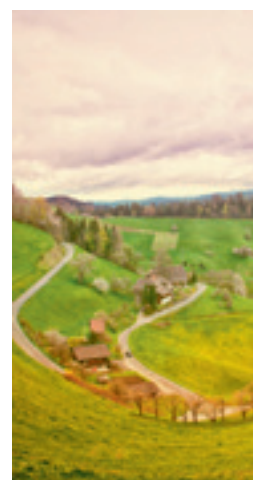


# Sharing our vision for the pan-European region

## Setting strategic goals and objectives

Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment



UNITED NATIONS

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

# Sharing our vision for the pan-European region

Setting strategic goals and objectives for the  
Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment



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# Introduction

The Environment for Europe process has – since 1991 – provided a framework for countries in the pan-European region to work together to improve environmental protection and to promote sustainable development throughout the region. In this context, Ministers of the Environment have continuously highlighted the importance of environmental information for policymaking and public awareness.

At the Astana Environment for Europe Conference in 2011, Ministers requested that a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) be developed to underpin a regular environment assessment process across the pan-European region. More recently, at the Batumi Environment for Europe Conference in 2016, Ministers welcomed progress in developing SEIS, but reiterated the need for countries to continue their efforts and to develop further their national information systems to have SEIS in place in the countries of Europe and Central Asia by 2021.

As an integral part of this process, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment has been engaged in efforts to make environmental monitoring an effective instrument in policymaking and, in particular, to assist countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In doing so, the Working Group has cooperated closely with the European Environment Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme – as the three organizations have agreed on a common approach to support national and regional reporting on the state of the environment – and other relevant partners.

ECE member States, with the support of the secretariat, have made significant progress in establishing SEIS, and there is a renewed and strengthened momentum for environmental monitoring and assessment following the Batumi Environment for Europe Conference. As a next step, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment at its eighteenth session in June 2016 launched a collaborative and forward-looking discussion to define a vision for its work leading up to 2021 and beyond.

Thinking about the future challenges in the pan-European region is an important step to ensure that the Working Group and secretariat make substantive contributions to, among others, the establishment of a pan-European Shared Environmental Information System, while also assisting in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

We are grateful to all of those involved in this effort to shape a new pathway for the Working Group and extend an invitation to all countries in the region to engage with the Working Group in its continued efforts to transform the strategic goals and objectives for the Working Group into reality.

# Acknowledgements

The present vision document is the result of a consultation organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment during its eighteenth session (Geneva, 28–29 June 2016).

This publication would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of the countries participating in the Working Group. The ECE secretariat wishes to acknowledge the contributions by representatives of the following countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. In addition, representatives of the European Environment Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme supported the production of this publication.

The following ECE secretariat staff contributed to the production of this publication: Filip Aggestam, Nicholas Bonvoisin, Yulia Bunina (intern), Ivonne Higuero, Caroline Jeunet, Marco Keiner, Tiina Luige and Michael Nagy.

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Sharing a vision for  
the pan-European region



## Sharing a vision for the pan-European region

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We are living in a time of growing unpredictability, accelerated change and unprecedented global societal challenges ranging from biodiversity loss to energy and food security to natural resources scarcity. These challenges require not only that societies adapt and consider innovative solutions, but they also offer new opportunities and possibilities for the future.

It is crucial to ask how these changes could be anticipated and to turn present and future challenges into drivers that encourage social, economic and environmental progress. These questions matter more and more as societies and economies increasingly embrace technological changes that may have unpredictable effects on the natural environment. There is consequently an ever-increasing demand for accessible, available and high-quality environmental information as a basis for data-driven policymaking in the environmental sector.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment was established in 2000 by the Committee on Environmental Policy, in part to address this demand for environmental information and data. More specifically, it serves as an instrument for ECE member States that could provide recommendations, propose action plans and improve coordination of international initiatives concerning environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting related to global challenges.

with countries in the pan-European region. This work has entailed assisting in the production and sharing of environmental data in areas such as air, climate change, water, biodiversity and waste. In working with environmental data and information, the Working Group has contributed to improving the timely flow of relevant environmental data, including its assessment. This has in turn helped to facilitate improved decision-making processes, both nationally and internationally, in the environmental sector.

Since the launch of the Working Group, and particularly throughout 2015 and 2016, there was significant political progress and change, both nationally and internationally. High-level developments, such as the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit and commitments made at the twenty-first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, characterize some of these changes. There was also a renewed call by Ministers of the Environment, at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016), for countries to continue their efforts and to further develop their national information systems to have a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in place throughout Europe and Central Asia by 2021.

The outcomes of these developments have had both direct and indirect implications for several areas of work of the Working Group. To capture

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