



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Working Group on Environmental
Monitoring and Assessment****Twenty-fifth session**
Geneva, 2 and 3 May 2023**Report of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring
and Assessment on its twenty-fifth session****I. Introduction****A. Background**

1. The Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) approved,¹ during its 126th meeting (Geneva, 13 January 2023), the extension of the mandate and terms of reference² of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring until 31 December 2023.
2. The mandate of the Working Group states that it should: review progress made by countries of Europe and Central Asia in establishing a Shared Environmental Information System; identify and explore options for establishing a regional environmental information and assessment network of networks and, as part of that process, develop an inclusive platform for countries to discuss the integration of environmental, economic and social considerations regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the green economy and other related areas of work; lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting; and engage in capacity-building assistance regarding specific challenges in environmental monitoring and assessment.³
3. The twenty-fifth session of the Working Group was held on 2 and 3 May 2023 in Geneva in a hybrid format.⁴ The participation of experts from countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as the online platform for remote

¹ See Decisions related to the Committee on Environmental Policy from the 126th meeting of the Executive Committee (ECE/EX/2023/L.2, para. 7 (b)). Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/item%205b_ECE_EX_2023_L.2_ENG.pdf.

² ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II.

³ Ibid., annex II, para. 2.

⁴ Meeting documents and other information, including informal documents and presentations, are available on the session web page at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-fifth-session-working-group-environmental-monitoring-and>.



participation, were financially supported by Austria, Switzerland and the European Union through the EU4Environment – Water Resources and Environmental Data programme.

B. Attendance

4. Environmental experts and statisticians from the following countries attended the meeting: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Finland, France, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

5. Representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Space Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) also participated in the meeting.

6. Furthermore, representatives of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization, the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe, the Iranian National Invention and Innovation Team, Women Engage for a Common Future, the European Environmental Bureau, the Air Pollution and Climate Secretariat, the Organization for Research and Community Development, the Pew Charitable Trusts and independent experts and representatives of academia were present.

C. Procedural matters

7. The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Working Group, Ms. Maia Javakhishvili (Georgia), who stated that the special procedures adopted by the ECE Executive Committee on decision-making for formal meetings with remote participation (ECE/EX/2020/L.12) and the silence procedure for decisions agreed *ad referendum* that had been applied during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic would no longer be applied.

II. Adoption of the agenda

8. The Chair provided an overview of the agenda of the Working Group as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/1 and asked the Working Group for comments.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

9. The Working Group adopted the agenda as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/1.

III. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chairs

10. At its twenty-third session (Geneva, 4–5 May 2021), the Working Group had elected Ms. Javakhishvili (Georgia) as its Chair and Ms. Katerina Nikolovska (North Macedonia) and Mr. Johannes Mayer (Austria) as its Vice-Chairs.⁵ Its terms of reference specified that: “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.”⁶

11. Therefore, members of the Working Group needed to elect a new Chair and Vice-Chairs or re-elect the current Chair and Vice-Chairs at the twenty-fifth session. Members had been invited to start consultations on possible candidates prior to the twenty-fifth session.

12. The secretariat communicated that no nominations for the posts of Chair and Vice-Chairs had been received and that, in the absence of alternative proposals, the current Chair

⁵ ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/2, para. 14.

⁶ ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II, para. 12.

and Vice-Chairs had expressed their readiness to stand for re-election. The Working Group was then invited to re-elect the current Chair and Vice-Chairs.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

13. The Working Group re-elected Ms. Javakhishvili (Georgia) as its Chair and Ms. Nikolovska (North Macedonia) and Mr. Mayer (Austria) as its Vice-Chairs for a period of up to two years.

IV. Adoption of the report of the twenty-fourth session

14. The secretariat summarized the outcomes of the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group (Geneva, 11–12 April 2022), as contained in the report of that session (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/2), and informed the Working Group of the status of implementation of the decisions and recommendations made at the twenty-fourth session. The secretariat asked the Working Group for comments.

15. The Chair invited the Working Group to adopt the report.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

16. The Working Group adopted the report of the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/2.

V. Implementing the mandate and terms of reference

17. The secretariat reported on the decisions made by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its special session on 3–4 October 2022 in Nicosia and relevant outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) regarding the activities, mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the related Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, as set out in the report of the Committee on its special session⁷ and the Ministerial Declaration (forthcoming).

18. The secretariat informed the Working Group that the Committee on Environmental Policy, at its special session in Nicosia, had approved the extension of the current mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until the end of 2023,⁸ and that the decision had subsequently been approved by the ECE Executive Committee.⁹ The Committee on Environmental Policy also requested that a new draft mandate and terms of reference be presented to the Committee at its next regular session, which was to be held in November 2023.¹⁰

19. At its twenty-fourth session (Geneva (hybrid), 11–12 April 2022), the Working Group had conducted a survey to discuss relevant elements, programme areas and activities for the new terms of reference of the Working Group beyond 2023, and had requested the secretariat to integrate the results of the survey and the discussion and to present a draft version of the new mandate and terms of reference at its next session.¹¹

20. During the current session, one of the Vice-Chairs of the Working Group presented an overview of the draft new mandate and terms of reference for the period 2024–2028

⁷ ECE/CEP/S/2022/6, paras. 30–31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 31 (a).

⁹ EXCOM/CONCLU/126, para. 24 (a).

¹⁰ ECE/CEP/S/2022/6, para. 31 (a).

¹¹ ECE/CEP/AC.10/2022/2, paras. 20–26.

(ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/3), including the main objectives, planned activities under the respective programme areas and expected results.

21. The representative of Switzerland welcomed the proposed new mandate and terms of reference, highlighting the importance of support to the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and, in particular, three core elements that should guide the work of the Working Group: (a) the need to address the gaps identified in the seventh pan-European environmental assessment; (b) the continued provision of support for the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System, both at the national and pan-European region levels; and (c) the use of the revised ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators.¹² He recognized the ambition of the proposed mandate and related work programme but also requested that priorities be set and measurable objectives defined. In addition, he expressed concern regarding financial constraints. The Chair took note of the three priorities identified by the representative of Switzerland and suggested highlighting those areas in the new mandate and terms of reference. The secretariat added that a fourth important area of work was the regular review of the state of the environment in the region, especially the next pan-European environmental assessment, regarding which the Working Group had an important role to play.

22. The Chair highlighted that it was important that all members of the Working Group engage actively in promoting the work of the Working Group outside the meeting room to support the implementation of the new mandate and terms of reference, and to raise funds for enhancing environmental monitoring and assessment in target countries.

23. The Vice-Chair invited Working Group members to serve as leading or co-leading countries or organizations for specific programme activities or areas – a common practice under other ECE programmes and conventions. The Vice-Chair then explained that leading or co-leading an activity or area might, for example, comprise the development of a detailed road map or workplan for the activity or area, including means of implementation, support to fundraising, provision of guidance during the implementation of certain activities and reporting on progress on those activities to the Working Group or the Committee on Environmental Policy. The Vice-Chair proposed splitting the activities for leading or co-leading according to themes and requested Working Group members to express their interest to the secretariat by the end of May 2023 on leading or co-leading an action under each thematic area. The representative of Austria proposed that Austria lead the work related to air quality, suggesting Georgia as a co-lead. He also suggested having “twins” for each major thematic area, with one twin being a European Union or EEA member State and one not. That might strengthen cooperation between the different parts of the ECE region. The representative of Austria concluded by proposing to start a consultation among Working Group members to find leads and co-leads for the main thematic areas and develop thematic plans, taking into account the different functions that the Working Group should perform in the period 2024–2028.

24. The representative of Georgia welcomed the proposal of the representative of Austria and agreed to serve as co-lead for the work related to air quality. The proposal of the representative of Austria was also welcomed by the representative of North Macedonia, who agreed that, by the end of May 2023, every country should express its interest in the topic that it would like to lead or co-lead. The representative of UNDP Turkmenistan welcomed the proposal of the representative of Austria and asked for further clarification regarding the tasks and interaction among countries working in the same thematic area. The representative of Austria replied that one of the first tasks as lead or co-lead could be to write down ideas regarding what should or could be done in the period 2024–2028 to move forward on the specific theme within the new mandate. The ideas would then be discussed within the Working Group. The representative of Austria noted that the aim of the proposal would be to distribute the burden of developing ideas and move forward on issues in alignment with those areas that were important for Working Group members and arose in discussions at the national and regional levels. He added that it would make sense for countries to express their

¹² Available at <https://unece.org/guidelines-application-environmental-indicators>.

interest in thematic areas where they were asking themselves the most questions, or where they were trying to make significant progress.

25. The representative of UNDP Turkmenistan asked whether a country might choose a thematic area that it had the intention to work on, but where it had made no progress so far. The representative of Austria replied that it would be possible, giving the example of a country that was willing to work on a specific theme teaming up with another country that already had significant experience in that area, and highlighting that such a pairing could produce highly relevant proposals regarding what the actions of the Working Group should be in the period 2024–2028.

26. The representative of Georgia asked whether it was envisaged to carry out missions in countries to make assessments of the situation in the thematic sector and develop corresponding road maps. The Vice-Chair and the secretariat replied that the Working Group should first link up with all ongoing projects and initiatives, to combine them with existing or ongoing assessments of specific thematic areas. Country visits could be a possibility to move on specific issues, including upon request by a given country, while at the same time making sure not to duplicate ongoing work.

27. The representative of Switzerland welcomed the proposal on enhanced proactivity within the Working Group and stated that a distinction should be made between the activities that the Working Group members would work on together, for example, on environmental indicators, and the activities in which some countries might take the lead. He also asked whether the secretariat would have an overview of the process. Furthermore, he re-emphasized the importance of addressing gaps identified in the seventh pan-European environmental assessment, including on green and circular economy and sustainable infrastructure, noting that some countries could not begin working alone on those themes as they needed resources and the support of international organizations.

28. The secretariat added that an important area to be addressed was waste. In that respect, the representative of Austria highlighted the importance of combining the work regarding waste management and circular economy. The secretariat suggested that a country that volunteered to co-lead in an area in which it had limited expertise should be paired with a more experienced country, should those countries so wish. The secretariat acknowledged that the programme did not have the capacity to carry out missions but could look for partners interested in working on a specific topic with a certain country, providing the example of the state-of-the-environment report in Uzbekistan where ECE and then UNEP had provided support. In that regard, a member of the secretariat expressed support for the suggestion of the representative of Austria to team up with ongoing projects to assess the needs and challenges of countries. She referred to the ECE Environmental Performance Review programme, which conducted in-country missions and usually assessed the performance of a given country in environmental monitoring and assessment. She also noted its role in finding countries willing to lead or co-lead in thematic areas identified as priorities in the Nicosia Ministerial Declaration, such as sustainable infrastructure. Furthermore, she noted that the invitation to volunteer as lead or co-lead extended to international organizations with which the secretariat had been cooperating, such as EEA and UNEP.

29. A Vice-Chair presented the draft annual timetable of activities for 2024 (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/4), the preparation of which was required under the Working Group's terms of reference.¹³ No amendments were requested by the members of the Working Group and the Working Group was invited to approve the document.

30. The agenda item concluded with two presentations by representatives of EEA, who provided an overview of activities relevant for the implementation of the Working Group's mandate and terms of reference. The first presentation concerned the new structure of the European Environment Information and Observation Network and recent developments at EEA, while the second presentation covered EEA support to climate and energy monitoring by the Energy Community.

¹³ ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/4, annex, para. 5.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

31. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the decisions made by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its special session in October 2022;

(b) Also took note of the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, confirmed its commitment to support the implementation of the outcomes subject to availability of resources, and decided to integrate the outcomes into its work;

(c) Requested the secretariat to continue to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy on the activities on environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting;

(d) Approved the new mandate and terms of reference for the Working Group for the period 2024–2028, as set out in the addendum to the present document (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/2/Add.1);

(e) Requested the secretariat to reflect changes agreed during the current session in the new mandate and terms of reference;

(f) Underlined the need to provide extrabudgetary resources for the implementation of the activities foreseen;

(g) Requested the secretariat to forward the new mandate and terms of reference to the Committee on Environmental Policy for consideration;

(h) Welcomed the expression of interest by the representatives of Austria and of Georgia in co-leading activities related to air quality;

(i) Invited other members of the Working Group to express their interest in leading or co-leading an activity or area in writing to the secretariat by 31 May 2023;

(j) Adopted the timetable of activities for 2024 as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/4.

VI. Resource requirements

32. The secretariat provided information on the financial resources available to support the Working Group's meetings and its other activities. The secretariat highlighted that it was important that members of the Working Group promote the work of the Working Group and support fundraising efforts in order to enhance data and information production and assessment in support of decision-making. The secretariat also informed the Working Group about an external evaluation of the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme that was to be conducted in 2023 and its expected financial implications for the Programme.

33. The Chair explained that a five-year outline of activities of the Working Group for the period 2024–2028 (informal document No. 1) had been made available to the Working Group as an informal document on the meeting web page prior to the session.

34. The representative of Switzerland suggested requesting additional funds when asking for the adoption of the new mandate and terms of reference at the next session of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The representative of Austria agreed and asked the secretariat whether it had received informal pledges for funding. The secretariat responded that a message had been sent to the members of the Committee, inviting them to support the Programme in different ways, but that no response had been received regarding a financial contribution.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

35. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the financial resources available for the implementation of activities under the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme;

(b) Expressed appreciation to those countries and organizations currently supporting the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme financially – Austria, Switzerland and the European Union;

(c) Requested its members and the secretariat to continue their fundraising efforts to enable the full implementation of activities planned for the period 2023–2024, including revision of the ECE Environmental Monitoring Guidelines and the holding of the next sessions of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group;

(d) Took note of the planned evaluation of the Programme;

(e) Welcomed the five-year outline of activities of the Working Group for the period 2024–2028;

(f) Requested the secretariat to forward the five-year outline of activities to the Committee on Environmental Policy for consideration at its twenty-eighth session (Geneva, 1–3 November 2023).

VII. Reporting on the Shared Environmental Information System to support a regular process of environmental assessment

36. At the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, the Final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System in Europe and Central Asia (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/8) was launched. Ministers commended the general establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System across the region to support a regular process of environmental assessment and invited countries to continue their efforts to implement all pillars of the System – content, infrastructure and cooperation – and to address any remaining gaps.

37. During the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group, participants in a survey on the future of the Shared Environmental Information System had suggested: continuing the System’s regular and continuous use, sharing data and exchanging good practice experience; and regularly reviewing the implementation of the System for specific environmental themes and developing it further, including at the national level. They had also agreed that: (a) they would review annually a limited number of environmental themes and indicators based on the assessment framework for monitoring progress in establishing the System (ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2019/3); (b) the environmental theme “air pollution and air quality” should be reviewed in 2023 by using the reporting tool; and (c) the ECE indicator guidelines currently being revised should be implemented and used, starting from 2022.

38. During the current session, a Vice-Chair presented an overview of the preparations of the review of the theme “air” and the outline of the report that would be prepared based on a reporting exercise (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/5).

39. Consultants working for ECE introduced the reporting template for the review of the theme “air” and the envisaged next steps. They also presented the upcoming regional training session on air quality and emissions to air statistics and indicators (Geneva, 4–5 May 2023), which would support the planned reporting on the theme “air”.

40. The Chair emphasized that it was important for all countries to contribute to the reporting on the theme “air” and that reviewing the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System and training were two elements that would contribute to the implementation of the outcomes of the Nicosia Conference. The Chair also invited the Working Group to discuss other activities and next steps to implement the outcomes of the Nicosia Conference related to the Shared Environmental Information System and open data.

41. Noting that the questions presented were more general in nature and applicable to different types of indicators, also outside of the theme “air”, the representative of Austria asked an ECE consultant whether the intention was to create a set of indicator questions that could be reused in other thematic areas and whether there were variations within the questions asked for different indicators. The ECE consultant responded that the questions were: applied to each indicator covered in the current assessment period; the same as in the above-mentioned assessment framework; and appropriate for use for other thematic areas.

42. The Chair of the Working Group then invited the participants to adopt the outline of the report on the review of the environmental theme “air” and asked whether they agreed with the review of the theme “waste” in 2024 as a regular review of the System, followed by that of the theme “energy, including renewable energy” in 2025.

43. The representative of Switzerland asked whether the mid-term review to be undertaken in 2025 for the Committee on Environmental Policy would comprise, or be separate from, the reviews of the three environmental themes identified. The secretariat responded that a mid-term review would be conducted in 2025 on the outcomes of the Nicosia Conference but not specifically on the Shared Environmental Information System; however, the review of the three environmental themes identified and prioritized by the Working Group could be relevant input to the Nicosia mid-term review.

44. The secretariat noted that identifying “waste and circular economy” as the environmental theme to review in 2024, as suggested by the representative of Austria, would reflect the outcomes of the Nicosia Conference. The secretariat asked whether the Working Group would be interested in selecting “sustainable infrastructure” instead of “energy” as the environmental theme to review in 2025, in follow-up to the Nicosia Ministerial Declaration.

45. The representative of Austria reiterated his suggestion to review “waste and circular economy” in 2024. Noting that “energy” and “sustainable infrastructure” were broad themes, he proposed identifying “sustainable energy infrastructure” as the environmental theme to review in 2025. The secretariat noted that there was no common definition of “sustainable infrastructure”, as had been highlighted in the pan-European assessment.¹⁴ The secretariat suggested that one way to assess the topic could be to review indicators that were close to sustainable infrastructure as part of the Shared Environmental Information System review, such as sustainable and renewable energy indicators. Thus, the secretariat proposed agreeing on a mixed set of existing indicators, and possibly developing two or three additional indicators by 2025.

46. The representative of Switzerland noted that, when addressing the gaps identified in the pan-European assessment, a distinction should be made between different topics. For thematic areas such as air, waste and water, countries could look at the gaps through the indicators and complete annual surveys or questionnaires. However, regarding thematic areas such as circular economy or sustainable infrastructure, there was a lack of resources at the country level and a consequent need for support from international organizations with data and indicators, as well as a need to define a methodology.

47. The Chair proposed finding an agreement on the theme to review in 2024, and discussing the thematic area to review in 2025 during the twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group. A representative of the ECE Statistical Division confirmed that the indicators for waste were sufficiently mature to be used for the review in 2024. With respect to circular economy, he noted that there were difficulties in identifying the scope of the topic but referred to a draft conceptual framework of circular economy, prepared by ECE with various partners, that could be used as a reference. He added that, with respect to material flows, circular economy should not be difficult to review.

48. The Working Group agreed to review the theme “waste and, as appropriate, circular economy” in 2024 and to decide during its next session on the theme for 2025.

49. The secretariat then provided an overview on further next steps to continue supporting the outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference related to the

¹⁴ *Europe's Environment: The Seventh Pan-European Environmental Assessment* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.E.15), p. 10.

Shared Environmental Information System, followed by an application-based survey for real-time feedback.

50. Members of the Working Group provided the following answers to the questions posed:

(a) Regarding the first question on what other actions and activities were needed to support closing of gaps and implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System and open data, participants suggested various possible actions including:

- (i) Reporting of data and indicators;
- (ii) Provision of guidance and more training and capacity development, including for experts;
- (iii) High-level information events;
- (iv) Study visits;
- (v) Application of artificial intelligence (machine learning);
- (vi) Collection of data through horizon scanning (also as a non-classical statistical resource);
- (vii) Support to development of national open and integrated data portals with an environmental focus;
- (viii) Sharing of good practices on existing open data platforms;
- (ix) Provision of financial and technical support to countries for the creation and maintenance of information technology infrastructure;
- (x) Implementation of all the indicators identified within the framework of the Shared Environmental Information System, development of indicators for new topics identified (e.g., circular economy and sustainable infrastructure) and collection of the relevant data;
- (xi) Preparation of guidelines for the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System;
- (xii) Mobilization of political will;
- (xiii) Streamlining of data reporting to avoid duplication of efforts due to European Union Regulation 2023/138;¹⁵
- (xiv) Enhancement of cross-sectoral digitalization;
- (xv) Strengthening of the legal basis for open data access;
- (xvi) Organization of joint meetings with government representatives to obtain more accurate data, given that a significant amount of data came from administrative sources;
- (xvii) Sharing of experience and application of modern approaches;
- (xviii) Promotion of satellite-based environmental information;
- (xix) Reallocation to the enhancement of national monitoring systems of financial resources currently dedicated to the creation and maintenance of additional national information technology systems;
- (xx) Technical support (project and financial) to build databases with the requirements of open data standards;
- (xxi) Enhancement of a cross-sectoral approach to digitalization;

¹⁵ Commission Implementing Regulation (European Union) 2023/138 of 21 December 2022 laying down a list of specific high-value data sets and the arrangements for their publication and reuse, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 19 (2023), pp. 43–75.

(xxii) Clarification of the division of roles and responsibilities among governmental institutions at the national and local levels to implement a Shared Environmental Information System;

(b) The second survey question concerned possible additional actions to make information publicly available, findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. Participants suggested enhancing training, including on using guidelines, by having “data shows” at universities and specialized high schools, as well as introductory shows at primary schools, together with workshops on visualization and use of data. Another action emphasized was experience sharing between countries. Participants also suggested strengthening the principle of public availability of data established with public funds and suggested that the data collected should be shared by EEA in one place and also via application programming interfaces,¹⁶ in order to avoid duplication of reporting efforts by member States. It was also suggested that steps be taken to: build the technical capacity of institutions to produce raw data automatically; connect the databases of organizations with each other, thus creating an integrated database; and, provide access to the data contained therein to all interested organizations. The use of data in school activities and regular advertisement of data availability were other actions mentioned;

(c) With respect to the third question on how the Working Group could best support countries with the collection of local and Indigenous knowledge, participants suggested identifying successful cases and sharing knowledge, expertise and good practices, as well as providing support to the exchange of experience between countries. Other suggestions included: the provision of guidance to countries on selecting indicators and collecting data; jointly organized expert data-gathering campaigns; data reliability checks; referral to regional programmes and organizations to fill gaps in countries; and the use of questionnaires;

(d) The fourth open question pertained to how the Working Group could best support countries with citizen science. Participants suggested training the public, including on the appropriate methodologies to combine data and support the development of digitalization. It was also suggested that steps be taken to showcase, facilitate and promote the use for reporting, by decision makers and the public, of data generated by citizen science, including by supporting the publication of reports. Participants also suggested sharing successful examples, including from the national level, organizing consultations on specific issues, and conducting training, webinars and courses on specific issues;

(e) Regarding the fifth open question on how the Working Group could best support countries with crowdsourced data, participants suggested promoting the introduction of crowdsourcing in countries to produce data and the public utilization of such data, including by decision makers, and, for example, for biodiversity monitoring. It was suggested that information be disseminated about crowdsourced data and how they could be used. The importance of standardization, guidance and coordination was highlighted, including through demonstrating why it was worthwhile using crowdsourced data and by providing specific useful products. Participants also suggested sharing expertise, positive examples and good practices. In addition, the need for support to information technology development was noted;

(f) Lastly, participants were asked whether their countries relied on open data, big data and state-of-the-art digital technologies to improve data availability, transparency and public involvement. All participants replied in the affirmative. One participant replied that only official data were used. Another noted that mostly open data and modern digital technology were used. One participant replied that open data were not used so much in the area of environment and that the focus was mainly on meeting the requirements of European Union law. In that respect, another participant noted that too many different technologies were required in the European Union region, and that they were difficult for citizens to understand and challenging for environmental experts to implement.

¹⁶ Application programming interfaces are means of communication between two or more computer programmes.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

51. The Working Group:

(a) Adopted the outline of the report on the Shared Environmental Information System review of the environmental theme “air” as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/5;

(b) Agreed to review the theme “waste and, as appropriate, circular economy” in 2024 as a regular Shared Environmental Information System review;

(c) Requested the secretariat to assess the possibility of organizing a regional training event on the revised ECE waste indicators, possibly within the framework of the European Union-funded programme EU4Environment – Water Resources and Environmental Data;

(d) Suggested sharing good practices, including on open data platforms, the collection of local and Indigenous knowledge, citizen science and the use of crowdsourced data, during regular sessions of the Working Group, and organizing training and guidance, subject to availability of resources.

VIII. Regular pan-European environmental assessment and reporting supported by the Shared Environmental Information System and open data and streamlining reporting obligations in environmental policy

52. The Working Group had been tasked with leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment¹⁷ leading up to the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, resulting in the successful launch of the seventh pan-European environmental assessment at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

53. The secretariat provided an overview of the seventh pan-European environmental assessment and related outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The secretariat then invited the Working Group to discuss the next steps and specific activities in support of implementation of the recommendations of the assessment and outcomes of the Conference that the Working Group could support. The secretariat used an application-based survey for real-time feedback.

54. Members of the Working Group provided the following replies to the questions posed:

(a) The first question concerned the specific activities that the Working Group should pursue to help close the gaps identified in the seventh pan-European assessment. While emphasizing that the Working Group should keep up its good work, one participant suggested continuing to work on the emerging issues identified, including circular economy, also in connection with waste, and sustainable infrastructure and collecting respective indicators. It was suggested that training and capacity development activities be provided on specific environmental topics, to facilitate interaction between countries, the sharing of experiences and good practices, and to provide expert support. Participants also suggested improving reporting tools, including by creating modern but simple-to-use tools, and coordinating aspects of compliance with the same parameters. In addition, the importance of digitalization of monitoring and statistical surveys, coordination and financial resources was highlighted. Furthermore, support was needed for the preparation of monitoring strategies. The participation of all member States, including members of EEA, and international organizations should be promoted;

(b) The second question pertained to the activities that the Working Group should prioritize to implement the recommendations of the seventh pan-European environmental assessment. Participants emphasized that bringing attention to gaps and requiring countries

¹⁷ ECE/CEP/2017/2, annex II, para. 2 (b).

to report on progress in closing those gaps would support the implementation of the recommendations made in the seventh pan-European assessment. Participants also pointed out the importance of integrating the recommendations of the assessment into national and regional programmes and the need to distinguish between activities regarding data and indicators, on the one hand, and emerging issues, on the other hand. In addition, participants suggested continuing to provide support for the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System, the utilization of the revised ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators and the organization of common exercises. It was also suggested that more modern and simple-to-use reporting tools be created, which would allow for coordination with compliance reporting processes. Furthermore, suggestions were made to improve access to environmental information, develop methodologies and provide guidance on how to best develop state-of-the-environment reports, including on cross-cutting issues;

(c) Regarding the third question on the specific activities that countries or organizations implemented or planned in support of the outcomes of the Nicosia Conference and the assessment, participants replied that the departments responsible for the sector were actively working to close technology gaps in the data production process, and database creation and improvement, through donor and government programmes. Other participants answered that their countries were preparing a monitoring strategy and an information system. The representative of the Russia Federation noted that the Federal State Statistics Service and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment were testing new standards for the collection and dissemination of environmental information, taking into account new digital technologies. The representative of Belarus mentioned that the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus had approved the methodology for calculating statistical indicators characterizing the generation of electrical and electronic equipment waste, and had calculated the volume of electronic waste generation for 2020 and 2021; the results would soon be published on the Committee's website. The importance of synergy in the environmental reporting process was also highlighted;

(d) The fourth question on whether countries should report annually on activities implemented to support the outcomes of the Nicosia Conference and assessment was answered by nine participants. Seven participants answered in the affirmative, and two in the negative;

(e) The fifth question on whether the Working Group's questionnaire on progress in environmental monitoring and assessment should be updated in that regard was answered by nine participants. Six participants answered in the affirmative, and three in the negative;

(f) The last question, on which monitoring gaps should be supported with priority in the area of biodiversity and ecosystems, air and climate change, was answered by ten participants according to the following priorities (highest priority first):

- (i) Production of certain indicators, including ECE indicators "Terrestrial protected areas" and "Land uptake", and comparability of data (both four votes);
- (ii) Improvement of the quality of data for emissions (two votes);
- (iii) Measurement and analysis of fine particulate matter and completion of data sets on greenhouse gas emissions for some countries (both zero votes).

55. The Working Group was then invited to discuss possible approaches for the eighth pan-European environmental assessment based on lessons learned from the latest assessment.

56. The representative of Switzerland highlighted the importance of preparing the eighth pan-European environmental assessment in a systematic way, making use of the Shared Environmental Information System, and creating synergies with other international reports. The representative of Austria noted that EEA should be involved, and that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development had carried out valuable work regarding green growth indicators that would strengthen the basis of the assessment.

57. The meeting subsequently focused on assistance regarding the streamlining of environmental reporting in support of environmental policymaking, which was envisaged under the Working Group's mandate and terms of reference.

58. The secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements were invited to provide an overview of recent developments and their upcoming reporting exercises. A representative of the ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) secretariat provided guidance on the template for the third reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2. Subsequently, a representative of the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat provided an overview of: (a) developments since the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Kunming, China, 11–15 October 2021 (phase I) and Montreal, Canada, 7–19 December 2022 (phase II)); and (b) the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, its monitoring framework and national and global reporting mechanisms.

59. Meeting participants then discussed the key messages of the presentations and provided comments.

Working Group decisions and recommendations

60. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed ideas and approaches for the planned eighth pan-European environmental assessment and requested the secretariat, together with the Working Group members, to develop a draft concept to be presented at the next session of the Working Group;

(b) Agreed to provide regular updates on the activities implemented by countries and organizations to support the environmental monitoring- and assessment-related outcomes of the Nicosia Ministerial Conference;

(c) Welcomed the presentations on monitoring and reporting made by representatives of the secretariats of the ECE Water Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

IX. Sharing and integration of economic, social and environmental data with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

61. The secretariat provided an overview of regional environmental events and initiatives promoted in 2023 with relevance to the Working Group, including the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region (Geneva, 29–30 March 2023), the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva, 18–19 April 2023), the twentieth session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (Geneva, 16–17 October 2023) and the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) together with the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Geneva, 12–15 December 2023).

62. The secretariat and international partners were invited to present recent developments and key messages pertaining to environmental monitoring and reporting, particularly in relation to circular economy, sustainable infrastructure and sustainable tourism. A representative of the secretariat of the Water Convention presented the publication *Updated Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters*¹⁸ and the process of developing a new publication on good practices and lessons learned in transboundary data exchange. Subsequently, a representative of the ECE Statistical Division provided an overview of ongoing work to measure circular economy. A representative of UNEP then provided an overview of the process for the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook, the next steps and linkages to the seventh and eighth pan-European environmental assessments.

¹⁸ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.23.II.E.1.

63. The agenda item also included presentations on developments related to new technologies, big data, artificial intelligence and Earth observation and how countries could make full use of the potential of data, technology and digitalization that would complement and potentially replace established monitoring practices and information sources for improved decision-making. There was a pre-recorded presentation by a representative of the European Space Agency, who provided an overview of the use of Earth observation for environmental monitoring. Subsequently, a representative of the Environment Agency Austria presented the latest developments under the EU4Environment – Water Resources and Environmental Data programme.

64. Representatives of UNEP and the ECE Environment Division presented their respective organizations' current and planned projects, including on capacity development, followed by a presentation by a representative of the ECE Statistical Division, who provided an update on the status of the revision of the ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, its relevance for the Working Group and next steps.

65. The secretariat gave an overview of the suggested update of the 2003 publication *Environmental Monitoring and Reporting: Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia*,¹⁹ in anticipation of an updated version being issued in 2024.

66. The Chair then invited the Working Group to discuss how the work on environmental information, data and indicators, including in relation to a green and circular economy, as well as geospatial and Earth observation data, could best support the development of integrated assessments, reporting on and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and other activities related to the Working Group. Meeting participants were also invited to discuss relevant topics for the twenty-sixth session of the Working Group, scheduled to take place in 2024.

67. The Working Group agreed that waste would be discussed during the twenty-sixth session. The secretariat added that circular economy could be discussed in connection with waste. The secretariat also noted that the results of the forthcoming evaluation of the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme could be discussed during the twenty-sixth session of the Working Group.

68. After the presentations and discussions, the Working Group adopted the conclusions and recommendations listed below.

Working Group conclusions and recommendations

69. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of information provided on recent and upcoming ECE regional events related to the activities of the Working Group;

(b) Welcomed the presentations by the representatives of the Environment Agency Austria, ECE and its Water Convention secretariat and Statistical Division, UNEP and the European Space Agency on their relevant projects and activities;

(c) Took note of the information presented on the revision of the ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators;

(d) Invited representatives of regional and international organizations to provide regular updates to the Working Group on upcoming events and initiatives of relevance;

(e) Took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the suggested revision of the 2003 guidelines on *Environmental Monitoring and Reporting: Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia*;

(f) Supported the proposal to review the above-mentioned 2003 guidelines and make them widely applicable and confirmed its availability to contribute to the review process;

¹⁹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.E.33.

(g) Requested the secretariat to initiate the above-mentioned review process by setting up a drafting group;

(h) Also requested the secretariat to prepare the revised 2003 guidelines as an official publication in English, French and Russian in electronic and paper editions;

(i) Further requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the outcomes of the agenda item;

(j) Took note of the suggestions relating to how the work presented in the current session on environmental information, data and indicators could better support the development of integrated environmental assessments, reporting on and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and other activities of the Working Group;

(k) Also took note of the suggestions on topics for the twenty-sixth session of the Working Group and invited the participants to submit further suggestions in writing within two weeks.

X. Progress in environmental monitoring and assessment, including institutional and regulatory mechanisms and infrastructure at the national level

70. Members of the Working Group, especially those representing countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, were invited to make a short presentation on major actions undertaken since the previous meeting regarding, as appropriate:

(a) Production of environmental reports, analyses and assessments based on environmental information and indicators, including through the use of the Shared Environmental Information System;

(b) Modernization and upgrading of national monitoring networks, in particular, those on air, water and soil;

(c) Improvements in data quality assurance and control, as well as in data management;

(d) Improvements in data policy and institutional and regulatory mechanisms and technical solutions for data exchange between various ministries and agencies (ministries of environment, environment agencies and ministries of agriculture, energy, health, industry, transport and water) and with other users, including the public;

(e) Implementation of recommendations regarding environmental monitoring and assessment made in national environmental performance reviews;

(f) Developments related to the use of new technologies, big data, artificial intelligence and Earth observation for environmental monitoring;

(g) Cross-cutting developments such as integrating a gender perspective into environmental monitoring and assessment activities.

71. The representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, North Macedonia, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reported on progress in environmental monitoring and assessment and efforts to enhance digitalization since the twenty-fourth session of the Working Group.

Working Group conclusions and recommendations

72. The Working Group welcomed the presentations by the representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, North Macedonia, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on developments in environmental monitoring and assessment and expressed appreciation for the progress made by those countries.

XI. Other business

73. No other business was raised by members of the Working Group.

XII. Closure of the meeting

74. The Chair informed the Working Group that the report of the meeting and the list of participants would be finalized by the secretariat for circulation to the Working Group after the meeting. The two documents would be posted on the meeting web page.

75. The Chair informed the Working Group that the next session was tentatively scheduled to be held in Geneva on 18 and 19 April 2024.

76. The Chair invited the Working Group to take part in the evaluation of the meeting.

77. The Chair closed the meeting.
