



NEWS & NOTES

Environment Statistics and Environmental Accounting
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2006 – Data Collection Year!

Mandated by the Statistical Commission, UNSD initiates this year the fourth round of the international collection of environmental data from countries. In order to facilitate coordination at the national level, to reduce response burden in countries and to increase the use of the data, UNSD and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) send a joint questionnaire to both National Statistical Offices and Environment Ministries.

The Questionnaire was sent out earlier than usual by UNSD to the twelve Eastern European, Caucasian and Central Asian (EECCA) and the five Balkan countries upon the request of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the European Environment Agency (EEA), who require the data for the preparation of the fourth pan-European State of the Environment report (the “Belgrade Report”) to support the Environment for Europe process.

As in previous years, the Questionnaire will be sent out at the end of March to all other countries who then will be asked to return the completed questionnaire to UNSD by 30 June 2006. In accordance with a data sharing agreement between UNSD, OECD and Eurostat, countries that report regularly to the OECD/Eurostat Joint Questionnaire on the State of the Environment will not have to fill out the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire, as the two international data collections are compatible with each other and are fully coordinated among the organizations.

The 2006 UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire has been revised based on lessons learned from the previous data collections, from regional experiences and from consultations with countries, expert groups and partner organizations.

The 2006 UNSD/UNEP data collection focuses on two important subject areas:

- The section on WATER includes tables on freshwater resources, water abstraction and use,

the water balance, waste water treatment, population connected to water supply and waste water treatment;

- The section on WASTE includes tables on waste generation, waste collection and waste treatment, with particular emphasis on municipal waste and hazardous waste.

The full Questionnaire also contains tables on LAND and AIR, but these sections will not be sent out in 2006. Data on these subject areas will be obtained from existing international databases, where available.

In order to facilitate responses, the Questionnaire is pre-filled with data from the 2004 and 2001 data collection for both sections. The blank questionnaire will be available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/questionnaire_2006.htm

As in previous years, the Questionnaire is sent to both the National Statistical Office and the Ministry of Environment in the countries who nominate in agreement a single national focal point responsible for the co-ordination of the activities for this Questionnaire and for submitting the data to UNSD. After validation, data will be entered to UNSD’s environment statistics database and will support various environmental reports, studies and indicator initiatives within UNSD, UNEP and other United Nations bodies. The data will primarily be used in UNEP’s Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) and its underlying GEO Data Portal and in the “Belgrade Report”, the fourth assessment report for the next Environment for Europe ministerial conference. Results will also be available to the countries.

UNSD relies very much on the cooperation of the countries to respond to the Questionnaire. All responses are appreciated as they contribute to the global improvement of timely and reliable environment statistics based on official country data.

Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-ENV)

The Working Group met three times in 2005, back to back with the International Work Session on Water Statistics in June in Vienna, the Eurostat Directors Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts in Luxembourg in November and the OECD Conference on Environmental Information for Decision Making in Mexico in December.

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN joined UNSD, UNECE, UNEP, Eurostat and OECD in the Working Group as a member in November 2005.

In 2006-2007, the Working Group will focus on:

- (a) Continuing methodological and harmonization work in the subject area of water through its Subgroup on Water Statistics;
- (b) Setting up a new subgroup on land-use and land cover statistics for the discussion of methodological issues and starting preparations for an international work session in this subject area;
- (c) Reviewing the draft chapters of the revised *UNSD Glossary of Environment Statistics* with a view to considering joint work on an inter-institutional glossary;
- (d) Developing a proposal for harmonized metadata for environment statistics and testing this in the subgroups on water and land statistics;
- (e) Organizing the international work session on land-use and land cover statistics in 2007;
- (f) Deciding on joint training and capacity-building actions on the basis of the shared work programmes of the member organizations.

IWG-ENV Subgroup on Water Statistics

The Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-ENV) has established a Subgroup on Water Statistics after this was recommended by the International Work Session on Water Statistics, Vienna June 2005. The subgroup is a voluntary group of experts from international organizations focusing on issues related to statistics on freshwater.

The mandate of the subgroup, as approved by the IWG-ENV, is (1) to foster a close collaboration between the parties involved in the collection and compilation of statistics on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of freshwater resources and their use, with the aim of

assuring complementarities in international data collection, removing redundancies, and sharing data and country information between all parties, and (2) to promote best practices in the compilation, dissemination and analysis of freshwater statistics in countries.

Tasks for the IWG-ENV Subgroup on Water Statistics include:

- Comparing water related terms and water questionnaires used by international organizations and recommending ways for harmonization;
- Resolving existing overlaps in data collection between international organizations;
- Assessing methods for water quality statistics;
- Contributing to the preparation of water statistics manuals/methodological guidelines.

The IWG-ENV Subgroup on Water Statistics has already reviewed the water section of the UNSD/UNEP joint Questionnaire. Upcoming tasks will be the review of the water chapter of the *Glossary of Environment Statistics*, the review of the draft chapters of the *Manual on Water Statistics* and the test of metadata standards.

Currently the subgroup has the following participants: UNSD, FAO, OECD, Eurostat, UNECE, UNEP and UNEP/GEMS-Water. Other interested international organizations involved in water data collection are welcome to contribute to the work of the subgroup. Country experts will be consulted on a thematic basis as required.

UNSD-ECOWAS Statistics Project

As part of the UNSD/ECOWAS project "Strengthening Statistical Capacity-building in Support of the Millennium Development Goals in the region of the Economic Community of West African States", a report entitled "An Assessment of the Situation of Environment Statistics in the ECOWAS Countries" has been prepared by UNSD, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Secretariat and the ECOWAS member countries. The report is based on country papers presented at the Workshop on Environment Statistics held from 28 February to 4 March 2005 in Dakar, Senegal, responses to the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics, information from relevant websites, as well as responses to the draft country profiles sent to the countries by UNSD.

The report includes background information about the assessment, provides a description of the availability of environment statistics in ECOWAS countries, presents detailed information on the state of environment statistics in each ECOWAS country and includes

recommendations for improvements, as well as describes the role and activities of international and regional organizations related to environment statistics in the region.

The report will be made available on the ECOWAS Secretariat website shortly at <http://www.ecowas.int> and subsequently on UNSD's website at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/ecowas.htm>

A similar report is already available about the state of environment statistics in the ESCWA countries at UNSD's website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/escwaassess.htm>

News from the European Union

In November 2005 Eurostat organized for the first time a “**Directors Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts**” (DIMESA) which would replace the previous annual Environment Statistics Plenary Meeting.

The Meeting gathers the Directors responsible for reporting of environmental data and indicators from the National Statistical Offices, the Environment Agencies and Environment Ministries, in order to:

- advise Eurostat in the planning of the annual work programme for the up-coming year;
- coordinate the long term strategic planning for the 5-year work programme on environment statistics and accounts, to avoid any duplication of work, with the aim to benefit from synergies;
- assure the efficient implementation of decisions of the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC) and of the annual work programme;
- prepare items for decision at the SPC in the area of environment statistics and accounts.

A technical agreement for the establishment of Environmental Data Centres based on a thematic distribution of roles in line with the mandates and strengths of the four major Community bodies involved on a regular basis in environmental data collection, production and hosting (the Directorate General for the Environment (DG ENV), the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Environment Agency (EEA) and Eurostat), was signed by the Directors General of the four institutions in December 2005.

The aim is to have a primary data contact point for the European Commission for major thematic areas, and to ensure the availability of robust environmental data to support European environmental policies. The data centres' task will be to ensure that the data collected fit European policy requirements, that their collection is

organised in an efficient way, that the necessary quality assurance is performed and that all relevant existing data are accessible to the other institutions. The actual data collection and quality control will remain in the hands of the institution originally in charge, but will be coordinated with the respective data centre.

The agreed thematic distribution of responsibilities is as follows:

- Data centre for air, climate change, water, biodiversity and land use: EEA
- Data centre for soil and forestry: JRC
- Data centre for waste, natural resources and integrated product policy: Eurostat

RECENT MEETINGS

Annual GEO Data Working Group Meeting (Geneva, 31 October-1 November 2005)

The GEO (Global Environmental Outlook) Data Working Group met on 31 October and 1 November 2005, at UNEP in Geneva. The members of the group discussed progress in international and regional environmental data collection, and progress in the establishment of global and regional data portals. The data portals provide data for the UNEP flagship publication *Global Environmental Outlook*. UNSD contributes environmental and related social and economic data to the portal and the publication.

UNSD is particularly interested in seeing the methodological foundation for GEO data collection strengthened, especially in the application of common classifications and definitions among partners. In addition to this issue, the meeting also saw discussion of a global-regional data comparison study underway at UNEP which aims at a systematic analysis of differences between data in regional and global GEO databases. The possibility of introducing a standardization of environmental data exchange formats based on XML was also raised, and will be a topic of discussion in the future.

First Eurostat Directors Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts (Luxembourg, 7-8 November 2005)

The meeting discussed plans for a communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council on the future of environmental statistics and accounts and agreed on a distribution of work among the

four major Community bodies involved on a regular basis in environmental data collection, production and hosting. Two major initiatives, statistics on the sustainable use of pesticides and on chemicals and hazardous substances, were on the agenda as well as the overview of the work carried out and perspectives in the fields of water and waste statistics and environmental accounts.

**OECD-LAC Conference on Environmental Information for Decision Making
(Cancun, Mexico, 28-29 November 2005)**

UNSD co-sponsored the OECD-Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Conference on Environmental Information for Decision Making that was hosted by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico and took place in Cancun only five weeks after the severe damages inflicted to the region by hurricane Wilma. Strengthening environmental decision making and improving environmental democracy were the twin goals of the Conference attended by government officials and experts from 37 OECD and LAC countries and representatives from nine international organizations.

The Conference opened with keynote speeches characterising the demand for environmental information in participating countries and regions. Three main thematic sessions addressed the role of different information tools and frameworks in (1) monitoring environmental conditions and trends and tracking progress (2) communicating with the public and supporting public debates, and (3) integrating environmental concerns into economic and sectoral policies. A fourth thematic session dwelled upon the pre-requisites for effective environmental information systems. During each session, considerable experiences in individual OECD and LAC countries were reviewed and discussed. The Conference was a very worthwhile platform for countries to exchange experiences and foster cooperation in the development of environmental information systems and the implementation of environmental information systems to support policy making.

**OECD Working Group on Environmental Information and Outlooks (WGEIO)
(Cancun, Mexico, 30 November – 1 December 2005)**

The meeting focused on OECD work on material flows and resource productivity, improving environmental data quality, and outreach and cooperation with non members. The discussion on material flows and resource productivity covered: (a) the draft methodological guidance on measuring material flows and resource productivity; (b) the proposed modular approach and architecture for the implementation; (c) the criteria to be used to select material flow indicators; (d) a set of material

flow and productivity indicators for international use; and (e) the building blocks for producing a brochure on material flow analysis. In the discussion on improving environment data quality, OECD presented the plans for data collection, treatment and quality assurance in 2005-2006, and delegates expressed their views on the simplified core version of the questionnaire. Summaries from other recent OECD and international meetings were also reported.

**Meeting of the Environment Sub-Group of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on MDG indicators
(New York, 12 December 2005)**

The objective of the Meeting was to discuss the current set of global indicators used and proposals for adjustment and/or replacement to monitoring progress in achievement of MDG goal 7 target 9 on “Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programme; reverse the loss of environmental resources,” and to discuss suitable alternatives, as applicable. The Meeting also discussed areas of future work and modus operandi of the sub-group.

**Expert Group Meeting on Indicators of Sustainable Development
(New York, 13-15 December 2005)**

The objectives of the meeting were to review and update the current list of Indicators of Sustainable Development of the Commission of Sustainable Development (CSD-ISD) and to consider future areas of work on indicators. The meeting was an important intermediate step in the review of the CSD-ISD. The discussions led to a preliminary revised CSD-ISD of 54 core indicators, 33 additional indicators and 13 indicators to be developed. The meeting also discussed the suitability of the different frameworks for the ISD, with special emphasis on the capital based approach and the ongoing work on the System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounts.

CES/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development

The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) recently approved the terms of reference for a joint CES/OECD working group on statistics for sustainable development. The working group should:

- i) articulate a broad conceptual framework for sustainable development measurement;
- ii) identify the broad domains that good indicator sets should span;

- iii) develop a menu of good sustainable development indicators in order to help governments and international organizations when they are designing indicator sets;
- iv) identify a small set of indicators from the menu that might become the core for international comparisons;
- v) identify basic data systems necessary for a small set of indicators and identify their possible sources;
- vi) discuss the relationship between integrated environmental and economic accounts and sustainable development indicators.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

37th Session of the Statistical Commission (New York, 7-10 March 2006)

The Commission will have on its agenda the report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics and the report on the establishment, objectives and mandate of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2006.htm>).

Workshop on Energy and Environment Statistics (Doha, Qatar, 1-3 May 2006)

The workshop will bring together producers and users of energy and environment statistics from the Gulf Countries, will discuss the role of statistical offices in these statistical fields and the UNSD energy and environment statistics questionnaires.

OECD Workshop on Material Flow and Resource Productivity Indicators - Interpretation and Use (Rome, Italy, 16-17 May 2006)

The workshop is hosted by the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territory in co-operation with the Italian Statistical Office. It is organised by the OECD Working Group on Environmental Information and Outlooks in co-operation with the Working Group on Waste Prevention and Recycling.

Second Forum on Environment Statistics for Mediterranean Countries (Amman, Jordan, 13-14 June 2006)

The Forum will assess the implementation and the results of the second phase of the MEDSTAT Environment Project of Eurostat.

UNSD Expert Group Meeting on Environment Statistics, 4th quarter of 2006

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Chief of the Environment Statistics Section, P5

The position is located in the Environment and Energy Statistics Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division, DESA. The incumbent is responsible for planning and directing the Division's work programme in the area of environment statistics and indicators, covering:

- Management of the environment statistics database and the biennial international collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of environment statistics and indicators;
- Development and maintenance of conceptual/methodological guidelines in environmental statistics and indicators;
- Technical cooperation, provision of technical advice and guidance to countries through training, and country and regional projects;
- Collaboration and coordination of these activities with international, regional, subregional and other organizations and specialized agencies active in the field.

Deadline for application is 18 March 2006.

For more details and application go to:

http://myun.un.org/Galaxy/Release3/vacancy/Display_Vacancy.aspx?lang=1200&VACID=a7b28841-40f9-4c5f-84c6-ac2f3242d18a

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