

UNEP Side Event @ HLPF 2026

Pollution-Free Economies for a sustainable future for all

Venue, date: UNHQ, New York, 13 July 2026, 1.15-2.30 pm (Conference Room 7)

Organizers: UNEP in collaboration with the European Union and Germany

Participants: National and subnational government and representatives of the UN system and of major groups and stakeholders

Background

The 2026 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, under the auspices of ECOSOC, is convening under the theme *“Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for a sustainable future for all”*.

Pollution is also intimately intertwined with all SDGs. The SDGs under review at HLPF 2026 (6, 7, 9, 11 & 17) are key for transitioning to a pollution-free economy, as they call for transformative action in key economic sectors. They provide an opportunity to accelerate the shift towards more sustainable, circular and less polluting approaches and call for targeted and time-bound actions on pollution:

- **Target 6.3** related to improving water quality and reduce pollution
- **Target 7.a** related to boosting cooperation on clean energy access and technology
- **Target 9.4** related to making infrastructure and industry more sustainable and resource-efficient
- **Target 11.6** related to reducing cities' environmental impact, especially on air quality and waste

Pollution touches every part of the planet and peoples' lives- affecting our health through the food we eat, water we drink and air we breathe. Yet it is largely controllable and avoidable, affecting biodiversity and intimately intertwined with climate. Transitioning to pollution-free economies can drive innovation, social equity, jobs and productivity, while securing a clean environment and health for all. Investing in pollution prevention is a cost-effective way to improve well-being, strengthen competitiveness and advance the SDGs.

Reducing pollution is necessary to preserve biodiversity as recognized by target 7 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. It calls for reducing pollution risks and impacts from all sources by 2030 to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity, ecosystem functions and services. **Chemicals and pollution are intimately linked with climate.** Climate and clean-air objectives can result from actions to curb emissions of super pollutants from sectors addressed by the CCAC ; sound waste and wastewater management can lead to benefits for climate, while allowing the recovery of nutrients; unpolluted ecosystems are more resilient to climate impacts; and investing in nature-based solutions can bring not only climate but also pollution benefits.

Solutions and innovations exist, yet not at the pace and scale needed for a pollution-free world within our lifetimes. Tackling individual threats must be matched with more systemic transformations to reduce exposure to hazardous chemicals and the liabilities industrial economies create. Actions that deliver benefits across the climate, biodiversity and pollution agendas while promoting circular economies can help create healthy, prosperous and resilient societies.

Recent advances in the sphere of pollution and health are opening new avenues toward a more prosperous, healthy and sustainable economy. The recently adopted **Global Framework on Chemicals**, for example, creates a policy and industry interaction space where innovation along high impact sectors and value chains, including mining and minerals and metals, agriculture, energy, plastics, textiles, electronics among others, can deliver results for a healthier and more robust industrial development.

The newly established **Inter-Governmental Science Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution** will help advance progress by providing policymakers with authoritative, policy-relevant scientific advice in support of the sound management of chemicals and waste and pollution prevention. **Chemicals and waste related MEAs** and other legally binding instruments offer key direction and mechanisms for translating ambitions into action.

The event **seeks to increase** understanding and visibility of the pollution-free agenda and its relevance to Sustainable Development, promote engagement, policy alignment and commitment among governments and stakeholders, and catalyse action in high-impact sectors to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda and the goals under review.

Side event objectives:

- Explore pathways to promote more circular, zero-waste and pollution-free sectors and value chains, in order to prevent pollution in our air, soil and water - thus enhancing environmental quality and health for all.
- Build on a large body of work that outlines the what, why and how of reducing pollution and toxicity across high impact sectors of the economy.
- Explore the economic – alongside the health and social - rationale for dealing proactively with pollution, alongside the role that government institutions play in creating enabling environments for action, including by shaping the financial playing field that will drive and shape investment decisions.
- Discuss the opportunities offered by governance frameworks such as the Global Framework on Chemicals, the Inter-Governmental Science Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution and the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) to translate global science into informed and decisive action.
- Explore how to drive private-sector investment and innovation to create a pollution-free economy.

Preliminary Programme (75 minutes)

Time	Segment	Participants/ Speaker
13.15 (15 min)	Opening Remarks	- Ms. Elizabeth Mrema, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UNEP H. E. Ms. Jessika Roswall, Commissioner, Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, European Commission
13.30 (15 min)	Setting the Scene: government perspectives	H. E. Mr. Matthew Samuda, Minister of Environment Jamaica & UNEA President H. E. Ms. Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, State Secretary Germany
13.45 (20 min)	Moderated Panel Discussion	- Ms. Fithriyyah Iskandar, Youth Representative - Local authority representative (tbc) - Mr. Christian Kaufholz, World Economic Forum
14.05 (20 min)	Interactive Q&A	Dialogue with the wider audience
14.25 (5 min)	Conclusions	