

Effective and inclusive instruments of international cooperation for a healthy, resilient and long-term competitive future for people and planet.

What are Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)?

MEAs are international legal instruments, negotiated and ratified by countries that are Party to them, to address the most urgent global environmental issues of our time

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are instruments of multilateral cooperation that address environmental challenges which individual countries or bilateral efforts cannot effectively resolve. These include issues of transboundary nature—such as the movement of environmentally sensitive goods, the conservation of species and ecosystems that span national borders—as well as matters requiring harmonized rules or collective action on issues of global concern, such as climate change.

Why do they matter?

Implementing the MEAs is critical to tackling the three planetary environmental crises of climate change, nature, land and biodiversity loss, pollution and waste. MEAs advance science-based solutions at the global, regional and national levels that can result in transformative shifts across economies and societies, such as:

- Improving the **sustainable use and management of natural resources** to benefit human well-being and economic resilience and long-term competitiveness.
- Shifting **consumption and production patterns** and creating a level-playing field globally for all countries in their transition towards a green and circular economy.
- Enhancing **environmental governance and legal frameworks** to support long-term policy coherence and compliance and sustainable investments.
- Reducing pollution across air, water, and soil systems—leading to **improved public health, lower healthcare costs, and increased economic productivity**, while at the same **enhancing time industrial efficiency and increasing agricultural productivity**.
- Driving **innovation and green technologies** through common standards and cooperation.
- Fostering international solidarity, technical cooperation, and capacity building, particularly for developing countries.

- Supporting early warning systems and coordinated responses to environmental risks and emergencies.

How can they help decision-makers?

MEAs can empower decision-makers to strengthen governance, shape coherent policies across sectors and assert environmental priorities at the heart of national development agendas – involving the whole-of-government and whole-of-society.

But the success of MEAs ultimately depends on their implementation at both national and regional levels. Their effectiveness hinges on how countries **translate international commitments into concrete laws, policies, and regulatory frameworks**.

Implementing MEAs through national policies, strategies and legislation can embed environmental priorities across all sectors and ensure **long-term resilience for economies, ecosystems, and communities**. For both the private sector and civil society, the implementation of MEAs can influence business environments, shaping risks and opportunities globally. MEA implementation contributes to informing stakeholders about sustainability and setting national standards that can benefit present and future generations.

MEAs build international cooperation towards a healthier, prosperous, and resilient planet

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides Secretariat functions to 15 MEAs that address issues including:



1. Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity at ecosystems, species and genetic resource levels through the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#), the [Convention and International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna \(CITES\)](#), the [Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals \(CMS\)](#).



2. Protection of the oceans and sea biodiversity through the [Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean \(Barcelona Convention\)](#) and the [Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region \(Cartagena Convention\)](#).



3. Addressing pollution sources by promoting the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes and chemicals, through the [Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and their Disposal \(Basel Convention\)](#), the [Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade \(Rotterdam Convention\)](#), the [Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants \(Stockholm Convention\)](#) and the [Minamata Convention on Mercury \(Minamata Convention\)](#).



4. Addressing the impacts of climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer through the [Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer \(Vienna Convention\)](#) and the [Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer \(Montreal Protocol\)](#).

UNEP promotes regional oceans governance also through its Regional Seas Programme, which is implemented via **18 regional frameworks** for cooperation, management and protection of shared marine and coastal environments: the **Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs)**. Through region-specific activities and more than **50 thematic protocols**, the RSCAPs support and advance the global oceans agenda, while responding to emerging issues, policies, and initiatives, such as the [Agreement under the United Nations](#)

Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

UNEP also works in close partnership with the non-UNEP administered MEAs, including the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) and the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#) to deliver on the environmental agenda.

UNEP serves as an implementing agency to several multilateral funds that support MEA implementation, including the [Global Environment Facility \(GEF\)](#), the [Green Climate Fund \(GCF\)](#) and the [Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol \(MLF\)](#), unlocking the necessary resources to provide technical expertise and capacity support to eligible countries.

UNEP plays a foundational role in advancing science-policy interfaces, serving as one of the key institutional hosts of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) and the host for the [Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#) – two international panels that provide the latest authoritative science on climate, biodiversity and ecosystems services, guiding global environmental action and informing MEAs implementation. The establishment of a [third scientific panel on chemicals, waste and pollution prevention](#) – to be hosted by UNEP – was recently agreed at intergovernmental level. The UNEP-launched International Resource Panel provides knowledge on our use of resources, steering away from overconsumption and waste and ecological harm.

UNEP's work is informed and responds to international policy frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), the [Global Biodiversity Plan](#) (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework or GBF) and the [Global Framework on Chemicals \(GFC\)](#) – for a transformational response that involves all sectors of the economy and society.

UNEP's role in supporting the coherent and effective implementation of MEAs includes:

- **Providing science-based policy guidance** to inform national decision-making and legislative reforms on MEAs integration into national and regional legal frameworks, thereby enabling the effective execution of global environmental commitments
- **Strengthening institutional and technical capacities** of governments and stakeholders in facilitating national coordination, synergies and integrated approaches for the implementation of MEAs.
- **Supporting national reporting and compliance efforts** to uphold transparency and accountability and leverage environmental data for decision-making.
- **Serving as a trusted convener and knowledge hub**, fostering dialogue, partnerships and international cooperation including through the [United Nations Environment Assembly](#) – the highest-level decision-making body on the environment.

Biodiversity loss and land degradation	The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Protocols provide a global normative framework for ensuring that the world moves in one direction to reverse biodiversity loss. The CBD guides countries towards translating their biodiversity commitments and obligations into national laws and policies and aligning these with the goals agreed under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and its 23 targets. The CBD and the GBF play a key role in catalyzing a global shift in policy thinking through transformative change that reconciles competitiveness with sustainability. As a result of the Convention, 84% of Parties to the CBD have adopted national targets to address the impacts of invasive alien species on human health and economic activities, such as fisheries. This result was recently boosted by the adoption of a new Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health in 2024 to help countries advance biodiversity and health co-benefits from the implementation of the Convention and the GBF. The CBD mobilizes critical biodiversity finance. The 386 million USD pledged to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund as of June 2025 are expected to generate significant economic, social and environmental benefits globally, for example, through ensuring that the imports and exports of biological products uphold the same standards. The publication of 2,900 decisions and more than 2,800 risk assessments by the 173 Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety through the Biosafety Clearing-House has contributed to the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biodiversity, taking into account risks to human health and supporting food security globally. The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing has aided its 142 Parties to regulate access to genetic resources, ensuring fair benefit-sharing through legally binding means, supporting responsible innovation, and reducing reputational and compliance risks. The Convention and International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), plays a critical role in conserving biodiversity by regulating international trade in over 40,000 species of animals and plants. Through a robust permitting system and effective compliance processes, CITES ensures that trade is legal, sustainable, and traceable — protecting the survival of species in the wild while supporting economies and livelihoods. The Convention has also helped curb illegal and unsustainable exploitation. CITES fosters resilient economies in the long term by promoting sustainable use of natural resources through enabling legal, sustainable trade that supports jobs and communities, particularly in biodiversity-rich developing countries. By establishing a common global standard on trade transactions, CITES increases transparency and efficiency for legal, sustainable businesses. Its work is increasingly critical in the face of climate change, habitat loss, changing consumption patterns and transboundary wildlife crime — reinforcing environmental security and global governance for nature. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is the only global treaty dedicated to the protection of migratory species and their habitats across national borders. CMS has contributed to the recovery and protection of key species — from marine turtles and sharks to birds of prey and antelopes — while enhancing ecosystem connectivity and resilience. The Convention fosters international cooperation to reduce threats such as habitat loss, bycatch, pollution, and climate change and supports sustainable economic opportunities, including eco-tourism, community-based conservation, and sustainable fisheries, helping improve competitiveness and livelihood security in partner countries. By safeguarding migratory species and the ecological services they provide — such as pollination, pest control, and nutrient cycling — CMS contributes to healthier ecosystems that are more resilient to environmental and economic shocks. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the only legally binding framework aiming to address desertification, land degradation and the effects of drought. The Convention is a multilateral commitment to mitigate the impacts of land degradation and drought, to provide food, water, shelter and economic opportunity to all people and ecosystems. In collaboration with a broad group of partners (including the International Drought Resilience Alliance and the G20 Global Land Initiative), the UNCCD delivers knowledge sharing, capacity building and technology transfer, to assist countries in achieving drought resilience and implementing sustainable land management. This helps countries unlock new green economic opportunities in agriculture, forestry, and nature-based solutions — enhancing productivity, reducing input costs, and positioning countries to compete in a resource-constrained global economy. Through the UNCCD, 131 countries have been engaged in setting Land Degradation Neutrality Targets and 113 have successfully set voluntary targets and designed implementation plans. This has resulted in voluntary commitments to restore over 450 million hectares of degraded land – with recent estimates possibly measuring upward and closer to 600 million hectares.
--	---

¹ The information presented in this table represents a selection of data regarding the implementation of MEAs and does not constitute an exhaustive list. It is intended to provide illustrative examples and should not be interpreted as comprehensive coverage of the subject.

Ocean governance	The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) safeguards the region's environment and the health of its coastal communities by reducing pollution from POPs, mercury, and other hazardous chemicals. Since 2018, the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP) has been working to reduce pollution from POPs and mercury across the Mediterranean to ensure the environmentally sound disposal of 2,000 tons of POPs and several hundred tons of PCB-contaminated equipment. This is expected to significantly reduce cancer risks and protect marine ecosystems and food chains from toxic contamination. The implementation of the Conceptual Framework for Implementing Marine Spatial Planning in the Mediterranean agreed in 2023 and aligned with the EU Directive 2014/89 on Maritime Spatial Planning is expected to significantly improve the health, productivity, restoration and resilience of the marine and coastal ecosystems in the region, as well as accelerate the transition towards sustainable, green, blue and circular economy and sustainable finance. The Convention's Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) has enhanced science-based decision-making for the Mediterranean Sea, building resilience against climate change and enhancing surveillance of biodiversity and pollution issues, including marine litter. The Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and its three Protocols on Oil Spills, Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS), and Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW), play a crucial role in safeguarding marine biodiversity and reducing pollution in the Wider Caribbean Region, catalyzing policy harmonization, enhancing stakeholder participation, and increasing regional capacity for environmental monitoring. The LBS Protocol has led to a 30% reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus discharges in hotspots like Kingston Harbour and Havana Bay, through upgraded wastewater treatment infrastructure, supported by GEF-funded initiatives. The Oil Spills Protocol has enhanced national preparedness and response frameworks in over 20 countries, significantly reducing the response time to spills from over 48 hours to under 12 hours in key ports. The SPAW Protocol has designated over 37 marine protected areas (MPAs) as "SPAW-listed," covering more than 150,000 km² and leading to a 25% increase in coral cover in areas like Bonaire and Guadeloupe and improved population trends for endangered species.
Pollution and waste	The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions support countries in strengthening global environmental health, by protecting citizens from the dangers of chemical and waste pollution and hazardous chemical substances. The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal controls the transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes and promotes their environmentally sound management, including through prevention and minimization. It covers a wide range of wastes, defined as "hazardous" based on their origin/composition, as well as household waste, incinerator ash, certain plastic wastes and non-hazardous e-wastes. Since the adoption of the Plastic Waste Amendments to the Basel Convention in 2019, over 120 technical assistance projects on plastic waste worth 20 million USD have been implemented across 76 countries with the support of the BRS Secretariat. These projects have been instrumental in preventing and minimizing plastic wastes, ensuring their environmentally sound management, and controlling their transboundary movements, while strengthening circular economy approaches. The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade supports countries in making informed decisions on the import and trade of hazardous chemicals, building trust and shared responsibility. Through the adoption of stronger legal and regulatory frameworks and safer trade as a result of the Convention, farmers and local communities globally have been better protected from the dangers of highly toxic pesticides. As of June 2025, 57 chemicals, including 38 pesticides, 18 industrial chemicals, and 1 chemical in both the pesticide and the industrial chemical categories, are listed under the Convention. This has enabled 167 countries to take precautionary action and make informed decisions to protect human and environmental health. The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) protects people and the planet against the harmful impacts of POPs – chemicals that are highly toxic, long lasting in the environment, become widely distributed and bio-accumulate throughout the food chain. As of June 2025, 37 POPs (both industrial chemicals and pesticides) are listed under the Convention and are targeted for elimination. Some of the listed chemicals are PFAS – the so-called "forever chemicals" – which were used in a wide range of products and applications, leading to significant pollution in some regions. Owing to efforts made by Parties to meet the Stockholm Convention's deadlines, more than 650,000 tons of waste contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) – a class of industrial POPs used in electrical transformers, have been eliminated globally, reducing long-term threats to human and environmental health. Through the Stockholm Convention's financial mechanism – the Global Environment Facility, from 2018 to 2022 alone, 98 countries improved their capacity to develop national implementation plans and carried out disposal operations under the Convention. These efforts led to the disposal of 126,165 tons of POPs and reduction of 3,067gTEQ of unintentional POPs.

	The Minamata Convention on Mercury protects people and the environment from the harmful effects of mercury. The Convention works across the lifecycle, including a ban on new mercury mines, the phase-out of existing ones, the phase-out and phase-down of mercury use in a number of products (such as batteries, thermometers and dental amalgam) and processes, control measures on emissions to air and on releases to land and water, and the regulation of the informal sector of artisanal and small-scale gold mining. The Convention also addresses interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, sites contaminated by mercury as well as health issues. The Convention entered into force in 2017 and currently has 152 Parties. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining is a complex global development issue and is responsible for nearly 38% of global anthropogenic mercury emissions. As of June 2025, 55 countries have acknowledged the need to take action on artisanal and small-scale gold mining and processing using mercury, including taking steps to reduce, and where feasible eliminate, the use of mercury and to develop and implement a dedicated national action plan. Furthermore, the Convention has driven innovation in mercury-free technologies across sectors such as dentistry, lighting, industrial manufacturing and artisanal and small-scale gold mining — creating new markets while aligning trade and production with global safety standards.
Climate change and atmosphere	The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer protects people and the environment by phasing out the production and use of chemicals that deplete the Earth's ozone layer. Under the Protocol, more than 99% of ozone-depleted substances (ODSs) have been phased out, avoiding an estimated 135 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emissions from 1990 to 2010. Without the Protocol, the Earth's surface temperature would have experienced an additional rise of temperature of 0.5–1.0 °C. Phasing down the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol and transitioning to sustainable and more energy efficient cooling equipment would avoid up to a potential 1°C degrees of warming by the end of the century. Protecting the ozone layer is expected to prevent approximately 443 million cases of skin cancer, 2.3 million skin cancer deaths, and 63 million cases of eye cataract for people born between 1890 to 2100. The Protocol is expected to result in an estimated US\$1.8 trillion in global health benefits (US\$1.109 trillion for skin cancer alone) and almost US\$460 billion in avoided damage to agriculture, fisheries, and materials from 1987 to 2060 (both cumulative estimates).
	The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) underpins international cooperation on limiting the adverse effects of climate change and keeping global warming below 1.5 C°. At the center of UNFCCC's mandate is the objective to advance progress across all dimensions of the 2030 SDGs Agenda, to ensure safety and wider planetary health, through access to jobs and livelihoods, access to energy, water and poverty reduction. The UNFCCC guides countries in addressing the climate crisis at national and international levels, including by supporting technology transfer, capacity building, climate finance, the use of market instruments, adaptation, awareness and education, and transparency through mechanisms such as national inventories and the Global Stocktake. On climate finance, the UNFCCC facilitates its scaling up, with efforts to increase annual flows from 100 to 300 billion USD per year and the ambition of reaching 1.3 trillion USD by 2035. The Convention oversees and monitors the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – national climate plans submitted by Parties under the Paris Agreement. In its implementation process, the UNFCCC engages with more than 4,000 observer organizations, including women, youth, indigenous communities, civil society and business, to promote inclusivity and transparency in its decision-making processes.

The European Union plays a critical role to advance the effective implementation of MEAs.

The European Union and its Member States are collectively Party to 47 MEAs, including global and regional treaties and Protocols.²

The EU's policy success is intertwined with its constructive ambition that informs the shaping of the MEAs and enforcing their provisions. As such, MEAs remain foundational pillars for delivering on Europe's strategic vision for a competitive, resilient, secure, and sustainable future.

The EU has long served as a global frontrunner of MEAs implementation — embedding key MEA obligations into binding EU law across areas such as:

- The Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (**REACH Regulation**), supporting the implementation BRS Conventions.
- The **Nature Restoration Regulation** and the **EU Habitats Directive**, supporting the implementation of the CBD, CMS and the GBF.
- The **European Climate Law** supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

² The overview of the European Union's Party Status to Multilateral Environmental Agreements is available at <https://www.informea.org/en/countries/eu/party-status>

This regulatory alignment has helped the EU not only meet its environmental goals but also drive global ambition.

EU policies such as the **Clean Industrial Deal**, the **Circular Economy and Zero Pollution** strategies, the **EU Health and Emergency Preparedness Strategy** and the **EU Water Resilience Strategy** provide essential tools to meet and implement MEA objectives at EU and national levels:

- **Preparing for future crises**, including pandemics and climate-induced shocks, relies on healthy ecosystems and pollution control — goals that are at the heart of international cooperation in the field of environment.
- **Addressing the root causes of migration** — including desertification and ecosystem collapse — requires scaling up implementation of the desertification and migratory species conventions (**UNCCD** and **CMS**).
- Achieving the EU's climate neutrality goal by 2050 requires full alignment with the **Paris Agreement** and integration of biodiversity, chemicals, and land restoration targets under MEAs like the biodiversity (CBD), chemicals and waste (**BRS and Minamata**), and desertification conventions (**UNCCD**).
- The Clean Industrial Deal's ambition to modernize EU industry through decarbonization and ensure resource efficiency depends on global uptake of circular economy practices encouraged by MEAs, including the **Basel Convention** which supports the safe and sustainable trade and use of secondary raw materials.
- Food and water quality and sustainability — essential to build the long-term resilience of national and local economies, and discard soil and underwater pollution sources — are directly supported by MEAs such as the **Minamata** and **Rotterdam Conventions**.