained in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2015/1, as well as the report of its ninth session (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2014/6).

II. Implementation of the recommendations for the production and online sharing of the selected environmental indicators

A. Progress in implementing the recommendations for the initial set of eight environmental indicators

9. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators reviewed further progress in the production and sharing through the Internet of the initial set of eight core environmental indicators[2] by the target countries. The review was supported by an analysis prepared by the secretariat covering 12 of the 17[3] target countries (see ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2015/3).[4] The review examined the progress made by countries since the previous review at the ninth session of the Joint Task Force (Geneva, 4-5 November 2014). It also assessed the implementation of the set of 14 recommendations (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2014/2, annex) for improving the production and sharing of environmental indicators agreed at its eighth session (Geneva, 13-15 May 2014).

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[2] I.e., emission of pollutants into the atmospheric air (A1); ambient air quality in urban areas (A2); consumption of ozone-depleting substances (A3); greenhouse gas emissions (B3); biochemical oxygen demand and concentration of ammonium in rivers (C10); nutrients in freshwater (C11); protected areas (D1); and waste generation (I1).

3 Albania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan did not provide links to the websites with the environmental indicators prior to the session.

4 Document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2015/3 provides a synopsis of the larger report. The full analysis of progress in the production and sharing of core environmental indicators in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia is also available on the website for the tenth session as an informal document (see http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35516).

10. The Joint Task Force acknowledged further progress made by the 12 target countries, although to a smaller degree than in the period between the eighth and ninth sessions. That could be explained by the fact that further improvements, in particular to enhance the quality of information accompanying the indicators, required more effort and were more time-consuming to implement than uploading the indicators produced online.

11. The Joint Task Force expressed concern about the lack of data published for 2013 for some indicators by a number of countries. In that connection, the importance of the regular updating of the data and indicators was stressed. It was also clarified that failing to regularly update the data and indicators was a sign of malfunction of the national information system, whether due to regulatory, institutional or infrastructural shortcomings.

12. The Joint Task Force also reviewed the production and sharing of the eight environmental indicators in Albania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine, as well as information provided by UNMIK for Kosovo.[5]

13. A representative of Albania said that four environmental indicators — A2 (ambient air quality), C10 (BOD_5 and concentration of ammonium in rivers), C11 (nutrients in freshwater) and I1 (waste generation) — were already produced and shared online on the website of the National Environment Agency. As for the other indicators, Albania was in the process of preparing an annual monitoring programme to ensure the availability of data and information for generating environmental assessments in accordance with the international requirements.

14. A representative of Tajikistan reported on the partial production of indicator A1 (emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air) and I1 (waste generation). A representative from Turkmenistan said that all of the eight indicators were produced, except for certain data of the indicators A1 and A2. For both countries the data and indicators were available only offline, and there was no clarity as to when they could be shared though the Internet.

15. A representative of Ukraine informed the Task Force that it was producing the great majority of the set of environmental indicators from the Indicator Guidelines[6] and that a web portal had been developed as part of the website of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources through which the indicators and accompanying information would be shared. At the time of the meeting, indicators A1, A2, C10 and C11 were accessible online through that portal. In addition, indicators A1, F2 (fertilizer consumption), H1 (passenger transport demand) and I1 were produced and published on the website of the State Statistics Service.

16. A representative of UNMIK reported that there were several environmental indicators produced for Kosovo[5] related to areas such as air, water, climate change, energy, agriculture, forestry, waste, transport and biodiversity. Further improvements to their production as well as sharing were anticipated through implementation of a project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, expected to start by the end of 2015.

17. The Joint Task Force welcomed the information provided by representatives of the four countries and UNMIK. It urged the countries to share all the indicators produced through the Internet. It further invited the countries to take the necessary efforts to produce

[5] All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

[6] See the Online Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators: http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html.

all eight indicators and, to the extent possible, benefit from the ongoing projects supporting indicator production and sharing.

18. The Joint Task Force urged Uzbekistan to produce and share the environmental indicators and to report in that regard.

B. Progress in implementing recommendations for the additional set of six environmental indicators

19. The Joint Task Force also reviewed implementation of the recommendations with regard to the production and sharing of a set of 6 additional indicators[7] that had been included in the extended core set of 14 indicators at the ninth session. This review was also supported by the analysis prepared by the secretariat for the 12 target countries.

20. The majority of the target countries produced and shared most of the data for the six indicators. However, indicator C1 (renewable freshwater resources) was not produced by several countries, and production of indicator D4 (threatened and protected species) also presented challenges for a few countries.

21. Most of the gaps with regard to the production of the six additional indicators had been identified for Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, a representative of Armenia reported at the meeting that further progress had been achieved, and that additional data were being shared for some of the six indicators.

22. The three additional water indicators of the extended core set (C1, C2 (freshwater abstraction) and C3 (total water use)), were discussed in detail at the workshop on water-related statistics and indicators organized as part of the tenth session. The workshop helped especially to clarify a number of conceptual and terminological issues and should enable the countries to more effectively produce those water indicators.

23. The Joint Task Force welcomed the achievements of countries in producing and sharing the extended set of 14 core indicators. It requested the secretariat to update the indicator production and sharing analysis with the information provided at the meeting. In future, countries should especially focus on recommendations 2, 6, 11 and 12 in order to attain further progress. They should take the necessary efforts to produce and share all the data, in particular under the air and water indicators (recommendation 2). The data for all indicators should be updated regularly. For the set of the 14 indicators that meant that the data should be updated annually for each calendar year before the end of the following year (for 2013 before the end of 2014)[8] (recommendation 6). Countries should also provide or improve the quality of information accompanying the data on the methodology applied for indicator production and publish interpretation of data and trends (recommendations 11 and 12).

24. Countries were requested to provide easy access to the indicators and their underpinning data published online. In that context, representatives of the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, EEA and UNEP demonstrated ways to ensure easy access to the published information. Accordingly, presentations were made on the Macedonian national system (which gathered all the indicators and information in one

[7] I.e., renewable freshwater resources (C1), freshwater abstraction (C2), total water use (C3), threatened and protected species (D4), fertilizer consumption (F2) and passenger transport demand (H1)

[8] An exception to this is indicator D4 (threatened and protected species): for this indicator data should be updated at least every five years.

place), the EEA State of Environment Report online (SoER online) and UNEP-Live, and the different features of those systems and tools were explained.

III. Outcomes of the sixteenth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment of relevance to indicator production and sharing

25. The secretariat informed the Joint Task Force about the outcomes of the sixteenth session of the Working Group of Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Istanbul, 16-17 April 2015) of relevance to indicator production and sharing.

26. The main outcome of the Working Group's sixteenth session had been the agreement on a first set of 67 data flows for constituting the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) for the pan-European region. Those data should be implemented — i.e., produced and shared through the Internet — by every pan-European country in the course of 2015. The data would serve as a basis for the Working Group to analyse progress in developing SEIS. The Working Group would thus review if the data were produced and shared in the countries and prepare a progress report for consideration by environment ministers at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi, Georgia, in June 2016. The initial version of that report would be submitted to the twenty-first session of CEP in October 2015.

27. The majority of the agreed pan-European SEIS data flows (47 out of 67) underpinned the production of the extended set of 14 core environmental indicators. At the same time, 20 data flows referred to other environmental indicators from the indicator guidelines. Those included the climate change indicators B1 (air temperature) and B2 (atmospheric precipitation); water indicators C5 (water supply industry and population connected to water supply industry), C14 (population connected to wastewater treatment), C15 (wastewater treatment facilities) and C16 (polluted (non-treated) wastewaters); biodiversity indicator D3 (forests and other wooded land); land and soil indicator E1 (land uptake); energy indicators G1 (final energy consumption) and G2 (total primary energy supply); and waste indicator I2 (management of hazardous waste).

28. The secretariat further noted that the oversight of countries performance on SEIS by the Working Group would make it redundant for the Joint Task Force to review the production and sharing of environmental indicators. In that context, the secretariat invited the countries to consider the role that the Joint Task Force could play in the future. The secretariat reminded the Joint Task Force that it had been requested to prepare a paper for CEP on options for streamlining the activities of the ECE Programme on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment with a view to strengthening the role of the Working Group.

29. The representative of OECD informed the Joint Task Force about the outcomes and recommendations from a workshop on SEIS and Green Growth[9] that could be of relevance for considering the new role for the Joint Task Force.

30. The workshop participants had concluded that SEIS could serve as a good basis to produce a number of green-growth indicators related to environmental, resource and material productivity, the environmental dimension of the quality of life and the risk to economic development from depleting the natural asset base. In that context, the national network for SEIS should be expanded to include ministries of economy.

[9] The workshop was organized by OECD with support of ECE, UNEP and EEA for countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia on 10 and 11 March 2015 in Paris.

31. Recommendations from the workshop included that countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia should be provided with a platform at the international level for discussing the production and use of environmental data in connection with economic and social ones. It was further recommended that through such platform countries could discuss how best to interpret the green growth and environmental indicators.

32. In addition, the secretariat told participants about the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), developed by the United Nations Statistics Division, which provided a framework for producing internationally comparable statistics on the environment and their relationship with the economy, and about activities organized for countries on SEEA.

33. In connection to the information provided on SEIS activities, the representative of EEA noted that the EEA-implemented SEIS projects were expected to continue.

34. In view of the new developments, the Joint Task Force concluded that, if approved by CEP and the Conference of European Statisticians, it could take a new role and provide a platform dedicated to the target countries to help them address:

(a) Methodological challenges related to the production of the agreed SEIS data, including environmental and related economic statistics;

(b) Challenges faced with the application of SEEA;

(c) Interpretation and assessment challenges related to the presentation of environmental and green-growth indicators in the assessment reports so that they could be successfully used to show the effectiveness of environmental and economic policies.

35. The Joint Task Force further concluded that it should possibly change its name so that it would better refer to the new tasks, as well as be opened to the participation of the experts representing ministries of economy from the target countries.

36. The Joint Task Force requested the secretariat to incorporate those conclusions in the paper requested by CEP.

IV. Revision of the waste indicators from the Online Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators

37. The secretariat had made a proposal at the ninth session to separate the indicator “final waste disposal” (I4) into two distinct indicators — “management of municipal waste” (I3); and “management of non-hazardous manufacturing waste” (I4) — both including exports and imports of the respective wastes. Owing to time constraints, the discussion on this proposal had been moved to the tenth session.

38. The secretariat proposed the following specific amendments to the Online Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators:

(a) Waste generation (I1): add “import of waste”;

(b) Waste reuse and recycling (I3): change “non-hazardous industrial waste” to “non-hazardous manufacturing waste”, changing the numbering to I5;

(c) Final waste disposal: management of municipal waste (I4a): change number and title of I3 to “management of municipal waste” and add rows “of which from households” and “imports” and “exports” into the tables;

(d) Final waste disposal: management of non-hazardous industrial waste (I4b): change number and title of I4 to “management of non-hazardous manufacturing waste” and add “imports” and “exports”.

39. The Joint Task Force agreed that the changes outlined should be introduced by the secretariat. At the same time, the Joint task Force acknowledged that countries would require additional support to get their waste statistics and reporting in order. The Joint Task Force, in its new role, would thus be requested to continue addressing the challenges related to waste statistics and "use of waste" definitions, and to that end would closely cooperate with the United Nations Statistics Division, Eurostat and other relevant agencies. An international process to develop a framework for waste statistics might emerge from that cooperation.

V. Other business and closing of the meeting

40. The Joint Task Force thanked the donors, in particular the European Union, Norway, Switzerland and the Russian Federation, for the financial support provided to organize the tenth session. The Chair then closed the meeting.