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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

Revised draft mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2022–2026

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document provides background for the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to discuss, during its twenty-second session, its future mandate and terms of reference. The Working Group will be invited to consider the draft set out below, agree on changes and determine next steps. Those steps could begin with a survey among members of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy. Upon receiving feedback from members of the Committee, the draft terms of reference would be revised, approved by the Working Group and submitted for consideration by the Committee and subsequently to the ECE Executive Committee for approval. The present draft was prepared based on the current terms of reference, outcomes of past sessions of the Working Group, written feedback provided by member States in May 2020 and the questionnaire and publication *Sharing our vision for the pan-European region: Setting strategic goals and objectives for the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment*, which emphasizes strategic goals and objectives up to 2030.^a

^a United Nations publication, ECE/CEP/187.



I. Introduction

1. Environmental policies in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region are evolving to allow a transition to sustainable development and an inclusive green and circular economy. A broad set of policy interventions aims at socioeconomic development in the region, while respecting planetary boundaries. Relevant policies for the region include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, multilateral environmental agreements including ECE Conventions and the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and other relevant instruments, including policies at the subregional level such as the European Union European Green Deal.

2. Effective and sound policymaking and informed decision-making require integrated, relevant, timely and easily accessible information and its appropriate assessment. To achieve this, adequate monitoring systems and programmes, data and information management systems, assessment and reporting routines and methods must be in place. In addition, non-traditional sources, such as big data, the Internet of things and citizen science, need to be tapped. The ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment assists member States in working with environmental data and information to ensure their timely flow and adequate assessment, thus supporting informed decision-making processes, both nationally and internationally, on the environment.

II. Mandate

3. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment shall serve as the environmental knowledge and assessment network for the ECE region as a whole, under the oversight of the Committee on Environmental Policy, to aid informed decision-making in support of the transition to sustainable development and a green and circular economy in the ECE region. It shall report annually to the Committee on its achievements and the implementation or modification of the objectives and activities set out below. These terms of reference are valid for a period of five years, until the Committee's regular session in 2026.

III. Objectives

4. The Working Group's overall objective is, in cooperation with partners, to enable informed environmental decision-making through regular monitoring, assessment and reporting to support the transition to sustainable development and a green and circular economy in the ECE region.

5. Under the oversight of the Committee, the specific objectives of the Working Group are to:

(a) Support the development of environmental monitoring and information systems in Europe and Central Asia, and their alignment with the Shared Environmental Information System principles, to aid informed decision-making;

(b) Enable a consultative process on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2026 in support of sustainable development and a green and circular economy and the implementation of the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;

(c) Facilitate consultation between ECE member States, partner organizations and other institutions and networks with relevant expertise in the area and provide an inclusive platform for countries to discuss advances in the area of monitoring and assessment and the integration of environmental, economic and social information and data with regard to sustainable development and a green and circular economy;

(d) Enable the development of capacity to tackle specific challenges in environmental monitoring and assessment, including the development and improvement of environmental monitoring systems, their technical specifications and modernization, financing and the collection of environmental knowledge through national monitoring systems and other mechanisms and technologies, in support of sustainable development and a green and circular economy;

(e) Engage as partners the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), its network and other organizations and programmes within the United Nations system, institutions of the European Union, including the European Commission and the European Environment Agency and its European Environment Information and Observation Network, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Group on Earth Observations, among others.

6. The Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators will continue to carry out all activities related to statistical capacity development for countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

IV. Planned activities and outputs

7. The Working Group shall:

(a) Assist in the development of environmental monitoring and information systems in support of regular environmental assessment processes, reporting and relevant policy developments in the area of environment, and their alignment with the Shared Environmental Information System principles, and in particular:

(i) Support institutional strengthening and legislative improvement;

(ii) Promote the use of new technologies and tools (such as big data, the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence) and the integration of official statistics and administrative data with both environmental data from new sources and data for other sectors, including health and transport;

(iii) Continue cooperating with the Joint Task Force in its work on environmental statistics and indicators;

(iv) Regularly evaluate the performance of environmental monitoring and information systems;

(v) Contribute to the process of implementing the main outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in 2021–2026;

(vi) Review the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System, as appropriate;

(vii) Provide recommendations on how environmental monitoring and information systems can be further strengthened;

(b) Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting, to support the transition to sustainable development and a green and circular economy and in particular:

(i) Bring together experts from the partner organizations and other interested parties to discuss and oversee the regular pan-European environmental assessment;

(ii) Discuss and detail regional priorities concerning the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting, also involving other thematic networks, including those under the multilateral environmental agreements, in the discussion;

(iii) 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;

(c) Continue the process of consultation between ECE member States, partner organizations and other institutions and networks, including the secretariats of multilateral

environmental agreements, international financial institutions and the private sector, with relevant expertise in the area, and provide an inclusive platform for countries to discuss recent developments in the area of monitoring and assessment and the integration of environmental, economic and social information and data with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, a green and circular economy and other related areas of work. In addition:

- (i) Cooperate with the Joint Task Force and other relevant bodies under other ECE sectoral subprogrammes, including those of Housing and Land Management, Population, Sustainable Energy and Transport, to ensure that activities are synergetic and streamlined;
 - (ii) Engage with other communities and networks to discuss how environmental, social and economic information and data can be integrated and utilized in decision-making and how to present environmental information on geospatial platforms;
 - (iii) Publish outcomes from the Working Group's collaborative activities (for example, best practices, guidelines and lessons learned) to share outputs and guide future activities in the area;
 - (d) Engage in capacity-development assistance addressing specific challenges related to environmental monitoring and assessment and environmental knowledge. The specific challenges to be addressed will depend on regional and national capacity gaps and be defined by the Working Group members. The implementation of capacity-development activities will depend on the mobilization of resources. Such activities might include:
 - (i) Detailing regional and national capacity gaps, in collaboration with the Joint Task Force, in environmental monitoring, information and data needed for producing environmental indicators. This will involve identifying institutional, legal, monitoring, data and information gaps in the target countries;
 - (ii) Supporting countries in the development and implementation of regional and national indicator frameworks to monitor relevant environmental policy developments and activities to support their implementation, including the review and establishment of national reporting mechanisms, procedures and methodological approaches associated with the indicators in all ECE countries;
 - (iii) Engaging and liaising directly with other relevant knowledge-sharing actors working on capacity-development in related areas of work;
 - (iv) Implementing capacity-development activities to provide assistance in accordance with priority areas of action identified for targeted ECE countries.
8. The following outputs will be delivered leading up to 2026:
- (a) Updated guidelines for the application of environmental indicators, in collaboration with the Joint Task Force;
 - (b) Assistance to target countries for regular reporting on the Shared Environmental Information System, to address gaps in its implementation, if needed;
 - (c) Recommendations and advice to ECE countries to improve their performance in developing environmental monitoring and information systems, aligned with the Shared Environmental Information System principles;
 - (d) Assistance in the preparation of the regular pan-European environmental assessment and other relevant state-of-the-environment reports;
 - (e) Support for the implementation of regional and national indicator frameworks to contribute to environmental monitoring and national reporting mechanisms, procedures and methodological approaches associated with environmental indicators;
 - (f) Thematic conferences, meetings, workshops and publications that address the integration of environmental, social and economic data, subject to the availability of funding;
 - (g) Support in assessing regional and national capacity gaps in environmental monitoring, information and data needed for producing environmental indicators;

(h) Focused capacity-development activities to address specific national priorities, including the preparation of training materials and the provision of advisory services, subject to the availability of funding.

V. Timetable

9. The Working Group shall prepare an annual timetable of activities and achievements, as an official document, and regularly report to the Committee on the progress of its work. This will ensure that the Working Group can accommodate new demands over time and allow the Committee to comment on and monitor ongoing and future activities.

10. During 2022, the Working Group shall:

(a) Assist in the review of the ECE core environmental indicators and associated data sets identified as priority areas by the Joint Task Force, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and a green and circular economy;

(b) Maintain and expand the online Shared Environmental Information System reporting application through the UNEP World Environment Situation Room;

(c) Provide recommendations to ECE member States on how to improve their performance in environmental monitoring and assessment and assist in the identification of regional and national priorities regarding monitoring and assessment capabilities needed, including for compiling environmentally related indicators, notably Sustainable Development Goal indicators, as a part of defining priority areas of action for the Working Group for 2023;

(d) Organize a thematic workshop on streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting, including how environmental, social and economic data can be integrated, and engage other communities and networks in this activity, subject to the availability of resources;

(e) Continue efforts to mobilize resources and support from regional and international organizations to enable the Working Group to increase its capacity-development assistance.

11. The mandate of the Working Group will be reviewed and amended by the Committee in its regular session in 2026.

VI. Methods of work

12. The Working Group shall meet at least once annually. It shall also communicate through email and other electronic collaborative platforms in the period between meetings.

13. Additional meetings, workshops and capacity-development activities will be organized subject to the availability of funding.

VII. Membership

14. The Working Group shall be composed of members from all ECE member States. They should represent the national institutions dealing with environmental monitoring, knowledge and assessment.

15. The Working Group shall also involve representatives of partner organizations such as programmes and policies and multilateral environmental agreements dealing with the collection of environmental data and information and the generation of environmental assessments — whether covering the environment as a whole, or only certain themes — as well as expert teams.

16. The Working Group shall elect a chair and two vice-chairs for a term of up to two years, ensuring a regional balance in the nominations. The chair and vice-chairs shall be eligible for re-election for one additional term.

VIII. Secretariat support and resources

17. The Working Group shall be serviced by the ECE secretariat, supported by UNEP and the European Environment Agency, and guided by the relevant procedures established by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The ECE secretariat will work closely with interested partners, such as the European Commission and OECD.

18. Donors will be invited to provide support for the Working Group's activities.
