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Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Conference of European Statisticians

**Joint Task Force on Environmental
Statistics and Indicators****Thirteenth session**
Geneva, 29-30 June 2017**Report of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics
and Indicators on its thirteenth session****I. Introduction****A. Background**

1. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators was established by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) to support the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia¹ in improving their environmental statistics and indicators. The work being carried out by the Joint Task Force aims at strengthening environmental reporting and making environmental statistics available and comparable throughout the pan-European region in the long term. The Terms of Reference for the Joint Task Force (ECE/CEP/2015/12) were approved by the ECE Executive Committee on 31 March 2015 (ECE/EX/28).

2. The thirteenth session of the Joint Task Force was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 29-30 June 2017.

B. Attendance

3. The thirteenth session was attended by environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

¹ The countries of Eastern Europe, 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.

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

4. Representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) attended the meeting.

5. Furthermore, the University of Geneva, the Vienna University of Economics and Business, Zoë Environment Network and Institute Cadaster also participated in the meeting.

C. Organizational matters

6. The meeting was chaired by Ms. A. Yepbayeva (Kazakhstan).

7. The Joint Task Force adopted the agenda for its thirteenth session, as contained in document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2017/1.

8. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:

(a) Implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the twelfth session of the Joint Task Force;

(b) Data quality in Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) reporting: methodological considerations;

(c) Revision of biodiversity indicators;

(d) Implementation of recommendations on energy indicators;

(e) Nexus approach on energy, water and agriculture;

(f) Pilot data collection on water quality by the United Nations Statistics Division;

(g) Waste statistics;

(h) Capacity-building;

(i) Updates on developments related to the Sustainable Development Goals;

(j) Other relevant developments relating to:

(i) Meetings of the United Nations Expert Group on Environment Statistics,

(ii) The twelfth meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting,

(iii) Green Economy,

(iv) Modernisation of Statistics.

II. Implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the twelfth session of the Joint Task Force

9. The secretariat presented the status of implementation of the following decisions and recommendations of the twelfth session of the Joint Task Force (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2016/12):

- (i) Renewal of the mandate of the Joint Task Force;
- (ii) Simple data validation tools;
- (iii) Revising the ECE set of biodiversity-related indicators;
- (iv) Revising the ECE set of energy-related indicators and templates;
- (v) Discussing the energy-water-agriculture nexus approach;
- (vi) Progress made by the CES Task Force on Waste Statistics;
- (vii) The work of ECE on the modernization of statistics.

10. The secretariat also informed the Task Force about the related issues that were discussed by the nineteenth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 27-28 June 2017),² organized back-to-back with the Joint Task Force meeting:

- (i) Streamlining of monitoring and reporting obligations;
- (ii) The establishment of an environmental information and assessment network of networks;
- (iii) The Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) Assessment Framework and the SEIS reporting application.

11. Other actions based on recommendations and decisions made at the twelfth session of the Joint Task Force were in progress. These include the continuation of efforts to establish a national process of coordination and data sharing for energy data, to further explore the link between biodiversity-related indicators, ecosystem accounting and ecosystem services, and to present examples of environmental information systems and their products and services.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

12. The Joint Task Force agreed that a request would be submitted to the twenty-third session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 14-17 November 2017) to renew the mandate of the Joint Task Force for 2018-2021. It was also agreed that the new mandate should also take into account the mid-term review of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (ECE/CEP/2017/2, Annex II, para. 7).

III. Data quality in Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) reporting: methodological considerations

13. The secretariat, together with UNEP, presented a proposal for considering data quality in the evaluation of producing and sharing of indicators as part of the updated SEIS

² See <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44829#/>.

Assessment Framework (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2017/5). Members of the Joint Task Force were informed about the plan to pilot the SEIS Assessment Framework and countries were invited to volunteer to take part in the pilot exercise.

14. The secretariat furthermore presented a proposal to the Joint Task Force regarding the integration of a simple validation tool into the ECE production tables.

15. Representatives of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan asked for more information regarding who should provide the information on data quality and how the pilot testing would be carried out.

16. Representatives of Kazakhstan and Switzerland mentioned that not all data to be assessed for quality are statistical data. To address this issue, the representative of Switzerland suggested changing the term “statistics” used in the assessment tool to “statistics/data”.

17. Representatives of Georgia and Ukraine stressed the importance of explanatory notes and/or a glossary that would explain the terms used in the assessment tool.

18. A representative of Armenia asked whether respondents should provide references for questions to be answered with “yes” or “no”. The secretariat clarified that this was not foreseen currently, in particular as it would increase the reporting burden.

19. A representative of EEA asked for clarification on the substantive topics that would be covered by scientific articles in the special issue with Environmental Science and Policy. The secretariat noted that the scientific articles would be used as a basis for a chapter in the mid-term SEIS assessment and shared the proposal for the special issue, including the tentative list of foreseen scientific articles, with the Joint Task Force. It was further announced that more information will be provided on the meeting website. Members of the Joint Task Force were also invited to participate in the production of these articles.

20. The representative of Austria stressed that for all the European Union and EEA members States, SEIS reporting is organised via EEA. A practical solution on how data collection for mid-term SEIS assessment could be coordinated between ECE and EEA would be needed for the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) member States in this case.

21. Representatives of Armenia and the Russian Federation noted that it would be very useful to integrate a simple data validation tool into the ECE production. The secretariat was requested to implement some validation rules into the revised templates for the ECE set of biodiversity-related and energy-related indicators.³

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

22. The Joint Task Force asked the secretariat to include a glossary in the SEIS Assessment Framework. The glossary should provide clear definitions for each of the questions. It was further agreed that the term “statistics” used in the SEIS Assessment Framework would be changed to “statistics/data”.

23. The following countries agreed to pilot the SEIS Assessment Framework and its associated reporting application: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. EEA will also take part in piloting the SEIS Assessment Framework. For the pilot testing, the secretariat will prepare a guidance document and clarify which indicators from the ECE set of

³ See <http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html>.

environmental indicators will be used. It was also agreed that there would be a paper-based questionnaire, in addition to the online reporting application, which could be shared with other relevant agencies. The secretariat will establish a timetable for the piloting and completion of the questionnaire, identify expected inputs from countries and clarify the agencies to be involved.

IV. Revision of biodiversity indicators

24. The secretariat presented a proposal for revising the production tables for the ECE set of biodiversity-related indicators (D1 – Protected areas, D2 – Biosphere reserves and wetlands of international importance, D3 – Forests and other wooded land, D4 – Threatened and protected species, D5 – Trends in the number and distribution of selected species and D6 – Invasive alien species).

25. The Russian Federation presented work on producing official statistics for indicator D1 on protected areas.

26. The representative of Austria found the proposal of the secretariat to be acceptable, but stated that there may be more comments at a later stage after an internal expert consultation.

27. A representative of Kyrgyzstan mentioned some problems in determining the exact size of protected areas, as no Geographic Information System data is available.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

28. The Joint Task Force agreed that the secretariat would prepare revised production tables for the biodiversity-related indicators D1, D2, D3 and D6. It was further agreed that simple validation rules would be integrated into the production tables for testing.

29. The revised production tables will be made available to the members of the Joint Task Force in advance of its fourteenth session (Rome, 2-3 October 2017). This will allow members of the Joint Task Force to consult with national subject matter experts and to provide feedback to the secretariat ahead of its next meeting.

V. Implementation of recommendations on energy indicators

30. The secretariat presented a proposal for revising the production tables for the ECE set of energy-related indicators (G1 – Final energy consumption, G2 – Total primary energy supply, G3 – Energy intensity and G4 – Renewable energy supply).

31. Kazakhstan made a presentation on producing energy statistics and energy balances by combining data collected via surveys with administrative data.

32. Several members of the Joint Task Force asked the secretariat to provide the revised production tables in advance of the fourteenth session of the Joint Task Force to allow for a consultation with national subject matter experts.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

33. The Joint Task Force agreed that the secretariat would prepare the revised production tables for the energy-related indicators. It was further agreed that the simple validation rules would be integrated for testing.

34. The revised production tables will be made available to the members of the Joint Task Force in advance of its fourteenth session (Rome, 2-3 October 2017). This will allow members of the Joint Task Force to consult with national subject matter experts and to provide feedback to the secretariat ahead of its next meeting.

VI. Nexus approach on energy, water and agriculture

35. A discussion was held on the nexus approach where energy issues were considered in conjunction with other policies, such as climate change, agriculture, forestry and water.

36. Presentations were given by the ECE secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes on the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus in transboundary water basins and by the University of Geneva on its work on mountain water supply and climate change.

37. A representative of Kyrgyzstan informed the Task Force about a project on water, food and energy which was being developed together with OECD.

38. The representative of the University of Geneva explained that the project team needed two years to get the necessary data. The greatest challenge was obtaining socioeconomic data, mainly due to its confidentiality. He also stated that more data from environmental-economic accounting could be helpful for better analysis of the relationship between different themes such as water and climate change.

39. A representative of EEA recommended the use of the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) for future projects.

VII. Pilot data collection on water quality by the United Nations Statistics Division

40. UNSD presented recent work related to data collection on water statistics, with a particular focus on the UNSD/UNEP Pilot Questionnaire on Water Quality in 2017. The questionnaire was distributed to 40 selected countries, 37 of which had replied by end of June 2017. The purpose of this questionnaire was to advance methodology in the field of water statistics.

41. Georgia presented country experiences in replying to the UNSD/UNEP Pilot Questionnaire. The presentation addressed the legal framework and the water quality monitoring and data collection process in Georgia. The presentation concluded with a summary of specific challenges in responding to the questionnaire.

42. A presentation on European Union water indicators, current trends and reporting was given by EEA. The presenter informed the meeting about the most important water-related policy questions in the European Union and illustrated the most recent developments with selected indicators. He explained that environmental water demand (or the "Water Exploitation Index +") was not being considered, as it depends significantly on the local context.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

43. The Joint Task Force agreed that water quality issues should be further discussed in upcoming sessions of the Joint Task Force.

VIII. Waste statistics

44. The secretariat informed the Joint Task Force about the progress of work of the CES Task Force on Waste Statistics, which was established in February 2017 under the auspices of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians.

45. The representative of UNSD made a presentation in connection with its efforts to collect data on waste statistics. This includes the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics (Section: Waste) in 2016 and the UNSD/UNEP Pilot Questionnaire on Electronic Waste, which was sent to selected countries in March 2017.

46. The representative of ITU presented the newly established Global e-Waste Statistics Partnership.⁴ She pointed out the importance of statistics on electronic waste (e-waste) and the need for cooperation among international organizations, the private sector and national governmental agencies. The “Global e-Waste Statistics Partnership” cooperated closely with UNSD and the relevant custodian agencies for Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

47. The representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina presented the country’s experience in replying to the UNSD/UNEP Pilot Questionnaire. The presenter informed the meeting about the international and national legal framework and the methodology that had been applied to calculate the amounts of e-waste, while noting problems related to different classifications for e-waste used internationally.

48. Ukraine reported about its problems with unaccounted waste and the use of different coefficients for converting volumes of waste to mass of waste.

49. The secretariat invited interested members of the Joint Task Force to nominate additional experts to participate in the CES Task Force on waste statistics.

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

50. Representatives of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and UNEP expressed their interest to participate in the work of the CES Task Force on Waste Statistics, while Ukraine expressed an interest to review documents produced by the Task Force. The secretariat invited other interested members of the Joint Task Force and international organizations to nominate experts.

IX. Capacity-building

51. The purpose of the agenda item on capacity-building was to inform the Joint Task Force on current national and regional capacity-building activities of international organizations related to SEIS implementation, environment statistics and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and how international organizations coordinate them.

52. ECE and UNEP made a joint presentation on current and planned capacity-building activities in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The members of the Joint Task Force were invited to report on concrete capacity-building needs either to ECE or UNEP.

53. Kazakhstan reported on its experiences from the national training workshop on environment statistics and Sustainable Development Goals, which was carried out in

⁴ See <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Climate-Change/Pages/ewaste/globalewastestatisticspartnership.aspx>

cooperation with ECE and UNEP in April 2017. Aside from the Statistical Committee of Kazakhstan, the workshop involved relevant national agencies (such as the Ministry of Energy) and staff from regional (sub-national) statistical offices. Statistical offices and environmental administration from neighbouring countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) were also represented at the workshop.

54. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan presented their progress with implementing the SEIS indicators and concluded with some capacity-building needs that could be addressed through national workshops and/or regional training events.⁵⁴

Decisions and recommendations by the Joint Task Force

55. Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan expressed their interest in national capacity-building workshops. It was agreed that the interested countries would contact the secretariat to discuss possible support. The members of the Joint Task Force supported the idea to organize regional and subregional capacity-building activities for groups of countries with common interests and capacity needs. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of translating technical materials into Russian.

X. Updates on developments related to the Sustainable Development Goals

56. The secretariat informed the Joint Task Force about the latest developments regarding work being carried out by the Interagency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-building for Statistics. The proportion of tier 3 (methodological development required) and tier 2 (data not regularly produced by countries) indicators is significantly higher among environment-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators compared to other thematic areas.

57. A representative of UNEP presented the status of methodological development for the 26 Sustainable Development Goal indicators for which UNEP is the custodian agency. Seventeen of them are currently classified as tier 3 and four as tier 2.

58. The Vienna University of Economics and Business provided a detailed presentation on the material flow indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals. The presentation discussed the methodology for material flow analysis and implications for policymaking and future research.

XI. Other relevant developments

59. The representative of UNSD presented the main outcomes of a meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics, which was held from 3-5 May 2017 in Prague. He informed, that the *Manual on the Basic Set of Environment Statistics* is now further advanced (methodology sheets on water resources now available alongside mineral and energy resources). He furthermore informed, that currently work on other methodology sheets, including land cover and land use, forests, air quality, environment protection expenditure and waste, is being carried out by various international experts and UNSD. Another important outcome of that meeting was a substantive discussion of the global set of climate change statistics and indicators which is currently being developed by UNSD.

60. A representative of ECE reported on the main outcomes of the twelfth meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, which

was held from 19-21 June 2017 in New York (United States of America). The meeting focussed on the UNCEEA work programme, which includes some important activities which are relevant for the ECE region. Among them are the establishment of regional focal points for SEEA capacity building within the regional commissions, and the development of a global work programme for capacity building. UNCEEA decided to launch a new SEEA website by 1 September 2017, which will serve as a central repository of environmental-economic accounting documents and activities.

61. A representative of OECD (by video conference) reported on updates and the current status of work on the green economy and green growth indicators. The presenter noted the recently published report *Green Growth Indicators 2017*,⁵ which presents a selection of updated and new indicators illustrating progress that OECD and G20 countries have made since the 1990s. The OECD representative furthermore presented the recently issued report on *Green Transformation in Ukraine Based on OECD Green Growth Indicators*.⁶

62. Belarus informed the Joint Task Force that green growth indicators would be considered in its next statistical yearbook and the representative of Azerbaijan noted that it had recently changed some of its indicators based on input received from OECD.

63. ECE presented work being carried out on the modernisation of statistics, taking note of its possible relevance for work on environment statistics and environmental indicators.

XII. Closing session

64. The Task Force adopted its decisions and recommendations.

65. The next meeting of the Joint Task Force will be held on 2-3 October 2017 in Rome, back to back with the Expert Forum on Climate Change-related Statistics (Rome, 3-5 October 2017) and the meeting of the Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters (Rome, 6 October 2017).

66. The Joint Task Force thanked donors, Switzerland and EEA, for the financial support provided to organize the thirteenth session.

⁵ See <http://www.oecd.org/env/green-growth-indicators-2017-9789264268586-en.htm>.

⁶ See <http://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/towards-green-growth-9789264234437-en.htm>.