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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Environmental Policy

#### Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

##### Twenty-sixth session

Geneva, 18 and 19 April 2024

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

##### **Regular pan-European environmental assessment and environmental reporting to strengthen environmental policy**

### **Draft concept of an eighth pan-European environmental assessment**

#### **Note by the secretariat and members of the Working Group**

##### *Summary*

At the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022), ministers acknowledged the importance of regular, indicator-based environmental assessments, and confirmed their commitment to keeping the pan-European region under regular review in support of sustainable development and the transition to a circular, green and sustainable economy.

The mandate and terms of reference of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2024–2028 identify one of the Working Group's objectives as being to support the development of regular pan-European environmental assessments to, in turn, support policy with scientific evidence. The Working Group, at its twenty-fourth session (Geneva (hybrid), 2–3 May 2023) 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.

The present document provides a draft concept of an eighth pan-European environmental assessment, including a timetable, budget and expanded outline, to be presented to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-ninth session (Geneva, 6–8 November 2024).



## I. Introduction

1. The series of environmental assessments of the pan-European region provide up-to-date and policy-relevant information on the interactions between the environment and society. The assessments were a consistent feature of the Environment for Europe process from 1995 to 2022. The 2009 reform of the Environment for Europe process identified the pan-European assessment as one of the three substantive documents to be prepared for each ministerial conference, together with up to two theme-specific reports.<sup>1</sup>

2. Following the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011), responsibility for the drafting of the assessment shifted from the European Environment Agency to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The two organizations published the two most recent assessments, the sixth and the seventh assessments, in 2016 and 2022 respectively.

3. At the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022), ministers acknowledged the importance of regular, indicator-based environmental assessments, and confirmed their commitment to keeping the pan-European region under regular review in support of sustainable development and the transition to a circular, green and sustainable economy. They also took note of the key findings of the seventh pan-European assessment,<sup>2</sup> produced by ECE and UNEP. Furthermore, they commended the general establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System across the region to support a regular process of environmental assessment.<sup>3</sup>

4. The mandate and terms of reference of the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2024–2028 identify one of the Working Group's objectives as being to support the development of regular pan-European environmental assessments to, in turn, support policy with scientific evidence.<sup>4</sup> The Working Group, at its twenty-fourth session (Geneva (hybrid), 2–3 May 2023), 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.<sup>5</sup>

5. The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-eighth session (Geneva, 1–3 November 2023) took note of the information provided on the expected eighth pan-European environmental assessment (ECE/CEP/2023/2, forthcoming).

6. The present document sets out a draft proposal for the eighth pan-European environmental assessment, to be discussed by the Working Group. As the form of assessment was discussed extensively by both the Working Group and the Committee prior to preparing the seventh assessment, this paper moves directly to a discussion of a light, indicator-based assessment of a similar format and scope. The seventh assessment can be judged as successful by three measures: it was welcomed by ministers in Nicosia, widely acknowledged and received much media attention; it informed the drafting of the declaration adopted by the Ninth Ministerial Conference; and it was completed on time, within a tight budget, while

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<sup>1</sup> ECE/CEP/S/2009/1, paras. 11 (b) (iii) and 12 (a) and (d).

<sup>2</sup> *Europe's Environment: The Seventh Pan-European Environmental Assessment* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.E.15).

<sup>3</sup> ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/2.Add.1, paras. 16 and 19.

<sup>4</sup> ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/2/Add.1, para. 9 (b).

<sup>5</sup> ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/2, para. 60 (a).

allowing consultation of all member States on the draft pan-European environmental assessment and the summary for policymakers<sup>6</sup>.

7. Should substantially larger financial resources be forthcoming, or should the Working Group's preferences have shifted in terms of the scope and format of the assessment, other assessment options might be considered by the Working Group and, subsequently, the Committee.

## II. Eighth pan-European environmental assessment

8. While the themes for the next ministerial conference have yet to be identified, there is a need for agreement on a way forward for the eighth pan-European environmental assessment, as the necessary fundraising and the actual preparation of the assessment may take a considerable period of time.

9. The light, indicator-based and thematic assessment would be limited to examining the state and trends of a range of ECE environmental indicators<sup>7</sup> and to addressing the two conference themes by using the conference background papers that are foreseen to be produced for the next ministerial conference.

### A. Outline

10. The following elements might be considered in the development of the next pan-European environmental assessment, with the additions in italics implying additional resource needs:

- (a) Front matter (foreword, preface, acknowledgements and abbreviations and acronyms);
- (b) Summary for policymakers;
- (c) Chapter I: Setting the scene:
  - (i) Regular assessment of the state of the environment;
  - (ii) State of knowledge;
  - (iii) Environmental policies in the region;
- (d) Chapter II: Regional context and developments as drivers of environmental change;
- (e) Chapter III: Environmental state and trends:
  - (i) Atmospheric air and the ozone layer;
  - (ii) Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions;
  - (iii) Fresh water;
  - (iv) Coastal waters, marine ecosystems and seas;
  - (v) Biodiversity and ecosystems;
  - (vi) Land and soil;

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Nicosia%20assessment%20draft%20summary%2014.2.22.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators – 2023 Edition*, forthcoming.

- (vii) Chemicals and waste (*with circular economy*);
- (viii) *Noise*;
- (ix) Environmental financing and public spending on environmental protection;
- (x) *Sustainable infrastructure*;
- (xi) *Green economy*;
- (f) Chapter IV: Themes of the Tenth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference;
- (g) Chapter V: Strengthening environmental governance;
- (h) Chapter VI: The way forward;
- (i) Back matter (glossary).

11. To the degree possible, greater use might be made of Earth observations. A list of indicators and possible Earth observation sources could be developed. In addition, each theme might be concluded with a discussion on the likely trajectory of indicators assessed. Furthermore, a review of policy goals adopted by past Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences might be included, subject to the availability of additional resources. A foresight chapter has also been proposed, although this would incur substantial additional expenses.

## B. Process and timetable

12. A light, indicator-based assessment, including addressing the two conference themes, could be undertaken as previously by engaging a small group of experts from within the United Nations system, together with external consultants, in the production of the assessment. In particular, bodies under multilateral environmental agreements would be invited to report on the latest state, trends and policies for a number of areas, such as air quality, climate change, water and biodiversity. Other areas might be covered by UNEP and relevant divisions of ECE (e.g., regarding housing, forestry, transport and energy). Consultants would be used for the two conference themes and to support the secretariat in coordinating the assessment. The process could fit within the time available until the expected date of the Tenth Ministerial Conference, in 2027, if the intersessional period of five years is to be maintained (see table 1 below).

Table 1

### Possible timetable for the eighth pan-European environmental assessment

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Actions</i>
April 2024	26th session of Working Group	Agreement on the concept for the eighth pan-European environmental assessment
First half of 2024	-	Publication of <i>Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators – 2023 Edition</i>
October 2024	21st session of Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators	Advice on suitable environmental indicators Determination of whether some indicators could be derived from Earth observations

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Actions</i>
November 2024	29th session of Committee on Environmental Policy	Agreement on the concept for the eighth assessment and on its funding  Possible expressions of interest from international organizations
Spring 2025	27th session of Working Group	Agreement on detailed design of the assessment
Mid-2025		Drafting of terms of reference on consultants and institutional contractors
Autumn 2025	22nd session of Joint Task Force	Agreement on suitable indicators
Autumn 2025	30th session of Committee	Agreement on the themes for the next Ministerial Conference  Resolution of any funding shortage, if appropriate
Late 2025 to autumn 2026	-	Preparation of the draft assessment
Autumn 2026	23rd session of Joint Task Force	Consultation on the draft assessment
Autumn 2026	26th session of Committee	Consultation on the draft assessment
Late 2026/early 2027	Special session of Committee	Consideration of the draft assessment and its possible use in drafting a ministerial declaration  Editing of the draft assessment
Early/mid 2027	Special session of Committee	Clearance of the summary for policymakers
Early-mid 2027	-	Design and layout of the assessment, and design, layout and printing of the summary for policymakers
Mid/autumn 2027	10th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference	Consideration of the eighth pan-European environmental assessment

### C. Roles

13. ECE and UNEP stand ready to lead the preparation of the eighth pan-European environmental assessment, with guidance from the Committee on Environmental Policy, the Working Group on the assessment itself, and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators on the environmental indicators. The Working Group and the Joint Task Force

proved effective in providing forums for consultations of member States and for seeking advice on the improvement of the seventh assessment.

14. ECE and UNEP would wish to engage the European Environment Agency and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in this work, to a degree to be determined by those organizations. In addition, organizations that could serve as sources of information, including statistical institutions such as Eurostat, would be contacted.

15. Other possibilities for cooperation might relate to the processing of Earth observation data with, for example, a university or the Group on Earth Observations.

## D. Budget

16. The estimated budget would be approximately \$140,000, as broken down in table 2 below, with additional costs arising should further elements be introduced.

Table 2

**Estimated budget breakdown for a light, indicator-based and thematic assessment, and additional options**

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Budget (US dollars)</i>
Consultants and/or stipends for experts and/or institutions	90 000
Coordination and harmonization of inputs	10 000
Editing, design, graphics and layout	20 000
Translation (into Russian, if not provided by regular budget of United Nations)	20 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>140 000</b>
Possible optional additions:	
Section on noise	5 000
Text on circular economy	5 000
Section on sustainable infrastructure	10 000
Section on green economy	10 000
Review of policy goals adopted by past Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences	20 000
Foresight or outlook chapter	100 000

## III. Next steps and questions for consideration

17. Based on the options presented above, the Working Group might consider the following next steps:

(a) Agreeing on a general approach and process for the eighth pan-European environmental assessment, to be proposed to the Committee on Environmental Policy in November 2024;

(b) Discussing possible measures to secure funding for the assessment, and agreeing on how to raise this matter at the next session of the Committee;

(c) Discussing also whether to seek to include a foresight or outlook chapter, subject to the availability of funding (about \$100,000), or similarly a review of policy goals (\$20,000);

(d) Discussing further whether, to what extent and how it may be appropriate to use Earth observations to generate indicator values;

(e) Discussing whether a section should be included on early warning systems as a real-time source of hazard data, or another relevant theme, possibly prepared in cooperation with relevant international organizations.

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