

QUARTERLY REPORT

to the 154th Meeting of the COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES

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programme

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Highlights



Leadership for the Planet: the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.1)

The first virtual UNEA session took place from 22 to 23 February 2021. More than 1,500 delegates from 153 United Nations (UN) Member States and over 60 ministers of the environment participated. The Online Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, 9–11 February 2021, the Global Youth Environment Assembly, 12–13 and 18–20 February 2021, and the Third Global Session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Science-Policy-Business Forum, 18–20 February 2021, also took place.



Adaptation Gap Report 2020

Ahead of the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021, the UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2020 was launched on 14 January 2021.

Making Peace with Nature

The UNEP synthesis report, *Making Peace with Nature: a scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies*, was launched on 18 February 2021.



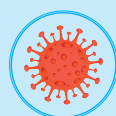
Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency

UNEP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the European Commission launched the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency on 22 February, as a side event of the fifth UNEA. Thirty-nine countries have already joined the Global Alliance, which will support the transition to a global circular economy for more efficient and equitable use of resources.



Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments

The Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments, legally binding on 186 states, came into effect on 1 January 2021, with the objectives of enhancing the control of transboundary movements of plastic waste and clarifying the scope of the Convention as it applies to such waste.



Investing to build back better

The Global Recovery Observatory and the *Are We Building Back Better?* report were launched on 10 March 2021. The Observatory is a live database of all COVID-19 related government spending in the 50 largest economies, with over 3,500 policies recorded as at February 2021. It tracks and assesses the potential impacts of COVID-19 spending policies on environmental (climate, nature and pollution), social and economic impacts.



Ecosystem service accounts

In March 2021, the fifty-second meeting of the UN Statistical Commission adopted the System of Environmental Economic Accounting – Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA) framework, as an international statistical standard for countries to map and measure ecosystems, their condition, their services, and to evaluate their contribution to the world's socioeconomic activities. UNEP made a major contribution to this ground-breaking initiative, which will promote understanding of how ecosystems and their services contribute to the economy, social wellbeing, jobs and livelihoods.

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1. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS



(Photo credit: Unsplash/Martin Sanchez)

COVID-19 RESPONSE

COVID-19 continued to impact some project implementation activities, particularly in relation to the ongoing Global Environment Facility project. UNEP is working to mitigate this impact and, moreover, having established remote-working modalities in duty stations, UNEP continues to operate and deliver on its mandate.

In this context, the UNEP COVID-19 response continues to focus on four building blocks: 1) the medical and humanitarian emergency phase, 2) transformational change for nature and people, 3) investing to build back better, and 4) modernizing environmental governance. Some of the key activities under blocks 1 and 3 are described below.

Under the medical and humanitarian emergency phase, UNEP and the Asian Institute of Technology are conducting research, awareness-raising and webinars on sound management of plastics and packaging waste in the wake of COVID-19. This includes plastics in personal protective equipment such as

masks and gloves, single-use plastic products in e-commerce and home food delivery and the use of single-use plastic products at eateries and coffee shops. The first in a series of webinars designed to share lessons learned on the best available techniques and approaches to combat plastic waste was held on 26 February 2021. Factsheets were developed to complement the webinars; one factsheet on [policy and legislation](#) dealt with increased and contaminated waste linked to the pandemic.

The [Global Recovery Observatory](#) and the [Are We Building Back Better?](#) report were [launched at an event](#) on 10 March 2021, under block 3. The Observatory is a live database of all COVID-19 related government spending in the 50 largest economies, with over 3,500 policies recorded as at February 2021. It tracks and assesses the potential impacts of COVID-19 spending policies on environmental (climate, nature and pollution), social and economic impacts. The report showed that in 2020 only 18 per cent of recovery spending and 2.5 per cent of total spending had positive green characteristics.



GLOBAL

Leadership for the Planet: the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.1)

The first virtual UNEA session took place from 22 to 23 February 2021. More than 1,500 delegates from 153 United Nations Member States and over 60 ministers of the environment participated. The fifth meeting of the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, held online from 15–18 February 2021, preceded UNEA-5.1.

UNEA-5 concluded with an urgent call for action to solve planetary emergencies and adopted three important decisions on the UNEP [Medium-Term Strategy for 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023](#), on the management of trust funds and earmarked contributions, and on the adjournment and resumption of UNEA-5. The Assembly adopted a joint political message entitled '[Looking ahead to the resumed UN Environment Assembly in 2022](#)'. A summary of the leadership dialogue held on 22 and 23 February 2021 on the topic 'Contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world' can be found [here](#).

In terms of **media** coverage, 887 articles on

UNEA were published in 582 outlets across 71 countries in 21 languages. On the **social media** front, 9.6 million people saw the UNEA content and people engaged with it 623,000 times. The **videos** produced were viewed 2.14 million times ([UNEA playlist](#) here). The new [UNEA website](#) has had 73,000 pageviews and the [UNEA live blog](#) reached 13,000 pageviews. In addition, several [web stories](#) were produced to support the Assembly.

Online Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, 9–11 February 2021

This meeting was organized by the Major Groups and Stakeholders accredited to UNEP, with UNEP support, and approximately 250 representatives participated. The Forum issued a Joint [Statement](#), which included a key message to UNEA-5.1. Coverage of the Forum, from the International Institute for Sustainable Development, is available [here](#).

Global Youth Environment Assembly, 12–13 and 18–20 February 2021

Over 4,000 participants, mainly youth, from around the world participated in the Global Youth Environment Assembly, organized by the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP. The UNEP Executive Director, UNEA President, Permanent Representatives of Member States,

UNEP and United Nations staff engaged in discussions with youth on chemicals and wastes; youth and faith-based engagement; the Science-Policy-Business nexus; education and environment; and nature, food security, environment and health. Under the slogan, 'Nothing about us, without us', youth called on leaders to fully engage with them on the environmental agenda. Coverage of the Assembly from the International Institute for Sustainable Development is available [here](#).

Third Global Session of the UNEP Science-Policy-Business Forum, 18–20 February

The [Third Global Session of the Science-Policy-Business Forum](#) was held virtually in support of the Fifth Session of UNEA. Approximately 5,000 participants registered to follow the seven online sessions and listen to 126 speakers representing various sectors including governments, the private sector, civil society, science/academia and United Nations organizations. The Forum recognized the importance of investing in ecosystem restoration and sustainable consumption and production to ensure a post-COVID-19 recovery that accelerates and strengthens the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UNEP synthesis report

The UNEP synthesis report, [Making Peace with Nature: a scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies](#), was launched on 18 February 2021. It presents a scientific blueprint for how climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution can be tackled jointly within the framework of the SDGs.



Adaptation Gap Report 2020

Ahead of the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021, the UNEP flagship [Adaptation Gap Report 2020](#) was launched on 14 January 2021. It identifies major gaps in adaptation finance, especially for developing countries, which are made vulnerable to climate change as a result of these gaps.



Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency

UNEP, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the European Commission, launched the [Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency](#) (GACERE) on 22 February 2021, as a side event of the fifth UNEA. Thirty-nine countries have already joined the Global Alliance, which will support the transition to a global circular economy for more efficient and equitable use of resources by bringing together governments willing to cooperate and advocate at the political level and in multilateral fora.

Ecosystem service accounts

In March 2021, the fifty-second meeting of the UN Statistical Commission adopted the SEEA EA framework as an international statistical standard for countries to map and measure ecosystems, their condition, their services, and to evaluate their contribution to the world's socioeconomic activities. UNEP made a major contribution to this ground-breaking initiative, which will promote understanding of how ecosystems and their services contribute to the economy, social wellbeing, jobs and livelihoods.

Bern II Consultation

The [Bern II Consultation Workshop of Biodiversity-Related Conventions on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#) took place between 18 January and 22 February 2021. It enabled the parties and secretariats involved in 13 Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) on biodiversity, chemicals and wastes, and drought and desertification to collectively contribute to strengthening cooperation and coherent implementation of conventions with respect to biodiversity. A summary is available [here](#).

United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration

Preparations are underway for the launch of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. UNEP has actively engaged with Member States in the pan-European region to promote its principles by defining possible areas of interventions, according to the regional context, emphasizing the transborder and regional dimensions of the initiative.



Faith for Earth initiative

Faith for Earth announced the launch of three [National Coordination Hubs](#) in India, Lebanon and Bosnia and Herzegovina. A mapping survey of 70+ faith-based organizations by the India National Coordination Hub indicated that training, capacity-building and science-based education resources are essential to actively engage local, grassroots faith-based organizations in addressing the environmental challenges in India.

Basel Convention

The Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments, legally binding on 186 states, came into effect on 1 January 2021, with the objectives of enhancing the control of transboundary movements of plastic waste and clarifying the scope of the Convention as it applies to such waste.

AFRICA

Bamako Convention

The [Bamako Convention](#) Bureau met on 16 March 2021 and received updates from Tunisia and Liberia on the illicit trafficking of hazardous household and contaminated plastic waste into their countries. The Bureau made several [recommendations](#) to strengthen the management of hazardous waste in Africa.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Energy and Resources Institute's World Sustainable Development Summit, 10–12 February 2021, New Delhi

The Energy and Resources Institute's World Sustainable Development Summit was inaugurated virtually by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India. The UNEP Executive Director called on countries to prioritize sustainable consumption and production and circular economy in their recovery plans and to build on the recovery momentum through the climate and biodiversity agendas.

The 7th Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Forum, 8–12 March 2021

The Asia Pacific Adaptation Network, with the Ministry of the Environment of Japan, held the [7th Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Forum](#) virtually, from 8 to 12 March 2021. The forum, entitled 'Enabling Resilience for All: The Critical Decade to Scale-up Action', highlighted the urgency for inclusive transformation to build resilience and achieve adaptation goals. UNEP underscored the cost of inaction and stressed the need for innovation, climate financing and investment to address challenges. The [Forum Summary and Key Recommendations](#) are available [here](#).

The 8th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, 22–26 March 2021, Bangkok

The [8th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development](#) agreed on key messages to the High-Level Political Forum. UNEP highlighted green recovery mechanisms to achieve the SDGs in the context of COVID-19 through its support to roundtables and side events.



The Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments, legally binding on 186 states, came into effect on 1 January 2021 (Photo credit: Unsplash/Tanvi Sharma)

EUROPE

Engagement with United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams

UNEP continued to implement the UN reform agenda in the pan-European region, through participation in UN regional processes, strengthened engagement with UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams, as well as through active leadership in the Issue-Based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change. Since January 2021, UNEP has worked on Result Groups and task engagement with UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. In Turkey, UNEP has been requested to lead a Task Team on assisting the Turkish government to develop its international cooperation strategy for climate action in preparation for the twenty-sixth United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26).

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Bridgetown Declaration of the XXII meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin American and the Caribbean

In February 2021, the XXII meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin

American and the Caribbean adopted the [Bridgetown Declaration](#), which calls for action on the environmental dimension of the COVID-19 recovery, to build forward better while tackling the underlying causes of unsustainability. The Forum also adopted eight decisions on gender and environment, pollution and waste, climate action, circularity, environmental emergencies, a data and information platform, Small Island Developing States and biodiversity. The Forum approved the Regional Action Plan for the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. UNEP provides the Secretariat for the Forum.

The first decision, on pollution, is worth highlighting. It includes the Chemicals and Waste Regional Action Plan 2021–2024, the Roadmap for the Progressive Closure of Dumpsites, the re-establishment of the Air Pollution Regional Network, and an invitation to UNEP to establish a Marine Litter and Microplastics Working Group.

NORTH AMERICA

Climate and environment

President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau met in February to discuss cooperation on repairing economies and combating climate change. They launched a [High Level Ministerial Dialogue on Climate Ambition](#) and arranged further talks for the 22 April 2021, at the Climate Leaders' Summit, and beyond.

2. PROGRAMME OF WORK IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 CLIMATE CHANGE¹

2.1.1 Key highlights

Nationally Determined Contributions

Colombia, a partner of the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, revised its Nationally Determined Contributions, to set new targets of reducing greenhouse gas by 51 per cent and black carbon emissions by 40 per cent in 2030 compared to 2014 levels. Details are available [here](#).

Short-lived climate pollutants

Thailand and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition started a [new initiative](#) to reduce air pollution, improve human health and mitigate climate change, through win-win strategies that simultaneously benefit climate protection and air quality.

Adaptation Fund

Applications to the new [Adaptation Fund Climate Innovation Accelerator](#) began. As implementing entities, UNEP, UN Industrial Development Organization and the UNEP-hosted Climate Technology Centre and Network support developing countries to test, evaluate, roll out and scale up innovative adaptation practices, products and technologies. The second call for submission of applications is underway and will be open until 30 April 2021.

National Adaptation Plan

Pakistan officially began the creation of a [National Adaptation Plan for building resilience to climate change](#). A two-year project to develop the adaptation plan, supported by UNEP and funded by the Green Climate Fund, was formally launched on 25 March 2021 at a virtual event attended by His Excellency Mr Malik Amin Aslam, Federal Minister and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on climate change, academia and the private sector.



Climate change

Technology publication

The Climate Technology Centre and Network launched a new publication on [Public-Private Partnership for Climate Technology Transfer and Innovation](#), which describes how enhanced public-private partnerships can strengthen private sector participation in climate technology transfer activities.

Cleantech innovations

Thirteen start-ups from Africa and Asia were selected to advance their cleantech solutions through the Climate Innovation Labs, a programme organized by the Climate Technology Centre and Network in partnership with SAFEEM (Swiss Association for Entrepreneurship in Emerging Markets) and Seedstars. Details are available [here](#).

Mitigating methane emissions

In March, UNEP officially announced the creation of the International Methane Emissions Observatory in collaboration with the European Commission. The Observatory aims to accelerate reduction of methane emissions from governments and companies. More details are available [here](#).





(Photo credit: [unsplash.com/Matt Palmer](https://unsplash.com/photos/MattPalmer))

2.1.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

Preparations for the upcoming global stocktake of the Paris Agreement provide an opportunity for UNEP to work with countries to track their Nationally Determined Contributions. Member States can partner with UNEP to enhance their capacities in relation to the Paris Agreement's transparency framework.

2.2 RESILIENCE TO DISASTERS AND CONFLICTS

2.2.1 Key highlights

Disaster reduction

UNEP's work on Disaster Risk Reduction included the launch, in January 2021, of a new Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Nature-based Solutions for Disaster and Climate Resilience. By the end of March 2021, the free course had over 13,000 participants from 186 countries. It was developed in collaboration with experts from the Partnership of Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction, and with support from the European Commission. The course is hosted on the SDG Academy/edX platform.

In Somalia, UNEP completed a study entitled *Identifying Climate Adaptive Solutions to Displacement in Somalia* (2021), working jointly with the International Organization for Migration. This study will help inform international policy and programming on displacement in Somalia.

In addition, a new project in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Organization for Migration got underway in Côte d'Ivoire in January 2021. Financed by the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the project aims to reduce and prevent conflict in the north eastern border zone of the country, through participatory and inclusive natural resource management and the development of sustainable and equitable livelihood options.

Response and recovery

In March 2021, the UNEP/Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Joint Environment Unit led a mission to Equatorial Guinea, following a series of explosions in an armoury in Bata, the country's economic capital and largest city. In response to a request from the UN Resident Coordinator and the government, a UNEP-led UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team was dispatched to support on coordination,



needs assessments, environmental impact, information management and humanitarian financing.

In Beirut, Lebanon, UNEP and United Nations Development Programme have continued to support debris management following the explosion in the Port of Beirut. A cost-benefit analysis was conducted and guidance materials on safe handling and management of asbestos were disseminated, with a training webinar delivered to national and UN partners. UNEP is also supporting the technical design of debris management options by national and UN partners.

In Afghanistan, UNEP is supporting the government to conduct regional consultations for the development of the country's first National Environment Policy. The consultations aim to enable local leaders, civil society groups and regional environmental actors to participate and provide input to the policy development process.

In Sudan, UNEP's Wadi El Ku Catchment Management Project received the 'Water for Peace' award for its contributions to integrated water resources management and conflict resolution in North Darfur.



2.2.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

Following extensive review, UNEP is currently working to reconfigure internal structures that support Disasters and Conflicts work, to prepare to deliver the UNEP Medium Term Strategy for 2022–2025 and in light of the UNEP commitment to mainstream its support to disaster- and conflict-affected Member States and partners working in these contexts.

2.3 HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE ECOSYSTEMS

2.3.1 Key highlights

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Agriculture and Food programme (TEEBAgriFood)

[TEEBAgriFood business roundtables](#), held in February 2021 in India and March 2021 in China and Indonesia, showcased how agri-food businesses with 'nature on their balance sheets' are likely to thrive in future scenarios.



Coral reefs

In March 2021, UNEP and the International Coral Reef Initiative jointly launched a small grants programme to fund projects that support the conservation of coral reefs, mangrove and seagrass. The objective is to support projects that focus on initiatives leading to the sustainable management and protection of vulnerable marine and coastal ecosystems.

the Nairobi Convention launched the new [Guidelines on Seagrass Ecosystem Restoration for the Western Indian Ocean Region](#). They outline how to design successful seagrass restoration projects, using best practices, protocols and case studies from the region and globe so that practitioners can focus on what is most likely to work for them.

Regional seas

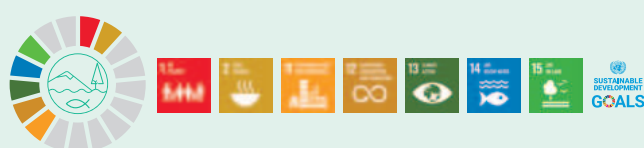
On World Seagrass Day, held on 1 March 2021,

Global Peatlands Initiative

In March 2021, the Global Peatlands Initiative launched the second workshop, entitled



Coral reef, Wakatobi, Indonesia (Photo credit: Ocean Image Bank/Warren Baverstock)



'Peatland location and mapping: preparation of fieldwork for peatland mapping', thereby strengthening national capacity to map peatlands and improve the knowledge base in Democratic Republic of the Congo and Republic of the Congo.

Natural capital risks

Land Bank, in South Africa, has collaborated with Natural Capital Finance Alliance to apply a Rapid Natural Capital Risk Assessment, using the ENCORE (Exploring Natural Capital Opportunities, Risks and Exposure) tool to improve understanding of natural capital risks. The ENCORE tool is managed by the Natural Capital Finance Alliance, a collaboration between the UN Environment Finance Initiative and Global Canopy, in partnership with the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Focusing on large-scale irrigated and rain-fed maize production in the North West Province of South Africa, the risk assessment improved the Bank's insight into natural capital risks by identifying which ecosystem services and natural capital assets its lending activities depend on.

2.3.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

The European Commission-UNEP (EC-UNEP) Dialogue on Biodiversity, held in March 2021, provided the opportunity to identify and agree on joint policy priorities and action areas for cooperation, with a focus on four thematic areas: a post-2020 biodiversity framework, nature-based solutions, safeguarding of oceans/marine topics and natural capital accounting.

The EC-UNEP Regional Dialogue on Latin America and the Caribbean was also held in March 2021 with the objective of identifying priorities for collaboration in the region.

UNEP participated in the Second Health Working Group meeting of the G20 and co-presented a paper on pandemic preparedness, which had been prepared jointly with World Health Organization (WHO), FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). The presentation emphasized strengthening environment dimensions of the 'One Health' approach.

2.4 ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE²

2.4.1 Key highlights

UNEP supported Cameroon to operationalize the [Data Reporting Tool for MEAs](#) (DaRT) by establishing a national working space to facilitate biodiversity knowledge management and reporting to different MEAs.

UNEP also developed an [Issue Brief on SDG 16: Human rights and the environmental rule of law](#).

UNEP prepared Agenda Briefs to support four regional consultations and help participants understand the key discussion issues during the Convention on Biological Diversity Processes on delivering the global biodiversity framework.

The Enhancing the Role and Impact of Gender Equality in the ACP-MEAs III project launched a [Gender Operational Note](#) to guide its project partners on some of the gender issues that need to be considered in project implementation.

UNEP, with its WasteForce project partners and the International Criminal Policy Organization (INTERPOL) trained frontline enforcement officials on disrupting illegal trade in waste. There were 144 participants, with different areas of expertise, from 21 European and nine Asian countries.



Environmental governance

To support environmental negotiators, UNEP trained convention and protocol focal points to the Caribbean Environment Programme and the Cartagena Convention on techniques for effective participation in intergovernmental conferences.

2.4.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

The COVID-19 pandemic and limited resources are some of the key challenges impacting programme delivery. With the pandemic, multilateralism was impacted and different project activities requiring in-person interactions were either postponed or transitioned to virtual settings.

While the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, it also presented unique opportunities for increased collaboration with partners through UNEP corporate and programmatic responses.



2.5 CHEMICALS, WASTE AND AIR QUALITY

2.5.1 Key highlights

Chemicals

The sixth meeting of the Executive Board of the Special Programme held from 1 to 5 March 2021 approved 15 projects, requesting US\$ 3.7 million.

UNEP supported the government of Tajikistan to establish an inter-ministerial chemicals management committee that counts with UNEP support.

Peru adopted a law establishing a 90ppm limit for lead paint.

India approved pilot-testing of UNEP-supported training modules on Integrated Vector Pest Management, thus preparing the ground to phase out use of dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT).

Cambodia became the 118th country to ratify the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol and the 131st Party to the Minamata Convention.



Chemicals, Waste and Air Quality

India issued a draft notification to amend the Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016 and phase out several single-use plastics from the country, following UNEP advocacy and strategic work with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to fulfil the commitment made by the Prime Minister during World Environment Day 2018.

On 13 January 2021, Nicaragua became the 100th Party to the Basel Convention ratifying the Ban Amendment, which prohibits transboundary movements from developed to developing countries of hazardous waste for final disposal.

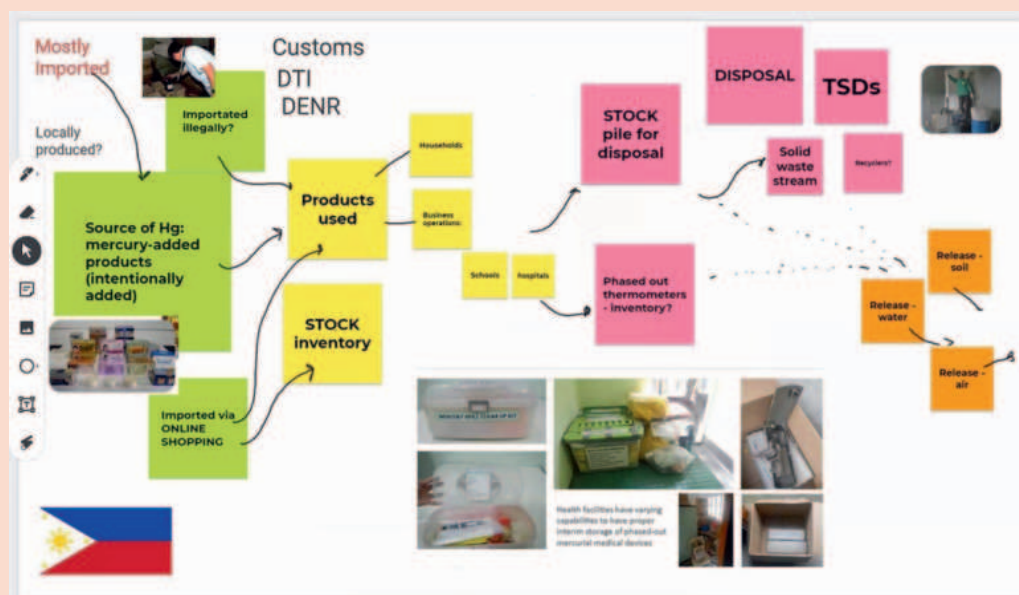


Figure: Philippines participants analysed material flow of mercury containing products



The sixteenth meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee, held from 11 to 16 January 2021, adopted the risk profile for methoxychlor and agreed to include UV-328 in Annex A to the Stockholm Convention.

In Asia, over a hundred representatives of national authorities and laboratories from 10 countries were trained on implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Waste

The Sanitation and Wastewater Atlas of Africa, a tool to understand and address gaps/opportunities, was launched on 2 March 2021.

The Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative was launched on 3 March 2021, at a meeting that convened mayors representing some one hundred communities along the river.

A beta-version of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter digital platform was released. The platform connects resources, data and stakeholders to guide action.

On 22 March 2021, Sri Lanka's president launched the Save the Rivers programme, which UNEP supports through CounterMEASURE II, a project that promotes action against marine plastic litter.

The UNEP SEA circular project supported Thailand's Solid Waste Management Association to launch a plastic-footprint reduction project on 26 March 2021.

UNEP supported the government of Chile to adopt a national organic waste strategy.

The third International Course on Sustainable Waste Management trained 75 professionals in the Latin America and the Caribbean region.

UNEP published a plastic waste management strategy and action plan for the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation in India and guidelines for the safe closure and rehabilitation of municipal solid waste dumpsites in Sri Lanka.

Air quality

On 1 January 2021, Vietnam banned the open burning of rice straw, having been supported by UNEP in 2019–2020 to understand the pervasive issue of open burning of agricultural crop residue in the city.

A virtual expert review for the North American *Actions on Air Quality* report (2020) took place on 4 February 2021.

2.5.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic caused some delays in implementing activities. It also limited outreach activities and posed challenges in terms of logistics to deal with technical issues experienced in connection with virtual events. Nonetheless, as virtual meetings and seminars were normalized around the world, there were numerous opportunities for UNEP to participate in regional and online events.

2.6 RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

2.6.1 Key highlights

Sustainable infrastructure

The [International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure](#) were launched on 25 February 2021, along with a collection of case studies highlighting 10 good practice principles, which are supported by a database of tools for integrating sustainability into infrastructure development³.



Eco-innovation approach

Recognising the importance of Small and Medium Enterprises to economic, social and environmental resilience, UNEP reviewed the impact of its eco-innovation approach, implemented since 2012. The findings, described in an updated [Business Case for Eco-innovation report \(2021\)](#), show that businesses that had adopted this approach were not only more resilient to short- and long-term shocks but also more competitive and had greater employee and customer loyalty.

Hotspot analysis in development planning

To support governments and UN Country Team members to analyse the environmental and socioeconomic performance of countries and identify opportunities for improvement, UNEP trained 90 participants from 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean⁴ on the use of the Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Hotspot Analysis Tool in March 2021.



Sustainable public procurement

UNEP supported Georgia's Public Procurement Agency to draft articles with sustainability elements for its new Public Procurement Law.

Sustainable consumption and production

Kuwait's sustainable consumption and production assessment was completed and enabled national decision makers and stakeholders to identify Kuwait's priority sectors. The assessment's recommendations focused on integrating sustainable consumption and production activities at multinational levels, prioritizing energy efficiency, renewable energy and waste management, with a need to strengthen these priorities within the industrial sector.

Sustainable lifestyles

Online challenges related to sustainable lifestyles reached over 5 million people, including [youth](#), through a [global activation](#) using the [Anatomy of Action](#) tool, an initiative of UNEP and the UnSchool of Disruptive Design.

2.6.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

The COVID-19 socioeconomic recovery represents a huge opportunity for sustainable consumption and production, an inclusive green economy, and circular approaches to support the transition towards new and more sustainable models. Sustainable value chains present major opportunities in this regard, in particular for Small and Medium Enterprises, which represent the majority of businesses in most countries.



2.7 ENVIRONMENT UNDER REVIEW

2.7.1 Key highlights

SDGs for development

In February 2021, 22 SDG Indicators were reported to the United Nations Statistics Division for inclusion in the SDG Global Database and the Secretary General's SDG Progress Report.

UNEP organized two capacity-building events on the use of environmental SDG data and indicators.

On 16 March 2021, the UN regional flagship report, the [Asia Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021](#), was released by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and its partners. UNEP was part of the core team that authored this report.



An event was held on 23–24 March 2021 to provide Latin American countries with technical training on how to measure and report on SDG indicator 12.c.1, concerning subsidies to fossil fuels.

In West Asia, the UNEP methodology framework for SDG indicator 17.14.1, on policy coherence of sustainable development, was introduced in a regional workshop, held on 17 February 2021.



Assessments and why they matter

The [Adapt to Survive: Business transformation in a time of uncertainty](#) brief is the first in a series of six [Global Environment Outlook \(GEO\) for Business briefs](#) published to better inform business leaders.

The [GEO-6 for Youth](#) report was launched on 19 February 2021 in an inspiring and youth-engaging live event during the Global Youth Environment Assembly.

Data and capacity development

UNEP, together with its project partners, Moscow State University and the Russian National Academy of Sciences, conducted capacity building and technology transfer activities in Uzbekistan.

In Asia, UNEP collaborated with national leading institutions in Bhutan, Indonesia and Lao People's Democratic Republic and coordinated with UN Country Teams to support Voluntary National Review drafting for SDGs 12 and 13.

A partnership with Global CEO Alliance was signed on 27 May 2021 to conduct the first Regional Conference on Digital Transformation towards environmental sustainability in West Asia.



Global Environment Outlook⁵

The intergovernmental steering committee on the future of GEO has submitted its interim report to UNEA-5.1. It will present its final results and recommendations for the beginning of the next GEO cycle at UNEA-5.2.

2.7.2 Main opportunities, challenges and responses

In a season of flagship reports, there is a clear opportunity to use science not in isolation but rather as a purposeful tool to increase knowledge about environmental urgencies and about the integrated nature of environmental, social and economic wellbeing.

The challenge is knowing how to consistently mainstream scientific knowledge to influence wider audiences, increase their awareness of the interlinked challenges and incite decision makers, practitioners and other stakeholders to adopt potential solutions, especially in the context of ongoing threats to subprogramme delivery such as the COVID-19 pandemic and future emerging issues.

2.8 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Gender

Mainstreaming of gender in projects

Between January and March 2021, reviews of gender-responsive project planning and development were conducted. Out of the 14 project documents reviewed using the Gender Marker, 5 projects mainstreamed gender partially (35.7 per cent) and 9 mainstreamed gender fully (64.3 per cent).

Environmental and social safeguards

In the first quarter of this year, a safeguard performance analysis was conducted based on 70 UNEP projects reviewed in 2020. The findings indicated that about 38.6 per cent of UNEP projects were in the moderate risk category for safeguarding. They were mostly Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund projects, and risk avoidance and mitigation measures were communicated accordingly.

UN System-Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

In response to UNEP/EA.4/Res.17: Promoting gender equality and the human rights and empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance, UNEP began the review of its Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment, to align it with the upcoming Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2025 and the requirements of the UN System-Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UNSWAP 2).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Linked to UNEP resolution UNEP/EA.2/Res.6 and SDGs 13.1, 13.2, 13.3.2, 13.a and 13.b; UNEP/EA.3/Res.8 and SDGs 7.1.1, 7.1.2, 7.2.1, 7.3.1, 7.a.1, 7.b.1, 9.4.1, 12.c.1, 13.3.2, 13.a, 13.b, 17.17.1; and UNEP/EA.2/Res.6 and SDGs 12.c.1, 13.3.2, 13.a, 13.b, 15.1.1, 15.2.1, 15.3.1, 15.6.1 and 17.17.1.
- 2 Highlights support for the implementation of UNEA resolutions 2/2, 2/5, 2/17, 2/19 and 2/21.
- 3 Implementation of UNEP/EA.4/Res.5 on Sustainable Infrastructure
- 4 Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela
- 5 Responds to UNEP/EA.4/Res.23

3. RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

3.1 FINANCIAL UPDATE AS AT 31 MARCH 2021

Overview of income

By the end of the first quarter, as at 31 March 2021, UNEP had received US\$ 142.4 million of income, or 32 per cent, against the budgeted income of US\$ 439.7 million. The income comprises the annual funds of the United Nations Regular Budget and the Environment Fund, as well as earmarked contributions which include multi-year funding⁶.

Core funding

Core funding to UNEP consists of the Environment Fund and the United Nations Regular Budget.

The United Nations Regular Budget appropriation⁷ is usually fully allotted in advance. However, due to the continuing liquidity challenges, as seen last year, the allotments will be released in increments. The United Nations Regular Budget supports the UNEA in the years it takes place and finances core work in science, capacity building, management and oversight.

In the first quarter of 2021, the Environment Fund income decreased by 2 per cent compared to the same time last year. It amounted to 42 per cent of the approved 2021 budget.

Earmarked contributions

By 31 March 2021, the organization had received US\$ 77.1 million in earmarked funds for the current and future years, against the budgeted amount of US\$ 316 million. Of this income, 29 per cent was 'softly earmarked funds' (contributions earmarked mainly at a sub-programme or higher level that provide flexibility in programming), provided mainly by Norway and Sweden.

FIGURE 1 Budget and Income January 2021–March 2021

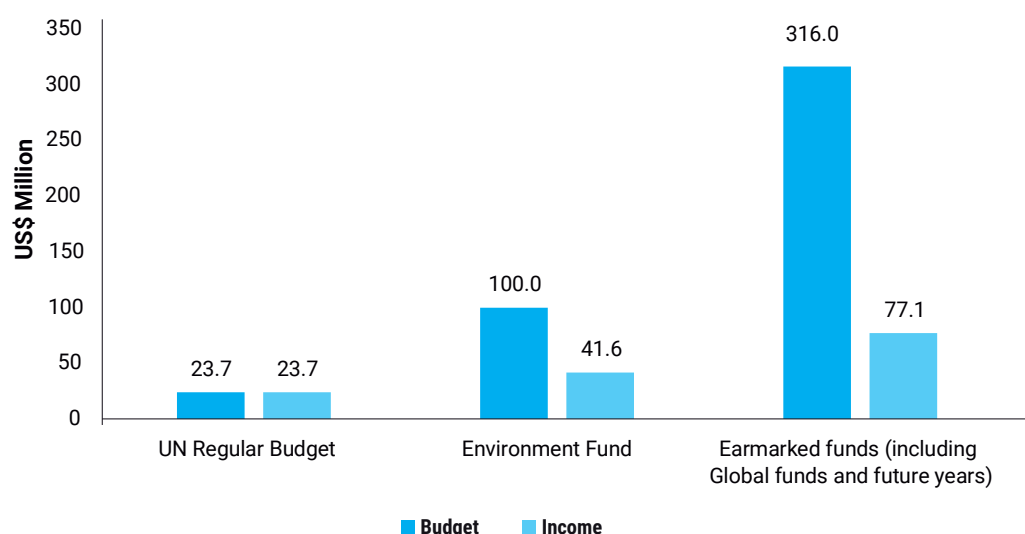
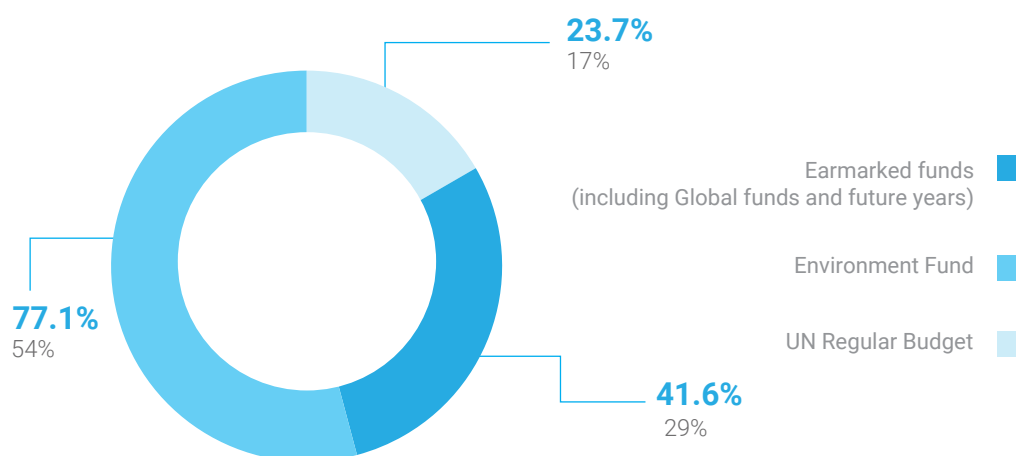


FIGURE 2 Income per Source of Fund (in US\$ Million) January 2021–March 2021



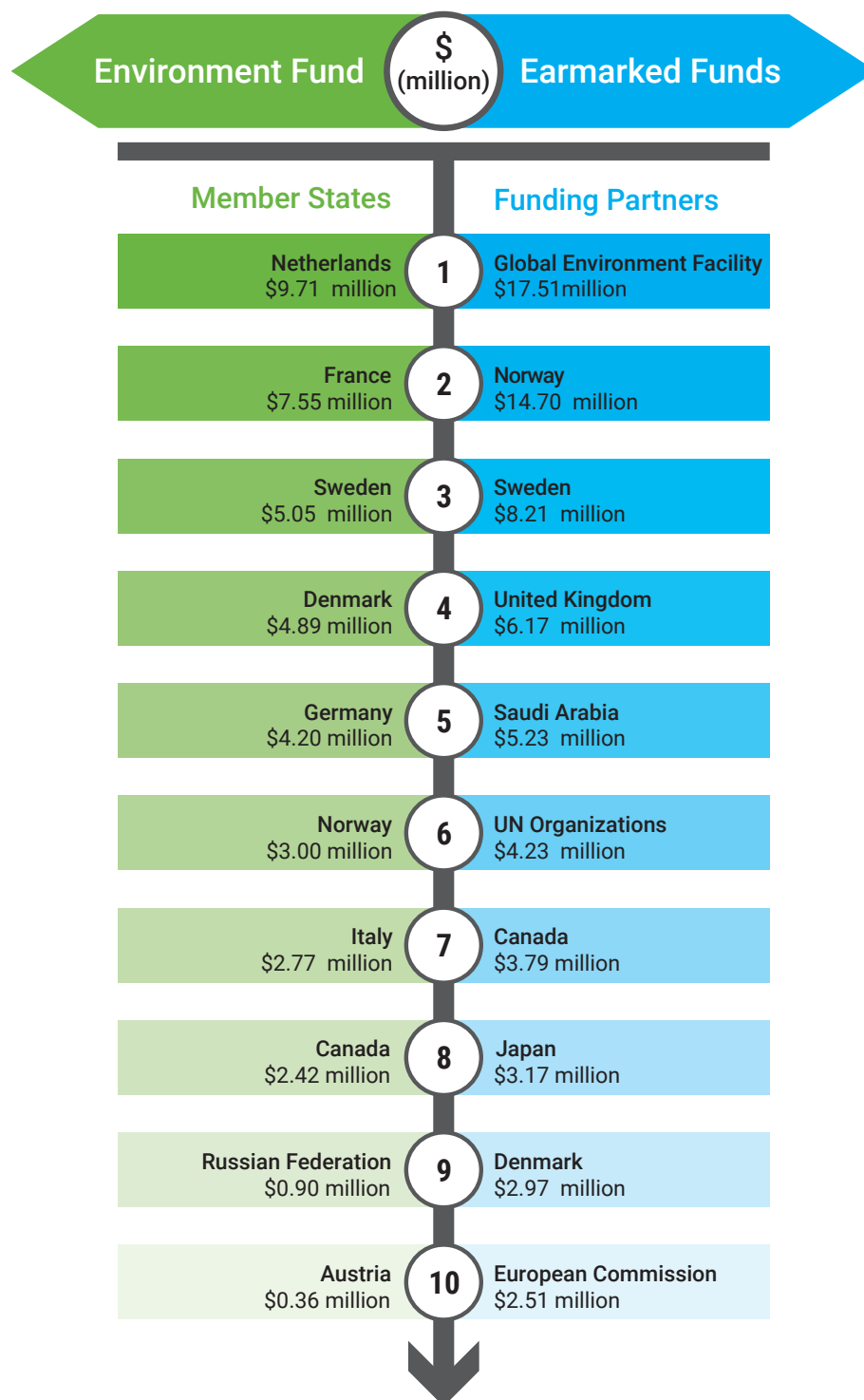
Funding partners

The work of UNEP is made possible by the partners who fund and champion its mission. UNEP is very grateful to all the contributing Member States and other funding partners for their commitment and support to the organization.

UNEP appreciates all the 30 Member States that pledged to the Environment Fund by 31 March 2021, with a special thank you to those 15 Member States that have contributed at their 'fair share' level, as established by the Voluntary Indicative Scale of Contributions (VISC), showing leadership that benefits the entire global community.

The number of Member States contributing is 20 per cent more than at the same time last year. However, it represents only 16 per cent of the universal membership. To address this, the Secretariat has sent renewed invitations to Member States to contribute to the Environment Fund. The support will ensure that the organization can focus on delivering its mandate, which is critical given the unprecedented nature of the environmental challenges we face today.

FIGURE 3 Top 10 Contributors to the Environment Fund (January 2021–March 2021)



Member States that contributed their fair share as established by the VISC (January–March 2021)

Brunei Darussalam	Iceland	Norway
Cyprus	Mauritius	Slovenia
Denmark	Micronesia (Federated States of)	Somalia
Fiji	Monaco	Sweden
France	Netherlands	Tuvalu

3.2 STATUS OF ALLOCATIONS AND EXPENDITURES AS AT 31 MARCH 2021

2020–2021 Core Budgets - Programme of Work (US\$)					
	Functional Area Name	Environment Fund	Overhead Trust Account	Regular Budget	Grand Total
A	Policy Making Organs	4,000,000	20,000	423,200	4,443,200
B. 1	Executive Direction & Management	7,200,000	-	6,747,600	13,947,600
B. 2	United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects on Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)	-	-	1,697,500	1,697,500
	Subtotal A + B	11,200,000	20,000	8,868,300	20,088,300
C	Programme of Work				
1.	Climate change	22,200,000	7,200,000	4,522,300	33,922,300
2.	Resilience to disasters and conflicts	15,600,000	1,000,000	3,089,400	19,689,400
3.	Healthy and productive ecosystems	28,000,000	2,100,000	5,261,500	35,361,500
4.	Environmental governance	26,200,000	2,100,000	9,197,800	37,497,800
5.	Chemicals, waste and air quality	23,400,000	3,000,000	3,608,600	30,008,600
6.	Resource efficiency	28,400,000	3,000,000	3,953,900	35,353,900
7.	Environment under review	23,000,000	400,000	6,178,400	29,578,400
	Subtotal C	166,800,000	18,800,000	35,811,900	221,411,900
D	Fund Programme Reserve	10,000,000			10,000,000
	Subtotal C + D	176,800,000	18,800,000	35,811,900	231,411,900
E	Programme Management and Other	-	-	-	-
	Programme Support	12,000,000	19,180,000	2,400,200	33,580,200
	Subtotal E	12,000,000	19,180,000	2,400,200	33,580,200
Total (A+B+C+D+E)		200,000,000	38,000,000	47,080,400	285,080,400

2020–2021 Core Budgets – Allotments as at 31 March 2021 (US\$)					
	Functional Area Name	Environment Fund	Overhead Trust Account	Regular Budget	Grand Total
A	Policy Making Organs	3,766,642	-	386,140	4,152,782
B. 1	Executive Direction & Management	7,367,844		6,416,327	13,784,171
B. 2	United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects on Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)	-	-	1,738,050	1,738,050
Subtotal A + B		11,134,486		8,540,517	19,675,003
C	Programme of Work				
1	Climate change	16,838,562	924,957	4,517,381	22,280,900
2	Resilience to disasters and conflicts	11,625,861	1,111,487	3,044,930	15,782,278
3	Healthy and productive ecosystems	21,072,040	2,057,821	5,197,766	28,327,627
4	Environmental governance	20,587,314	1,587,423	9,154,065	31,328,802
5	Chemicals, waste and air quality	17,631,885	1,447,962	3,617,589	22,697,436
6	Resource efficiency	21,080,938	2,131,816	3,875,790	27,088,544
7	Environment under review	17,135,161	374,345	5,778,630	23,288,136
Subtotal C		125,971,761	9,635,811	35,186,151	170,793,723
D	Fund Programme Reserve	2,525,000	-	-	2,525,000
Subtotal C + D		128,496,761	9,635,811	35,186,151	173,318,723
E	Programme Management and Other				
	Programme support	10,368,753	25,940,530	2,389,032	38,698,315
Subtotal E		10,368,753	25,940,530	2,389,032	38,698,315
Total (A+B+C+D+E)		150,000,000	35,576,341	46,115,700	231,692,041

2020–2021 Core Budgets - Expenditures as at 31 March 2021					
	Functional Area Name	Environment Fund	Overhead Trust Account	Regular Budget	Grand Total
A	Policy Making Organs	2,398,555	-	91,131	2,489,686
B. 1	Executive Direction & Management	3,886,335	-	3,528,585	7,414,920
B. 2	United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects on Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)	-	-	1,072,655	1,072,655
Subtotal A + B		6,284,891	-	4,692,370	10,977,261
C	Programme of Work				
1.	Climate change	10,864,749	555,151	2,654,789	14,074,689
2.	Resilience to disasters and conflicts	6,633,714	730,613	1,684,983	9,049,311
3.	Healthy and productive ecosystems	12,296,220	1,299,952	2,904,512	16,500,684
4.	Environmental governance	11,054,716	1,095,216	5,338,223	17,488,155
5.	Chemicals, waste and air quality	10,726,709	969,548	2,275,819	13,972,076
6.	Resource efficiency	12,504,576	1,147,070	2,166,675	15,818,321
7.	Environment under review	10,555,098	282,345	3,184,414	14,021,857
Subtotal C		74,635,782	6,079,894	20,209,415	100,925,091
D	Fund Programme Reserve	1,086,201	-	-	1,086,201
Subtotal C + D		75,721,983	6,079,894	20,209,415	102,011,292
E	Programme Management and Other				
	Programme support	6,001,770	12,423,456	1,455,654	19,880,880
Subtotal E		6,001,770	12,423,456	1,455,654	19,880,880
Total (A+B+C+D+E)		88,008,643	18,503,350	26,357,439	132,869,432

3.3 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

With reference to decisions of the UNEA⁸, UNEP is currently reviewing its Resource Mobilization Strategy. This review will be informed by the results of the 2020 Online Survey on the Funding of UNEP, in which 80 respondents from all UN regions provided valuable information on UNEP strengths as well as the needs and priorities for resource mobilization. These results are reflected in the proposed action plan for the implementation of paragraph 88 of the Rio+20 outcome document, specifically related to paragraph 88b on secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources for UNEP.

The Secretariat is also continuing outreach to Member States, with a particular focus on strengthening UNEP core funding for the Environment Fund and the number of Member States that contribute their fair share as established by the VISC. The video to explain the concept and importance of fair share premiered at the opening of UNEA-5. The video, together with the status of voluntary contributions to UNEP can be viewed in the section on funding and partnerships on the [UNEP website](#).

3.4 HUMAN RESOURCES

General overview

As at 31 March 2021, UNEP employed 1,269 staff members of whom 752 (59 per cent) were in the professional and above categories, 9 (1 per cent) in the National Professional Officer category and 508 (40 per cent) in the general service category. Of the total, 773 (61 per cent) are female and 496 (39 per cent) are male.

Senior level staff

Total staff at grade P-5 and above as at 31 March 2021

Level	USG	ASG	D2	D1	P5
No. of Staff	1	3	7	48	134

Note: USG = Under Secretary -General; ASG = Assistant Secretary-General; D = Director; P= Professional

Senior appointments

The following senior staff appointments were made in the first quarter of 2021 (January to March).

Position Title	Grade	Gender	Nationality	Division/Office
CHIEF OF SERVICE, PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT	D1	Female	Australian	Chief Scientist's Office
SENIOR PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT OFFICER	P5	Female	Spanish	Latin America and Caribbean Office

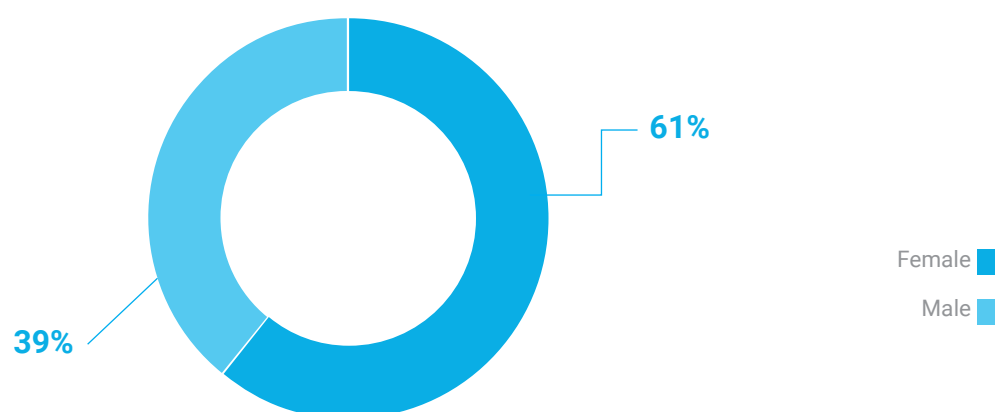
Gender parity status

The overall gender parity status remains the same for the year 2021.

UNEP Secretariat and MEAs												
Gender Parity	USG	ASG	D-2	D-1	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	Total P+	Total NPO	Total GS	Total
Female	1	2	4	21	56	121	127	60	392	3	378	773
Male	0	1	3	27	78	128	83	39	359	6	131	496
Grand Total	1	3	7	48	134	249	210	99	751	9	509	1269
Female	100%	67%	57%	44%	42%	49%	60%	61%	52%	33%	74%	61%
Male	0%	33%	43%	56%	58%	51%	40%	39%	48%	67%	26%	39%

Note: USG=Under-Secretary-General; ASG=Assistant Secretary-General; D=Director; P=Professional; NPO=National Professional Officer; GS=General Service

FIGURE 4 UNEP Gender Parity

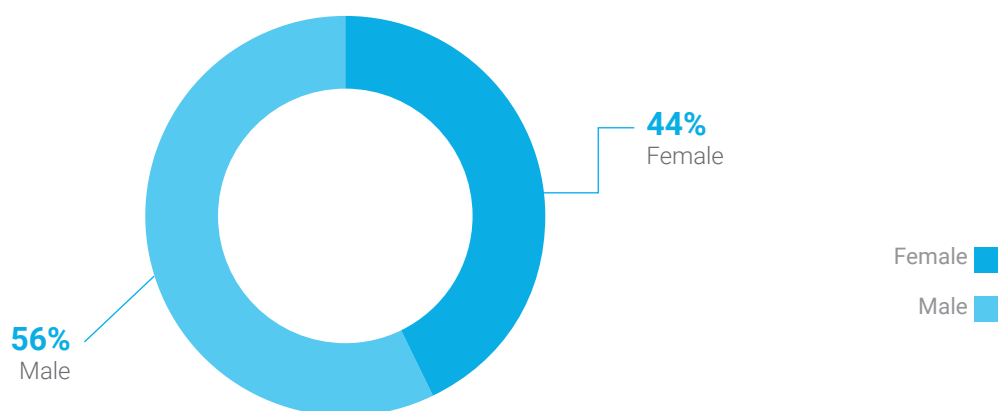


Gender status for P5 and above – UNEP Secretariat and MEAs – 31 March 2021

Gender	USG	ASG	D-2	D-1	P-5	Total
Female	1	2	4	21	56	84
Male	0	1	3	27	78	109
Total	1	3	7	48	134	193
Female	100%	67%	57%	44%	42%	44%
Male	0%	33%	43%	56%	58%	56%

Gender breakdown: P-5 and above as of 30 June 2020

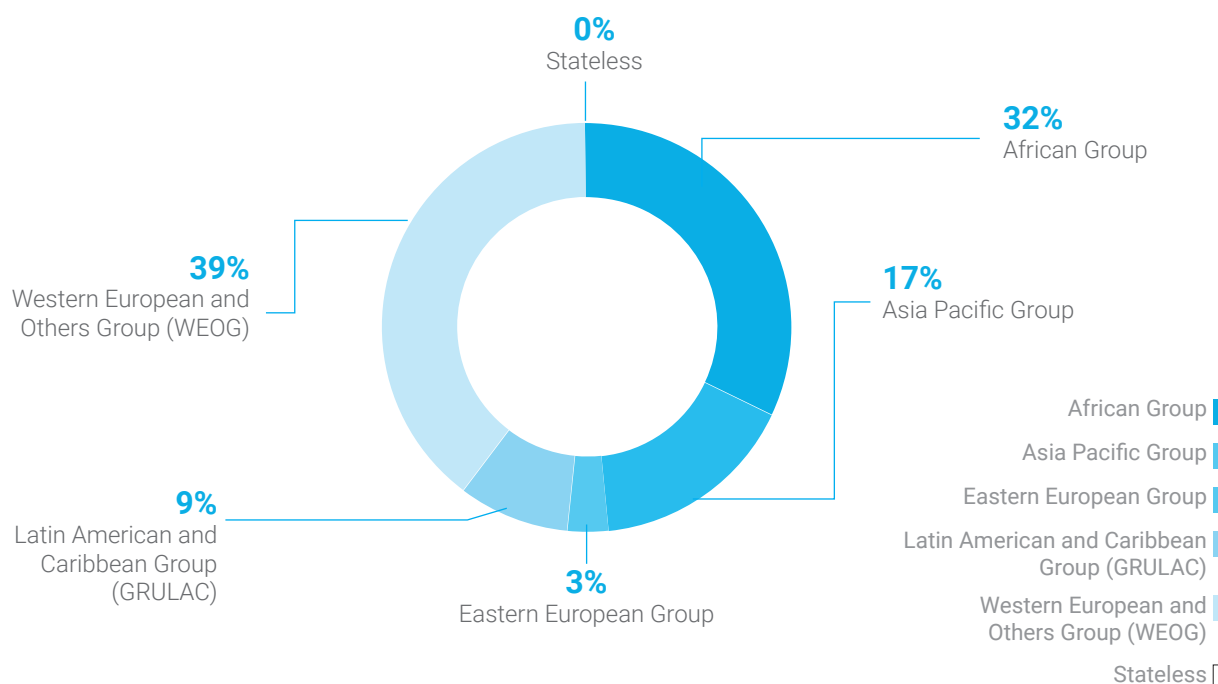
FIGURE 5 Gender Status for P5 & Above as at 31 March 2021



Regional representation of staff (UNEP and MEA Secretariats) as at 31 March 2021

REGION	TOTAL
African Group	406
Asia-Pacific Group	216
Eastern European Group	32
Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)	116
Stateless	1
Western European and Others Group (WEOG)	498
TOTAL	1269

FIGURE 6 UNEP Regional Representation



Regional representation P5 and above

REGION	TOTAL
African Group	32
Asia-Pacific Group	35
Eastern European Group	8
Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)	24
Western European and Others Group (WEOG)	94
TOTAL	193

Key human resources risk and issues

UNEP's Gender parity implementation plan is on track to meet the Secretary General's UN System-Wide Gender Parity Strategy. UNEP's current overall gender ratio is 61 percent female to 39 percent male. At the Professional level UNEP's gender ratio is 52 percent female to 48 percent male overall.

Adjustments have been made to ensure that temporary special measures for the

achievement of gender parity are in place, to balance recruitment of both sexes at the Professional level, particularly the P5 and above levels. There has been a slight improvement (1 per cent) in parity at these levels: the figures now stand at 56 per cent male to 44 per cent female. Parity is considered to be within the 47 to 53 per cent margin. UNEP continuously monitors and evaluates its overall gender targets against those set out in the implementation plan.

UNEP continues to work at improving the pool of candidates applying to vacancies to ensure a wider geographic distribution in the recruitment of staff at the international level. UNEP began outreach initiatives this year by participating in job fairs. Moreover, it is developing a more streamlined and targeted strategy on outreach to develop a wider network of applicants in order to increase its talent management pool and enable greater representation of staff from un- and under-represented countries.

3.5 AUDITS

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS):

Ongoing implementation OIOS audits:

- recruitment process
- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
- Afghanistan Project Office
- Abidjan Convention Secretariat
- resource efficiency subprogramme
- environmental governance subprogramme
- management of partnerships
- grants management.

Completed audits:

- Audit of official travel at the United Nations Environment Programme
- Audit of the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
- Audit of the United Nations Environment Programme Caribbean Environment Programme

Planned audits:

- management of data classification and data privacy
- COVID business continuity.

The Board of Auditors conducted the interim audits from October to 22 November 2020 for UNEP Headquarters, Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean, Addis Ababa Liaison Office, and Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions. Out of 84 recommendations, 19 have been implemented, 62 recommendations are under implementation, 1 recommendation was not implemented and 2 recommendations were overtaken by events.

3.6 EVALUATIONS

During the reporting period:

- five project evaluations were brought to completion
- twenty-eight project evaluations are currently ongoing.

In the context of the current pandemic, evaluations can continue as normal if they are deemed suitable for a fully desk-based approach. If field missions are required for a credible evaluation, only desk-based preparatory work is being conducted. These evaluations will be continued when public health conditions are more favourable.

Selected lesson from the Independent Review of UNEP Contributions to Poverty Reduction on behalf of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)

The review recognized that there is a lack of knowledge and guidance to look at environmental projects from a poverty perspective. It also recognized the need to identify linkages with poverty in UNEP projects and for greater clarity about where poverty fits within the organization's strategic documents. SIDA's poverty framework was considered a useful way to include multiple dimensions in the understanding of poverty and it was considered appropriate to see how parts of the framework could be operationalized in the context of UNEP initiatives and projects. However, the review also recognized that donor agencies differ in terms of the attention they give to poverty.

ENDNOTES

- 6 As per the UN Secretariat interpretation and application of the International Public Service Accounting Standards (IPSAS), Umoja does not enable breakdown of this income into annual figures.
- 7 Includes UNSCEAR, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation
- 8 Decision UNEP/EA.4/1: Approves the programme of work and budget for 2020–2021 and encourages the Executive Director to implement the resource mobilization strategy in close consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
Decision UNEP/EA.5/L.3: Endorses a medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023; welcomes the efforts of the Executive Director to design and implement a resource mobilization strategy in close consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

QUARTERLY REPORT

to the **154th** Meeting of the

COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES

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