MOPAN ASSESSMENT REPORT

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

MOPAN

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ABOUT MOPAN

The Multilateral Performance Network (MOPAN) comprises 20 members that promote an effective multilateral system, trusted to deliver solutions to evolving global goals and local challenges.

MOPAN is a network of members who assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and promote learning and insight to strengthen development and humanitarian results and accountability. Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality, and timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach.

MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making, and supports change, helping increase knowledge and trust amongst all stakeholders and ultimately achieving a stronger, better-performing multilateral system.

FIGURE 1: **MOPAN MEMBERS AS OF 1 AUGUST 2026**



PREFACE

INTRODUCING MOPAN

The Multilateral Performance Network (MOPAN) comprises 20 members[1] that promote an effective multilateral system, trusted to deliver solutions to evolving global goals and local challenges.

BOX 1. **MOPAN mission and vision**

MOPAN is a network of members who assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and champion learning and insights to strengthen development and humanitarian results and promote accountability.

Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral system perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality and timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach.

MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making and supports change, helping to increase knowledge and trust amongst all stakeholders, and ultimately to achieve a stronger and better performing multilateral system.

MOPAN's shared vision is to promote an effective multilateral system, trusted to deliver solutions to evolving global goals and local challenges.

MOPAN assessment reports seeks to provide a snapshot diagnostic of an organisation's performance, within its mandate, including how an organisation is positioned to address its current and future challenges. They support MOPAN members in their governance and decision-making for the multilateral organisations they fund, and in the leadership of those organisations in implementing reforms that reflect multilateral good practices.

In addition to assessments, MOPAN produces a range of analytical insights into the multilateral system. MOPAN's full range of performance evidence and analysis is available on the MOPAN website.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND REPORT STRUCTURE

MOPAN assessments are conducted through a rigorous, collaborative process to ensure that the findings rest on solid evidence and resonate with an organisation and its stakeholders.

It draws on multiple lines of evidence (documents, survey, and interviews) from sources within and outside an organisation. Evidence from these different sources is triangulated to identify findings and determine ratings against MOPAN's indicator framework using MOPAN's methodology, which is based on international best practice. Additional information about the process is provided in Chapter 5 of this report and in MOPAN's methodology manual.

The report is composed of two parts.

1. As of 1 August 2026: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.



Beach clean up by Muslim women, Kenya

Sorting of plastic and marine litter at EcoWorld Watamu.
Photo: © Florian Fussstetter / UNEP

Part I: Analysis summary

- Executive Summary;
- *Chapter 1: Introducing UNEP,* which provides key information about the organisation being assessed, including its mandate, governance structure, business model and operations;
- *Chapter 2: Conclusions and considerations for the future,* which lays out the overall conclusions of the assessment and identifies forward-looking considerations for the organisation and its governing body;
- *Chapter 3: Assessment findings ratings,* which describes the findings of the assessment against MOPAN's framework and Key Performance Indicators.
- *Chapter 4: About this Assessment,* which provides information about the methodology and approach, including timelines for implementation and key activities.

Part II: Technical and statistical annex of UNEP available online contains:

- *Annex A: Performance analysis,* which describes in detail the underlying analysis feeding into the assessment ratings.
- *Annex B:* Evidence list provides the documents.
- *Annex C:* Results of MOPAN partner survey.

HISTORY OF MOPAN ASSESSMENTS FOR UNEP

This is the fourth MOPAN UNEP assessment, covering the period from 2021 to 2025. It applies the MOPAN 3.1 Methodology.



Tackling plastic pollution

The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-5), held in Busan, Republic of Korea, December 2024.

Photo: © Duncan Moore / UNEP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The MOPAN assessment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was conducted under the overall strategic guidance of Suzanne Steensen, Head of the MOPAN Secretariat. It was managed and guided by William Norris.

MOPAN is very grateful to Caroline Payne of the United Kingdom and Joost van den Broek of the Netherlands for championing this assessment on behalf of the MOPAN membership.

The assessment was conducted in co-operation with IOD PARC. Patrick Tiefenbacher led the assessment and is the principal author of the report. A team comprised of Silke Hofer, Roeland Hemsteede, and Karl-Axel Lindgren also supported the assessment and contributed to the final report. The SEA/SH component benefited from analysis and consolidation by the MOPAN Secretariat. The report also benefited from an external peer review, conducted by Daniel Arghiros.

The partner survey was managed by Corentin Beudaert-Ugolini from the MOPAN Secretariat, who, together with Karl-Axel Lindgren from IOD PARC, also supported the implementation and finalisation of the survey.

The report was prepared for publication by Camille Hewitt, proofread/copy edited by Christopher Mooney and graphically designed by Baseline Arts Ltd.

MOPAN would like to convey appreciation to Jyotsna Puri and Janice Sarah Golding from UNEP, who co-ordinated the process and provided substantive feedback on the report.

This assessment would not have been possible without the close engagement and valuable contributions from many senior officials and technical staff from UNEP as well as representatives of development partners who participated in interviews and the survey.

Finally, MOPAN is grateful to all Steering Committee representatives for supporting the UNEP assessment, and to its member countries for their financial contributions, which have made the report possible.

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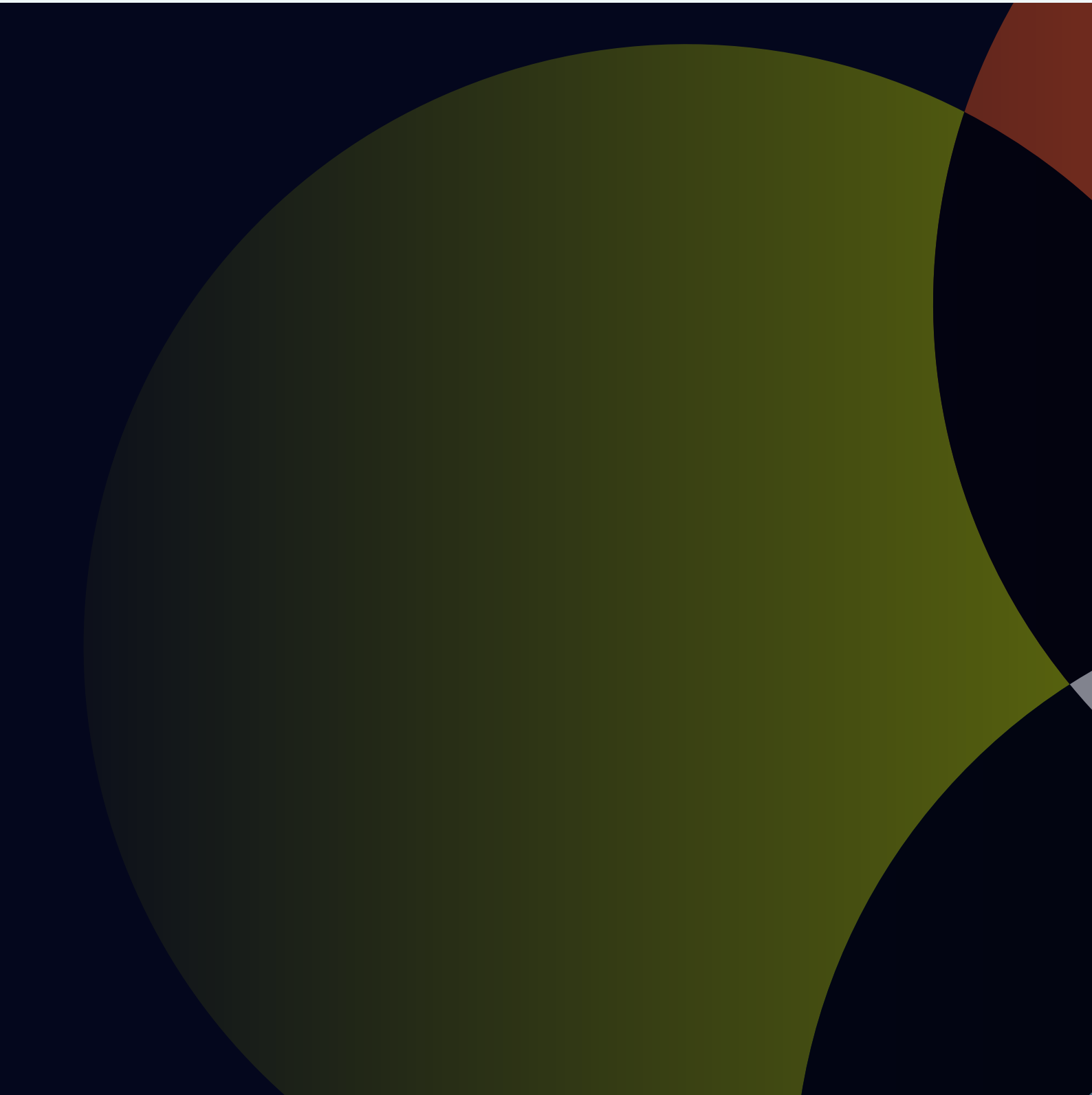
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

10FYP	10-Year Framework of Programmes
AEWA	Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds
ASCOBANS	Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas
BRS	Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions
BSC	Budget Steering Committee
CAG	Concept Approval Group
CBD	Convention of Biological Diversity
CCA	Common Country Analyses
CEP	Country Engagement Plan
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
COP	Conference of Parties
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CSD	Corporate Services Division
CTCN	Climate Technology Centre and Network
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DED	Deputy Executive Director
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ED	Executive Director
EMG	Environment Management Group
ERM	Enterprise Risk Management
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
ESSF	Environment and Social Sustainability Framework
ETF	Enhanced Transparency Framework
EU	European Union
EUROBATS	Conservation of Populations of European Bats
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCAS	Fragile and conflict-affected state
FI	Finance Initiative
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Fund
GEO	Global Environmental Outlook
GFCR	Global Fund for Coral Reefs
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
HIC	High income country
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HQ	Headquarters
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IL	Institutional Lead
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPMR	Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting
ISPCWP	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution.
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LDC	Least Developed Country
LIC	Low-income country
LMIC	Lower middle-income country
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MI	Micro-indicators

MIC	Middle income country
MLF	Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol
MO	Multilateral Organisation
MOPAN	Multilateral Performance Network
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MTS	Medium Term Strategy
NOWPAP	Action Plan for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northwest Pacific Region
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PPD	Policy and Programme Division
PPMM	Programme Performance and Monitoring Module
PRC	Project Review Committee
PSC	Programme Support Costs
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment
QBR	Quarterly Business Review
RBB	Results-Based Budgeting
RBM	Results-Based Management
RC	Resident Co-ordinator
RO	Regional Office
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SG	Secretary-General
SH	Sexual Harassment
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SWAP	System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
TR	Management Led Terminal Reviews
UMIC	Upper middle-income country
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
UNOG	United Nations Office of Geneva
UNON	United Nations Office at Nairobi
UNSCEAR	United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
USD	United States Dollar
USG	Under-Secretary-General
WHO	World Health Organisation



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





UNON Tree Watering Ceremony, Kenya

The ceremony took place on 10 December 2025 at the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON) during the week of the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7). The event highlighted ongoing greening, conservation, and sustainability efforts hosted alongside UNEP programmes. Photo: © Florian Fussstetter / UNEP

INTRODUCING UNEP

UNEP was established by the United Nations General Assembly following the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, with a mandate to serve as the leading global authority on environmental issues within the UN system. Its role was reinforced at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, which reaffirmed UNEP's responsibility to set the global environmental agenda and promote coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development. A subsequent General Assembly resolution established universal membership of its governing body. Operating within a complex environmental governance landscape shaped by the three Rio Conventions and their distinct institutional arrangements, UNEP serves as a co-ordinating and complementary actor within the UN system's environmental pillar.

UNEP's responsibilities have continued to expand, particularly with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, which assigns the organisation a central role in advancing the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. As custodian of 25 SDG indicators, UNEP collaborates with UN partners, governments and other stakeholders to support implementation of environmental targets at national, regional and global levels. Consistent with its mission to provide leadership and foster partnerships for environmental sustainability, UNEP acts as an agenda setter, knowledge broker and normative authority aimed at improving quality of life while safeguarding environmental conditions for future generations**.**

Since the last MOPAN assessment of UNEP in 2021, the global context has evolved considerably. Environmental SDGs remain largely off track, climate indicators continue to worsen, and biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation persist. These trends are increasing demand for UNEP's scientific, normative and convening functions. At the same time, like other multilateral actors, UNEP is facing heightening expectations for effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

ASSESSMENT CONCLUSIONS

UNEP has important comparative advantages in its scientific-policy authority, normative leadership, and convening power that are widely recognised by stakeholders.

UNEP has a recognised comparative advantage in its scientific-policy authority, normative leadership, and convening power. Over this period, UNEP has played a significant role in shaping global environmental discourse through its science-policy leadership and in helping to establish the concept of the "triple planetary crisis" — climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution — as the dominant framework for understanding interconnected environmental risks. UNEP's knowledge products and flagship assessments such as the Emissions Gap Report, continue to be highly valued and inform international climate policy discussions and national planning processes. The organisation's hosting of multiple Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) secretariats further reinforces its central role within global environmental governance.

UNEP has sharpened its strategic focus, and its Medium-Term Strategies provide coherent and credible strategic frames for addressing the triple planetary crisis. This assessment spans a challenging period. In response to negative environmental trends and increasing demand for its expertise, UNEP has sharpened its strategic positioning around the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and provides a clear articulation of UNEP's comparative advantages and long-term direction. The 2022-25 strategy is widely regarded as technically robust, well aligned with the 2030 agenda, and offering clarity of purpose and a shared reference point for Member States and partners. Improvements were also noted in the associated Programme of Work with strengthened results logic and alignment with strategic objectives.

However, UNEP needs to articulate more clearly how it will operationalise its comparative advantages. This gap is particularly urgent in the case of UNEP's founding mandate as the UN system's environmental co-ordinator, given the growing dispersion of environmental mandates and activities across the multilateral system. In particular, UNEP's core normative and co-ordination functions, including its UN system-wide environmental co-ordination and its role in hosting and providing administrative support for MEA secretariats, remain weakly reflected in the Programme of Work's results framework. The practical consequence is that the functions that most clearly differentiate UNEP from other entities are the hardest to resource, measure, and defend.

Furthermore, there is a fundamental misalignment between what UNEP's strategy defines as its purpose and what its funding model incentivises it to do. UNEP's heavy dependence on extrabudgetary, earmarked, project-based funding, such as from the GEF, has enabled operational scale but also reinforced incentives that prioritise project throughput over upstream normative work, and leaves core institutional functions chronically under-resourced. The result is an organisation whose strategy points in one direction and whose funding pulls it in another.

UNEP has undertaken widescale institutional change to close the gap between strategic intent and delivery; but continued efforts are required to ensure intended benefits are achieved.

Reforms initiated during the assessment period are directionally appropriate and reflect genuine institutional ambition to address known weaknesses. To deliver on its strategic ambitions, UNEP has pursued a series of organisational and operational reforms, including important innovations in development areas identified in the previous MOPAN assessment. For example, the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting system has created, for the first time, a single system connecting planning, monitoring, reporting, and financial tracking across portfolios**.** The introduction of the Chief Digital Officer and the continued pursuit of the organisation's digital transformation agenda have produced tools that extend UNEP's convening role digitally. The independent evaluation function has achieved new milestones, such as new project designs required to reference and apply lessons from evaluations, although uptake is uneven. Changes and structural realignment have moved UNEP closer to the logic of the 2022-25 MTS, but the net effect to date is incremental coherence rather than a step-change in organisational performance. Three areas for further attention were identified:

Firstly, the organisation's decision-making framework limits agility. At an organisational level, the two-year UNEA decision cycle, built around extensive preparatory consultations and negotiated resolutions among member states, combined with CPR's non-decision-making status hinders the continuous strategic steering and oversight typically expected in the governance of a modern international institution. Furthermore, at an operational level, decision-making authority continues to sit with headquarters, even as responsibility for delivery and results is distributed across divisions, regional offices and support functions. As a result, aspirations for further delegation and adaptive management are not yet matched by operational reality.

Secondly, while the changes introduced have made financial oversight arrangements more rigorous, they have also caused operational frictions. UNEP benefits from a detailed and comprehensive framework of financial regulations, audit standards, anti-fraud mechanisms, and conduct and discipline procedures, backed by a strong audit function. However, the strength of this framework is also its limitation, as the rigour that ensures accountability also creates operational constraints. For example, systemic disbursement delays are consistently traced to internal procedural constraints and administrative arrangements, with a noted reliance on multi-layered approvals. While some of these issues cannot be resolved by UNEP unilaterally and may require joint action with UNON and other partners, attempts to address these organisational frictions have tended to involve additional co-ordination mechanisms and layered controls rather than through simplification of processes and clarity of roles.

Finally, operational performance management systems do not yet fully function as a lever for organisational learning, collaboration, or resource decisions. Corporate commitments to RBM are strong on paper, and the introduction of IPMR marks a significant step forward for tracking costs from activities to results and capturing relevant performance information. Nonetheless, the use of this information, including its integration of monitoring data into strategic planning and operational results, is an area which requires further attention.

Institutional strengthening has contributed to improving project results but continued attention is required to sustainability and efficiency.

UNEP demonstrates improving performance in achieving its development and normative objectives, with a clear positive trajectory in project results. Evidence suggests that UNEP's development and normative performance has improved significantly during the assessment period. Project evaluations indicate stronger effectiveness, improved financial management, and higher overall project success rates than in previous years. UNEP continues to demonstrate its ability to influence environmental governance, support policy development and implementation of environmental commitments, and strengthen institutional capacities.

Despite these achievements, several concerns remain. Project implementation delays continue to be common, driven both by external risks and UNEP's internal procedural constraints. Furthermore, evidence of long-term sustainability remains limited. Although sustainability ratings have improved compared with previous assessment periods, only a minority of projects are considered likely to sustain benefits over the longer term. This remains a persistent challenge and limits UNEP's ability to demonstrate durable impact. UNEP's evaluation framework relies primarily on end-of-project assessments rather than systematic post-completion follow-up. As a result, the organisation is often unable to verify whether institutional capacities, policy reforms, or governance mechanisms remain effective once project funding has ended. Finally, progress in integrating cross-cutting priorities – particularly gender equality, human rights and attention to vulnerable groups remains gradual and uneven across UNEP's portfolio.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

UNEP enters the next strategic cycle from a position of recognised relevance and growing institutional maturity. In a context of growing demand for UNEP's services and growing competition for multilateral funding, its challenge will be to convert scientific authority and normative leadership into demonstrable system-wide impact while operating within an increasingly constrained financial and political environment. Four interlinked factors will be critical to its success.

Firstly, there should be stronger prioritisation discipline. UNEP's strategic evolution demonstrates increasing ambition with the organisation moving from issue-based environmental programming toward a more integrated model that links environmental sustainability with economic transformation, financial systems, digital innovation, and governance reform. However, this evolution also introduces risks. Each successive strategy expands UNEP's scope while resources remain constrained. There is therefore a danger of strategic overstretch. Member States must define priorities clearly, and in particular address a fundamental governance question: whether the organisation should primarily function as the UN system's strategic environmental authority focused on norm-setting, co-ordination and policy influence or as a project-based implementing partner within the existing financing architecture.

Secondly, resources need to be aligned with strategic ambitions. UNEP's increased strategic ambition has not been matched by a comparable expansion in flexible funding or institutional authority, with earmarked project finance continuing to dominate. Strengthening alignment between ambition and resources will require action on both sides: clearer prioritisation by UNEP and improvements in the predictability and flexibility of voluntary funding. Over time, more structured approaches — such as multi-year or core funding arrangements — could help anchor this alignment.

BOX 2. **Main strengths and areas for improvement**

Strengths

- UNEP's scientific authority, normative leadership and convening power constitute distinctive comparative advantages that are widely recognised by Member States and partners. UNEP's founding mandate as the UN system's environmental co-ordinator is of increasing importance given increased dispersal of environmental authority across UN entities.
- UNEP's knowledge products and flagship assessments are highly valued by stakeholders and inform international environmental policy discussions and national planning processes.
- Growing institutional maturity and organisational effectiveness, with a clear commitment to close the gap between strategic intent and delivery. Areas of progress include results-based management systems through the new Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting platform, on-going strengthening of the independent evaluation function, and refined approach to private-sector engagement.
- A comprehensive financial oversight and accountability architecture, grounded in UN standards, and with strong enforcement functions.
- A positive track record for delivering projects with measurable environmental and governance outcomes, albeit with further attention required to sustainability and efficiency.

Areas for improvement

- Weak articulation of how UNEP will serve as the UN system's environmental anchor to deliver system-wide results, including a lack of accountability frameworks, joint programming indicators, and co-ordination tools. This is an important gap given the increasing fragmentation of environmental authority, delivery capacity and accountability across the multilateral system.
- The evidence base for broader normative or system-level results is less robust. The results architecture omits key aspects of UNEP's founding mandate, including relating to its role as the UN system's environmental co-ordinator. Limitations in outcome-level measurement, cost-efficiency analysis, and post-project follow-up constrain UNEP's ability to demonstrate sustainable impact beyond individual projects.
- A gap remains between UNEP's strategic and normative foundations and its operational delivery capacity. Complicated and unclear internal processes and layered decision-making hinder operational efficiency and disbursement.
- Weak performance feedback loops limit UNEP's ability to translate monitoring and evaluative evidence into systematic programme adjustments and programmatic reprioritisation.
- UNEP's operating model remains largely project-based, creating a structural mismatch between strategic intent and operational incentives. Over-reliance on extrabudgetary funding drives a gap between UNEP's global normative role and capacity to translate that into strategic country-level engagement.

Thirdly, UNEP's performance and evaluative information must better capture its success in delivering on its normative and co-ordination mandates. Strategy approvals should be accompanied by a strengthened results framework that traces causal pathways from normative outputs to behavioural, financial and policy shifts and better capture UNEP's overall impact.

Finally, **UN reform processes provide a rare opportunity to strengthen UNEP's positioning as the UN system's environmental anchor.** It requires formalised mechanisms for coherence with Resident Co-ordinators, MEA

secretariats and development agencies. Governance dialogue should move beyond rhetorical co-ordination to measurable joint programming indicators.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment applied the MOPAN 3.1 methodology while adapting selected micro-indicators to reflect UNEP's specific mandate and operating model as a primarily normative organisation. Unlike many other UN entities, UNEP does not deliver large-scale country programmes or service delivery interventions. The assessment therefore interpreted several micro-indicators to capture UNEP's role in shaping policy frameworks, co-ordinating environmental governance and generating knowledge, rather than focusing primarily on direct programme delivery outcomes.

Adjustments focused particularly on partnership-related indicators and results-management elements to account for UNEP's work with multilateral environmental agreements, scientific assessment processes and global policy platforms. Within the flexibility of the MOPAN 3.1 framework, these methodological adaptations were agreed with UNEP during the inception phase and documented in the Inception Report. During the Inception Phase it was also agreed with UNEP to consider Youth and Food Systems as additional cross-cutting issues to be considered under KPI 2. The assessment also incorporated a structured mapping exercise with MOPAN members to align priority issues with the methodology, ensuring that the framework remained consistent with MOPAN standards while meaningfully reflecting UNEP's institutional role and results pathways. The cut-off point for evidence collection for the technical annex and scoring was September 2025. Decisions taken at the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), held in December 2025, including the adoption of a new MTS and PoW, fall outside the scope of this assessment.

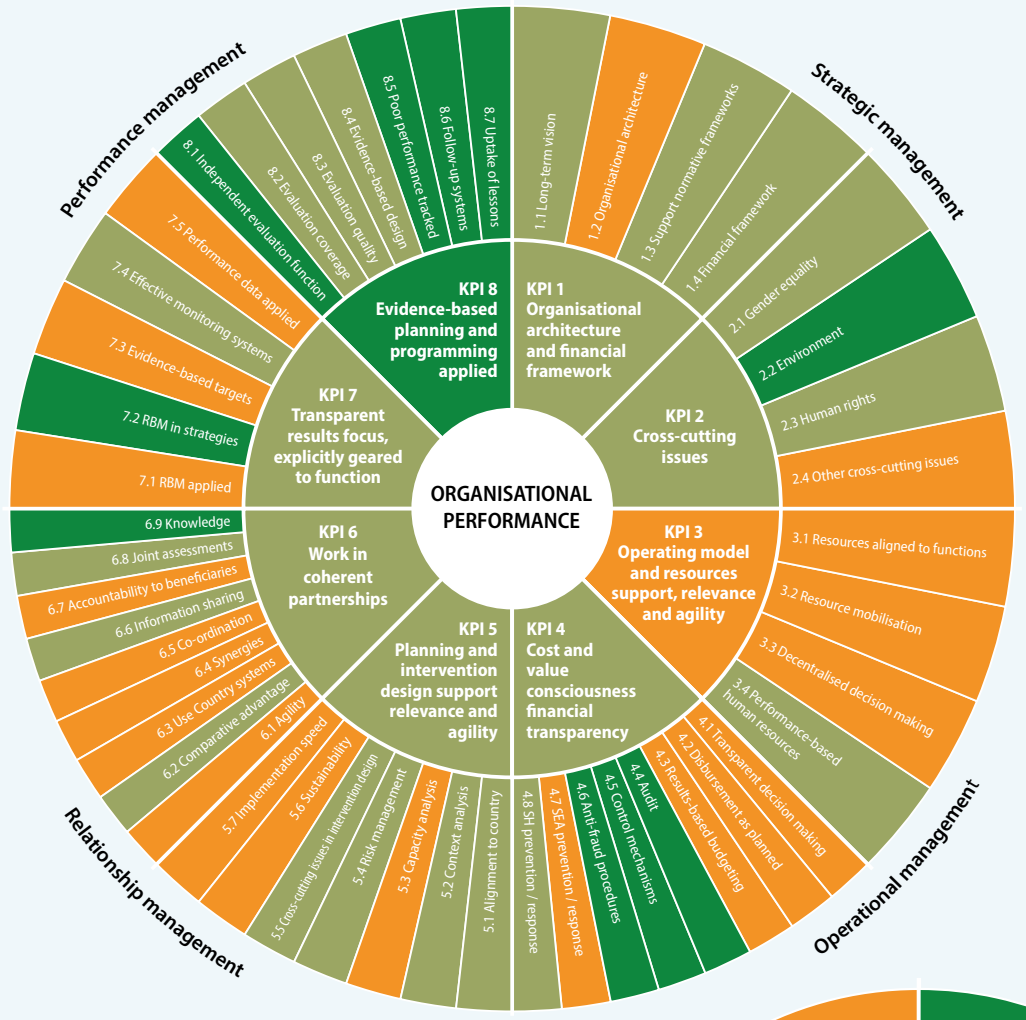


Negotiating solutions for plastic pollution

The UNEP Executive Director, INC Chair and INC Executive Secretary in conversation with Observers at the second part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-5.2)

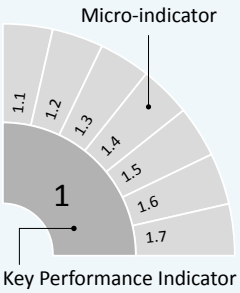
Photo: © Florian Fussstetter / UNEP

FIGURE 2. **UNEP'S PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY**

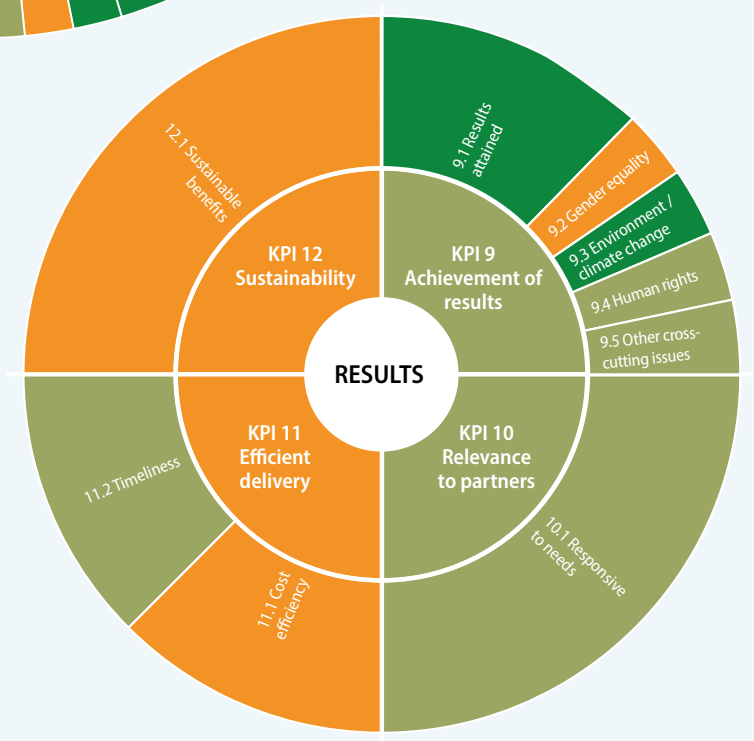


Disclaimer: Each organisation MOPAN assesses has a unique mandate, business model and operating environment. The context of multilateral development and co-operation is dynamic, with expectations and good practices changing over time. The MOPAN framework reflects this unique context and evolution across different types of multilateral organisations. As such, comparison across assessments is strongly discouraged. More information on the rationale underlying MOPAN's assessment ratings can be found in Chapter 4 of this report or in the Technical Annex.

How to read these charts



- **Highly satisfactory** (3.51-4.00)
- **Satisfactory** (2.51-3.50)
- **Unsatisfactory** (1.51-2.50)
- **Highly unsatisfactory** (0-1.50)
- **No evidence / Not applicable**



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME





The Giant Plastic Tap

UNEP DSG Amina Mohammed and colleagues pose in front of the plastic art installation at UNEA-5.2 created by artist and activist Benjamin Von Wong.

Photo: © UNEP / Cyril Villemain

MISSION AND MANDATE

UNEP was established in 1972 by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 2997, following the recommendation of the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden earlier that year. Article 1.2 of the resolution clarifies that UNEP's main roles and responsibilities will be to co-ordinate and promote environmental co-operation. At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in July 2012, world leaders committed to enhance UNEP's role "as the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, that promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the UN system, and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment".[1] The UNGA adopted a resolution in December 2012[2] to strengthen UNEP, including by establishing universal membership of its governing body. Within this broader mandate, UNEP operates in a complex multilateral environmental architecture shaped by the three Rio Conventions — the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) — which emerged from the 1992 Earth Summit. While UNEP administers the CBD Secretariat, the UNFCCC and UNCCD are independent entities, each with its own secretariats, governance and administrative arrangements, underscoring the diversity of institutional setups within the environmental pillar of the UN system. This reaffirms UNEP's complementary role vis-à-vis the three conventions, which do not themselves necessarily hold implementation mandates.

UNEP's responsibilities continue to evolve. For example, it was given the responsibility to lead on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UNGA on 25 September 2015.[3] Most of the Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include environment-related indicators and targets. UNEP is the custodian for 25 SDG indicators, and its responsibility includes co-ordinating and collaborating with UN partners, national governments, and other stakeholders on efforts to deliver the environmental goals of the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional, and global levels. The role of UNEP and other multilateral organisations in promoting environmental goals may continue to evolve in light of ongoing reform initiatives. In particular, under Work package 27 of the Action Plan for UN80, UNEP's Executive Director and the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC are tasked with undertaking a thorough assessment of current arrangements and to make proposals on possible structural changes and programme realignments on environmental issues.

UNEP's mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and their citizens to "improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations",[4] while serving as the global environmental authority, supporting countries in implementing internationally agreed norms and standards, and acting as an agenda setter, as reaffirmed in successive UN resolutions and the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2022-25.

UNEP's mandate is to promote international co-operation in environmental affairs and to co-ordinate environmental matters within the UN system. UNEP seeks to deliver on its mandate through successive four-year MTSs, which are further broken up into two biennial PoWs. The MTS and PoW mechanism is further discussed below in the section on UNEP's Business Model. More specifically, according to UNEP's Programme of Work (PoW) and budget

1. See UNGA resolution 66/288 dated 27 July 2012. See https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_66_288.pdf
2. See UNGA resolution 67/213 dated 21 December 2012. See https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/67/213
3. See UNGA, 2015. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Resolution A/RES/70/1, 70/1. United Nations General Assembly, New York. See https://docs.un.org/A/RES/70/1
4. See https://www.unep.org/who-we-are/about-us.

for the period 2026-27, "the overall aim of the organisation is to ensure a healthy, prosperous and resilient people and planet."[5] UNEP pursues this aim in two ways:

1. **Providing global leadership** to implement the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, fulfilling its normative role, as mandated by the UN General Assembly. It achieves this notably through:

   - informing the global community about the main environmental trends and challenges, their causes, and the effectiveness of the responses given so far, and translating this scientific knowledge into policy advice (science-policy interface);
   - organising intergovernmental environmental fora, and facilitating multilateral commitments;
   - building partnerships to set up or strengthen collective responses to environmental issues, including by hosting the secretariats of several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

2. **Providing direct support to public and private stakeholders** in order to pilot innovative solutions that reinforce UNEP's normative work; this constitutes the programmatic dimension of UNEP's activities (in the majority of cases, this involves management of specific projects funded by a variety of donors and for which UNEP is the designated or selected implementing entity).

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Since mid-2014 UNEP has been governed by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), which succeeded and replaced the earlier Governing Council. UNEA has universal membership and is led by a president and a 10-member Bureau, all elected for two-year terms from the close of the session at which they are elected to the close of the next. In addition to approving UNEP's MTSs and PoWs, UNEA provides directions and guidance to UNEP leadership and management through specific decisions and resolutions that are issued at the time of each biennial meeting. UNEA's first meeting, UNEA-1, was held in June 2014 and formalised the transformation from the earlier Governing Council to UNEA. UNEA customarily meets in Nairobi biennially to make strategic decisions and provide political guidance on global environmental issues.[6] While UNEA serves as the world's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters and provides overall policy guidance to UNEP, the UNGA also retains a role in UNEP's governance, notably in approving the organisation's budget for assessed contributions and considering environment-related resolutions of system-wide significance, for instance as part of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. UNGA's role stems from the fact that UNEP is part of the UN Secretariat and consequently falls under the authority of the UN Secretary-General and is subject to all directives and instructions issued by the UNGA.

The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) serves as UNEP's main intersessional body, providing oversight and guidance on behalf of UNEA on the implementation of decisions adopted by the UNEA between its biennial sessions. The CPR is led by a five-member bureau serving two-year terms, with each bureau member representing one of the UN's five regional groups. Crucially, however, the CPR does not have decision-making

5. See Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), Agenda Item 4. Development of a medium-term strategy for the period 2026-2029 and a draft programme of work and budget for the biennium 2026-2027 dated 12 June 2025. See https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/47670/12JuneSubCo_PoW.pdf

6. At UNEA-2 in 2016, its schedule was changed to every odd-numbered year to align better with related UN processes for PoW and budget approvals. Thus, UNEA-3 met in 2017 and UNEA-4 in 2019. UNEA-5 was divided into two annual meetings, with UNEA-5.1 conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The streamlined agenda focused on urgent and procedural decisions, for example the approval of the MTS for 2022-25 and PoW for 2022-23. UNEA-5.2 saw the adoption of 14 resolutions focused on addressing climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, also known as the triple planetary crisis, and strengthening action in pursuit of the SDGs. UNEA-6 took place in 2024 and UNEA-7 took place in December 2025 during which the MTS for the period 2026-2029 and the PoW for 2026-2027 were approved

authority. Comprising all accredited permanent representatives to UNEP, the CPR holds four formal meetings a year to prepare for upcoming UNEA sessions and to review progress on the organisation's PoW. Originally established in May 1985 as a subsidiary body of UNEP's Governing Council, the CPR now operates in support of UNEA. It also plays a central role in shaping UNEA's agenda and fostering consensus among Member States on draft resolutions and decisions. Within UNEP, the Secretariat of Governing Bodies is responsible for supporting the operations and meetings of both UNEA and the CPR.

The executive office at UNEP headquarters (HQ) in Nairobi is responsible for corporate operations and strategic oversight. In line with General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII), the role of the UNEP Executive Director is to provide leadership and overall direction for the United Nations' environmental programme by co-ordinating environmental activities across the UN system and ensuring implementation of decisions of the governing body. Inger Andersen was appointed Executive Director for a four-year term by the UN Secretary-General in February 2019 and reappointed for another four-year term starting in June 2023.[7]

UNEP also hosts the secretariats of multiple MEAs and the UN Environment Management Group (EMG), an inter-agency co-ordinating body. Among the diverse MEAs and funds that UNEP hosts and to which it provides technical support (Figure 1.1), only the CBD secretariat directly reports to UNEP's Executive Director (ED).[8] The secretariats of five other MEAs report to UNEP's Deputy Executive Director (DED).[9] Altogether, UNEP administers eight global[10] and seven regional[11] MEAs.

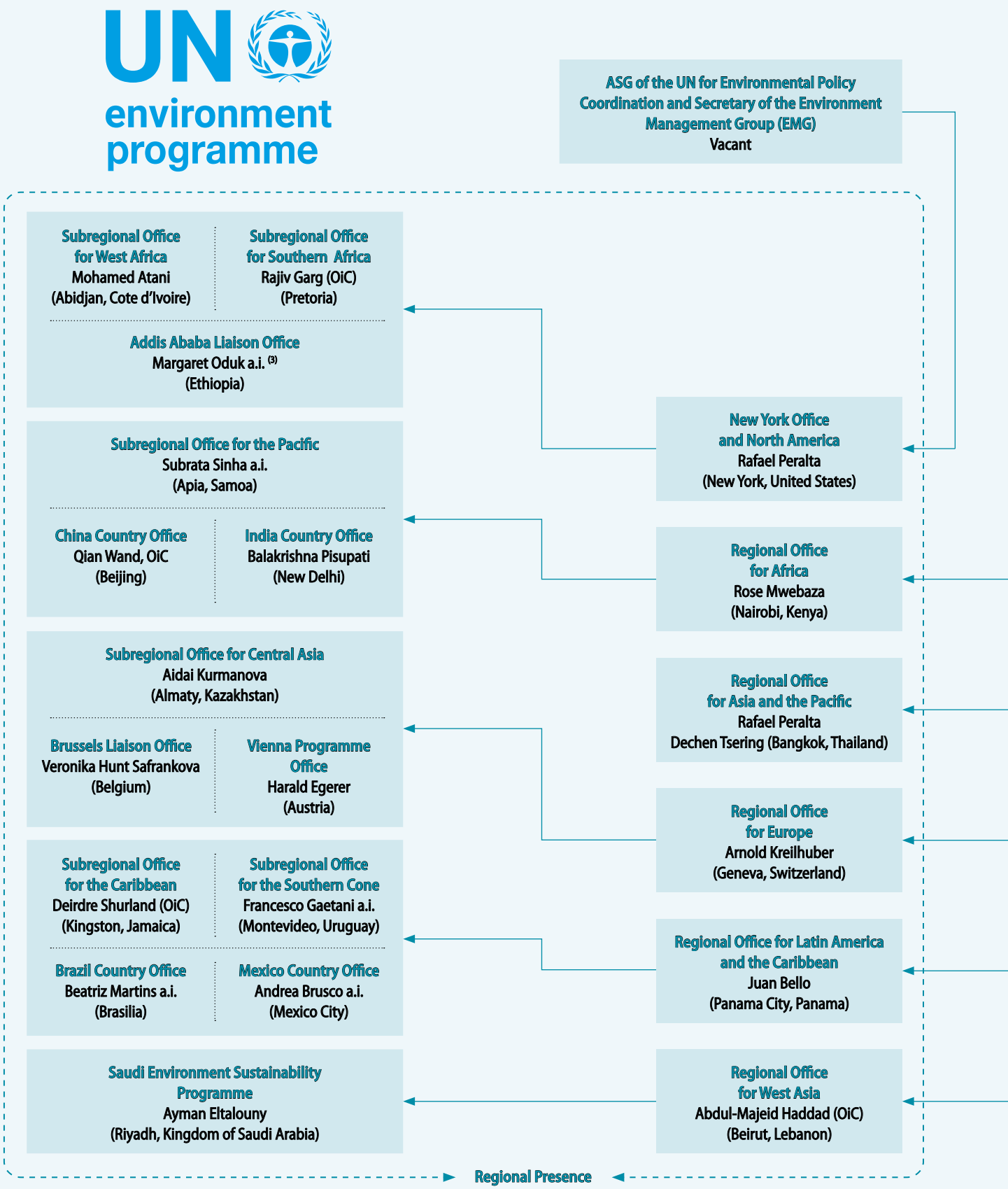
Each of the multilateral environmental agreements has its own independent mandate, mission, governance arrangements, organigram, staff, and budget. As independently negotiated treaties among state parties, they were established at different times and have their own mandates, dedicated activities and partners, with their Secretariats (or co-ordinating units) in different geographical locations. While UNEP's strategy seeks alignment with these agreements, the independence of MEA Secretariats remains a key aspect that needs to be considered when assessing UNEP holistically. All MEAs are related to UNEP's normative role and its priority concerns and responsibilities for environmental protection and sustainability and more specifically to biodiversity, climate change, and pollution.

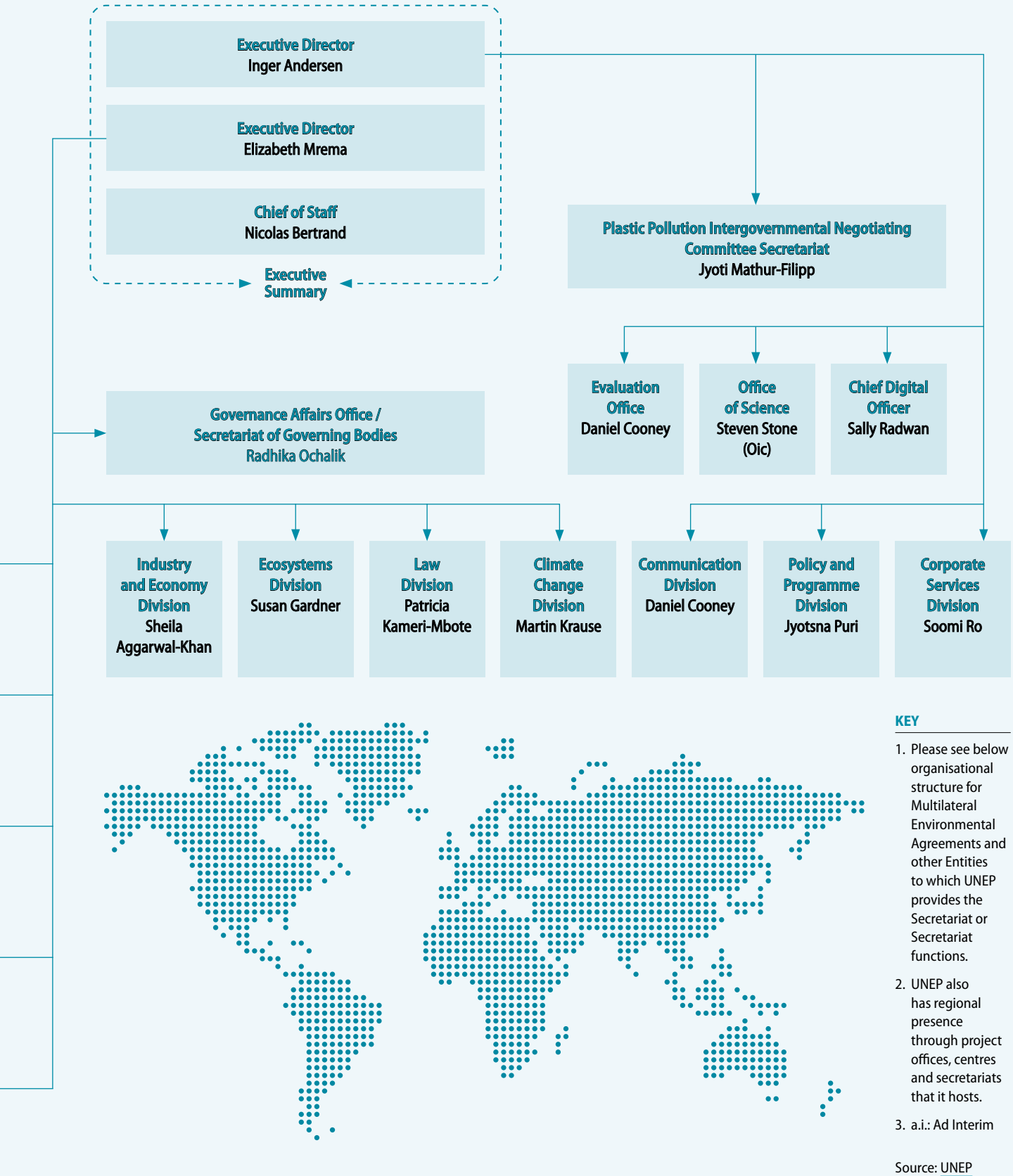
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

UNEP operates through a decentralised structure designed to support its global environmental mandate while responding to regional and national priorities. It currently works through eight headquarters divisions, six regional offices, six sub-regional offices, five country offices, and two liaison offices (see Figure 2). UNEP's matrix structure includes seven subprogrammes. There are three thematic subprogrammes (Climate Action, Nature Action, and

7. https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/personnel-appointments/2023-01-18/ms-inger-andersen-of-denmark-executive-director-of-the-united-nations-environment-programme
8. This is primarily because the CBD Secretariat is headed by an Assistant Secretary-General (ASG), whereas the other MEA secretariats are typically led by officials at the D1 or D2 level and report to the Deputy Executive Director, who also holds the rank of ASG.
9. These are: (i) Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS) on Hazardous Waste, Hazardous Wastes and Chemicals in International Trade, and Persistent Organic Pollutants, respectively; (ii) Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); (iii) Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), which has seven agreements; (iv) Secretariat of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Ozone Secretariat); and (v) Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.
10. The eight global MEAs are the following: Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Minamata Convention on Mercury, Basel Convention (hazardous wastes), Rotterdam Convention (prior informed consent for hazardous chemicals), Stockholm Convention (persistent organic pollutants), Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (Ozone regime), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). The secretariats of four other international environmental agreements — on (i) the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA); (ii) the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS); (iii) the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS); and (iv) the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitats — come under the Secretariat of the Convention on the CMS.
11. Seven regional MEAs focus on marine protection and regional seas, and one is a waste-related convention: Abidjan Convention (Protection of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central, and Southern African Region), Barcelona Convention (Protection of the Mediterranean Sea), Cartagena Convention (Wider Caribbean marine environment), Nairobi Convention (Western Indian Ocean marine environment), Theran (Caspian Sea) Convention (Protection of the Caspian Sea), COBSEA Action Plan (Coordinating body for East Asian seas), NOWPAP Action Plan (Northwest Pacific action plan), Bamako Convention (Ban on hazardous wastes in Africa).

FIGURE 3: **UNEP ORGANISATION CHART** (as of April 2025)





KEY

1. Please see below organisational structure for Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other Entities to which UNEP provides the Secretariat or Secretariat functions.
2. UNEP also has regional presence through project offices, centres and secretariats that it hosts.
3. a.i.: Ad Interim

Source: UNEP

Chemicals and Pollution Action), two foundational subprogrammes (Science-Policy and Environmental Governance), and two enabling subprogrammes (Finance and Economic Transformations and Digital Transformations). In 2020, subprogramme co-ordinators were moved from different thematic divisions to the Policy and Programme Division (PPD), which reports directly to the ED. The intention is for each subprogramme to have sub-coordinators in each of the regional offices, but due to funding constraints these are not available for all Subprogrammes across all regions. For example, the Climate Subprogramme has regional sub-programme co-ordinators only in the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, the Regional Office for Europe, and the Regional Office for West Asia. The decision to move the sub-programme co-ordinators at HQ to PPD was recommended by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) 2019 evaluation of UNEP and designed to strengthen co-ordination and accountability for delivery of the PoW.[12] As of 2024, sub-programme co-ordinators have been moved back to divisions, while continuing to report to the Director of PPD as an additional reporting officer. Prior to the OIOS evaluation, UNEP's Senior Management Team, chaired by the ED, had been expanded in July 2016, through the inclusion of the Regional Office Directors; this arrangement remains.

In addition to the PPD, the Communication Division and the Corporate Services Division (CSD) report directly to the ED, while the remaining five Divisions report to the DED. These are the Industry and Economy Division, the Ecosystems Division, the Law Division, the Early Warning and Assessment Division, and the Climate Change Division. CSD also houses the MEA Coordination Unit, established in 2023 pursuant to UNEA resolution 2/18 (2016). The Unit co-ordinates administrative support across finance, human resources, legal, and procurement functions for the 15 MEA secretariats hosted by UNEP, while respecting their institutional autonomy. Its mandate has evolved from a primary focus on financial oversight towards broader co-ordination and facilitation, aimed at improving administrative consistency, transparency, and coherent responses to cross-cutting governance, audit, and accountability issues. The Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution operates as an autonomous unit within UNEP, reporting to the DED, which reflects the global priority and cross-divisional nature of its mandate. The Governance Affairs Office/Secretariat of Governing Bodies, reporting to the ED, supports the functioning of UNEP's governing bodies, including UNEA and the CPR.

The Evaluation Office, the Chief Scientist, and the Chief Digital Officer report directly to UNEP's ED, aiming to ensure that the organisation's work is guided by independent evaluation, robust science, and digital innovation, all at the highest strategic level. In October 2025, the Office of the Chief Scientist was merged with the Division of Early Warning and Assessment to create a single scientific entity intended to strengthen science-policy support.

At the heart of UNEP's decentralised structure are six Regional Offices that co-ordinate UNEP's work across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, West Asia, and North America. Regional Offices are responsible for overseeing UNEP's activities in their respective regions and helping deliver the MTS and PoW. They are based in Nairobi (Regional Office for Africa), Bangkok (Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific), Geneva (Regional Office for Europe), Beirut (Regional Office for West Asia), Panama City (Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean), and Washington D.C. (Regional Office for North America). The Regional Office for North America, however, is unique in that it reports to UNEP's Liaison Office in New York, which is headed by an Assistant Secretary-General and also facilitates UNEP's contributions to the UN Environment Management Group (EMG)[13]. The EMG is chaired by the ED of UNEP and supported by a secretariat provided by UNEP, which is located in Geneva, not in New York. The remaining five Regional Offices report to the DED. Clarification of roles within UNEP's regional architecture also progressed during the assessment period.

12. See United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2019. Evaluation of the United Nations Environment Programme, Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), E/AC.51/2019/7.

13. The UN EMG comprises 53 UN entities.

Supporting the Regional Offices are several Subregional Offices[14], which aim to strengthen UNEP's presence in key geographic areas within each region and to enhance co-ordination with regional partners. Additionally, Country Offices are established in select nations to provide direct support to national governments and to facilitate the delivery of UNEP's mandate on the ground, particularly in areas of policy support and capacity-building. UNEP also maintains three Liaison Offices in Addis Ababa, Brussels, and New York. The Addis Ababa and Brussels Liaison Offices play strategic roles in engaging and co-ordinating with regional bodies such as the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the European Union (EU). The New York Liaison Office represents UNEP at UN Headquarters, enabling engagement with the UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, and other intergovernmental processes, and fostering co-ordination with UN Secretariat entities, Member States, and UN entities based in New York.

The United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), headed by a USG reporting to the SG, serves as the administrative backbone for UNEP, providing the UNEP Secretariat with most of its business operations and conference services. These services are provisioned in the memorandum of understanding signed in 2017 which covers financial services, human resources management services, central support services and procurement.[15] As UNEP's host entity, UNON enables UNEP to focus on its substantive mandate while ensuring compliance with UN administrative policies and procedures.

14. Namely, the Subregional Offices for West Africa (in Abidjan) and for Southern Africa (in Pretoria), the Subregional Office for the Pacific (in Apia), the Subregional Office for Central Asia (in Almaty), the Subregional Offices for the Caribbean (in Kingston) and for the Southern Cone (in Montevideo).
15. UNON/MOU/01-2018.



Adapting to climate change and rising seas

Coral nursery at Oracabessa Bay, Jamaica. Young coral is being re-planted on the reefs

Photo: © Kadir van Lohuizen / NOOR

UNEP had 1 327 (842 female, 485 male) total staff at the end of December 2025 spanning both the UNEP Secretariat (1 035) and the MEAs (292), up from 1 269 in quarter 1 of 2021the start of this assessment period.[16]

TABLE 1. **UNEP LEADERSHIP BREAKDOWN**

SMT Leadership	No. of staff
Under Secretary General	1
Assistant Secretary General	2
Division Directors/Office Heads and Regional Directors	18
Total	**21**

Source: UNEP

TABLE 2. **UNEP STAFF BREAKDOWN**

Geographic Region	No. of staff
Africa	425
Asia Pacific	252
Eastern Europe	71
Latin America & Caribbean	136
Other	1
USA	33
Western European & Others	409
Total	**1 327**

Source: UNEP

FINANCES AND OPERATIONS

For 2022-23, UNEP's approved budget of USD 872.9 million USD 44.2 million lower than in 2020-21comprised assessed contributions from the UN regular budget, core voluntary resources through the Environment Fund (EF), and earmarked resources and global trust funds. The 2022-23 budget was subsequently replicated for 2024-25. Earmarked funds, including Global Funds, comprise 83% of voluntary contributions to UNEP. Figure 3 provides a visual overview of the medium-term growth in UNEP's funding, funding sources, variations over time, and how its expenditure is geographically spread.

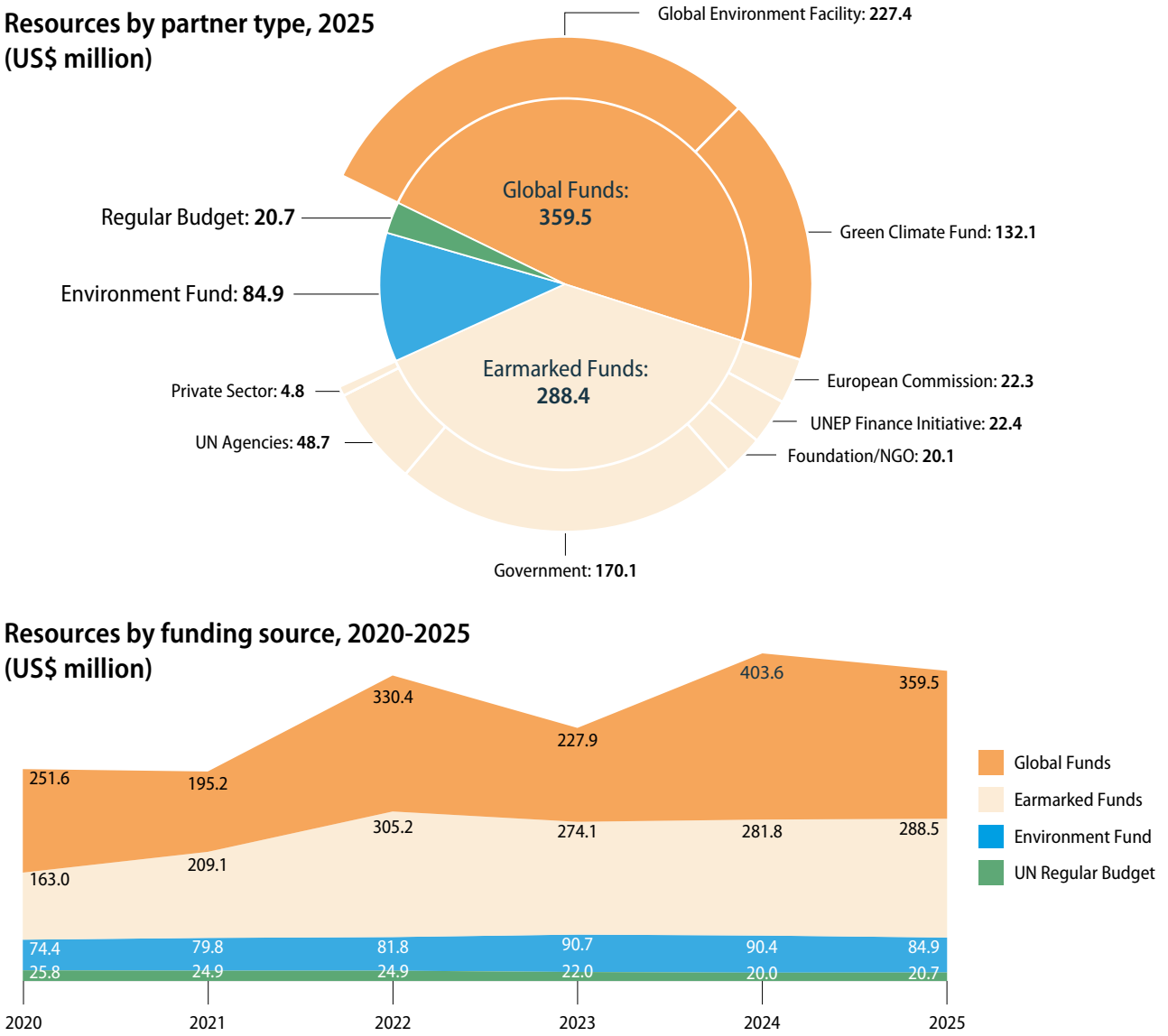
16. UNEP's staff numbers vary from quarter to quarter. See UNEP Programme Performance Reports and UNEP Quarterly Reports to the Committee of Permanent Representatives | UNEP – UN Environment Programme for more details.



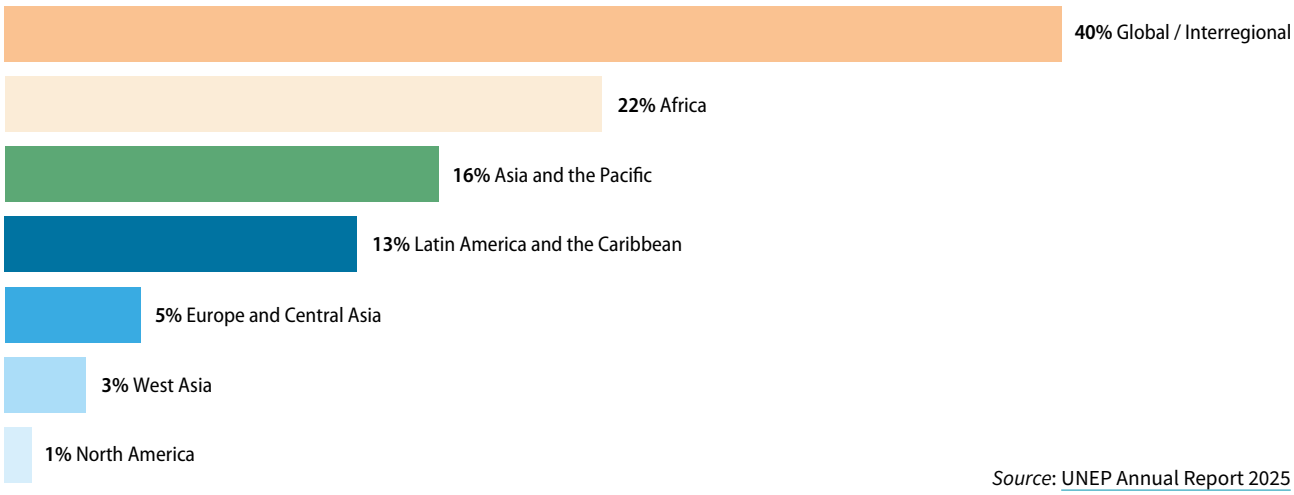
Launch of the Climate and Clean Air Conference 2024 (CCAC), Nairobi, Kenya

The world must make significant progress to slow the climate crisis, reduce air pollution, and address the poverty and inequality that threatens the most vulnerable.
Photo: © UNEP / Ahmed Nayim Yussuf

FIGURE 4. **UNEP FUNDING SOURCES, VARIATIONS BY YEAR, AND GEOGRAPHIC EXPENDITURE**



2025 expenditure in UN programme countries, by region



Source: UNEP Annual Report 2025

Core voluntary resources through the Environment Fund remain UNEP's financial backbone, with an annual budget approved by UNEA at USD 100m per annum. This "aspirational target" budgeted for in UNEP's biennial Programme of Work (PoW) has never been matched by actual Member State contributions. The Governing Council decision SSVII/1 of 15 February 2002 established the Voluntary Indicative Scale of Contributions (VISC) which aims to broaden the funding base and enhance the predictability of core contributions of the Environment Fund (EF). The highest contribution achieved over a decade was in 2024 at USD 90.5m. If all Member States pay per VISC, then the EF budget/target for 2025 would be USD125m.

The Environment Fund allocation underpins 431 staff posts and 87% of the Fund is channelled to seven subprogrammes: climate action, nature action, and chemicals and pollution action (12% each); environmental governance, science-policy, and finance and economic transformations (13% each); and digital transformations (7%), providing both stability and flexibility to respond to emerging needs. Even with these resources, UNEP faces a USD 40-50 million funding gap between secured contributions and the current approved budget. Other resources, i.e. earmarked funds and global trust funds, total USD 594 million. These funds are donor-directed and project-specific, with historical spending patterns indicating the relative size of portfolios.

UNEP has sought to improve transparency and strengthen linkages between strategic planning and resource allocation through closer alignment of budgets with strategic outcomes and improved tracking at thematic and regional levels. However, UNEP's continued reliance on voluntary contributions remains a structural challenge, affecting predictability and long-term planning, and hence the ability to undertake strong results-based budgeting. Anticipated declines in some funding streams, linked to the evolving geopolitical environment and reductions in overseas development assistance by several donors, have prompted UNEP to pursue efficiency measures and diversify its funding base in order to safeguard programme delivery. Forthcoming UN80 reforms are expected to have additional implications for UNEP's operating environment.

BUSINESS MODEL

UNEP's work is guided by its MTS and the corresponding PoW. The MTS is a four-year strategic framework that outlines UNEP's vision, priorities, and thematic focus areas. The MTS is implemented through two biennial PoWs, which translate the strategy into specific outcomes, outputs, and budget allocations. Both the MTS and the PoW are formally approved by the UNEA and provide the basis for UNEP's programming, resource mobilisation, and performance monitoring. This MOPAN assessment covers part of the 2018-21 MTS and all of the 2022-25 MTS, with the 2024-25 PoW as the last one considered. UNEP's results architecture at a high level is set out within the PoW and then becomes more granular through its subprogrammes and down to the projects which it delivers.

The 2018-21 MTS set out UNEP's "Vision 2030" which is "to reduce environmental risks and increase the resilience of societies and the environment as a whole", while responding to challenges highlighted in the MTS's situation analysis. These challenges resulted in seven "Priority Areas" on which the MTS focused: 1) Climate Change, 2) Resilience to Disasters and Conflicts, 3) Environmental Governance, 4) Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, 5) Resource Efficiency, 6) Chemicals, Waste, and Air Quality, and 7) Environment Under Review. Each of these seven priority areas was directly linked to specific SDG targets. While the MTS did not present an explicit, fully articulated theory of change or visual "Outcome Maps", it incorporated an implicit theory of change within its results-based management framework. This framework set out the expected accomplishments, indicators, and causal linkages that connected subprogramme outputs and outcomes to the long-term goal, thereby aligning UNEP's work with the relevant SDG targets.

The 2022-25 MTS is structured around the three interconnected dimensions of the "triple planetary crisis": climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. It seeks to drive "transformative shifts" in how these crises and

their impacts are addressed. This ambition is reflected in three core strategic objectives that underpin the MTS: 1) climate stability, 2) living in harmony with nature, and 3) towards a pollution-free planet. The strategy also places strong emphasis on the need for greater engagement with the MEAs, and enhanced collaboration across the wider UN system to ensure coherent, co-ordinated responses at global, regional, and national levels.

While outside the formal scope of this assessment, UNEA-7 adopted a new MTS for 2026-29 and the first PoW for 2026-27 (UNEP, 2025a; 2025b). As UNEP's final strategic cycle ahead of the 2030 Agenda deadline, the 2026-29 strategy builds on the 2022-25 framework and maintains UNEP's strategic objectives as being climate stability, living in harmony with nature, land degradation neutrality, and a pollution-free planet, with increased emphasis on integrated, science-based solutions, inclusive governance, digital innovation, and sustainable finance. While the "triple planetary crisis" of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution is not explicitly referenced in the PoW, these are clearly underpinning the strategic objectives.

In order to deliver on the intended results from the PoW, UNEP's divisions design interventions for which they then mobilise resources from appropriate sources. UNEP draws on the expertise housed within its divisions to design the technical part of its interventions while the involvement of regional directors shouldin theoryensure alignment with key (political) priorities in a country or region. The majority of the financial resources needed for interventions come from extra-budgetary sources such as the GEF, the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol (MLF), and the GCF, but they can also include earmarked funds from bilateral donors or other sources.

The high reliance on earmarked funding as described above also means that a high proportion of UNEP's work is directed towards implementation activities rather than to its original normative and co-ordination roles. Although implementation activities can directly support knowledge generation, UNEP's funding mix leaves it with limited flexibility to pursue its normative and co-ordination functions.

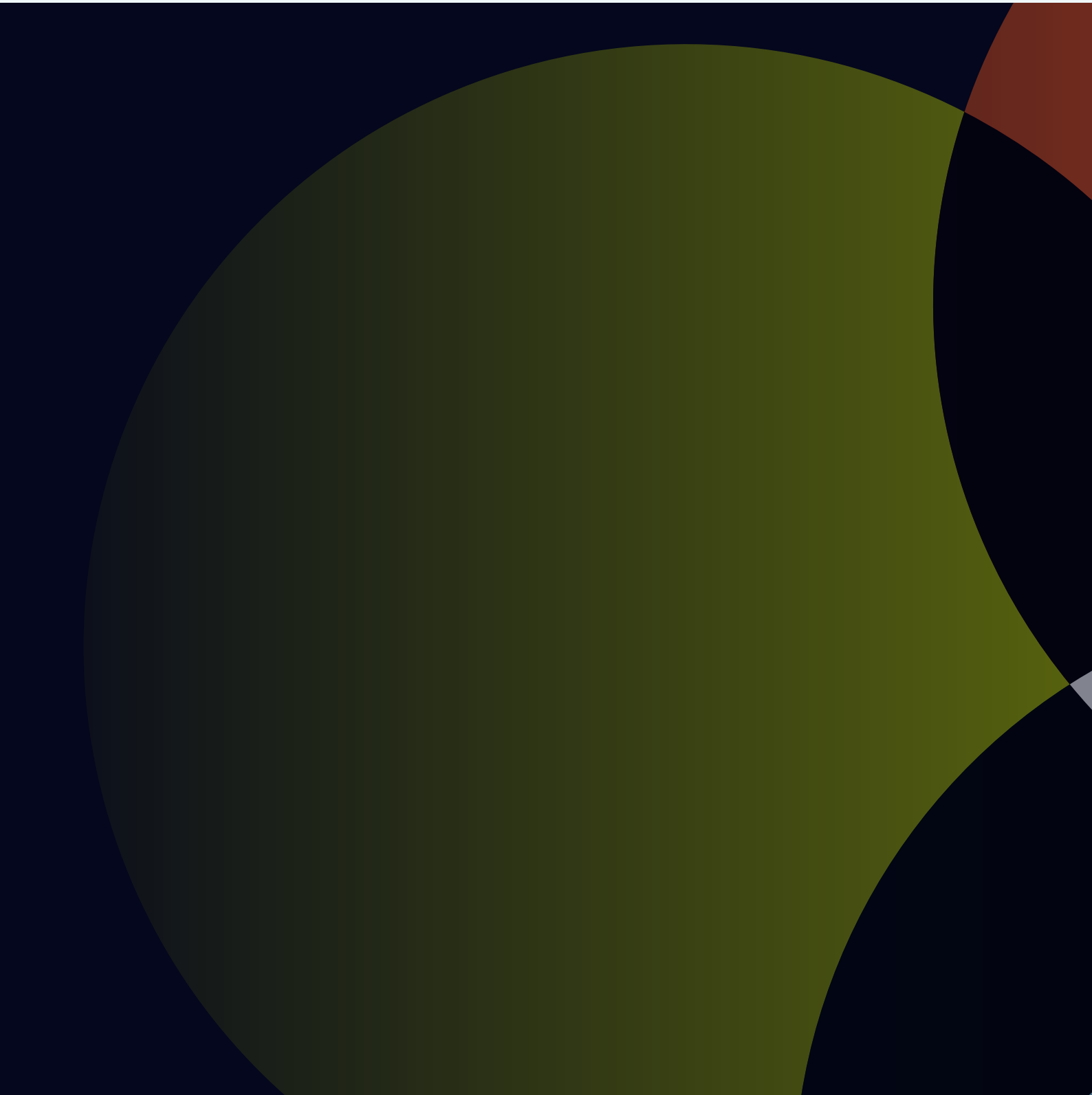
As a non-resident agency, partnerships are central to UNEP's mandate and delivery model, enabling the organisation to amplify its impact, leverage expertise, and promote coherence across the environmental dimension of sustainable development. UNEP engages with a broad range of partners, both in terms of financing (including the vertical funds) and in delivery (including UN entities, MEA secretariats, governments, scientific institutions, civil society, indigenous groups, and the private sector). These partnerships are instrumental in supporting implementation at the global, regional, and national levels, particularly through joint initiatives, technical co-operation, and policy alignment. UNEP has in recent years taken steps to strengthen and systematise its approach to partnerships, and it seeks to manage some of the risks from its partners through conducting due diligence before entering into (new) partnerships. UNEP has also strengthened its collaboration with UNCTs and RCs to ensure environmental priorities are integrated into UNSDCFsthough this remains work in progress and is affected by not being physically present in all countries where it operates.

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CHAPTER II

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE





Urban waste from Mombasa, Kenya

Close to the Mari Mani primary school is one of the main dumpsites for waste from Mombasa town. Many children can be found at the dumpsite collecting metals and plastic. Photo: © UNEP

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: NAVIGATING THE "TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS" IN A CHANGING MULTILATERAL CONTEXT

The period from January 2021 to September 2025 was marked by intensifying environmental pressures and a shifting geopolitical context for international co-operation. Global attention increasingly focused on the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – framed by UNEP as the "triple planetary crisis" — while the broader multilateral system faced significant disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions and tightening development finance (UNEP 2022). These dynamics reshaped the operating environment for multilateral institutions to support co-ordinated responses to global environmental challenges.

The triple planetary crisis has become the central framing of global environmental governance during the assessment period. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are increasingly recognised as mutually reinforcing crises requiring integrated responses across sectors and governance levels. Scientific assessments and international policy processes have highlighted the urgency of addressing these interconnected challenges, which affect ecosystems, economic systems and human security. As the United Nations system's leading environmental authority, UNEP occupies a central position in advancing international co-operation on these issues through its science-policy functions, convening role and support to multilateral environmental processes.

During the assessment period, global environmental governance has also been shaped by a series of major multilateral policy developments. These include the continued implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, the adoption of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and ongoing negotiations on new international instruments addressing issues such as plastic pollution. These developments reflect growing recognition among Member States of the need for stronger and more co-ordinated international environmental action. At the same time, the scale and urgency of environmental challenges have widened the gap between global commitments and the resources available for implementation, increasing pressure on international organisations to support countries in translating global environmental agreements into national policy and action.

The broader multilateral landscape has also undergone significant change during the assessment period. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped global development priorities and highlighted the interdependence between environmental sustainability, human health and economic resilience. Recovery strategies in many countries increasingly emphasised green recovery and sustainable investment, while the pandemic also disrupted international co-operation and strained public finances. Subsequently, geopolitical tensions, including those associated with the wars in Sudan and Ukraine, contributed to heightened uncertainty in global governance and increased pressure on international institutions to demonstrate their relevance and effectiveness in a fragmented political environment.

As part of its lateral co-operation, UNEP's role includes informing global environmental decision-making through scientific assessments, supporting environmental policy processes among Member States, and assisting countries in integrating environmental priorities into development planning and international commitments. The organisation's mandate therefore places it at the centre of international efforts to respond to the triple planetary crisis, including through its support to multilateral environment agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the chemicals and waste conventions, while navigating a multilateral system undergoing significant political, economic and institutional change.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT

UNEP's comparative advantages — its scientific authority, normative leadership, and convening power — are widely recognised and valued by member states and partners. UNEP's founding mandate as the UN system's environmental co-ordinator remains the function that most clearly distinguishes the organisation within the

multilateral system. This role is of high importance given that environmental authority is now increasingly dispersed across several UN entities, and it is examined in the further in Box 2 below on UNEP's comparative advantage in the context of UN80. Stakeholders also value UNEP's capacity to combine policy support, technical knowledge, and scientific credibility, with flagship knowledge products such as the Emissions Gap Report highly appreciated by stakeholders. Its hosting of certain MEA secretariats and its convening role in global environmental policy (for example, Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution) are established strengths.

The MTS 2022-25 marked a deliberate attempt to sharpen UNEP's strategic positioning around the intensifying triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. UNEP introduced a new medium-term strategy during the assessment period which recognised UNEP's comparative advantages — in particular its normative authority and UN system leadership role – and sharpened its positioning. Stakeholders praised the MTS as technically robust, conceptually disciplined and well aligned with the 2030 Agenda with a clear trajectory of increasing strategic ambition.

The organisation has addressed several of the areas highlighted for improvement in the previous MOPAN assessment. These include improvements to its RBM system during the assessment period through the adoption of the IPMR, which is now its main system for managing projects and capturing relevant performance information. It introduced a new Evaluation Policy and manual promoting consistency, strengthening tracking of recommendations, and introducing mechanisms to ensure that evaluation findings inform programme design. It has taken positive steps by focusing private sector engagements on a smaller group of strategically selected industry leaders.

UNEP's positive trajectory is also evidenced by progress towards its development and normative objectives, though sustainability remains an unresolved challenge. Project evaluations show pronounced improvements in key areas since the previous assessment, in particular effectiveness and financial management. UNEP has shown it can deliver results in science-based policy advice, capacity strengthening for national environmental governance, and global convening. The trajectory is positive and noteworthy. However, there remain several areas for further attention:

- Whilst almost three quarters of evaluated projects are now rated Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory, the highest proportion recorded in the past decade, many projects remain off-track in terms of timeliness, with implementation delays common, both due to external risks and UNEP's own processes.

- Evidence of enduring impact of projects is limited. UNEP does not undertake project post-completion follow-up systematically. Instead, its evaluation framework relies on end-of-project assessments to infer sustainability, which means the organisation cannot verify whether the institutional capacities it builds, the policies it helps draft, or the governance arrangements it supports continue to function once UNEP funding ends. UNEP's performance on this basis is mixed; while sustainability ratings have recovered from a dip in the previous period, the recovery brings performance back to a low baseline with only a minority of projects rated likely to sustain their benefits, a trend that has remained unchanged over the last eight years.

This assessment also reveals several areas for continued attention; the most significant is a structural misalignment in UNEP's organisational architecture between what it says it is for in the MTS and what it is aiming to deliver. For instance, several of UNEP's comparative advantages — including UNEP's original mandate as the UN system's environmental co-ordinator — receive limited attention in the MTS results architecture despite being the function that most clearly distinguishes the organisation from other actors. Furthermore, the MTS functions more effectively as a signalling instrument than as a direct management tool, with staff and partners frequently describing it as distant from operational decision-making and insufficiently translated into day-to-day priorities, particularly at regional and country levels.

BOX 3. **UNEP's comparative advantage in the context of UN80**

The UN80 process places UNEP at the centre of a broader reflection on how the environmental pillar of the UN system is organised (UN 2025a). UNEP's comparative advantage must be understood within an evolving institutional ecosystem in which multiple organisations exercise partial authority over different components of the global environmental agenda.

Academic literature has long highlighted the structural ambiguity surrounding UNEP's role in global environmental governance. Scholars like Maria Ivanova describe UNEP as the intended anchor institution for the global environment, designed primarily for agenda-setting, scientific assessment and system-wide co-ordination, rather than for large-scale operational delivery (Ivanova 2021a).

Environmental authority is increasingly dispersed across several multilateral entities with distinct forms of comparative advantage. For instance, UNESCO exercises leadership in science governance and environmental knowledge platforms, particularly in areas such as ocean science and global monitoring systems (MOPAN 2025a). UN-Habitat focuses on the global urban agenda, positioning cities as a key arena for environmental outcomes (MOPAN 2024c). And the Global Environment Facility (GEF) shapes environmental priorities through financial incentives as a funding mechanism for several multilateral environmental agreements (MOPAN 2025b). These institutional profiles illustrate a governance landscape in which environmental leadership is exercised through different forms of authority: scientific networks, sectoral policy platforms, development finance, and global environmental funding mechanisms.

The growing dispersion of environmental mandates reinforces the importance of UNEP's co-ordinating function, though its tools and resources for coordination need strengthening. As environmental challenges become more closely intertwined with economic systems, urbanisation, food production and financial flows, environmental authority becomes increasingly dispersed across the multilateral system. In this context, UNEP's founding resolution, to promote coherence and provide system-wide leadership for the environmental dimension of sustainable development, is increasingly important but there is a need for greater clarity on how it will deliver on this role. For instance, UNEP lacks a co-ordination strategy which articulates its role and approach, and is missing tools – such as accountability frameworks, joint programming indicators and joint reporting — which are increasingly being used by other agencies with co-ordinating mandates. Resources allocated to the co-ordination function also need to be reviewed for effective delivery.[a]

Growing integration of environmental issues into the sectoral mandates of organisations and development finance institutions requires UNEP to articulate subprogrammes clearly. For instance, UNEP's enabling subprogramme on finance and economic transformations must concentrate on norm-setting, taxonomy support, transparency standards and environmental risk metrics rather than financial intermediation. Clear articulation of this boundary will strengthen institutional positioning and avoid overlap with multilateral development banks.

a. For example, the EMG, which is responsible for co-ordinating 53 agencies on environmental matters, is serviced by a Secretariat of two staff.

This gap between strategic intent and operational practice is reinforced by the funding model. UNEP's financial position is stable, but it is structurally constrained: a heavy reliance on extrabudgetary resources, including the vertical funds, principally the GEF, incentivises the organisation to prioritise project throughput over the "upstream" science-policy leadership and agenda-setting on environmental governance that its strategy describes as central, and which is foundational for its normative work. The result is an organisation whose strategy points in one direction and whose funding pulls it in another.

The organisation's governance framework, while providing rigorous accountability, has also created operational friction. The two-year UNEA decision cycle is built around extensive preparatory consultations and negotiated resolutions among member states. As a result, it resembles the dynamics of an environmental treaty negotiation more than the continuous strategic steering and oversight typically expected in the governance of a modern international institution[1]. As part of the UN Secretariat, UNEP benefits from a detailed and comprehensive framework of financial regulations, delegation of authority, audit standards, anti-fraud mechanisms, and conduct and discipline procedures that leave little ambiguity in terms of what the rules require. However, the strength of this framework is also its limitation, as that same rigour that ensures accountability causes constraints. The delegation of authority framework is conceptually sound, but perceived by operational staff as complex, and operationalised through a multi-layer approval process, which has been a contributing factor to systemic delays in procurement and disbursement that are repeatedly flagged in oversight and audit reporting. The attempt to address these structural governance issues has been through the creation of committees, workstreams, and internal oversight layers, which has produced formal alignment without simplifying decision-making.

Whilst significant organisational reforms were introduced over the assessment period, moving UNEP closer to the logic of the MTS, the impact on performance to date has been incremental rather than transformational. The MTS was accompanied by consequential organisational reforms which included the introduction of the Climate Change division, the creation of a Chief Digital Officer role, the rollout of the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting (IPMR) system within UMOJA, and a new Delivery Model intended to strengthen coherence between headquarters, regional offices, and country-level engagement. Management reforms are thus visible over time, but the pace of change has not kept up with the demands of the triple planetary crises. The new "One UNEP Delivery" model in particular signals an important ambition for reform but has not yet acquired the necessary management infrastructure to function as an integrated mechanism. In practice, the approach has reinforced a model in which concentration of

1. The JIU Review of Management and Administration in the United Nations Environment Programme (JIU/REP/2025/1) noted that the role of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, as the intersessional subsidiary body of the Environment Assembly could be enhanced, and recommended that its mandate and role should be clarified and frequency of its formal meetings be examined.



Polluted Beach – Haiti

UNEP runs a Marine Environment Regeneration programme in the country's South Department that aims to promote marine ecosystems regeneration and the sustainable management of marine resources.
Photo: © UNEP

decision-making authority coexists with a fragmentation of delivery and accountability. For example, regional offices can contribute to co-creation and technical inputs but have limited authority over budget execution or resource reallocation. These issues are explored in more detail in Box 4 below on *UNEP's efficiency in the context of UN80*.

BOX 4. **UNEP's efficiency in the context of UN80**

Discussions within the United Nations place increasing emphasis on operational efficiency as a prerequisite for the system's long-term relevance. The ongoing reform agenda on business innovation frames efficiency primarily as a question of reducing fragmentation in the UN system's operational architecture. Parallel administrative systems across UN entities continue to create duplication in areas such as procurement, human resources and financial management, recommending greater reliance on "mutual recognition" of policies and procedures to reduce transaction costs (JIU 2024). The UN Development System Efficiency Roadmap 2025-28 (UNSDG 2025) expands this agenda by prioritising shared services, harmonised business operations and interoperable digital systems across the UN development system. The system-wide evaluation of the new generation of UN country teams (SWEO 2025) reinforces these findings from the country perspective, concluding that operational fragmentation continues to limit the ability of UN country teams to function as integrated entities and calling for accelerated harmonisation of administrative systems and business processes across agencies.

UNEP's response to UN80 funding cuts and donor announcements was informed by a functional review. The Functional Review was initiated in spring 2025 ahead of the Secretary-General's announcement and actions identified were being implemented as this assessment was being undertaken. Measures planned include consolidation of offices/functions, movement of posts to lower-cost duty stations and build-out of shared administrative platforms. 23 UNEP posts were submitted for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for abolishment.

UNEP's limited country presence shapes how the efficiency of its delivery model is perceived. UNEP is a relatively small, largely non-resident entity with a catalytic mandate, whereas many UN efficiency reforms implicitly assume organisations with large field delivery operations. UNEP also relies largely on project-based engagement through regional offices rather than formal country or regional strategies. While this approach provides flexibility, it can lead to reactive programming and slower responses to partner demand.

UNEP's partnership-based delivery model is efficient in principle but unevenly operationalised. UNEP delivers primarily through partners and national systems rather than through direct implementation structures. This model allows the organisation to leverage partners' operational systems, but it also places UNEP within a complex ecosystem of partnerships and governance arrangements, including with MEAs and vertical funds, that increase co-ordination requirements and can affect operational decision-making. Project design documents typically include contextual analysis but provide limited information on partner capacity assessments or structured analysis of delivery arrangements, which can make it more difficult to optimise implementation approaches and clearly demonstrate results.

UNEP makes use of common services for administrative efficiency, but its efficiency challenges stem less from resource constraints than from structural features of its operating model and institutional arrangements. Administrative processes are highly centralised, with challenges in co-ordination between UNEP divisions, corporate services and the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON). Reliance on service providers for administrative services has the potential to provide efficiencies of scale and scope if implemented without adding procedural layers in procurement, recruitment and financial management. Programme management

also requires multiple internal review bodies and clearance steps across divisions and corporate services. These arrangements can slow approvals, complicate project revisions and increase transaction costs in programme implementation. In areas such as HR, UN Secretariat policies can also hinder efficient processes and strategic decision-making.

At an intervention level, the central efficiency challenge for UNEP is the ability to consistently document, track and demonstrate how its catalytic interventions translate into sustained outcomes. Evidence from evaluations indicates that UNEP generally achieves a majority of its stated output and outcome objectives and contributes to significant normative and policy outcomes. UNEP also demonstrates operational practices that can generate efficiencies, but it lacks consistent analytical tools to measure cost-effectiveness, compare delivery modalities or quantify value for money.

Whilst the organisation has strengths at the global level, there remains a gap between this work and country-level interventions and engagement. The challenge lies in translating UNEP's normative and upstream strengths into sustained country-level engagement, particularly beyond the lifetime of individual projects. As a non-resident agency, UNEP has no sustained country presence, no official country strategies, and a delivery model that places programme design responsibility on the HQ-based technical divisions, with regional offices contributing at varied levels of co-creation, such as in project proposals. Partnerships at the country level often evolve around funding opportunities rather than through deliberate articulation of UNEP's unique value, which makes it difficult to achieve sustained normative influence beyond individual project cycles.

UNEP has improved its systems for collecting performance data, but how exactly this feeds back into planning decisions, target-setting, or intervention adjustments is often opaque. The organisation has invested in corporate results-based management systems, and monitoring data flows upward through annual performance reports, management reviews, and quarterly reporting to member states. Yet the feedback loop that should connect what the organisation knows about its performance to what it decides to do next is, for practical purposes, incomplete, with a target-setting process that is not visibly linked to actual performance, and no documented evidence that specific adjustments in interventions, reallocations, or de-prioritisation are undertaken based on performance data. At the project level, results-based management is more established, but the causal linkages from projects to subprogramme outcomes and strategic impact are not yet fully articulated. The independent evaluation function is a notable exception, having further strengthened since the last assessment, with new project designs required to reference and apply lessons from evaluations, although uptake is uneven. The gap is not in evidence production, but in the institutional mechanisms that would connect evaluative findings to programmatic re-prioritisations.

CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE TRAJECTORY

The 2025 global SDG monitoring updates by the United Nations indicate that the environmental SDGs remain largely off track. Climate indicators continue to deteriorate, with greenhouse gas concentrations and temperature anomalies reaching record highs in 2024. Biodiversity loss, land degradation and ecosystem decline remain structurally embedded trends rather than cyclical shocks. Pollution, particularly air pollution, waste generation and chemical contamination, continue to impose heavy health and economic costs. Progress in sustainable consumption and production remains insufficient relative to rising global material footprints. In short, environmental pressures are systemic, interlinked and accelerating, while implementation gaps persist across governance capacity, policy coherence and investment scale. (United Nations 2025a)

In parallel, while UNEP has benefited in recent years from increased funding available to support environmental objectives, today the availability of funding is increasingly constrained. OECD reporting indicates that official



Joint Commemoration of International Women's Day (IWD) 2026 and International Day of Women and Girls

The official United Nations joint observance for International Women's Day (IWD) 2026 took place on March 9, 2026, at UN Headquarters in New York.
Photo: © Ahmed Nayim Yussuf/ UNEP

development assistance declined by 23.1% in 2025 and is projected to decline a further 5.8% in 2026. While international climate-related development finance has grown in nominal terms, aggregate flows remain far below the trillions annually required to align with climate, biodiversity, and pollution targets. Adaptation finance in particular remains underrepresented relative to vulnerability exposure. Biodiversity and pollution-related finance remain less systematically tracked and comparatively smaller (OECD 2025a).

These budget pressures are already being felt by UNEP. UNEP's regular budget was reduced in line with the Secretary-General's proposal, and some Member States have notified UNEP of funding reductions to the Environment Fund. UNEP will also be affected by the funding reductions facing global funds. For example, GEF stakeholders interviewed estimated the next replenishment (GEF-9) would be 15-20% lower than current levels.

Against this backdrop, UNEP's three successive MTS cycles demonstrate a clear evolution in institutional positioning, programmatic architecture, and ambition. The trajectory moves from a primarily issue-structured environmental programme to an increasingly systems-oriented, finance-aware, and governance-integrated strategy, with a stronger emphasis on UNEP's normative authority and UN system leadership role. Substantively, the evolution across the three MTS cycles also shows increasing economic realism. The 2018-21 strategy focused on environmental outcomes in largely ecological terms. By 2022-25, the narrative linked environmental stability to economic resilience and social equity. In 2026-29, the framing is overtly macroeconomic: debt distress, investment risk, critical minerals, circular industrial transformation, and nature-positive finance are central analytical pillars. UNEP is positioning itself not only as an environmental norm-setter acting under the guidance of Member States but as an actor engaged with financial markets, fiscal systems, and economic transition pathways. This reflects both the scale of the environmental crisis and the recognition that traditional project-based environmental programming cannot close systemic gaps.

However, a critical tension remains across all three strategies. Each successive MTS increases ambition, scope, and integrative framing, yet UNEP's resource base and mandate constraints have not expanded commensurately. The move from thematic programming to system transformation raises questions about operational feasibility and prioritisation. While the 2026-29 strategy emphasiSes selectivity and comparative advantage, it simultaneously expands into digital governance, financial system reform, strategic foresight, the environmental footprint of digital technologies, including AI, and cross-sectoral transformation. The risk is strategic overstretch, particularly given

BOX 5. **Examples of how other multilateral organisations are addressing similar challenges faced by UNEP**

MOPAN assessments of other multilateral organisations highlight best practices and innovative approaches being adopted to address similar challenges faced by UNEP. These include:

- **Articulation of co-ordination mandate in strategic documentation — UN Women**. UN Women's co-ordination mandate is more prominent in its latest Strategic Plan 2026-29. This includes setting out the tools and mechanisms – System-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, UN-SWAP, IASC Gender Policy Accountability Framework — through which it will contribute to institutional UN-system strengthening and accountability for gender equality. Its Co-ordination Strategy sets out how it will deliver its co-ordination mandate (Theories of Change; roles and responsibilities, monitoring and learning etc).

- **Co-ordination mechanisms and tools — OHCHR**: The recently created Human Rights Council has a similar system-wide co-ordination and mainstreaming agenda to EMG. Its approach, structure and mechanisms may offer insights that will enable the EMG to strengthen value-added and impact.

- **Thematic "results chains" to promote collaboration and joint reporting across programmes and affiliated entities – UNESCO**: UNESCO's Programme and Budget for 2026-29 strengthened cross-organisation thematic results chains to align sectors, institutes and other actors around common outcomes, created shared theories of change, and establish common indicators for results reporting. Intersectoral outputs identified include the contributions of functionally autonomous "Category 1" Institutes. At UNEP, while the MEAs are fully independent entities, a similar approach could provide a voluntary mechanism for identifying and articulating collaboration based on the needs and offerings of each party.

- **Performance feedback loops that inform prioritisation and strategic discussion — Multilateral Climate Funds**: Several funds undertake comprehensive evaluations that draw on project evaluations and other sources to provide evidence on the organisations' performance and make recommendations on how to strengthen transformational impact that inform strategy-setting processes. Such exercises include post-completion project follow-up for a sample of projects to assess long-term impact including leverage effects and scaling. The MCFs have also strengthened results reporting by aligning their reporting approaches and indicators, enabling the aggregation of results across funds and providing a more coherent picture of collective contributions to global climate goals.

- **Sustainable financing for normative functions – WHO**: In the Sustainable Financing Decision (WHA75(8)), Member States agreed to increase the share of assessed contributions gradually to provide a larger share of predictable and flexible funding. The agreement linked increased assessed contributions to improvements in organisational performance and governance, including concrete measures to strengthen transparency, accountability, efficiency, compliance and budgetary oversight.

UNEP's reliance on extra-budgetary funding and the persistent imbalance between core and earmarked resources noted in internal evaluations. UNEP's strategic expansion must be accompanied by explicit clarity on comparative advantage.

Another point of evolution concerns results frameworks and accountability. The 2018-21 strategy was primarily outcome-oriented but operationally diffuse. The 2022-25 MTS strengthened impact articulation around medium-term environmental outcomes. The 2026-29 strategy goes further in linking resource mobiliSation and human resource

allocation explicitly to expected results, reflecting a more performance-driven management culture. Yet, whether this translates into sharper prioritisation or simply more complex reporting remains an open question.

In light of these dynamics, several strategic considerations emerge for decision-makers across senior management, MOPAN members and governing body representatives:

- **Prioritisation discipline**. UNEP's strategic evolution demonstrates increasing ambition with the organisation moving from issue-based environmental programming toward a more integrated model that links environmental sustainability with economic transformation, financial systems, digital innovation, and governance reform. However, this evolution also introduces risks. Each successive strategy expands UNEP's scope while resources remain constrained. There is therefore a danger of strategic overstretch unless priorities are clearly defined and linked to realistic resource assumptions. In particular, Member States must set clearer expectations for UNEP and address a fundamental governance question: whether the organisation should primarily function as the UN system's strategic environmental authority focused on norm-setting, co-ordination and policy influence or as a project-based implementing partner within the existing financing architecture.

- **Alignment between strategic ambition and resources.** UNEP's heightened strategic ambition has not been matched by a corresponding expansion of flexible resources or institutional authority, leaving UNEP to pursue system-level objectives with a funding model still dominated by earmarked project finance. This over-reliance on project-earmarked resources undermines strategic coherence and constrains its capacity to deliver on its normative and co-ordination roles. Strengthening alignment between ambition and resources will require action on both sides. This includes clearer prioritisation and allocation of funds based on transparent processes, and improvements in the predictability and flexibility of voluntary funding. In particular, decision-makers should consider linking strategic expansion to minimum thresholds of flexible funding, potentially through multi-year indicative pledges or core capacity compacts, to prevent over-reliance on earmarked funds.



Grenada, reefs and erosion

Mangroves are being planted in tubes at the heavily eroded beach of Telescope. The woman is bringing seawater to water the small mangrove plants at the nursery, Telescope Mangrove Propagation Nursery, Grenada.
Photo: © Kadir van Lohuizen / NOOR

- **Results information and accountability.** Strategy approvals should be accompanied by a strengthened results framework that traces causal pathways from outputs to behavioural, financial and policy outcomes. Portfolio-level KPIs should track leverage effects, including policy adoption, financial alignment and regulatory reform influence. Independent validation or external advisory review of flagship impact claims would align with leading multilateral evaluation standards.

- **Multilateral system coherence and reform alignment.** As UN reform processes evolve, UNEP's positioning as the environmental anchor within the system requires greater clarity on how it will promote environment objectives across the system (including MEA secretariats, development agencies, resident co-ordinators), backed by measurable joint programming indicators.

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CHAPTER III

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS





The Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, 2024

The Gala of Hope celebrates a new group of UN World Restoration Flagships – the world's most successful examples of healing the planet – as well as the re-launch of UNEP's Young Champions of the Earth programme, with a focus on protecting and restoring nature. The awardees include seven new World Restoration Flagships, restoring almost 40 million hectares across 20+ countries. Photo: © UNEP / Kiara Worth

This chapter provides a more detailed assessment of UNEP's performance across the five performance areas — strategic management, operational management, relationship management, performance management and results — and the KPIs that relate to each area, accompanied by their score and rating.

MOPAN PERFORMANCE SCORING AND RATING SCALE

- Highly satisfactory (3.51-4.00)
- Satisfactory (2.51-3.50)
- Unsatisfactory (1.51-2.50)
- Highly unsatisfactory (0.00-1.50)
- No evidence / Not applicable

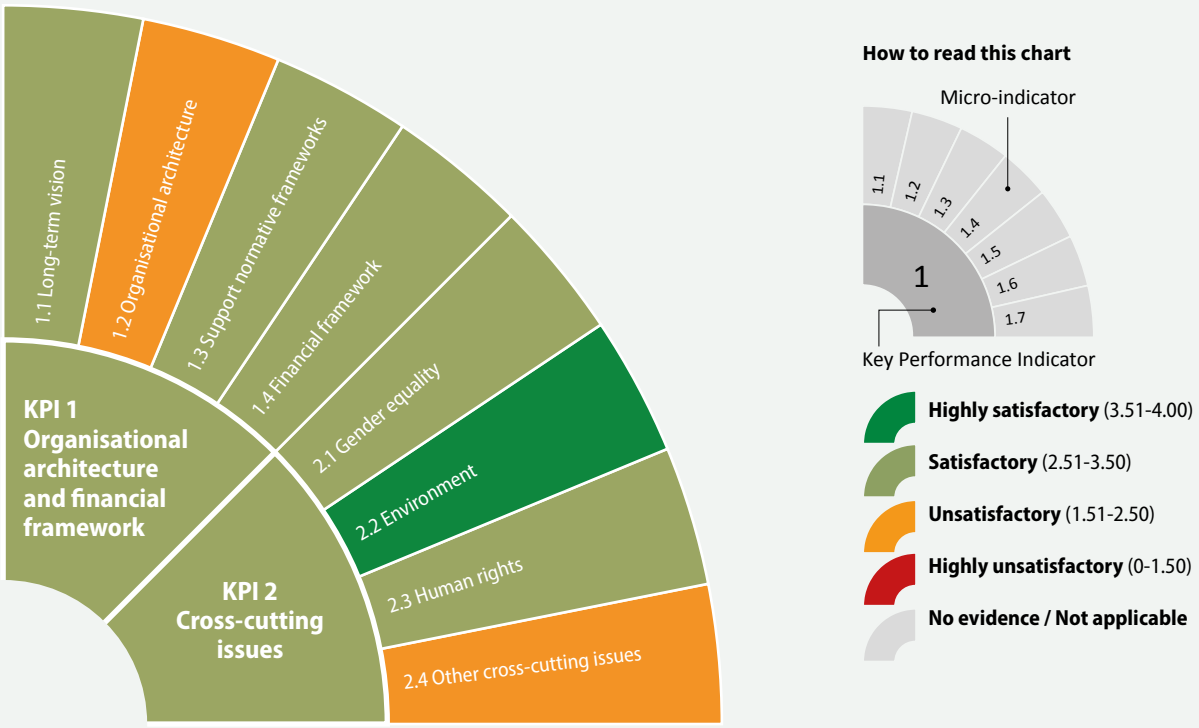
Assessment key findings draw on information from the three evidence sources (document reviews, interviews and a partner survey — see Chapter 4 for more information). Further analysis per micro-indicator and detailed scoring can be found in Annex A, while the full survey results are included in Annex C. For the full list and citation details of the documents referred to, please see Annex B.

ORGANISATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Clear strategic direction geared to key functions, intended results and the integration of relevant cross-cutting priorities.

FIGURE 5. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNEP'S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**



UNEP remains highly relevant in a world where environmental challenges cut across sectors and institutions, but in a resource-constrained environment this requires clearer strategic choices. UNEP is expected to demonstrate system-wide environmental results despite operating in a governance environment where authority, delivery capacity and accountability are fragmented across the UN system, creating a structural mismatch between its co-ordinating mandate and its implementation responsibilities.

KPI 1: Organisational architecture and financial framework enable mandate implementation and achievement of expected results

Satisfactory	2.76

UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy 2022-25 provides a coherent and credible strategic frame for addressing the triple planetary crises, offering clarity of purpose and a shared reference point for Member States and partners. The strategy is widely regarded as technically robust, well aligned with the 2030 Agenda and conceptually disciplined, and governance stakeholders express high confidence in UNEP's long-term vision. At the same time, the MTS functions more effectively as a signalling instrument than as a direct management tool, with staff and partners frequently describing it as distant from operational decision-making and insufficiently translated into day-to-day priorities, particularly at regional and country levels. The Programme of Work has steadily strengthened its results logic and alignment with strategic objectives, reflecting incremental institutional learning and improved planning discipline. Results chains and indicators are more developed than in earlier cycles, and project-level accountability has become clearer. Nevertheless, fragmentation across subprogrammes — as in the case of climate action - overlapping indicators, and inconsistent metrics continue to dilute strategic coherence.

UNEP's core normative and co-ordination functions, including MEA substantive work and UN system-wide environmental co-ordination, are weakly reflected in the results architecture, limiting visibility, resourcing, and managerial attention to mandates that define UNEP's distinct system-wide role. Strategic review and adaptation mechanisms are formally embedded in UNEP's governance cycle but remain more responsive to external political signals than to internal performance or risk analysis. Regular reporting to governing bodies and mid-cycle reviews provide transparency and procedural accountability, yet evidence-based strategic adjustment is limited. Risk management frameworks and evaluative products exist and are improving in quality, but they are not yet systematically linked to strategic recalibration, resulting in adaptation that is cautious and incremental rather than anticipatory.

UNEP's comparative advantage in science-based policy advice, normative leadership, and convening power remains a genuine and widely recognised institutional asset that needs to be more strategically operationalised. UNEP is consistently valued for its scientific authority, assessment functions, and role in shaping global environmental discourse, including through its stewardship of major knowledge platforms and support to multilateral environmental agreements. However, this advantage is not systematically analysed vis-à-vis other environmental actors, nor consistently leveraged to shape programme choices, partnership models, or country engagement strategies. Heavy reliance on vertical funds, such as GEF and GCF, reinforces this tension, as funding incentives prioritise project throughput and compliance over upstream policy leadership and agenda-setting.

UNEP's governance arrangements are characterised by inclusiveness and legitimacy, but also practical constraints on agility and strategic steering. The transition to universal membership under UNEA has strengthened political ownership and visibility, while the CPR provides a continuous oversight forum. At the same time, the CPR's non-decision-making status creates a gap between intersessional monitoring and timely strategic or budgetary decisions, encouraging procedural workarounds and reinforcing a tendency to address emerging issues through additional structures rather than clarified authority. The two-year UNEA decision cycle, built around extensive preparatory consultations and negotiated resolutions among member states, resembles the dynamics of an environmental treaty negotiation more than the continuous strategic steering and oversight typically expected in the governance of a modern international institution. This dynamic contributes to governance that is procedurally dense but strategically cautious.

Organisational structures broadly reflect UNEP's expansive mandate and political expectations, but increasing complexity has strained coherence and accountability. The organisation has adapted incrementally to new thematic priorities and Member State demands, demonstrating institutional flexibility. However, uneven

capacity across divisions and regions, outdated foundational documents, overlapping roles, and varied MEA hosting arrangements create ambiguity over responsibilities and weaken strategic alignment. Structural expansion has often occurred without commensurate resourcing, reinforcing perceptions of centralisation combined with fragmented accountability. The "One UNEP Delivery" model represents a credible and necessary attempt to strengthen organisational coherence, particularly between headquarters and regional operations. Its conceptual rationale is strong and aligns with long-standing reform objectives. Implementation, however, remains uneven, with persistent silos, weak horizontal accountability, and limited integration of performance management systems. Internal perspectives acknowledge gradual progress, while external partners and oversight bodies continue to see the model as aspirational rather than embedded, reflecting cultural and managerial constraints rather than design flaws.

UNEP's financial position is stable and well managed from a fiduciary perspective, yet structurally constrained by its funding model. Dependence on earmarked, project-based resources has enabled scale and delivery but has also produced uneven financing across subprogrammes and chronic underinvestment in core functions. The Environment Fund remains central to flexibility, but contribution targets — unchanged for decades — are widely seen as political rather than financially grounded. Dual budget processes exist because of UNEP's different funding sources. Following the JIU review's findings, UNEP has taken action to ensure greater consistency in the budgetary information shared with UNEA and the General Assembly, and to comply with UN Financial Regulations. Efforts to diversify funding sources, increase flexibility, and expand pooled financing demonstrate institutional awareness of these constraints, even if results remain modest. Initiatives such as the Planetary Funds signal strategic intent, but donor incentives continue to favour earmarking, and administrative complexity limits uptake. As a result, UNEP's role as a policy-setting and co-ordinating authority is structurally constrained by the very funding mechanisms that enable its operational reach, reinforcing a persistent tension between normative ambition and project-driven delivery.

KPI 2: Structures and mechanisms support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda principles

Satisfactory	2.84

Overall, a picture emerges whereby UNEP is particularly strong on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, which are supported by strong commitments, statements, and a results architecture. Human Rights are also considered throughout, but less explicitly. Youth and Food Systems, the other cross-cutting areas which UNEP and MOPAN agreed to consider in this assessment, lack specific (policy) commitments and resources, which limits mainstreaming. Youth was considered because of UNEP's explicit focus on future generations and the International Court of Justice's advisory ruling that states have an obligation to protect the environment following advocacy by youth.[1] Food systems, meanwhile, were considered because of their impact on the environment, and the environment's crucial impact on food systems. UNEP's mandate, among further policies and guidance, ensures a consistent focus on Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability across the organisation.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is pursued through its Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment and the application of UN-SWAP, and stakeholders actively see UNEP promoting gender equality through its operations. With Human Rights, the picture is more mixed. UNEP's mandate means it directly contributes to the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment which is a precondition to the enjoyment of other human rights. The PPMM identifies Women's Empowerment, Disability Inclusion, and Socio-Economic vulnerability as other important elements of human rights. However, in practice it is not always clear

1. See About the United Nations Environment Programme | UNEP – UN Environment Programme and World Court says countries are legally obligated to curb emissions, protect climate | UN News



The Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, 2024

Former Young Champions of the Earth Nzambi Matee, Molly Burhans, Sonika Manandhar, and Omar Itani at the Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, on February 27 2024.
Photo: © UNEP / Kiara Worth

from UNEP's programming how it seeks to implement these and more specific human rights, for example in relation to cultural, economic, and political rights. Explicit language about such human rights is limited. UNEP does not consider Youth or Food Systems to be cross-cutting issues that must be integrated across all of its programming, and they do not come with dedicated strategies. UNEP does, however, have a Major Group on Youth and a Food Systems Co-ordinator. As a result of these issues not being considered cross-cutting programming imperatives, their integration in programming depends largely on the requirements of specific projects.

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment are most strongly reflected in UNEP's indicators, targets, and accountability systems. UNEP sets, monitors, and reports against internal organisational targets on these two cross-cutting issues by focusing on its Environmental Sustainability Policy and UN-SWAP. It uses its biannual Programme Performance Report to report on its corporate-level indicators in these areas, while internally there is regular project-level reporting resulting in a cascading accountability mechanism. Compliance with UNEP's own Environmental and Social Safeguards should ensure that no human or environmental rights are violated, but accountability on human rights beyond the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is hampered by a lack of specific indicators. UNEP would, therefore, benefit from a more explicit approach to integrating specific human rights across its programming.

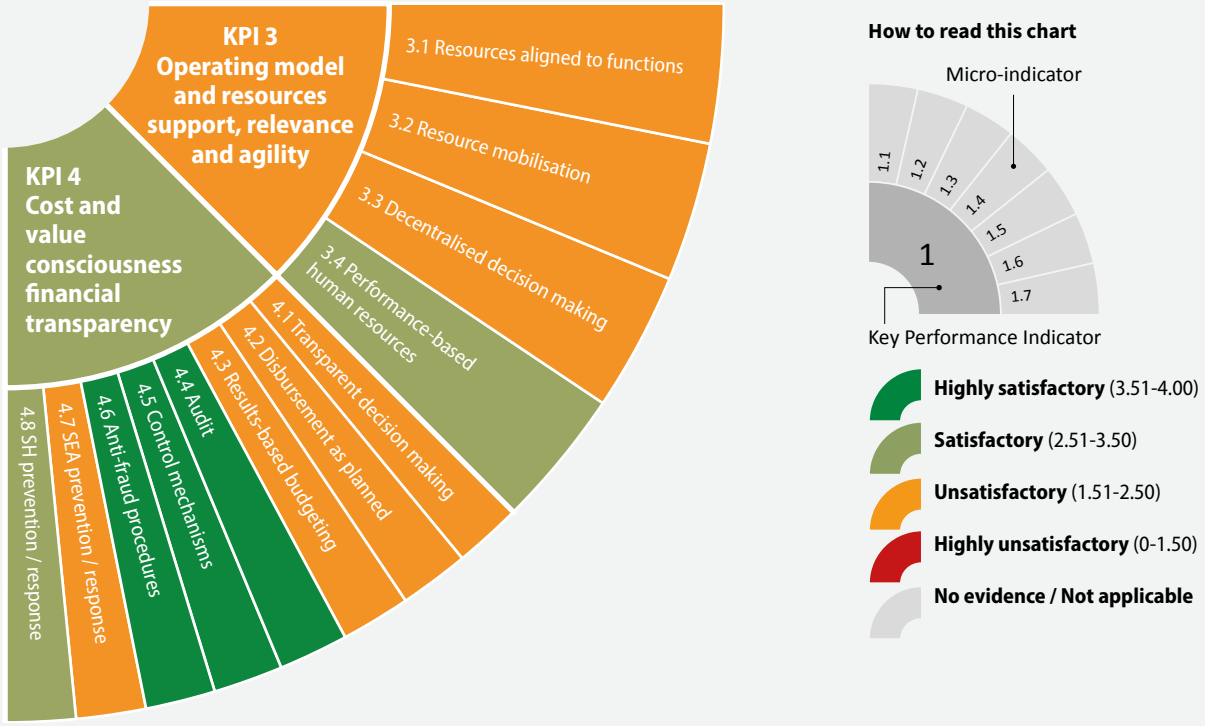
It is more difficult to ascertain the quality of implementation of UNEP's activities as they relate to cross-cutting issues. UNEP's own Evaluation Synthesis Report finds that implementing mandatory gender markers has not led to improved mainstreaming of gender in programmatic work, and only 46% of evaluated projects score highly satisfactory or satisfactory on responsiveness to human rights and gender equality, which contrasts sharply with environmental and social safeguards where 79% of projects achieved a highly satisfactory or satisfactory score in 2022-23. The lack of dedicated human rights indicators, and optional tagging in IPMR, further complicates the ability to assess UNEP's achievements in this regard. On youth and food systems even, less information is available.

The adequacy of human and financial resources available to address cross-cutting issues cannot always be determined. For example, all of UNEP's budget can be seen as being in support of climate change and environmental sustainability, but the same cannot be said for other cross-cutting issues. The PPMM mandates that projects make resources available to support gender mainstreaming, but it is not clear what is considered sufficient and how this mandate is enforced in practice. There is a Gender and Safeguards Unit, but evidence suggests it is under resourced and UNEP's core budget does not provide specific resources for this unit or the gender focal points serving the organisation. It is also not possible to identify how many resources are dedicated to the cross-cutting issues of human rights, youth, or food systems — evidence makes clear these cross-cutting issues are supported by UNEP, for example there is a Major Group on Youth and a Food Systems Co-ordinator, but the high reliance on extra budgetary funding and project initiatives makes their mainstreaming vulnerable.

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Assets and capacities organised behind strategic direction and intended results, to ensure relevance, agility and accountability.

FIGURE 6. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNEP'S OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT**



UNEP's operating model remains largely project-based, creating a structural mismatch between strategic intent and operational incentives. Organisational structures cut across subprogrammes and only partially align. This involves a complex array of units and funding sources, which fragments accountability and leaves core normative functions comparatively under-resourced.

KPI 3: Operating model and human and financial resources support relevance and agility

Unsatisfactory	2.22

Structural realignment since 2022 has moved UNEP closer to the logic of the MTS, but the net effect to date is incremental coherence rather than a step-change in organisational performance. The creation of new thematic capacity and the relocation of vertical fund co-ordination (GEF/GCF) towards the Policy and Programme Division signal an intent to connect delivery modalities to strategic steering, yet oversight evidence and staff accounts still describe a fragmented operating architecture with duplicated roles and weak end-to-end accountability. This "partial progress" profile is consistent with the Joint Inspection Unit's finding that the "One UNEP Delivery" approach still lacks the basic management infrastructure, such as corporate guidance and a monitoring framework, required to translate an organisational model into measurable, comparable performance across divisions and regions. The recurring pattern is that organisational frictions are addressed through additional committees, workstreams, and layered controls rather than through simplification of decision rights, sharper accountability matrices across unit interfaces, and a tighter integration of strategy, budgeting, and performance evidence. This fragmentation is further shaped by UNEP's institutional ecosystem of multilateral environmental agreements and collaborating centres, which extend

its normative reach but operate with varying governance arrangements and accountability relationships. While these arrangements amplify UNEP's convening and technical influence, they also add layers of institutional complexity that complicate strategic alignment, performance oversight and clear lines of organisational responsibility.

Operational functions continue to be managed through additional internal structures and workstreams that risk increasing transaction costs without clarifying decision making. UNEP's reliance on UNON for key business operations (HR, procurement, financial services) creates a three-tier arrangement, i.e. divisional administrative units, UNEP corporate services, and UNON/other providers, that stakeholders associate with slow workflows and co-ordination challenges, especially when processes involve multiple locations and time zones. The JIU's analysis of common services arrangements and the perceived need for more tailored service targets reinforce that this is not merely a "process irritation," but a structural governance issue affecting managerial agency, cycle times, and the credibility of accountability lines. While UNEP as part of the UN Secretariat faces certain constraints in the choice of service providers, a more enthusiastic approach to UN reform could offer new opportunities for administrative outsourcing.

Workforce reforms are directionally appropriate but remain constrained by a funding model and service architecture that make strategic workforce planning difficult to operationalise. On the positive side, UNEP's PoW update describes active skills mapping, a developing human resource strategy, investment in staff development tools (including a corporate academy), and continued work on gender parity and geographical diversity, all elements that are consistent with professionalisation and capability-building for an increasingly technical mandate. At the same time, oversight reporting points to persistent vacancy pressures in critical functions and locations, and a growing weight of affiliate personnel in the overall workforce, which increases flexibility but also heightens risks around consistency, performance management coverage, and organisational cohesion if not actively monitored and governed.

Results-based budgeting remains more aspirational than operational because strategic prioritisation is structurally dominated by earmarked funding and by governance arrangements that are better suited to compliance than to allocative discipline. The Board of Auditors' finding that performance indicators and targets were rolled over or insufficiently recalibrated, sometimes even lagging behind already-achieved performance, signals a planning-and-budgeting system that can produce "formal alignment" without improving decision quality on trade-offs, sequencing, or marginal resource allocation. This matters because it weakens the feedback loop between strategy, budgeting, and performance management: when targets are not credible and indicators are not refreshed, governance discussions can default to narrative programme review rather than enforceable choices about what will be stopped, reduced, or scaled.

Flexible financing instruments have been introduced, but have not yet reduced UNEP's dependence on vertical and project-based funding, which affects its policy-setting and normative role. The Planetary Funds concept is strategically coherent as a vehicle for softly earmarked contributions aligned to the triple planetary crisis, yet contributions between 2022 and April 2025 totalled roughly USD 31.2 million against an expected USD 90 million, with a narrow contributor base and no evaluation completed since launch. In practice, UNEP's financing remains anchored in donor-preferred earmarking and vertical fund modalities, which tends to favour project throughput over investments in system-wide co-ordination, normative functions, and organisational learning, especially when those functions are harder to package as discrete projects or to attribute through existing results architectures.

Delegation of authority and decentralisation remain limited not primarily by policy intent, but by unresolved governance interfaces and ambiguous clearance/approval practices that inhibit adaptive management. Delays are driven by ad hoc confirmation processes, uneven application of clearance rules, and the need for a thorough review and update of the UNEP delegation of authority framework in the context of "One UNEP Delivery." This reinforces a

centralised model in which regional and country actors can contribute to co-creation and technical inputs but have limited authority over budget execution or resource reallocation, reflecting a "voice without power" dynamic. While this may fit a primarily normative agency, it constrains responsiveness where UNEP is increasingly expected to show delivery traction and country-level problem solving.

Human resource performance management systems exist and have been strengthened in principle, but they do not yet function as a management lever for organisational learning, collaboration, or resource decisions. The broader evidence base highlights persistent concerns about decision-making centralisation, administrative burden, and uneven implementation of managerial processes across the organisation. These are conditions that typically produce compliance-oriented appraisal behaviour rather than performance-oriented management. The practical implication is that performance assessment risks becoming primarily a bureaucratic process, i.e. completed variably, weakly linked to consequences, and not aggregated into actionable insight, rather than a tool that informs talent decisions, capability investments, or the reallocation of managerial attention toward cross-divisional outcomes.

KPI 4: Organisational systems are cost- and value-conscious and enable transparency and accountability

Satisfactory	2.86

UNEP's financial oversight and accountability architecture is comprehensive on paper, grounded in UN Secretariat-wide standards and supported by independent audit and investigation functions, yet its operational effectiveness is uneven and constrained by internal bottlenecks that have persisted throughout the assessment period. The organisation benefits from a well-codified policy framework spanning anti-fraud, internal controls, enterprise risk management, and conduct and discipline, and from the structural independence of its oversight



The Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, 2024

Flagship winner Chadi Mohanna, Vice Chair of Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Silva Mediterrana, Director Rural Development and Natural Resources Ministry of Agriculture, Lebanon at the Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, on 27 February 2024.
Photo: © UNEP / Kiara Worth

bodies: the Board of Auditors for external audit and OIOS for internal audit, both of which apply internationally recognised public-sector standards. Audited financial statements have consistently received unqualified opinions, management responses to audit findings are systematically issued and tracked, and recommendation compliance is monitored through quarterly business reviews against an 85% implementation benchmark. These are genuine institutional strengths. At the same time, the risk management system's reach is limited by the gap between formal standards and their consistent application, such as capacity gaps in PROU, such as capacity gaps in PROU, who often rely on document verification to verify project-level. The JIU characterises UNEP's enterprise risk management framework as "not yet fully mature," with the ERM Committee having convened infrequently since 2021, and oversight bodies continue to flag issues including outstanding balances, missing partner audit and co-financing reports, and workflow bottlenecks in UMOJA that limit real-time financial visibility. Audit management responses continue to be issued, with recommendations tracked and followed up in a timely and transparent manner. Both BoA and OIOS recommendations, and their implementation compliance (against an 85% benchmark) are tracked in the QBR.

Resource allocation to partners lacks a unified, transparent policy framework, and disbursement delays are due to internal procedural constraints rather than external shocks. Only core funds are subject to allocation decisions by UNEP management, which include the Environment Fund, regular budget, and Planetary Funds. Non-core funds are tied to explicit project or programmatic activity, while the MEAs are administered through specific trust funds. Any resource allocation criteria would primarily involve the Environment Fund. There is no organisation-wide policy that defines criteria for allocating resources to partners. In practice, allocation is fragmented across project-specific agreements, MEA trust funds, and core budget processes, with only the Environment Fund representing genuinely untied resources, with portfolio development materially shaped by earmarked funding from Vertical Funds.



The Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, 2024

Flagship winners Iftikhar-ul-Hassan Shah Gilani, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination and Humaira Jehanzeb, UN in Pakistan at the Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, on 27 February 2024.
Photo: © UNEP / Kiara Worth

The Budget Steering Committee (BSC) provides advisory oversight of core budget allocation, and internal review bodies, such as the Concept Approval Group (CAG) and Project Review Committee (PRC), adjudicate project designs for alignment with the MTS and Programme of Work (PoW). However, the Climate Action subprogramme evaluation highlighted internal resource allocation unpredictability and noted donor concerns around limited transparency in tracing the flow of contributions, which the Management Response acknowledged and UNEP has actively sought to address. Disbursement targets are similarly decentralised and set at the project or portfolio level rather than as a UNEP-wide policy, although survey data indicates that 72% of respondents believe UNEP provides reliable information on when disbursements occur and on amounts. Across audits, evaluations, and interviews, delays in disbursement emerge as a systemic pattern driven primarily by internal factors. The Board of Auditors has flagged long-outstanding commitments to implementing partners, with amounts open for one to nine years, though this issue has now been resolved; OIOS audits document material lags in first instalments; and the Delivery Model evaluation highlights that the late disbursement of core funds to UNEP has follow-on effects across the disbursement chain. There is consistent evidence that these frictions pertain to multi-layered approval processes, inefficiencies in the procurement process, and weaknesses in contract specification and payment controls, rather than to external circumstances.

Mechanisms for adaptive management are formally articulated but do not yet function as a reliable system for course correction, reprioritisation, or phasing out lower-priority work. Both the current and forthcoming MTS commit to adaptive management, and the Delivery Model explicitly shifts the emphasis from "quality on entry" to "quality during implementation." The Planetary Funds, launched in 2022, also offer a more flexible alternative to earmarked funding. Yet the formative evaluation of the Delivery Model finds no evidence of a working mechanism to phase out lower-priority work, and no implemented change-management plan. The evaluation also noted reduced efficiency due to added bureaucracy and that co-creation was largely confined to project design rather than as continuous course correction. Interviews consistently highlighted process rigidity in management approaches, driven by the need for multi-layered approvals, with limited capacity to trigger timely reallocation or de-prioritisation in response to changing contexts. Adaptation, where it occurs, is cautious and incremental rather than strategic.

Results-based budgeting (RBB) is established in principle and improving in practice, but the link between financial resources and intended results remains partial and a work in progress, particularly at corporate level. The PoW functions as UNEP's budget instrument, articulating results frameworks by subprogramme with high-level budget allocations, and the PPMM codifies the intent to align resources with strategic objectives. The PPMM further notes that as incoming resources are not predictable, project managers must plan in an uncertain financing environment, so that RBB is more of an informed estimate and best practice rather than an expectation of a lived reality. At the project level, detailed budgets and outcome-linked indicators exist, and the roll-out of the IPMR within UMOJA has strengthened the organisation's capacity to track costs from activities to results across funding sources. RBB is thus more established at project level than at corporate level, with the linkages between project-level results, through to subprogrammes, and to corporate results not yet fully articulated. While Programme Co-ordination Projects (PCPs) are intended to connect project-level results to programme- and subprogramme-level results, the Delivery Model evaluation found an absence of causal links from project outcomes through to programme-level results, and to the MTS strategic objectives. Programme support costs (PSC), which are the primary discretionary funding source for management functions and fund more than 70% of Corporate Services Division staff positions, are not linked to defined management results in budget documentation. The JIU report finds that the Budget Steering Committee's allocation criteria for PSC have relied on historical patterns, with strategic considerations remaining secondary, although the JIU acknowledges progress, noting that PSC allocation will shift to needs-based analysis. Further reforms during the assessment period, including a shift from historical allocations toward a zero-based approach, show the institutional intent to strengthen results-based resource management. However, the organisation does not explicitly map financial resources to specific intended results at the strategic level, nor does it assign traceable costs to individual management outcomes beyond aggregate expenditure categories. The practical implication is that while UNEP can report on expenditure by results area, it cannot yet demonstrate that budgetary decisions are

driven by comparative cost-effectiveness or outcome priorities. Results-based budgeting thus remains aspirational at the corporate level, even as it functions credibly at the project level.

UNEP's anti-fraud and anti-corruption framework is comprehensively codified, with clear institutional roles, mandatory training with high completion rates, and routine public reporting, though the distance between policy standards and staff confidence in the system's responsiveness remains a concern. The UNEP Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Guidelines operationalise the UN Secretariat's zero-tolerance framework, defining roles for the Executive Director as responsible official, OIOS for investigations, and CSD for training and assessments. The guidelines are embedded in operational processes through the PPMM, which sets out managerial responsibilities and fraud-risk assessment requirements, and staff obligations are reinforced through mandatory ethics training. Annual Fraud and Corruption Reports and Conduct and Discipline Reports are submitted to the governing body and made public, demonstrating institutional transparency. Multiple reporting channels exist, including OIOS, the Executive Director, line managers, Conduct and Discipline Focal Points, and the Ombudsman, with whistleblower protections established under the Secretariat's regulatory framework. Nevertheless, interviews reveal that some staff remain hesitant to report concerns involving direct superiors, preferring to go via the Staff Union, and that a communication gap persists between the resolution of cases and the feedback provided to relevant stakeholders, which is a structural feature of the UN Secretariat system but one that has generated notable frustration.

SEA/SH requires heightened attention to ensure effective implementation of the framework and UNEP should reappraise SEA as a corporate risk. The Joint Inspection Unit's recent review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, found that while the majority of multilateral organisations have included SEA in corporate risk registers, UNEP has determined that SEA does not constitute a risk due to the normative nature of its operations. This is perhaps surprising given the increasing importance of project delivery activities to UNEP. UNEP should therefore reconsider inclusion of SEA in the risk register to ensure that SEA/SH is routinely reviewed through UNEP's risk management and senior management oversight processes, and potentially to adopt good practice of incorporating indicators relating to protection from SEA into corporate results frameworks, helping to institutionalise their commitment and accountability to protection from SEA.

Dedicated resources are required to maximise UNEP's response to SEA/SH efforts. Implementation of UNEP's PSEA/SH framework is constrained by lack of dedicated capacity to support SEA/SH activities with key staff often double-hatted and performing their SEA duties as "add-ons" to other functions. Training constitutes an important element of UNEP's preventive approach with high participation in training on standards of conduct (including modules addressing the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment), but the impact of these courses can be enhanced by making them context-relevant.

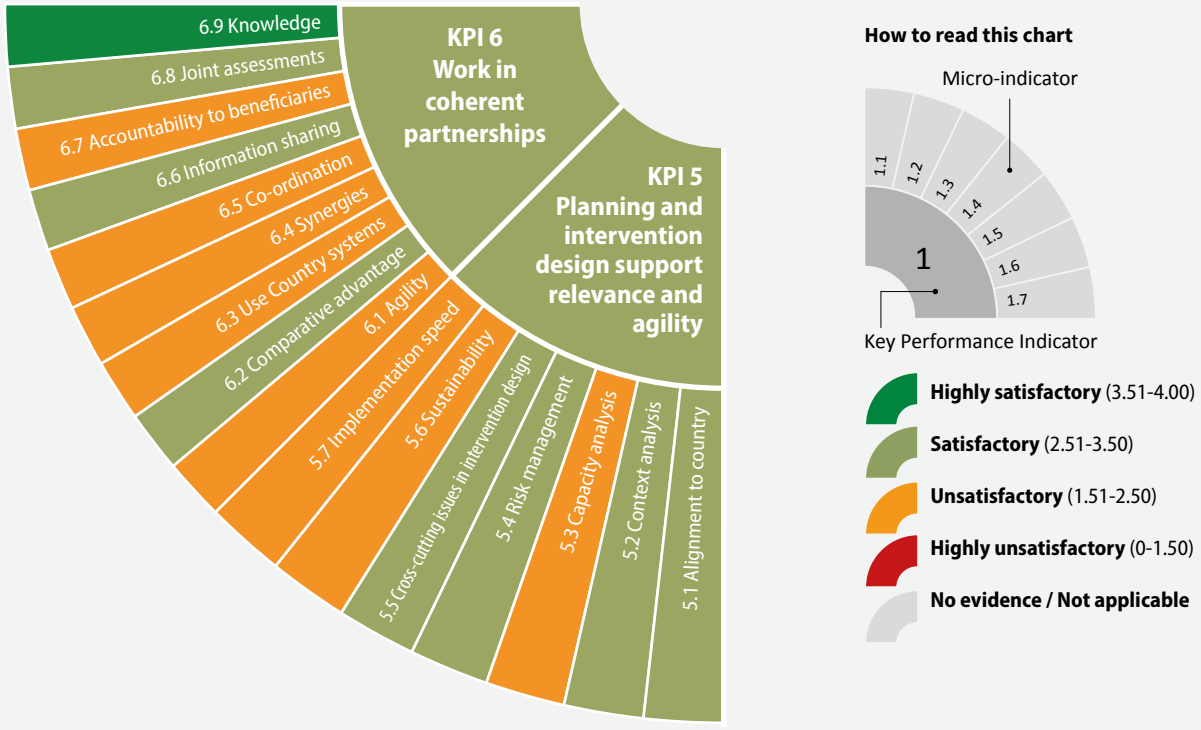
Safeguards for implementing partners are established but clearer guidance and additional capacity building support are required to ensure consistent implementation by partners. UNEP requires implementing partners to commit to standards prohibiting sexual exploitation and abuse and to comply with reporting obligations consistent with UN system policies. These requirements are embedded in co-operation agreements and programme management processes. However, survey evidence indicates that awareness of these obligations varies among partners, and respondents highlighted the need for clearer guidance and additional capacity-building support.

UNEP should support the system-wide response to SEA through participation in key reporting mechanisms. UNEP has strong internal systems to record reports of SEA misconduct and track progress, with reporting through the Conduct and Discipline Annual Report. However, unlike most agencies, funds and programmes, UNEP does not report all SEA allegations in the iReport tool, an important tool used by Member States and an information source for the Secretary-General's annual report on special measures for PSEA. Some allegations involving UNEP personnel have never been publicly disclosed.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Engaging in inclusive partnerships to support relevance, leverage effective solutions and maximise results.

FIGURE 7. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNEP'S RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**



UNEP's partnership model remains heavily anchored in ministries of environment, which reflects its mandate but can limit influence over broader policy change. Although the organisation has taken a positive step by reducing private sector engagements to a smaller group of strategically selected industry leaders, the added value UNEP brings to partnerships beyond its scientific expertise is not always clearly articulated, and its strong dependence on partners for delivery is not consistently matched by a systematic focus on strengthening partner capacity.

KPI 5: Operational planning and intervention design tools support relevance and agility in partnerships

Satisfactory	2.59

While overall satisfactory, this KPI is characterised by uneven performance across different MIs. There is alignment with the needs of beneficiaries and countries, and context is strongly considered in intervention design. Cross-cutting issues, particularly Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, are well considered while other cross-cutting issues receive less attention. However, performance is weaker when it comes to the usage of capacity analysis, project-level risk management, sustainability, and how UNEP's institutional procedures support the organisation's agility. There is also a gap between the information transparently available on partnerships and engagements needed to deliver interventions and what actually takes place, formally or informally.

UNEP seeks to ensure alignment with country priorities through its network of regional and sub-regional offices; global and regional subprogramme co-ordinators; (virtual) participation in UN Country Teams; and alignment

with the UNSDCF. Country-based interventions are required to select which UNSDCF outcomes they contribute to, ensuring a direct link with the wider work of the UN within a country and that country's priorities. The PPMM also makes explicit that stakeholder engagement, including with beneficiaries, is critical to good project design, and that this should take place during the early stages of the design process. Intervention designs explicitly describe the context in which they are to be implemented — even if the depth of these descriptions varies. The Concept Approval Group should, in theory, ensure that interventions are relevant to the countries and regions they aim to support. In practice, however, its effectiveness has been questioned: interviewees noted limited time for strategic discussion, and over 95% of concepts are approved.

UNEP's delivery model creates challenges for its relevance and agility, particularly its lack of country offices, limited continued presence of in-country staff, and reliance on UNON. Interventions need to link to UNSDCFs in countries where they are implemented, but without strong country presence it can be challenging for UNEP's staff to participate as fully and actively in UNCTs as agencies who have this presence. Without a strong network of country offices, regional offices play a key role in ensuring UNEP is able to respond to needs on the ground. Regional offices lack the resources (financial and decision-making) to respond quickly to emerging country/regional needs and depend on UNEP's divisions to design interventions, which can cause delays. UNEP has started to pilot Country Engagement Plans in lieu of country strategies, but these are still relatively new and unknown, and not supported by dedicated resources. UNEP's (perceived) limited ability to respond quickly to country requests puts it at a disadvantage compared to other actors who operate in a similar space.

It further appears that there is fragmentation in the documentation and information underpinning UNEP's relations with partners. UNEP collaborates closely with partners in the delivery of interventions and intervention designs explicitly mention key partners. This engagement stretches from the development of project documents to the closure of projects, but it is not always clear how, when, and what aspects of an intervention are explicitly agreed between UNEP and its partners as Project Documents are only signed by UNEP itself without counter signatures from other key stakeholders. UNEP staff who approve intervention designs invariably need to look beyond Project Documents to understand how a partner's capacity has been assessed, whether it needs further strengthening, and when it will be reviewed. It is safe to assume UNEP regularly meets with its partners to discuss an intervention's progress, but documentary evidence does not clarify what such discussions should cover. This leaves room for inconsistent approaches to partner engagement, which could pose risks, especially on the operational side.

KPI 6: Working in coherent partnerships directed at leveraging and catalysing the use of resources

Satisfactory	2.59

UNEP has established policy commitments to joint planning with external partners, but implementation is inconsistent and not yet systematic. The delivery model and "One UNEP Delivery" policy frame collaboration with UN Country Teams, governments and other partners as central to programme design and country support. Strategic documents emphasise alignment with national priorities and participation in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes. However, evaluations show that engagement in joint planning with partners varies by region and programme, often depending on individual relationships and available resources rather than standardised procedures. While UNEP participates in inter-agency co-ordination platforms, there is limited evidence of structured, consistently applied mechanisms to ensure genuine co-creation and shared programme design with external partners across the portfolio.

UNEP clearly defines what it brings to partnerships, but does not always translate this into structured roles, metrics, or resource alignment. Corporate strategies describe UNEP's strength in combining science, policy, and convening authority, and position it as the leading environmental voice in the UN system. While this comparative



The Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, 2024

Flagship winners Ravi Singh, WWF Nepal and Birendra Mahato, Nepal Environment and Forestry Minister at the Gala of Hope in Nairobi Kenya, on 27 February 2024.
Photo: © UNEP / Kiara Worth

advantage is widely acknowledged, evaluations show that partnership arrangements do not consistently clarify who contributes what or how collective value is measured. Mechanisms to assess collaborative benefits are weak, and documentation of partner contributions, including for collaborating centres, has been inconsistent. Resource allocation only partially reflects stated priorities, with recurring findings on capacity gaps, uneven workloads, and fragmented oversight arrangements.

UNEP commits to country ownership, yet operational engagement remains constrained by structure and incentives. Strategic documents emphasise alignment with national priorities and support for South-South and triangular co-operation. However, implementation has been uneven, with limited monitoring of results and insufficient resources dedicated to country-level engagement. Financial and administrative systems are centralised and heavily reliant on UNON and Umoja, which limits flexibility in using national systems. Internal incentives to strengthen collaboration with countries are not clearly embedded in performance frameworks, and monitoring of collaboration outcomes remains underdeveloped.

Partnership design refers to synergy and leverage, but measurement and coherence are not systematically applied. Programme documents frequently describe catalytic roles and resource mobilisation ambitions, yet evidence of consistent tracking of co-financing or leveraged impact is limited. Responsibilities in partnership agreements are sometimes unclear, including in the governance of collaborating centres. References to alignment with global frameworks such as the SDGs or UNEA resolutions are common, but systematic assessment of external coherence at design stage is not standard practice. Audit findings on delayed project implementation and retained funds suggest that catalytic intent is not always matched by disciplined follow-through.

UNEP participates actively in joint mechanisms, but shared monitoring and data systems remain fragmented. Engagement in inter-agency co-ordination platforms, trust funds and multilateral environmental agreements is well established. However, joint monitoring and reporting practices vary across subprogrammes, and evaluation coverage is uneven with comparatively fewer strategic or cross-cutting evaluations examining system-wide effectiveness or institutional performance. Not all data systems are fully interoperable between UNEP, UNON and external partners, limiting visibility on shared results and efficiency gains. Ongoing reforms to planning and reporting tools aim to address these gaps, but implementation is still incomplete.

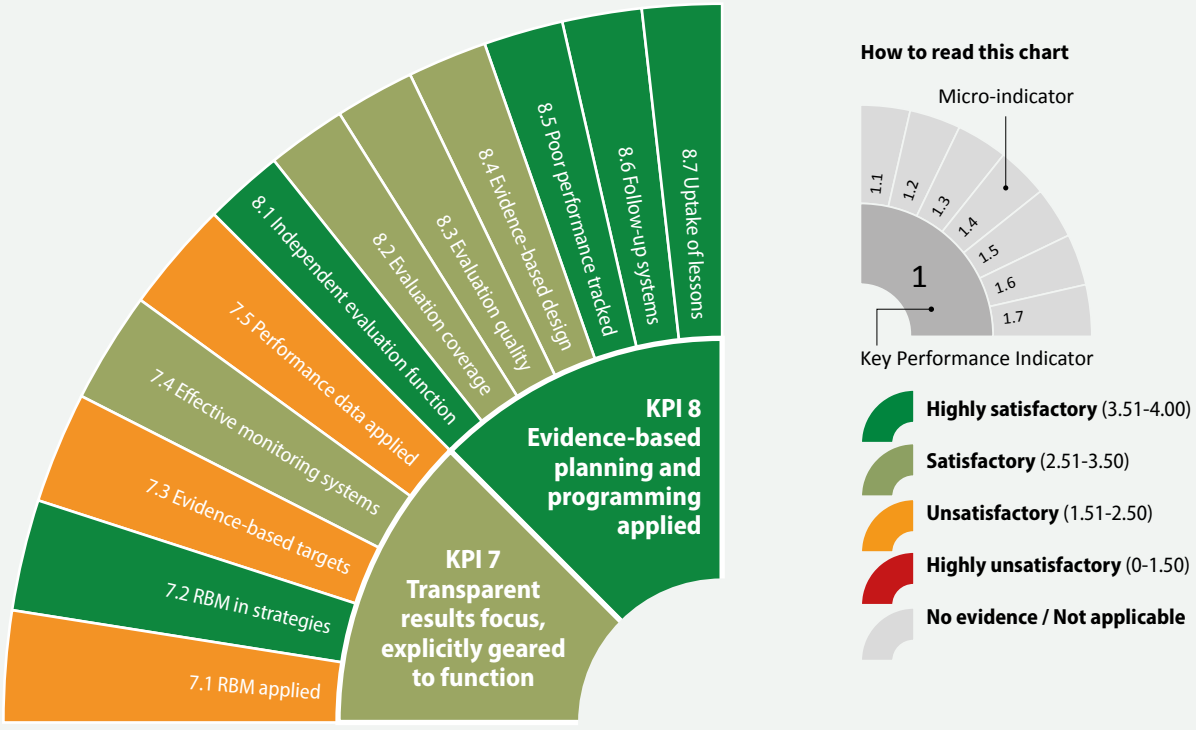
Transparency is broadly in place, yet depth, timeliness and accountability to beneficiaries require strengthening. UNEP publishes financial and programme information in line with international transparency standards, but audits note uneven traceability, especially in procurement and partner transactions. Budget and expenditure data are available, though not always disaggregated by outcome or geography in ways that fully support analysis. Accountability to affected populations is embedded in safeguard policies and stakeholder consultation requirements, rather than articulated as a standalone corporate commitment. Staff guidance and training on beneficiary accountability are dispersed and selective, and approval processes do not explicitly assess this dimension as a separate criterion.

Knowledge production is central to UNEP's mandate, and the quality of its reports is widely recognised. The organisation positions itself as the science-policy interface for environmental issues and produces widely recognised assessments and thematic reports. Partners use these products to inform policy, though uptake varies depending on relevance, format and timing. However, evaluations note that knowledge management systems are fragmented across divisions and that links between research outputs and advocacy outcomes are not consistently tracked. Delays in publication and uneven digital dissemination further affect impact, even though technical quality remains high.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Systems geared to managing and accounting for development and humanitarian results and the use of performance information, including evaluation and lesson-learning.

FIGURE 8. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNEP'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**



UNEP has established a broadly robust performance management architecture, combining results frameworks, structured reporting and an independent evaluation function that provides a solid institutional basis for monitoring performance and supporting organisational learning. However, weaknesses in monitoring systems, uneven data quality and reliance on implementing partners for performance data limit UNEP's ability to consistently generate strong evidence of results and to translate performance information into systematic programme adjustments.

KPI 7: Strong and transparent results focus, explicitly geared to function

Satisfactory	2.75

UNEP has a strong focus on results woven into its processes at both corporate and intervention level, but these intentions are not always implemented robustly, which can make it difficult to understand and improve performance. At the corporate level, the MTS and PoWs are key elements in UNEP's RBM system. There is a clear corporate commitment to RBM, not only covering UNEP itself, but also increasingly covering and supporting the MEAs. UNEP also encourages (but does not mandate) relevant staff to undertake training in RBM. UNEP's systems allow for linkages between different layers of the results architecture whereby the IPMR system supports aggregation of results upwards by ensuring intervention-level results link with subprogramme-level results and the SDGs. However, it remains challenging to identify exactly what contributions UNEP makes at higher levels of its results architecture. Some evidence – discussed in KPI 9 – shows positive contributions to environmental and governance outcomes, but achieving the outcomes in UNEP's corporate results framework depends on numerous actors and factors, many of which UNEP has limited or no influence over, such as the adoption and effective implementation of policies and/or frameworks. A second key challenge is that a RBM system can only serve its purpose when indicators and targets are appropriate. In this light, it is concerning that PoW targets are sometimes overachieved significantly or not adjusted over time, reducing their value as tools for managers to steer the organisation and direct resources effectively.



Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP)at the Geneva International Conference Centre

Pollution is now recognised as a leading threat to planetary and human well-being, yet the global response remains fragmented and uneven. ISP-CWP aims to fill this gap by assessing knowledge, identifying policy options, and catalysing action that is effective, inclusive, and grounded in scientific evidence. Photo: © Christopher Nicholas / UNEP

At the intervention level, UNEP has improved its RBM system during the assessment period through the adoption of the IPMR, which is now its main system for managing projects and capturing relevant performance information. While the system is not yet perfect, and the transition from legacy systems took time, the IPMR marks a significant step forward in ensuring all relevant data are in one place. At the same time, the quality of data informing results systems is not consistently high. UNEP's evaluation synthesis report considers only a minority of monitoring plans to be satisfactory, and there does not appear to be a consistent approach to ensuring data quality. Overall, MOPAN survey respondents were also relatively pessimistic about UNEP's ability to identify underperforming interventions and take action to address them. Requirements for resourcing monitoring at the intervention-level also appear to be less strict than for evaluations. Whereas resources for project evaluations must be fully budgeted with secure funding (though there is no guarantee that these funds will be available in full by the end of implementation), ongoing monitoring to feed into the results framework has no similar requirement. Much of this monitoring must be carried out by UNEP's partners, which inherently limits UNEP's ability to ensure quality data and reporting.

Three further challenges affect UNEP's ability to manage for and with results. First, across the corporate and intervention levels, UNEP faces difficulties in capturing the results of its normative and co-ordination roles. This challenge is not unique to UNEP and many multilateral organisations struggle to effectively capture the impacts of their normative and policy work. However, given the importance of these roles to UNEP's mandate they are especially pertinent. Second, where UNEP is better able to capture performance data from its interventions and subprogrammes, it is often not able to demonstrate how this then translates into adjustments in programming or strategy. Therefore, there is a transparency and traceability gap in terms of explicitly linking performance to adaptive management. The systems — for example, review processes, reporting requirements, etc. — likely ensure performance data are used in practice, but to an observer it remains unclear what (performance) data inform which decisions. Third, it is concerning that targets are sometimes approved after already being achieved in a previous biennium, that only 40% of interventions have a sound monitoring plan and associated budget, and that 5.38% of the projects since 2022 had no indicator progress data. This suggests that the process for setting and monitoring targets, and overseeing their appropriateness, is insufficiently robust at project, corporate, and governance levels.

KPI 8: Evidence-based planning and programming applied

Highly satisfactory	3.62

UNEP demonstrates generally strong institutional arrangements for evidence-based planning and programming, supported by an independent evaluation function, structured evaluation processes, and formal mechanisms for learning and accountability. The organisation's Evaluation Office operates independently from programme and financial management and reports directly to the Executive Director in line with UN Secretariat arrangements, helping ensure that evaluative evidence is generated and communicated without managerial interference. UNEP's evaluation policy and related guidance provide a structured framework for corporate, thematic and strategic evaluations, complemented by project-level assessments conducted either as independent terminal evaluations or as management-led terminal reviews subject to Evaluation Office validation. The Evaluation Office's work planning is aligned with the Medium-Term Strategy and Programme of Work, and evaluation practice broadly reflects UNEG (United Nations Evaluation Group) norms and standards and OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, providing a solid institutional foundation for generating evaluative evidence and supporting organisational learning.

Evaluation coverage is broadly systematic and aligned with organisational priorities, although UNEP's project-based delivery model and resource constraints limit the extent of strategic-level analysis. The Evaluation Office prepares prioritised and funded evaluation plans linked to the MTS and Programme of Work cycle, ensuring periodic coverage of major thematic subprogrammes and organisational priorities. Evaluations are conducted across areas such as Nature Action, Climate Action, Chemicals and Pollution Action, and Environmental Governance, generating

evidence on programme performance and lessons for future planning. However, available resources and staffing capacity mean that evaluation coverage remains concentrated on project-level assessments, with comparatively fewer strategic or cross-cutting evaluations examining system-wide effectiveness or institutional performance.

Quality assurance mechanisms and methodological standards underpin UNEP's evaluation system, although data limitations and variation across evaluation types affect analytical depth. Evaluations follow a structured cycle covering design, inception, data collection, analysis, and reporting, supported by standardised templates, peer review, and Evaluation Office oversight. Mixed-method approaches – including interviews, surveys, document analysis, and triangulation of evidence – are routinely applied, supporting the overall credibility of evaluation findings. Methodological limitations are also formally documented, improving transparency regarding the strength of conclusions. Nevertheless, analytical depth is not uniform across the portfolio, with some evaluations constrained by data availability, limitations, weak baselines, or uneven monitoring systems that affect the strength of evidence available for assessment.

Institutional mechanisms exist to ensure that evaluation findings inform programme design, although incentives for systematic uptake remain primarily procedural. UNEP formally requires programme and project teams preparing new interventions to demonstrate how lessons from prior interventions have informed new initiatives through project documentation and the Project Review Committee approval process. Structured feedback loops – including management responses, the Evaluation Recommendation Implementation Tracking System, evaluation synthesis reports, and learning events – support the dissemination and use of lessons across the organisation. Evidence indicates that recurring findings from evaluations have informed updates to project design templates, theories of change, and thematic approaches in areas such as environmental governance and ecosystem restoration.

UNEP maintains structured systems for identifying underperforming interventions and monitoring follow-up actions through evaluation, performance monitoring and management oversight mechanisms. Underperforming interventions are identified through a combination of independent evaluation ratings, mid-term reviews and internal monitoring tools, including "on track/off track" indicators, Quarterly Branch Reviews and the Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting system. These mechanisms provide early signals of implementation challenges and feed into corporate reporting processes such as the Programme Performance Report and the Evaluation Synthesis Report, which track performance trends and recurring implementation issues across the portfolio. Performance issues identified through these monitoring and evaluation processes are addressed through UNEP's programme management and oversight structures, with responsibility for follow-up clearly assigned to divisions, subprogramme co-ordinators and responsible project managers, as specified in UNEP's evaluation policy. Corrective actions and implementation progress are reviewed through internal management processes and senior management oversight, ensuring that emerging risks and performance weaknesses are addressed at the appropriate organisational level.

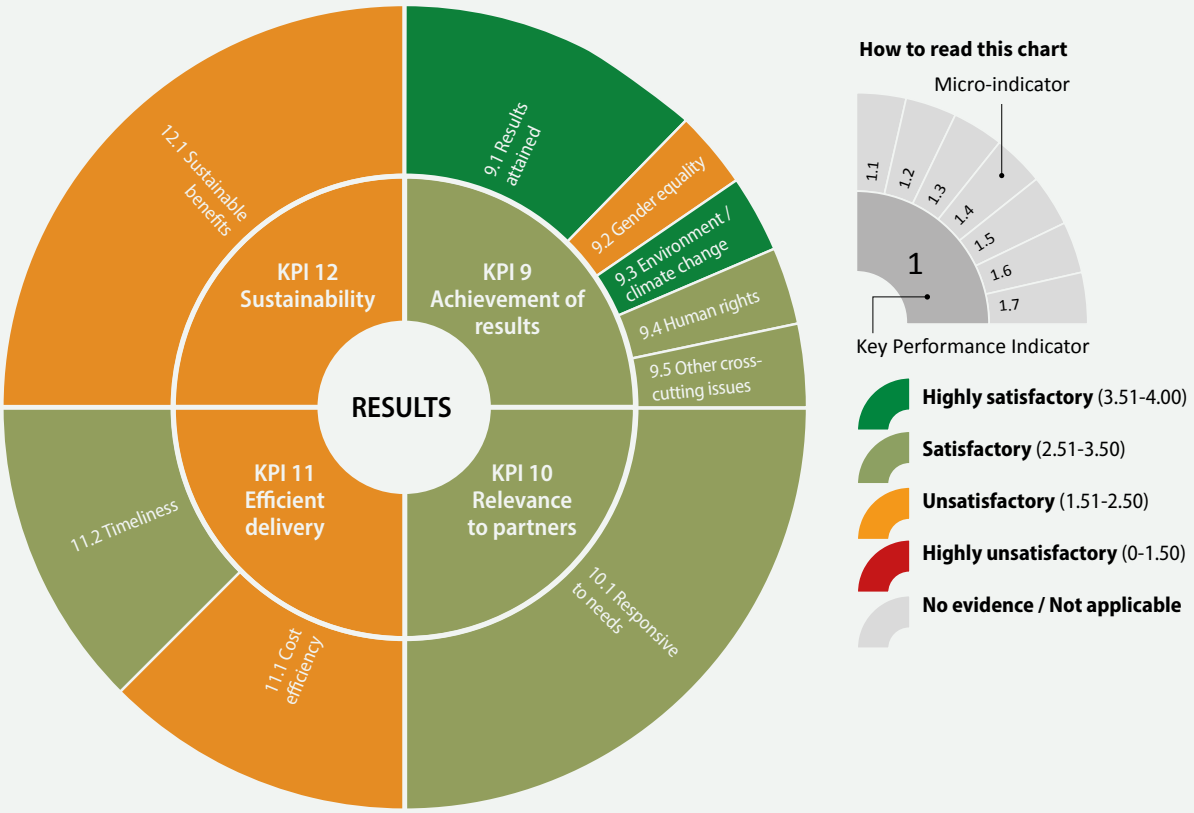
UNEP maintains strong transparency and accountability mechanisms for evaluation use, although systematic documentation of lesson uptake remains limited across its large and diverse implementation portfolio. All evaluation reports are accompanied by mandatory management responses outlining actions, responsibilities and implementation timelines, and the status of recommendation implementation is publicly reported through evaluation synthesis reports and corporate reporting processes. UNEP also maintains a comprehensive and publicly accessible repository of evaluations and associated recommendations, providing a central source of evaluative evidence for internal and external stakeholders. Lessons are disseminated internally through the Evaluation Synthesis Report and related briefing materials prepared by the Evaluation Office. Evaluation findings are also disseminated externally through platforms such as the Evaluation Office website, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and United Nations Evaluation Group networks.

DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

RESULTS

Achievement of relevant, inclusive and sustainable contributions to development results in an efficient manner.

FIGURE 9. **KEY FINDINGS ON UNEP'S RESULTS AREAS**



UNEP's project portfolio demonstrates relatively strong delivery performance, with a growing share of evaluated projects rated satisfactory and evidence that the organisation can implement environmental projects and support policy processes effectively. However, the evidence base for broader normative or system-level results is less robust, as limitations in outcome-level measurement, cost-efficiency analysis and post-project follow-up constrain UNEP's ability to demonstrate sustained institutional or policy impact beyond individual projects.

KPI 9: Development and humanitarian objectives are achieved and results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals

Satisfactory	3.20

UNEP demonstrates improving performance in achieving its development and normative objectives, with a clear positive trajectory in project results over the most recent biennium. Evaluation evidence indicates strengthening project performance across UNEP's portfolio. In 2022-23, 74% of evaluated projects were rated Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory, the highest proportion recorded in the past decade and a substantial improvement compared with the 39% recorded in the previous biennium. Improvements were particularly evident in effectiveness and sustainability ratings, reflecting stronger achievement of intended outcomes and more consistent delivery of



International Day of Zero Waste 2025

Facilitated jointly by UNEP and UN-Habitat, this event highlights the importance of bolstering waste management globally and the need to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns to address the waste pollution crisis.

Photo: © Ahmed Nayim Yussuf / UNEP

outputs. Evaluation findings also point to strong performance in areas such as environmental and social safeguards, stakeholder participation and communication, although weaknesses in monitoring and reporting systems continue to affect the consistency of results documentation.

UNEP's corporate performance reporting indicates measurable environmental and governance outcomes across multiple thematic areas. According to the Programme Performance Report, under the Nature Action subprogramme, UNEP supported 69 countries in aligning national biodiversity strategies with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and contributed to improved management of more than 2.7 million hectares of ecosystems. Additional reported results include the adoption of biodiversity-related decision-support tools by 561 national and subnational institutions and expanded mobilisation of finance for biodiversity and ecosystem restoration. In the Chemicals and Pollution Action subprogramme, UNEP reported the elimination of nearly 2 800 metric tons of hazardous pollutants and supported governments in strengthening national chemicals and waste governance systems, while contributing to global policy processes such as negotiations towards a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution. UNEP's science–policy work further contributes to environmental governance through flagship assessments such as the Emissions Gap Report and Adaptation Gap Report, which inform international climate policy discussions and national planning processes.

Progress in integrating cross-cutting priorities — particularly gender equality, human rights and attention to vulnerable groups — remains gradual and uneven across UNEP's portfolio. Evaluation evidence shows that responsiveness to gender equality and human rights has improved but remains inconsistent. In 2022-23, 46% of projects achieved Satisfactory or Highly Satisfactory ratings for gender and human-rights responsiveness, representing the strongest performance recorded to date, but still indicating that fewer than half of projects demonstrate robust integration of these considerations. Across the last three biennia, the average share of projects achieving higher-level ratings under this criterion is approximately 35%, pointing to gradual but incomplete progress. Evidence also suggests that gender considerations are more consistently reflected in project design processes and institutional publications than in demonstrated outcome-level results. While UNEP contributes to important normative advances – such as supporting the recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment – evaluation findings indicate that intersectional analysis remains limited and that impacts on vulnerable populations are not systematically documented across programmes. As a result, although UNEP's interventions contribute to strengthening environmental governance conditions that support environmental rights, stronger and more consistent integration of gender equality, human rights and inclusive participation is required to demonstrate differentiated results across beneficiary groups.

KPI 10: Interventions are relevant to the needs and priorities of partner countries and beneficiaries, as the organisation works towards results in areas within its mandate

Satisfactory	3.00

Evaluative evidence shows that UNEP's interventions are generally aligned with national priorities, multilateral environmental agreements and UN co-operation frameworks. Programme design and implementation are largely demand-driven and embedded in partner-led policy processes, although evaluation evidence indicates variability in the depth of needs analysis across interventions. Evidence from the Programme Performance Report shows that UNEP supported 69 countries in aligning biodiversity strategies with the Global Biodiversity Framework and assisted more than 120 countries and authorities in integrating ecosystem-based approaches into development and sectoral planning processes. During the reporting period, decision-support tools for biodiversity management were taken up across a wide range of national and subnational entities.

UNEP's support to international environmental agreements further demonstrates alignment with partner priorities. Ninety governments received assistance in developing or implementing policies and strategies for sound management of chemicals and waste, while additional countries advanced implementation of the Minamata and Stockholm conventions. UNEP also supported several countries in integrating environmental priorities into UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), contributing to the alignment of environmental considerations within UN system-wide country-level planning.

Evaluation evidence indicates that many interventions respond to locally identified priorities. Project-level evaluations indicate that interventions addressing ecosystem management, sustainable tourism and ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction were designed to respond to priorities articulated by partner governments and communities. These examples illustrate UNEP's role in supporting nationally driven environmental policies and development strategies.

At the same time, evaluation evidence highlights areas requiring continued attention to sustain programme relevance. Findings point to variability in the depth of needs assessments conducted at the design stage and uneven quality of monitoring and reporting systems, which can make it difficult to assess whether interventions remain responsive to evolving country priorities and stakeholder needs. Recent analytical work, including the formative evaluation of UNEP's delivery model and the updated Medium-Term Strategy, recognises these challenges and aims to strengthen the organisation's ability to maintain programme relevance across changing policy and environmental contexts.

KPI 11: Results are delivered efficiently

Unsatisfactory	2.50

While UNEP applies several practices intended to support efficient delivery, limited systematic cost-efficiency analysis and persistent implementation delays constrain its ability to demonstrate that results are delivered on time and cost-effectively. UNEP's delivery model relies extensively on partnerships with specialised organisations and existing institutional systems rather than establishing parallel implementation structures. This approach can reduce transaction costs and extend programme reach. UNEP also mobilises significant external financing, including vertical funds such as the Global Environment Facility, allowing it to scale interventions while conserving core resources. Multi-country initiatives, regional platforms and standardised tools similarly support economies of scale in programme delivery, while hybrid and virtual engagement formats can reduce travel costs and facilitate wider participation.

However, systematic analysis of cost efficiency remains limited across the portfolio. Few interventions include comparative assessments of alternative delivery approaches or cost-per-output metrics that would allow value-for-money considerations to be assessed. Evidence from evaluations and audits indicates that efficiency gains from practices such as partner leverage, hybrid engagement or economies of scale are rarely quantified or compared systematically across projects. As a result, while operational practices intended to promote efficient resource use are evident, UNEP does not consistently generate credible, comparable data demonstrating cost-efficiency or value for money at either the intervention or corporate level. Audit findings also identify instances where fragmented processes or unclear accountabilities increase transaction costs and reduce operational efficiency.

Timeliness of programme delivery shows some improvement but remains uneven. UNEP maintains formal planning cycles, results frameworks and regular oversight mechanisms intended to support timely implementation. Corporate planning guidance establishes time-bound milestones for programme delivery, and quarterly reporting to the Committee of Permanent Representatives provides structured updates on progress against workplans, including indicators identifying activities that are on track or delayed. Several high-profile outputs and intergovernmental milestones were delivered according to schedule during the reporting period, including flagship environmental assessments and major policy processes.

At the same time, evaluation and audit evidence identify recurring implementation delays affecting parts of the programme portfolio. These delays are linked to procurement bottlenecks, staffing constraints, partner capacity limitations and procedural complexity associated with certain funding modalities, particularly large multi-partner initiatives and externally financed projects. Audit findings describe instances of missed milestones and extended implementation timelines, while evaluations note that consultation requirements and co-creation processes can lengthen project design and approval phases. Although recent evidence suggests improvements in planning and earlier resource allocation, delays and project extensions remain common in complex interventions, indicating that agreed delivery timelines are not yet consistently achieved across the organisation.

KPI 12: Results are sustainable

Unsatisfactory	2.00

While UNEP interventions frequently aim to create enabling conditions for sustainability, available evidence does not consistently demonstrate that results continue beyond project completion. UNEP projects commonly pursue sustainability through capacity development, policy integration and strengthening of environmental governance systems. These approaches seek to embed environmental priorities within national institutions, regulatory frameworks and co-ordination mechanisms, creating conditions that could support continuation after project closure.

Evaluation evidence indicates some improvement in sustainability performance, although confirmed long-term continuation of results remains uneven across the portfolio. The Evaluation Synthesis Report for 2022-23 shows that 31% of evaluated projects were rated Satisfactory or Highly satisfactory to sustain their benefits after completion, representing a modest increase compared with the average across previous biennia. However, projects rated Highly satisfactory or Satisfactory for sustainability still represent a minority of evaluated interventions. When projects rated Moderately Satisfactory are included, the overall sustainability picture improves, suggesting that many interventions establish at least partial enabling conditions for continuation beyond implementation.

UNEP's normative and policy-oriented work is also intended to support long-term sustainability through institutional and governance change. Activities under the Environmental Governance and Science-Policy subprogrammes – including environmental law development, support to multilateral environmental agreement



Peace with Nature at COP16 Restoration Day, Cali, Colombia

Indigenous groups, faith-based organisations and women's collectives are leading efforts to restore ecosystems in ways that prioritise human well-being.
Photo: © UNEP

reporting, and global environmental assessments – aim to strengthen national systems and provide durable foundations for environmental decision-making. For example, the Seventh Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7) is designed to support long-term environmental governance through knowledge products, assessments and early-warning systems that inform policy decisions. However, the available documentation does not consistently confirm whether partner countries have the institutional capacity, resources or technical systems required to continue applying and updating these tools independently after UNEP support ends.

At the same time, sustainability ratings often reflect anticipated rather than verified continuation of results. Evaluations indicate that long-term outcomes frequently depend on factors outside UNEP's direct control, including sustained political commitment, domestic financing and effective inter-institutional co-ordination. While many interventions contribute to policy development, institutional strengthening and environmental governance frameworks, available evidence does not consistently confirm that these capacities remain operational or fully institutionalised once project support ends.

A key limitation in the evidence base is the extent to which sustainability can be demonstrated beyond project completion. UNEP's evaluation framework relies primarily on end-of-project assessments to infer sustainability rather than revisiting projects after closure to verify whether expected benefits have materialised. The Evaluation Synthesis notes that this limits the organisation's ability to confirm whether anticipated long-term outcomes – such as sustained institutional performance, replication or scaling of successful interventions – are realised in practice. As a result, although sustainability ratings show gradual improvement, the evidence base remains incomplete with respect to demonstrated continuation of results beyond project completion.

Organisational analysis also highlights structural factors affecting sustainability. The formative evaluation of UNEP's delivery model emphasises the need for longer-term programming and more systemic approaches to achieving durable environmental outcomes. It raises concerns about fragmented interventions and short project cycles, noting that sustainability cannot be assumed and must be deliberately built into programming design, monitoring and follow-up processes. While UNEP's work on environmental governance, legal frameworks and science–policy platforms has clear potential to generate lasting benefits, available documentation does not consistently demonstrate that institutional uptake, financing arrangements or follow-up mechanisms are sufficiently consolidated to ensure continuity once UNEP support ends.

REFERENCES

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CHAPTER IV

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT





International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste 2023, Nairobi, Kenya

UNEP's Food Waste Index has showed the huge scale of food waste across the globe. In 2019, 931 million tonnes of food sold to households, retailers, restaurants, and other food services was wasted. An estimated 17 per cent of food available to consumers in markets, households, restaurants, goes directly into the bin and 60 per cent of that waste is in the home. Moreover, the data shows that consumer food waste is truly a global problem, significant in almost every country that has measured it. Photo: © UNEP / Ahmed Nayim Yussuf

THE MOPAN APPROACH

The approach to MOPAN assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system. The MOPAN 3.1 Approach, applied in this assessment, is the latest iteration. Additional information can be found on our website.

BOX 6. **Operating principles**

MOPAN will generate credible, fair and accurate assessments through:

- implementing an impartial, systematic and rigorous approach;
- balancing breadth with depth, adopting an appropriate balance between coverage and depth of information;
- prioritising quality of information over quantity;
- adopting a systematic approach, including the use of structured tools for enquiry/analysis;
- providing transparency, generating an "audit trail" of findings;
- being efficient, building layers of data, seeking to reduce burdens on organisations;
- ensuring utility, building organisational learning through an iterative process and accessible reporting;
- being incisive, through a focused methodology, which provides concise reporting to tell the story of an organisation's current performance.

Source: MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, https://www.mopan.org/content/dam/mopan/en/publications/our-work/methods/mopan-3-1-methodology.pdf

UNEP Deputy Executive Director opens Youth Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya

Supported by UNEP, the Global Youth Environment Assembly (Global YEA) is a crucial platform that gathers young environmental enthusiasts and policy advocates from around the world to participate in policy discussions, knowledge-sharing, and the formulation of the Global Youth Declaration on Environment.
Photo:© UNEP / Will Swanson



Table 3 lists the performance areas and indicators used in MOPAN 3.1.

TABLE 3. **PERFORMANCE AREAS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance area	Key performance indicator (KPI)
Strategic management	**KPI 1:** Organisational architecture and financial framework enable mandate implementation and achievement of expected results
	KPI 2: Structures and mechanisms support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda principles
Operational management	**KPI 3:** Operating model and human and financial resources support relevance and agility
	KPI 4: Organisational systems are cost- and value-conscious and enable financial transparency and accountability
Relationship management	**KPI 5:** Operational planning and intervention design tools support relevance and agility in partnerships
	KPI 6: Working in coherent partnerships directed at leveraging and catalysing the use of resources
Performance management	**KPI 7:** Strong and transparent results focus, explicitly geared towards function
	KPI 8: Evidence-based planning and programming applied
Results	**KPI 9:** Development and humanitarian objectives are achieved, and results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals
	KPI 10: Interventions are relevant to the needs and priorities of partner countries and beneficiaries, as the organisation works towards results in areas within its mandate
	KPI 11: Results are implemented efficiently
	KPI 12: Results are sustainable

Source: MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, 2020 Assessment Cycle, https://www.mopan.org/content/dam/mopan/en/publications/our-work/methods/mopan-3-1-methodology.pdf

APPLYING MOPAN 3.1 TO UNEP

Interpretations and adaptations to the methodology

Some KPIs and associated MIs have been interpreted so as to be meaningful given UNEP's specific mandate and operating model as a largely normative organisation with selective operational activities. The assessment recognises that UNEP differs fundamentally from many other UN organisations because of its normative nature, with a mandate focused on providing environmental policy guidance, scientific and policy work, multilateral environmental governance, and global convening. Unlike operational UN entities, UNEP does not produce country-level strategic documents such as Country Programme Documents, and its results are often realised through influence on policy, co-ordination, and global and regional processes rather than through direct service delivery.

Within the flexibility allowed under the MOPAN 3.1 framework, the assessment framework was therefore tailored to UNEP's specific mandate and context. These interpretations and adaptations to the MOPAN 3.1 methodology were discussed and agreed with UNEP during the inception phase of the assessment. They are documented in the UNEP MOPAN Inception Report and reflect a shared understanding between MOPAN and UNEP of how the methodology should be applied to UNEP's specific mandate, operating model, and results pathways, while remaining fully consistent with the MOPAN 3.1 framework.

A structured mapping exercise was also conducted during the inception phase, in consultation with MOPAN members and under the leadership of the assessment's Institutional Leads, to align priority areas of interest with the MOPAN 3.1 methodology. This exercise ensured methodological consistency while responding meaningfully to member priorities and drew on MOPAN's cumulative perspective of UNEP's performance journey across four previous assessments.

Table 4 sets out the adaptations made to MIs and Elements. The left-hand column identifies the MIs as set out in the MOPAN 3.1, while the right-hand column provides notes on how the MI was interpreted for use in this assessment. Proposed additions or adjustments to the Elements are also mentioned in this column.

TABLE 4. **INTERPRETATION/ADAPTATION OF MIS AND RELATED ELEMENTS**

KPI/MI	Interpretation/Adaptation
KPI 2: Structures and mechanisms support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda principles	No change was made to the KPI itself. However, Micro-Indicators 2.2 and 2.4 were interpreted to reflect UNEP's mandate and operating model (see below).
MI 2.2: Corporate/sectoral and country strategies respond to and/or reflect the intended results of normative frameworks for environmental sustainability and climate change	Environmental sustainability and climate change are core elements of UNEP's mandate. As such, they were not assessed as standalone cross-cutting issues. Instead, this micro-indicator examined the extent to which environmental sustainability and climate change considerations are systematically integrated and mainstreamed in other results areas.
MI 2.4: Corporate/sectoral and country strategies respond to and/or reflect the intended results of normative frameworks for other cross-cutting issues (e.g. good governance, protection, nutrition, innovation)	For this micro-indicator, the assessment considered how UNEP plans for and pursues results related to other cross-cutting priorities, including youth, food security, and special development situations, and the extent to which these considerations are reflected in strategies, programmes, and implementation approaches.
KPI 6: Working in coherent partnerships directed at leveraging and catalysing the use of resources	No change was made to the KPI. However, selected micro-indicators were interpreted to reflect UNEP's partnership-based and co-ordination-focused operating model.
MI 6.2: Partnerships are based on an explicit statement of comparative or collaborative advantage i.e. technical knowledge, convening power/ partnerships, policy dialogue/ advocacy	This micro-indicator examined how UNEP articulates and operationalises its comparative or collaborative advantage in partnerships, including its working relationships with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), alongside other institutional, governmental, and non-state partners.
MI 6.5: Key business practices (planning, design, implementation, monitoring and reporting) co-ordinated with other relevant partners	This micro-indicator assessed the extent to which UNEP's policies, systems, and processes support effective co-ordination in planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting, including arrangements related to hosting and operational engagement with MEA secretariats, as well as co-ordination with other partners.
MI 6.8: Participation with national and other partners in mutual assessments of progress in implementing agreed commitments	In addition to assessing mutual accountability and joint review mechanisms with partners, this micro-indicator also captured youth engagement as a distinct and increasingly important stakeholder group, including in light of recent developments such as the ICJ advisory opinion on climate change spearheaded by youth and student groups.

KPI/MI	Interpretation/Adaptation
MI 6.9: Use of knowledge base to support policy dialogue and/or advocacy	This micro-indicator captured UNEP's role as a normative, science-based organisation, including its generation, synthesis, and use of scientific knowledge and its co-ordination role across the United Nations Development System. It also examined how UNEP's knowledge products are used to inform policy dialogue, advocacy, and policy trade-offs.
KPI 8: The MO applies evidence-based planning and programming	No change was made to the KPI. However, the scope of Micro-Indicator 8.7 was adapted.
MI 8.7: Uptake of lessons learned and best practices from evaluations	For UNEP, this micro-indicator also encompassed the dissemination and uptake of scientific work and outputs from major scientific panels and processes, including the IPCC, IPBES, and ISPCWP, alongside more conventional evaluation learning mechanisms.

Lines of evidence

This assessment of UNEP draws on three streams of evidence: a document review, a partner survey, and KIIs. The objective of each stream is to generate the most relevant evidence and meaningful insights to produce a clear and holistic view of UNEP's structure, operations, partnerships, and performance for the period January 2021 to September 2025.

Document review: The document review involved extracting and analysing data from 246 internal and external documents relevant to the MOPAN KPIs and MIs, and coding the documents using a qualitative analysis software. Documents reviewed were those published or entering into force during the assessment period (January 2021 — September 2025), and were limited to documents in final form, recognised by management, and available in English. The cut-off date for documentation for inclusion in the technical annex and scoring was 19 September 2025 though in some cases additional information was included from after this date to complete the assessment analysis, verify feedback from UNEP management and additional stakeholder input and provide additional information on direction of travel. Coding followed the MOPAN KPIs at the MI level. The review aimed to establish the extent to which UNEP has the systems, practices, and organisational behaviours in place that MOPAN considers to be important drivers of organisational performance, and whether these are being implemented as intended and having the desired effect. In addition, the assessment of KPIs 9–12 was informed exclusively by a synthesis of evidence drawn from a sample of evaluations as well as organisational reporting documentation.

The document review covered:

- Management documentation, including strategies, policies, results frameworks, budgeting and financial information, management reform initiatives, audits, and standard operating procedures;
- Programme-level documentation relating to the sampled subprogrammes;
- Independent evaluations at corporate, strategic, programme, project- and joint levels, as well as management-led terminal reviews;
- External assessments, including reports from the Joint Inspection Unit, UN Board of Auditors, and previous MOPAN reports; and
- Selected external documents situating UNEP within its wider development and environmental context, including recent Global Environmental Outlook reports.



World Environment Day

UN Environment Programme Executive Director Inger Andersen meets children at the exhibits outside of the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan on World Environment Day, June 05, 2026.
Photo: © UNEP

Stakeholder interviews: Interviews were conducted to deepen and interrogate findings from the document review, confirm or challenge emerging trends, update the assessment team on internal developments within UNEP, and generate new evidence where documentation or survey data were limited.

Interviews were conducted as follows:

- **Headquarters-level interviews:** In-person interviews held in Nairobi between 8–12 September 2025 with senior leadership and operational staff. 45 KIIs and Focus Group Discussions were conducted.
- **Regional and sub-regional interviews:** Remote interviews with senior staff from UNEP's Regional and Sub-Regional Offices in the two weeks following the Nairobi mission, comprising 12 interviews.
- **External stakeholder interviews:** Interviews with selected MEA Secretariats, key partners such as the GEF and GCF, other UN organisations, IPCC representatives, and Resident Co-ordinator Offices in selected countries.

Discussions were also held with the Institutional Leads of the UNEP assessment as part of the analytical process, to gather insights on current priorities for the organisation from the perspective of MOPAN member countries.

Partner survey: The partner survey sought the perspectives of representatives from UNEP's external partners on various dimensions of organisational performance. Survey results provide a key point of triangulation with evidence gathered through the document review and interviews, and help fill evidence gaps not well covered by other sources.

For this assessment, MOPAN's generic survey questionnaire was customised to reflect UNEP's operating model and to focus on strategic issues emerging from inception interviews and the early document review, particularly UNEP's partnerships, including its engagement with MEAs. To reduce respondent burden, the survey was shortened to a maximum of 25 substantive questions.

A total of 361 partners responded to the survey, representing a 16.4% response rate. The survey was conducted between 5 November 2025 and 6 December 2025 (see Annex C for further details).

General information on the sequencing of evidence collection, analysis, and the scoring and rating process as applied to UNEP can be found in the MOPAN 3.1 methodology.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Assessment consisted of four phases: Inception, Evidence Collection, Analysis, and Reporting.

FIGURE 10. **UNEP'S ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

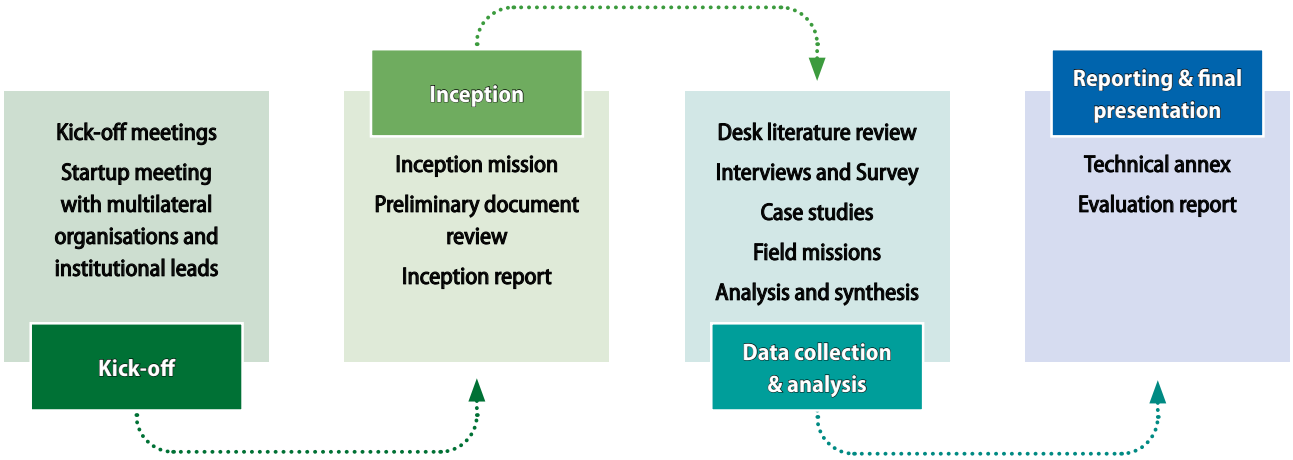


Table 5 describes the overall timeline for the assessment and the key activities undertaken during each phase, summarised by the table below.

TABLE 5. **ASSESSMENT TIMELINE**

Assessment Phase	Inception (May – Oct 2025)	Evidence Collection (Jun – Dec 2025)	Analysis (Oct 2025 – Feb 2026)	Reporting (Feb – Jun 2026)
Key activities				
Timeline	Draft Inception Report: **(Aug 9 – Oct 8)** Final Inception Report: **(Oct 8 – Nov 4)**	Key informant interviews: **(Jun – Oct; Nairobi visit 8-12 Sep)** Document Review: **(Jun – Oct)** Partner survey launch and closure: **(Nov – Dec)**	Preliminary findings: **(Nov 2025)** Draft summary analysis table (Annex A): **(Dec 2025)**	Draft assessment report: **(April 2026)** Final assessment report: **(June 2026**

METHODOLOGY FOR SCORING AND RATING

The approach to scoring and rating under MOPAN 3.1 is described in the 2020 Methodology Manual[1], which can be found on MOPAN's website. The MOPAN website also presents additional information about how the MOPAN framework was adapted for private sector operations.

Each of the 12 KPIs contain several micro-indicators (MIs), which vary in number. The KPI rating is calculated by taking the average of the ratings of its constituent MIs.

1. MOPAN 3.1 Methodology Manual, 2020 Assessment Cycle, https://www.mopan.org/content/dam/mopan/en/publications/our-work/methods/mopan-3-1-methodology.pdf

Scoring of KPIs 1-8

The scoring of KPIs 1-8 is based upon an aggregated scoring of the MIs. Each MI contains several elements, which vary in number, that represent international good practice. A score is then calculated per MI by averaging the constituent scores per element. The same logic is pursued at aggregation to the KPI level, to ensure a consistent approach. Taking the average of the constituent scores per MI, an aggregated score is then calculated per KPI.

Scoring of KPIs 9-12

The scoring of KPIs 9-12 is based upon a meta-analysis of evaluations and performance information, rated at the MI level and aggregated to the KPI level. KPIs 9-12 assess results achieved as reported in evaluations and annual performance reporting from the organisations. Other sources of information are reviewed and included as needed.

Rating scales

Whenever scores are aggregated, rating scales are used to translate scores into ratings that summarise the assessment across KPIs and MIs. The rating scale used under MOPAN 3.1 is shown below.

- **Highly satisfactory** (3.51-4.00)
- **Satisfactory** (2.51-3.50)
- **Unsatisfactory** (1.51-2.50)
- **Highly unsatisfactory** (0.00-1.50)

- **High evidence confidence**
- **Medium evidence confidence**
- **Low evidence confidence**

A score of "N/E" means "no evidence" and indicates that the assessment team could not find any evidence but was not confident of whether or not there was evidence to be found. The team assumes that "no evidence" does not necessarily mean that the element is not present (which would result in a zero score). Elements rated N/E are excluded from any calculation of the average. A significant number of N/E scores in a report indicates an assessment limitation (see the Limitations section at the beginning of the report). A note indicating "N/A" means that an element is considered to be "not applicable". This usually owes to the organisation's specific nature.

LIMITATIONS

This assessment was subject to a number of limitations and risks identified during the inception phase and documented in the MOPAN, UNEP Inception Report. These limitations were monitored throughout the assessment process and mitigated where possible through adjustments to the approach, sequencing, and analysis.

Assessment timeline and sequencing: The assessment timeline was aligned to deliver preliminary findings by summer 2026 in order to inform MOPAN members. This placed pressure on the assessment to adhere to a tight schedule. While the assessment team set aside sufficient time in line with the agreed timeline, any delays in document provision, interview availability, or review processes had the potential to adversely affect the assessment's ability to meet key milestones and stakeholder needs.

As with any assessment of this kind, the timeline was contingent on the timely availability of documentation and support in scheduling interviews by UNEP. Regular touchpoints were held with the UNEP focal point to flag any outstanding issues and seek additional attention where required. Where adjustments to the timeline were necessary, these were considered without compromising the quality of the assessment, and stakeholders were informed accordingly.

Organisational change and external reform context: The assessment took place against a backdrop of organisational and system-wide change. In particular, the UN80 initiative and related reform processes coincided

with the early phases of the assessment. While the majority of the assessment period covered years prior to the introduction of UN80 reforms, the evolving nature of these initiatives, along with heightened funding pressures at both organisational and system levels, created uncertainty around future institutional arrangements and priorities.

There were a number of unknowns underpinning this risk, including the outcomes and timing of reform processes and their implications for UNEP. The assessment team therefore remained in close co-ordination with UNEP senior management, Institutional Leads, and MOPAN members to identify any necessary methodological or analytical adjustments as developments unfolded.

Stakeholder selection and engagement: UNEP works with a wide range of stakeholders across multiple forums and modalities. As a result, there was a risk that the selection of stakeholders for interviews and the partner survey might not fully capture the breadth of UNEP's partnerships and engagement models. If not adequately addressed, this could have affected the accuracy of findings related to partnership coherence and effectiveness.

To mitigate this risk, the assessment team worked closely with UNEP to identify a stakeholder sample broad enough to reflect diverse perspectives, while remaining sufficiently focused to capture views from key partners. Particular attention was given to the selection and engagement of Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) stakeholders, given UNEP's hosting and co-ordination role.

In addition, some interviews with UNEP personnel took place during a period of organisational change associated with the functional review and broader UN reform discussions. This may have influenced stakeholder perceptions, with respondents placing greater emphasis on current organisational challenges, uncertainties or anticipated reforms. To mitigate this risk, interview evidence was triangulated with documentary evidence, survey findings and other stakeholder perspectives wherever possible.

Documentation availability and representativeness: UNEP has undergone a period of organisational change since the previous MOPAN assessment, including staff turnover and the completion of a Joint Inspection Unit Management and Administrative Review. As a result, some documentation generated during the assessment period may no longer fully reflect current practices or institutional arrangements.

To address this limitation, the assessment prioritised the most recent and relevant documentation and triangulated documentary evidence with interview insights and leadership perspectives. Where appropriate, the analysis notes changes over time to reflect UNEP's performance trajectory across the full assessment period.

Methodological limitations: The MOPAN 3.1 methodology is based on a predefined framework of KPIs, micro-indicators, and elements formulated using precise and sometimes binary language. This does not always align neatly with how organisations document or present their systems and practices. As a result, scoring outcomes may highlight areas for improvement that UNEP itself may interpret differently.

Where sampling was required, this was purposive rather than random, and findings are therefore not statistically representative of all UNEP activities. In addition, the results-focused KPIs (9–12) pose inherent challenges for largely normative organisations such as UNEP, particularly where the sustainability of impacts lies beyond the organisation's direct sphere of control.

Within the flexibility permitted by the framework, the assessment team tailored elements of the methodology to UNEP's mandate and operating context. These adaptations are documented in the Inception Report and reflected in the assessment framework chapter of this report. An overarching narrative is provided alongside scores to ensure appropriate context and transparency.



Tree growing as a way to combat climate change

Kirangari Primary School students planting strawberry seedling. Kiambu county Kenya.
Photo: © Derrick Milimo

Subprogramme-based sampling approach: In contrast to MOPAN's traditional geographic sampling approach, this assessment adopted a subprogramme-centred sampling methodology. This decision reflects UNEP's institutional structure and mandate as a primarily normative rather than operational entity.

UNEP does not maintain a standardised country programme structure and does not produce country-level strategic documents such as Country Programme Documents, which are typically used by operational UN entities as anchors for country sampling.

While UNEP is a full member of UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in 130 countries and contributes substantively to the development of the UNSDCF, it does not operationalise the UNSDCF through UNEP-specific country strategies. This makes a country-based sampling approach a poor fit for UNEP and supports the case for a subprogramme-based approach instead. Accordingly, four of UNEP's seven subprogrammes were selected for in-depth thematic inquiry, with illustrative countries and evaluative evidence used to examine implementation in practice. Countries were not assessed as independent programmatic units, but rather as sources of evidence to assess UNEP's design, delivery, and results across its core thematic pillars.

While this approach offers strategic and structural alignment with UNEP's delivery model and allows for thematic depth and comparative analysis across contexts, it also introduces certain limitations. The assessment does not provide a comprehensive country-level performance review and does not allow for systematic comparison across a representative geographic sample. Instead, evidence is anchored in selected subprogrammes and illustrative countries chosen based on the availability of evaluations, terminal reviews, and documented results.

Furthermore, three subprogrammes — Climate action (thematic), Finance and economic transformations (enabling), and Digital transformation (enabling) — were not included in the in-depth sample, as their areas of focus are covered through other components of the MOPAN 3.1 methodology. Nevertheless, the exclusion of these subprogrammes from detailed thematic inquiry may limit the depth of analysis in these areas.

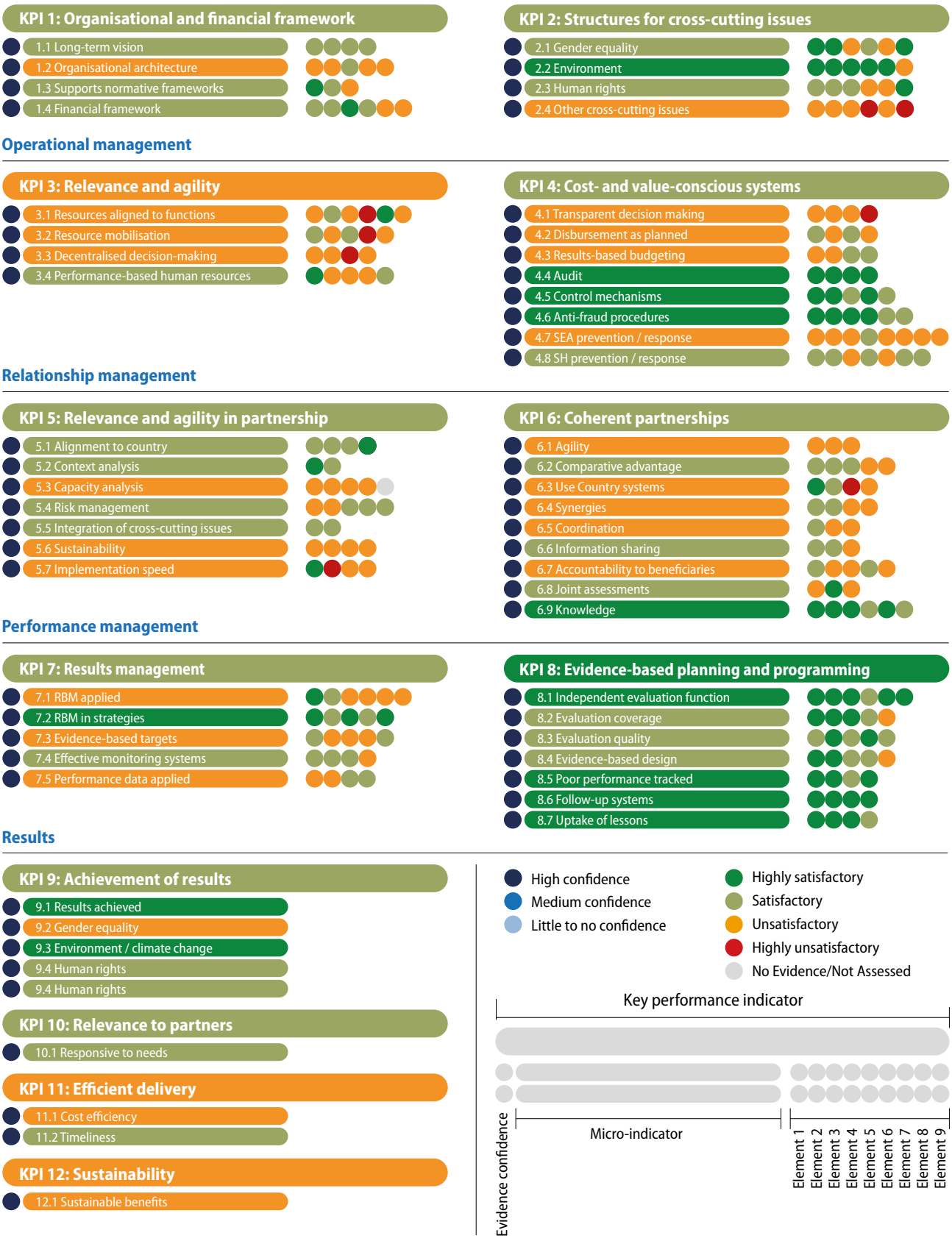
Overall, the subprogramme-led sampling approach provides a more accurate and analytically useful structure for assessing UNEP's performance and reflects its normative mandate and global policy influence. However, readers should interpret findings with the understanding that the evidence base is structured around selected thematic pillars rather than a statistically representative country sample.

REFERENCES

UNEP. (2025). *Quarterly Report to the 173rd Meeting of the CPR.* Nairobi: UNEP.

ANNEX

FIGURE 11. **UNEP PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**



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