



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

**Nineteenth Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
25-26 June 2024**

Review of the Mandate and Governance of the UNCEEA

Paper prepared by the Secretariat of the UNCEEA

Updated on 19 August 2024

(for discussion)

Review of the Mandate and Governance of the UNCEEA

**Please note that paragraphs 1, 10 and 16 were updated on 19 August 2024.*

Background and introduction

1. As a new chair started in 2023, the Bureau decided that this was an opportunity to review the Terms of Reference and Operational Guidelines of the UNCEEA. The current Terms of Reference were created in 2006 and updated in 2010, and the Bureau agreed that it was time to review them to ensure that they reflect the work of the Committee and its current priorities, as well as to identify ways to improve the functioning of the Committee. In January 2024, the Bureau agreed to establish a small group of Bureau volunteers to form the Task Team on the UNCEEA Mandate and Functioning, which would hold dedicated discussions and prepare a draft for consideration by the wider Bureau.

2. The Task Team includes the UNCEEA Chair, Secretariat, Working Group leads and other members of the Bureau that expressed interest in participating in the work. The Task Team met several times since March 2024 and reported back to the Bureau at its meeting in June 2024, where the Bureau reviewed and discussed the work done by the Task Team and agreed to submit the draft “Mandate and Governance” to the UNCEEA at its 19th meeting.

3. This short note presents a brief overview of the changes from the current UNCEEA Terms of Reference. The Committee is invited to endorse the Mandate and Governance document. The endorsed Mandate and Governance will be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission for approval.

4. The Task Team will continue its work by reviewing the “Operational Guidelines of the UNCEEA”. It is envisaged that the revised guidelines will take the form of a short document outlining the current Working Groups and their workplans. It is intended that the guidelines will be updated more frequently to reflect changes in the Committee’s workplan.

Overview of changes

5. Overall, the changes made do not significantly alter the mandate of the Committee. Rather, the changes update the text in line with the work done by the Committee (in the past and at present) and clarify certain aspects. Some suggestions for the governance of the Committee are proposed to increase its effectiveness in delivering its mandate.

6. A broad description of the changes are presented below and are organized in three main areas: structure of the document, which describes how the Mandate and Governance draws from elements of both the current Terms of Reference and Operational Guidelines; changes to the mandate of the Committee; and clarifications on the governance of the Committee.

Structure of the Mandate and Governance

7. During this review, the Task Team agreed to shift portions of the current Operational Guidelines focusing on governance (e.g. organization of the Committee’s work, composition, role of Chair, role of Secretariat, etc.) into a new Mandate and Governance document, recognizing that the Mandate and Governance are not expected to change frequently.

8. In addition, while developing the new Mandate and Governance document, the Task Team consulted the mandate and governance documents of other UN Committees, including the Intersecretariat Working Group on the System of National Accounts (ISWGNA), the UN Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics, UN Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications and others. The level of detail and scope of the new Mandate and Governance document is now more aligned with the mandate and governance documents of these Committees.

Changes in the mandate of the Committee

9. The overall scope and main elements of the Committee's programme of work in the new Mandate and Governance document is consistent with that in the current Terms of Reference and include: ensuring coordination in the field; encouraging the use of the SEEA in countries to support decision making; furthering methodology; advancing SEEA implementation; and data collection/dissemination.

10. However, the current Terms of Reference indicates that one of the overall objectives of the UNCEEA is "...develop normative international statistical standards...." The UNCEEA has already achieved this for the SEEA Central Framework and Chapters 1-7 of the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting. Thus, this objective has been updated to "maintain the SEEA and supporting documents through regular updates to ensure its relevance and coherence with other statistical standards."

11. In addition, to reflect the significant role that the Committee has in the overall development of the environmental-economic accounting field, the Task Team agreed to explicitly add this as one of the objectives of the Committee. Thus, one of the objectives of the Committee in the document is now to "provide strategic vision in the field of environmental-economic accounting and related statistics."

Clarifying the Governance of the Committee

12. The Mandate and Governance document now provides information on the major elements of the Committee's governance arrangements, which includes the roles and relationships between the UN Statistical Commission, the UNCEEA Bureau, the Secretariat, Working Groups and Technical Committees; Projects (e.g. update of the SEEA Central Framework); stakeholders; and city groups, such as the London Group on Environmental Accounting.

13. The Mandate and Governance provides further detail on the profile of UNCEEA members and their responsibilities. The managerial nature of the Committee has been reinforced, and representation is recommended to be from senior officials of participating institutions, to ensure the role of the Committee in setting priorities and developing strategic vision. In terms of responsibilities, Committee members are expected to actively participate in the work of the Committee (and its working groups, as appropriate) and promote the compilation and use of the SEEA in their countries and regions, as appropriate. In addition, the document formally adds the possibility to invite non-member observers to participate in the meetings of the UNCEEA, depending on the topics being discussed and upon recommendation by the Bureau.

14. The Mandate and Governance also provides details on the Chair of the Committee to reflect current practices. In particular, the Chair will serve for a 3 year-period, renewable every three years; if the Chair is to resign mid-term, the Bureau will designate an interim Chair.

15. Given the large number of responsibilities of the Chair, it is noted that the Chair may recommend to the Bureau the designation of a Deputy or Co-Chair, as appropriate. The Deputy/Co-Chair is to work closely with the Chair to carry out the overall duties of the Chair and will also serve as a member of the Bureau.

16. The Mandate and Governance provides a description of the role and functioning of the Bureau. The description of the Bureau is largely in line with the current functioning of the Bureau, whereby the Bureau, working under delegated authority from the Committee, provides strategic advice to the Committee and assists with the management of its programme of work. The Bureau comprises permanent members, which include international organizations; leads of the Committee's Working Groups and Technical Committees; and the Deputy Chair (as applicable). It also includes non-permanent country members. Furthermore, the Chairs of relevant city and expert-groups may be invited to participate in Bureau meetings.

17. In addition to the Bureau, the Mandate and Governance specifically designates a Steering Group, consisting of the Bureau's delegates to the UN Statistical Commission. Already, it is current practice to hold an in-person Bureau meeting on the sidelines of the UN Statistical Commission, to obtain strategic advice from high-level delegates. It is now specified that the Group will have a formal role in the Committee. It is also specified that the Steering Group will also have an additional meeting during the year, to keep them abreast of developments and obtain their views. This will provide an important opportunity for the Committee to engage more actively with high-level representatives.

18. Finally, the Working Groups and Technical Committees of the UNCEEA are now explicitly reflected in the document. In particular, the text explicitly mentions that the Bureau reviews and approves the creation of working groups and technical committees and appoints their leads. Also, task teams may be created for a specific time-bound objective.

Questions to the Committee

- Does the Committee endorse the Mandate and Governance of the UNCEEA document?
- Does the Committee have any comments on the Task Team's plans for the Operational Guidelines?