

Issue 8, September 2020





## 22<sup>nd</sup> session of Working Group and 17<sup>th</sup> session of Joint Task Force

The imposition of travel bans and quarantine rules prevented a face-to-face meeting of the Working Group back in May 2020. Similar constraints are affecting the postponed meeting in October 2020.

However, we have now managed to secure resources to organize two “hybrid” meetings under the UNECE Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme:

- 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (26 October 2020) – for latest updates and full documentation see <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54323>
- 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (27 October 2020) – see <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51963>

Each meeting is being reduced from two days of six hours to one day of four hours, thus limiting the time available to go through the agendas. Our expectation is that participants who are resident close to Geneva will be invited to attend in person (e.g., representatives of permanent missions), while others will join the meeting using an online platform with full interpretation – this being the “hybrid” format.

The Working Group will be asked to consider the draft annual timetable of activities for 2021 and draft mandate and terms of reference for the period 2022–2026, approve the outline for the SEIS final progress review report and consider a first draft of the report, and discuss the development of the pan-European environmental assessment (see below).

The Joint Task Force will continue its thorough review of the UNECE set of environmental indicators.

## Measuring and monitoring the SDGs: a nexus approach

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an ambitious and comprehensive framework that opens new perspectives for policymaking and international cooperation. Its integrated character highlights the linkages and complementarities that exist between different goals and targets.

The challenges facing the UNECE region cut across most SDGs. Environmental pressures persist. Sustainable economic development requires further advances in connectivity across the region. Growing urbanization will demand increased attention and new solutions to cities’ problems. Effective policies and a broader and meaningful societal dialogue cannot take place in the absence of robust data and monitoring mechanisms.

UNECE is supporting countries to address these key sustainable development challenges through an integrated, multisectoral approach leveraging UNECE norms, standards and conventions, and by building capacities and providing policy assistance.

At the crossroads of all UNECE programmes and expertise, four high-impact “nexus” areas have been identified where multiple SDGs converge:

- Sustainable use of natural resources
- Sustainable and smart cities for all ages
- Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity
- Measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

By connecting sectoral expertise and capitalizing on synergies, this approach aims to help countries unlock the interlinked benefits of sustainable development action.

A draft of the publication on the fourth nexus – measuring and monitoring SDGs – was circulated among the members of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for their comments. The publication is now being finalized for issue in advance of the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the UNECE Commission (Geneva, 21 April 2021). It may be issued before the end of 2020.

The publication reviews challenges in the field of measurement and monitoring of SDGs in terms of:

- Defining and supporting the role of National Statistical Offices
- Coordination and collaboration
- Modernizing statistical processes and systems
- Strengthening basic official statistics
- Dissemination and communication
- Financial and human resources

It then examines responses at global, regional and national levels to these challenges, before concluding with policy recommendations.

The publication is important for the environmental community because it recognizes that environmental statistics are relatively under-developed yet key to SDG measurement and monitoring.

It suggests that environmental sustainability is crucial to the overall sustainability of development and basic official statistics must be improved to reflect this. This is an area where improved coordination and collaboration across the national

statistical system is likely to pay dividends, since environmental data and statistics are often collected by environmental departments and agencies.

The publication highlights the United Nations *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and System of Environmental-Economic Accounting*, but also many UNECE instruments, such as the UNECE set of environmental indicators, Joint Task Force, Shared Environmental Information System, environmental performance reviews and Water, Air and Aarhus Conventions.



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## Pan-European Environmental Assessment

The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment has been tasked by the Committee on Environmental Policy with leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, UNECE has begun, in consultation with UNEP, to work on a limited indicator-based and thematic assessment, which would become the 7<sup>th</sup> pan-European environmental assessment under the Environment for Europe Ministerial Process.

Resources are limited and the timeframe uncertain, but a first consultant has been contracted to work on one of the key environmental topics of our day – biodiversity – and support the design of the assessment. The consultant will be drafting a short questionnaire to seek your help in filling data gaps.

Progress will be reported to the Working Group in October.

## Measuring the Circular Economy

An in-depth review of measuring the circular economy is being prepared by Statistics Finland (lead), the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, Statistics Canada, the National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia, Statistics Netherlands, the European Environment Agency, Eurostat, UNECE, the United Nations Statistics Division, UNEP and OECD.

The document takes stock of the policy needs for information on the circular economy, summarizes measurement challenges and makes recommendations to the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians for when it meets on 15 and 16 October 2020. It will appear on the UNECE website (at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54442>) prior to the Bureau meeting.



## Upcoming relevant events (with all dates & formats subject to change)

### **Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians**

15–16 October 2020, online

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54442>

### **17<sup>th</sup> session of Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators**

26 October 2020, online

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54323>

### **22<sup>nd</sup> session of Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment**

27 October 2020, online

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51963>

### **Task Force on Target-Setting and Reporting under the Protocol on Water and Health**

4–5 November 2020 (to be confirmed)

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=52847>

### **17<sup>th</sup> meeting of Task Force on Access to Information under the Aarhus Convention**

16–17 November 2020 (to be confirmed)

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=53318>

### **26<sup>th</sup> session of Committee on Environmental Policy**

9–11 November 2020

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54631>

The **Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment** was established in 2000 by the Committee on Environmental Policy to serve as an instrument for UNECE member States to provide recommendations, propose action plans, and improve coordination of international initiatives concerned with environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting.

For more information on the Working Group please visit:

<https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/environmental-monitoring-and-assessment/envema.html>

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