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Role of the Environment Fund for delivering the United Nations Environment Programme's Programme of Work

Discussion Document-Not for quotation or citation: The purpose of this document is to facilitate discussions during the Sixth Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, 26-29 August 2025. Comments are welcome and should be sent to unep-apmf@un.org.

1.0 UNEP Environment Fund

UNEP Environment Fund is the core flexible fund of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is financed by voluntary contributions from UNEP Member States. It represents the financial backbone of UNEP and plays a pivotal role in enabling the organization to fulfill its mission as the global environmental authority. Unlike earmarked funds that are tied to specific projects or regions, the Environment Fund provides flexible, core funding that allows UNEP to implement its Programme of Work as approved by all Member States. This flexibility is crucial for responding swiftly to emerging environmental challenges, and for maintaining a balanced, strategic approach to global environmental governance.

The Environment Fund provides the bedrock for UNEP's work worldwide. It is used for providing scientific evidence on the state of the global environment; the identification of emerging environmental issues and innovative solutions; advocacy and awareness-raising; capacity-building and results-focused programme management; and oversight. It also supports the convening power in bringing together governments, the private sector and civil society to advance the global environmental agenda, for example through the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

Of the fund, 87 per cent is used for the direct implementation of the Programme of Work –including addressing the environmental crises of climate, nature and pollution– as well as UNEP's work in science, policy and environmental law, which in turn help drive positive impact for the environment. The rest supports strategic direction, management and programme support, which are critical for implementing the organization's vision and ensuring transparency, solid oversight and delivery.

2.0 Member States' decisions on UNEP Environment Fund

The Environment Fund was established in 1972 by the UN General Assembly and came into effect from 1st January 1973. It was established as the core fund of UNEP to provide the bedrock for the organization's work globally in supporting Member States to deliver on their environmental commitments.

In 2012, at the Rio+20 UN Conference, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that strengthened the role of UNEP. From a Governing Council of 58 Member States, UNEP moved to an Environment Assembly, with universal membership that encompasses all 193 UN Member States. At the same conference, world leaders committed to ensure secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources to UNEP. Several UNEA decisions have urged all Member States in a position to do so to increase contributions to the Environment Fund, encouraged by the universal membership of UNEA.

The amount that each Member State is encouraged to contribute yearly to the Environment Fund is represented by the indicative scale of contributions (VISC). The VISC was established in 2002 by the Member States, to increase the number of Member States that provide funding, and to enhance predictability in the financing of the Environment Fund. The VISC level is based on the UN Scale of Assessment (which provides the basis for the UN Regular Budget), but it also considers other factors. It is not based on an equal share, but a share that is tailor-made for each country.

3.0 Status of the Environment Fund

There are four main sources of funding for UNEP: core contributions which include the Environment Fund and the UN Regular Fund, and earmarked contributions that include earmarked funds and global funds.

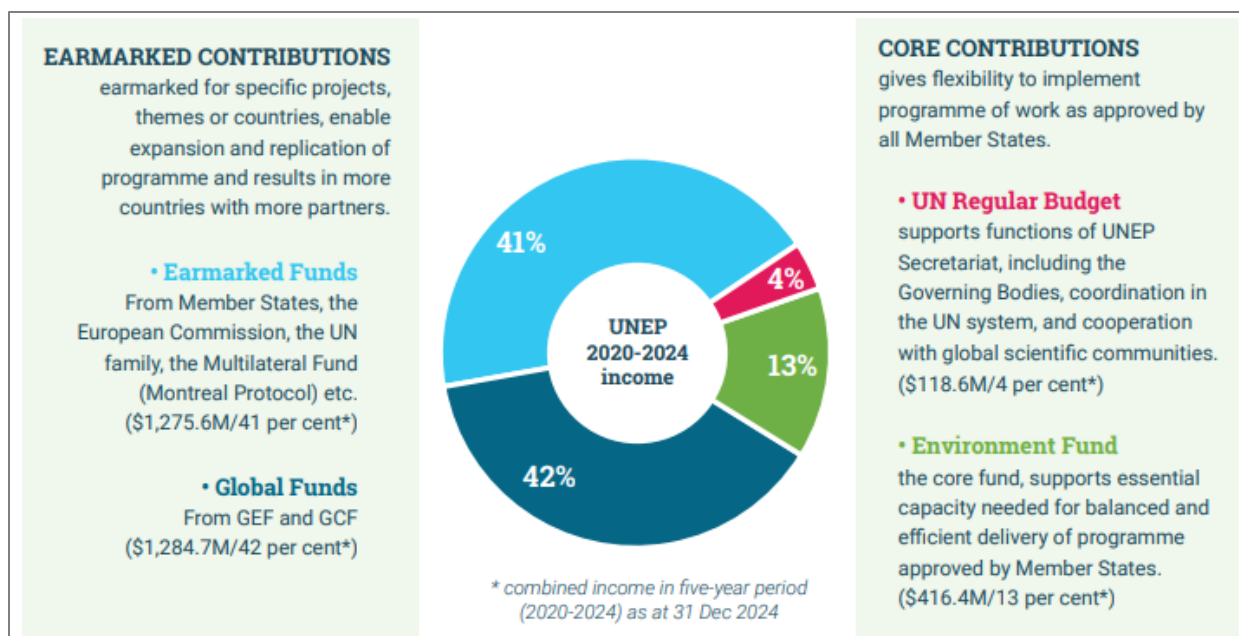


Figure 1. Composition of UNEP combined income (2020-2024)

The Environment Fund budget is approved by Member States alongside UNEP's Programme of Work. It has rarely been fully funded.

Considering UNEP's combined income during 2020-2024, the Environment Fund represented 13% of the overall UNEP income (Figure 1). Growth in earmarked funding continues to outpace that in core funding at UNEP. The total and relative increase in earmarked resources, largely for specific projects, risks to cause a situation where UNEP has reduced overall ability to direct resources towards the priorities mandated by the Member States in the Programme of Work.

By end of 2024, 94 out of 193 Member States contributed to the Environment Fund budget for 2024. 59 of the 94 contributed their full share as per the VISC. 99 Member States did not contribute.

While there has been a positive trend in the last years, still less than half of the 193 Member States provide funding to UNEP in any given year since 2012. This also means that the universality in membership is not translated into global responsibility in funding.

For 2024, 23 Member States from Asia and the Pacific (Figure 2) contributed to the Fund -11 of which at full share for a total of USD5,318,031 representing 16,7% over the total regional VISC of USD31,656,231.

CONTRIBUTIONS ABOVE AND EQUAL TO FULL SHARE**					
Albania	Denmark	Iceland	Madagascar	Netherlands	Serbia
Armenia	Dominica	Iraq	Maldives	New Zealand	Slovenia
Bahamas	Dominican Republic	Ireland	Malta	Norway	Somalia
Barbados	Eswatini	Italy	Mauritius	Oman	Sri Lanka
Belgium	Fiji	Jamaica	Monaco	Palau	Sweden
Belize	France	Jordan	Mongolia	Peru	Tajikistan
Bhutan	Gambia	Kenya	Montenegro	Philippines	United Kingdom
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Georgia	Latvia	Morocco	Saint Kitts & Nevis	Uruguay
Cabo Verde	Grenada	Lithuania	Nauru	Saint Lucia	Vanuatu
Cyprus	Guyana	Luxembourg	Nepal	Saudi Arabia	
OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS					
Andorra	Cambodia	Germany	Malaysia	Republic of Korea	Thailand
Australia	Canada	Hungary	Mexico	Singapore	Trinidad and Tobago
Austria	China	Indonesia	Micronesia	Slovakia	Uganda
Bangladesh	Croatia	Japan	Pakistan	South Africa	USA
Botswana	Czechia	Kazakhstan	Paraguay	Spain	Viet Nam
Bulgaria	Finland	Kuwait	Portugal	Switzerland	

Figure 2. Highlighted are Member States from the Asia and the Pacific region that contributed to the Environment Fund for 2024.

4.0 UNEP Planetary Funds

In response to Member States' suggestions, in order to conciliate the need for flexible funding and that of funding dedicated to specific environmental challenges, in March 2022, UNEP launched the [Planetary Funds](#) (UNEP Climate Fund, UNEP Nature Fund, UNEP Pollution Fund). The funds are open to contributions from all levels of government, multilateral development banks, regional organizations, international financial institutions, philanthropies, foundations and individuals.

5.0 Acknowledgments and further information

UNEP would like to thank all Member States that support UNEP in responding to its mandate, including by contributing to the Environment Fund. UNEP makes an effort to keep Member States informed on the status of the Environment Fund through a dedicated public [webpage](#) and through information shared with UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives and UNEP focal points.