

PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

SEPTEMBER 2026



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.



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

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.



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



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

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.



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

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



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.

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.



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

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.

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.

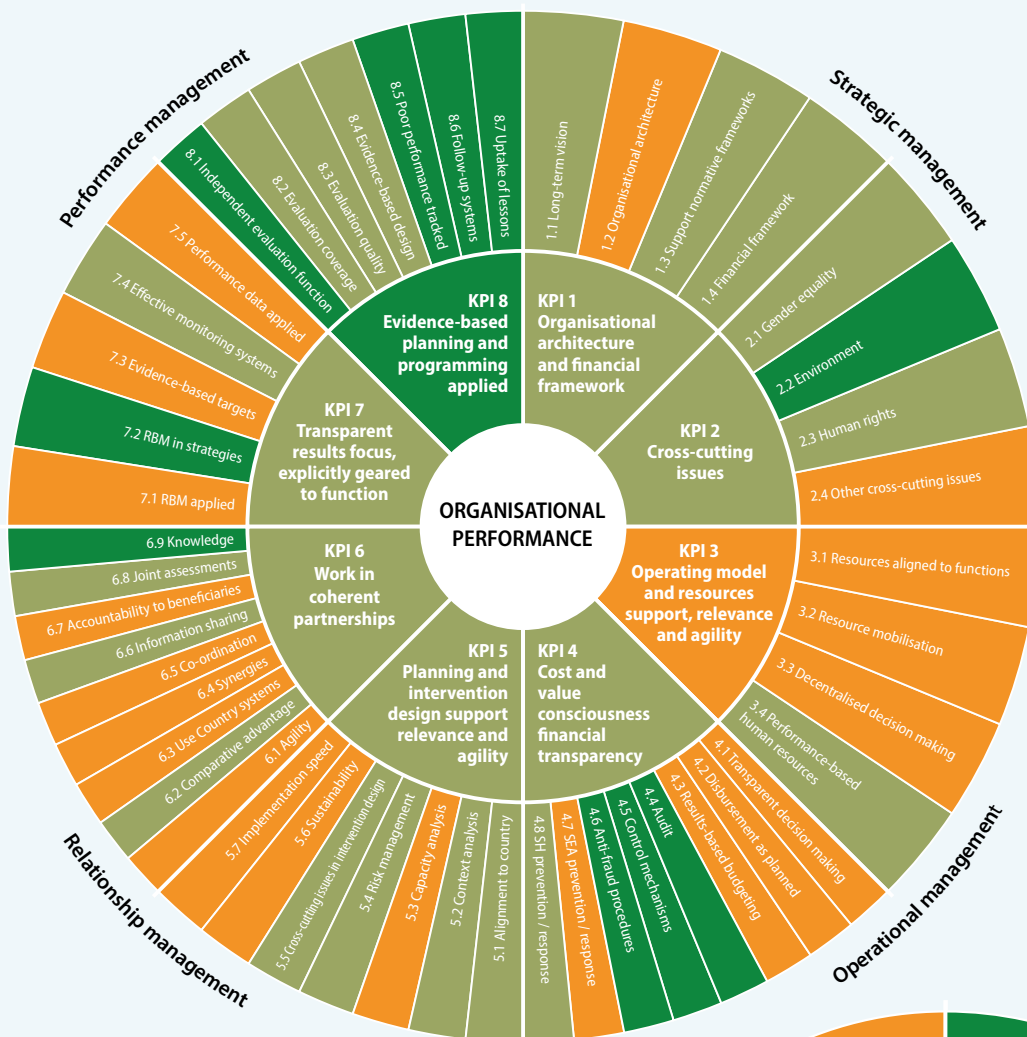
Finally, UN reform processes provide a rare opportunity to strengthen UNEP's positioning as the UN system's environmental anchor. It requires formalised mechanisms for coherence with Resident Co-ordinators, MEA secretariats and development agencies. Governance dialogue should move beyond rhetorical co-ordination to measurable joint programming indicators.



International Day of Zero Waste 2025

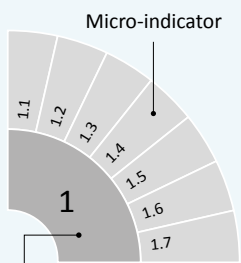
Facilitated jointly by UNEP and UN-Habitat, this event highlights the importance of bolstering waste management globally and the need to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns to address the waste pollution crisis. Photo: © Ahmed Nayim Yussuf / UNEP

UNEP SCORING OVERVIEW

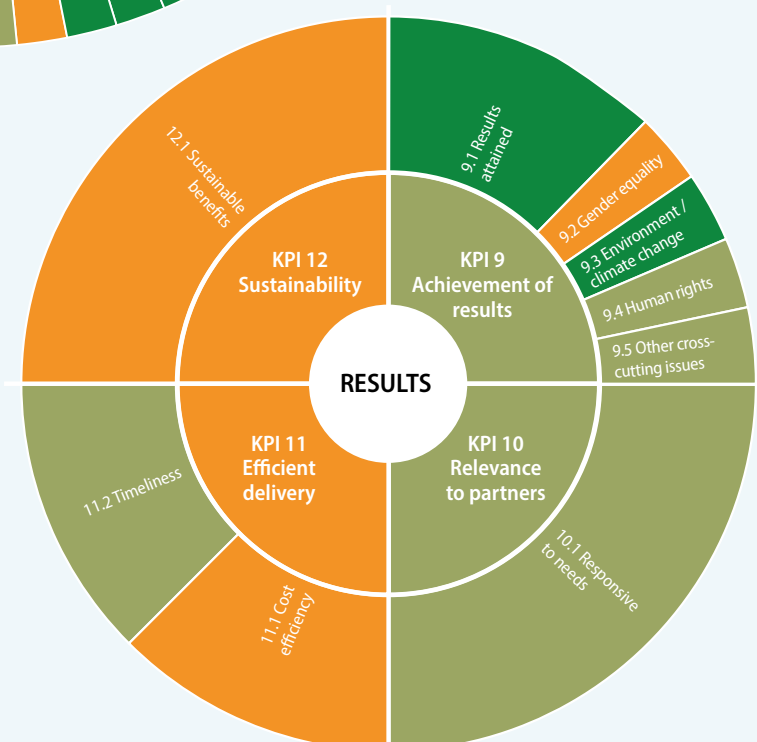


Note: The 2026 MOPAN assessment of UNEP was undertaken using the MOPAN 3.1 assessment methodology introduced following the previous assessment. Under the revised approach rating thresholds were raised to reflect the increasing expectations for organisational performance across the multilateral system.

How to read these charts



Key Performance Indicator



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.



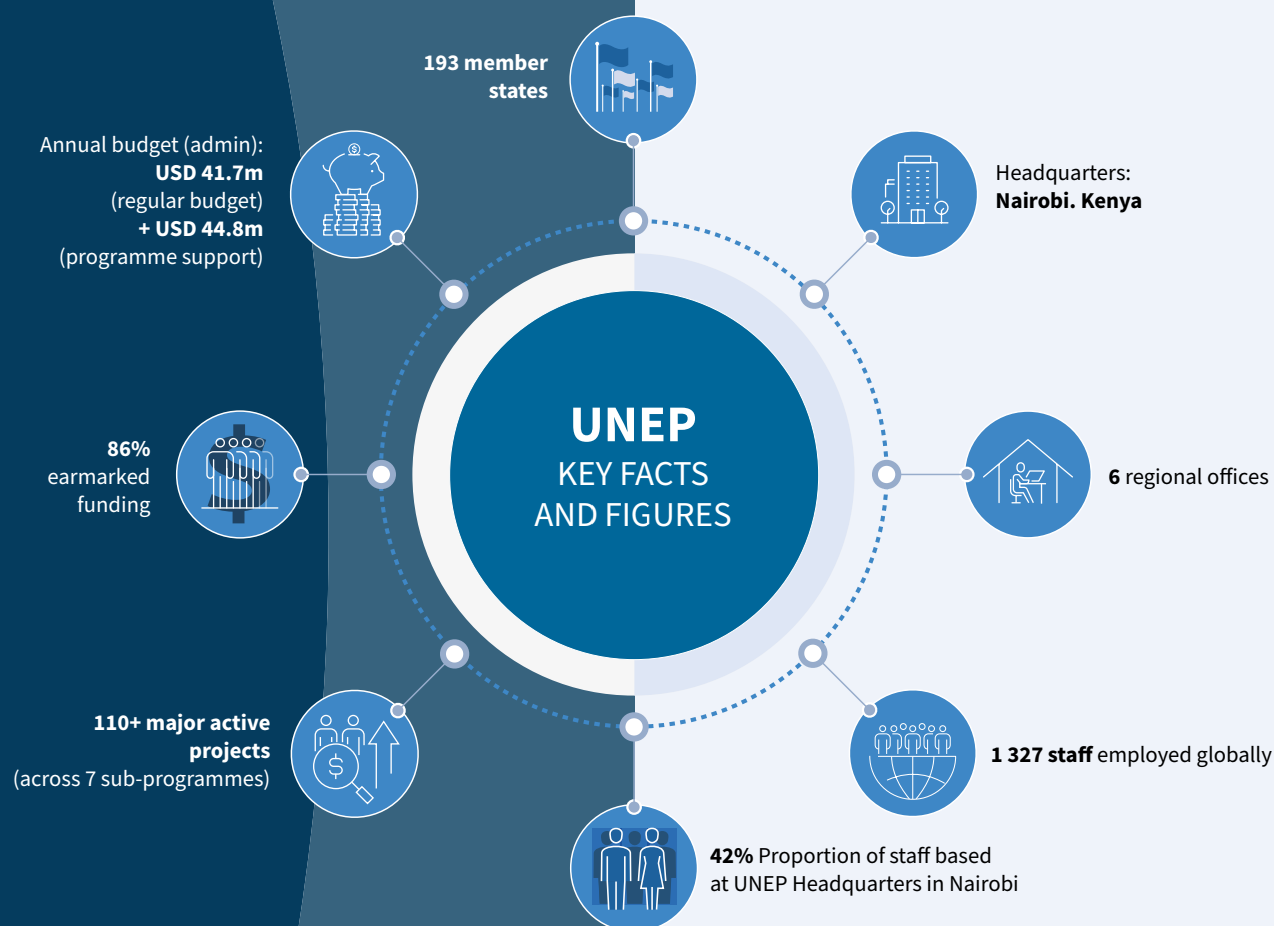
Beach clean up by Muslim women, Kenya

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

UNEP in numbers

INSTITUTIONAL LEADS

The Netherlands and the United Kingdom



TOP 10 DONORS / SHAREHOLDERS AND ANNUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Member	Amount (million USD)
1. Germany	51
2. Italy	39.9
3. Denmark	30.7
4. United Kingdom	24.1
5. European Commission	22.3
6. Norway	20.8
7. Sweden	12
8. Japan	10.7
9. Netherlands	10.2
10. Switzerland	8.4

Source: UNEP, last updated April 2026



THE ASSESSMENT APPROACH

MOPAN's assessments consider whether multilateral organisations are positioned to deliver results in line with their mandates, adhere to the highest standards of ethics and integrity and work coherently across the system. Assessments are shared as a public good to support dialogue and decision-making across the multilateral system, including concerning funding, multilateral policy, and governance. Further information on MOPAN's approach, including details of the assessment framework, is set out in MOPAN's Methodological Manual.

The assessment of UNEP draws on three streams of evidence: a document review, a partner survey, and KIs.

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.

ABOUT MOPAN

The Multilateral Performance Network (MOPAN) comprises 20 members¹ 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 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 increase knowledge and trust amongst all stakeholders and ultimately achieving a stronger, better-performing multilateral system.

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

For more
information



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

