

# Introduction

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has produced four pan-European 'state of Europe's environment' reports in support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) 'Environment for Europe' process <sup>(1)</sup>. Over time, and in conjunction with a host of other reports (including the additional four five-yearly state and outlook reports produced by the EEA for its geographical area <sup>(2)</sup>), this has provided a comprehensive overview of environmental challenges across the region.

To complement this, and in support of the 2011 'Environment for Europe' Ministerial Conference in Astana, EEA has prepared *Europe's environment — An Assessment of Assessments* (EE-AoA). This assessment of assessments focuses on the two themes of the Astana Conference: water and related ecosystems, and green economy.

An assessment of assessments process reviews and critically analyses the existing assessment landscape across the pan-European region. It thus provides a basis to identify strengths of and gaps in existing assessments and their findings, their regional specificities, and the ways in which they can be improved to make them more policy-relevant.

The methodological basis for an assessment of assessments was developed during the United Nations Marine Assessment of Assessments commissioned by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009. The present report demonstrates the robustness and viability of extending an assessment of assessments process to a broader set of thematic and geographic perspectives.

For the assessment of assessments presented here, almost 1 000 environmental assessment reports were identified and recorded in a dedicated virtual library, with the support of experts across 53 UNECE countries and international organisations. More than half of these publications have been reviewed in detail — focusing on water and related ecosystems, and green economy <sup>(3)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> In 1995, 1998, 2003 and 2007.

<sup>(2)</sup> In 1995, 1999, 2005 and 2010.

<sup>(3)</sup> Building on the methodology developed and applied in the context of the recent UN Marine Assessment of Assessments.

Overall, this exercise highlights that the assessment landscape is crowded, fragmented and diverse across the region. More reports, more statistics and more indicators are being produced today than five years ago. However, the evidence that more of what is produced is used for policy, awareness or action-driven purposes, is often missing.

This assessment of assessments exercise has resulted in a report, which is structured as follows:

- *Chapter 1* describes the overall setting for the EE-AoA, including the landscape of environmental assessments and their context. Furthermore, it explains the methodology that underpins the assessment of assessments exercise.
- *Chapter 2* focuses on water and related ecosystems. This chapter highlights that the number of publications recorded over the past years is impressive. However, description of the status remains predominant, while topics such as water scarcity, extreme events, water ecosystems or water management are addressed only in a limited fashion.
- *Chapter 3* focuses on green economy. As green economy is a relatively new topic and conceptual aspects are still to be clarified, there are only very few dedicated green economy assessments. Nevertheless, a host of sectoral and/or thematic assessments do address issues directly or indirectly related to green economy.
- *Chapter 4* presents a cross-cutting overview across and beyond the two themes addressed in the previous chapters. It highlights a number of key observations and questions about environmental assessments across the region covering commonalities, institutional responsibilities, processes and content, and scope for improved environmental governance, as well as applicability and transferability of the results.
- Finally, in *Chapter 5*, based on the findings across the assessment of assessments — and with the contribution and endorsement of the UNECE Steering Group on Environmental Assessments — a set of recommendations is presented to help strengthen the overall suite of environmental assessments in support of the 'Environment for Europe' process.