

Letter from the Executive Director

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UNEP in 2019

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I am honoured and humbled to have joined the United Nations Environment Programme in June 2019 at a time when the environmental agenda has taken centre stage.

— Inger Andersen

UN Under-Secretary-General and
UNEP Executive Director



2019 was a year when our past finally caught up with us and science provided an unambiguous call for urgent action. A year when the world witnessed devastating storms, ice sheets melting in the Arctic, giant wildfires and deadly floods. A year when we were warned that 1 million plant and animal species face extinction. A year when we were reminded that unless we act immediately to drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions, we will alter life on Earth forever.

Although this letter reflects on our work in 2019, as I write these words, the world is facing its biggest crisis since World War II. We stand in solidarity with the billions of people around the world that are suffering the impact of the global pandemic of COVID-19 and extend our heartfelt gratitude to the millions of healthcare professionals and members of the United Nations family, including the World Health Organization (WHO), who are working around the clock to protect us. In due course, this crisis will call for a stronger line of enquiry into environment and health, as the connection between the health of people and the health of our planet is so fundamental, yet so often ignored. At this time, however, the immediate priority is to protect people by limiting the spread of COVID-19.

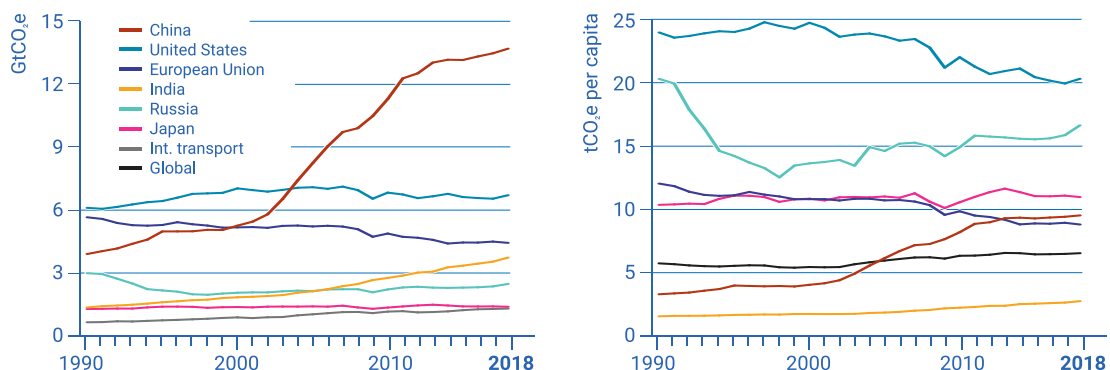
2019 was, despite its many challenges, a year that gave me hope. I was inspired by the millions of young people who took to our streets demanding action for the environment. And they were heard. Governments and businesses stepped forward with innovative policies and actions. While this global awakening is just a start, I am optimistic that we can ramp up our ambitions and actions for biodiversity and climate.

The context of the development of the Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2025 provides an opportunity for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to do even better. We can be more efficient. More focused. More impactful. Transforming UNEP into the best that we can be will be one of my top priorities going forward. That change will only happen with full buy-in and leadership from UNEP’s amazing staff.

2019 was also a year of deep tragedy for UNEP and the broader United Nations family. The deadly crash of an Ethiopian Airlines plane on its way to Nairobi with delegates to the United Nations Environment Assembly resulted in the death of all 157 people on board – United Nations staff, youth delegates, scientists, members of academia and other partners. Among them was our dear UNEP colleague Victor Tsang. The way in which UNEP staff rallied in the face of such a disaster and organized the most successful Assembly ever is testament to the talent and dedication of this team.



TOP GREENHOUSE GAS EMITTERS



Note: Excluding land-use change emissions due to lack of reliable country-level data, on an absolute basis (left) and per capita basis (right)
Source: Emissions Gap Report, UNEP, 2019



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We are telling countries that if they bet on the grey economy, they will have a grey future. Without carbon neutrality, countries will be facing more and more natural disasters, threats to public health and a dramatic loss in biodiversity.

— Secretary-General António Guterres,
20 September 2019, New York



Showing the world that nature is our biggest ally in fighting climate change

In 2019, a **landmark report** by the UNEP-hosted Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warned that the pace of nature’s decline is unprecedented in human history. This clarion call, which made front-page headlines worldwide, spelled out what is needed: a fundamental reorganization across technological, economic and social systems.

Still, the report showed that it is not too late. If we commit to change, nature can still be conserved, restored and used sustainably. And use it we must. Nature is the most effective and cost-efficient solution to many of the challenges we face.

At the United Nations Secretary-General’s **Climate Action Summit** last September, UNEP unveiled more than 150 proposals for nature-based solutions as part of the launch of the **Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Manifesto**, which offers a roadmap to unlock the full potential of nature for climate action and development.

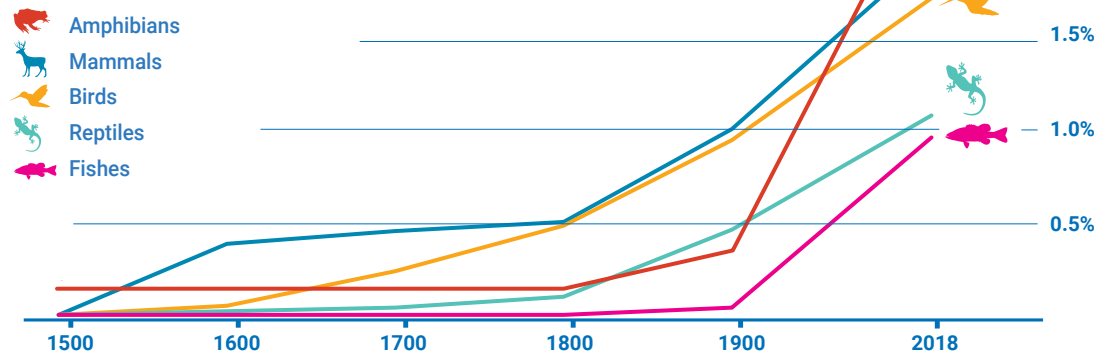
The tremendous capacity of nature to help us in our time of need will be at the heart of the **United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration**. The United Nations General Assembly last year tasked UNEP to work with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to lead the 2021–2030 Decade and scale up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide.

A critical moment for nature will come when the world agrees on a new **post-2020 framework for biodiversity** at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UNEP-hosted Convention on Biological Diversity. As 2019 drew to a close, the team was finalizing a zero draft. In addition to ambitious, measurable targets, success will only come with a real commitment for action by all sectors of government and society – especially business.



EXTINCTIONS SINCE 1500

The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20 per cent, mostly since 1900.



Note: Cumulative % of species based on background rate of 0.1–2 extinctions per million species per year.

Source: 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Global Assessment Report.

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We stand at a critical juncture in our collective efforts to address the climate emergency. Our war against nature must stop.

— Secretary-General António Guterres,
1 December 2019, Madrid



Shaping global conversations and policies on the environment

UNEP's flagship reports dominated headlines in 2019, putting environmental challenges at the centre of international meetings, boardroom discussions and conversations from classrooms to kitchens to protest marches.

Ahead of the December climate summit in Madrid, our **Emissions Gap Report** helped drive the agenda. The report said that we either cut greenhouse gas emissions by 7.6 per cent every year from now until 2030 or accept that our world will warm by more than 3°C by the end of the century. Quoting the report, the Secretary-General told delegates at the summit's opening that the only solution is rapid transformative action by all – governments, regions, cities, businesses and civil society. If we fail, "the impact on all life on the planet – including ours – will be catastrophic," he warned.

Earlier in the year, UNEP released its sixth **Global Environment Outlook** – the most comprehensive and rigorous assessment on the state of the environment. It warned that millions of people in Asia, the Middle East and Africa could die prematurely from water and air pollution by 2050 unless urgent action is taken. The report also sounded the alarm on pollutants – including antibiotics – in our freshwater systems, saying that resulting antimicrobial resistance could become a major cause of death. The report informed major policy discussions, including China's next Five-Year Plan as well as the European Union's Green New Deal, and the Association of American Publishers awarded the Outlook its **Award for Environmental Science**.

With chemical production forecast to almost double by 2030 – and an urgent need to decouple this growth from damage to human health and the environment – our research has informed the process to draft a post-2020 framework for the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. Our second **Global Chemicals Outlook** noted that the framework must bring together all relevant sectors and organizations to foster collaborative, ambitious action. If we get this right, it will help halt biodiversity loss and contribute to achieving other Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

Our **Environmental Rule of Law** report was the first such global assessment. It found that a lack of political will to fully implement and enforce environmental laws is one of the greatest challenges to mitigating climate change, reducing pollution, and preventing widespread species and habitat loss. Two months after its publication, the Supreme Court of India cited UNEP and the report in a ruling on a proposed airport that was to be constructed in an eco-sensitive area in the state of Goa. The decision judicially recognized the concept of environmental rule of law for the first time in India.

Our **Frontiers 2018/19** report on emerging environmental issues addressed the threat posed by nitrogen pollution. The report informed discussions at the United Nations Environment Assembly, and Member States subsequently adopted a resolution on nitrogen management that included a proviso to better coordinate policies across the nitrogen cycle at national, regional and global levels.

Science does not just show us where we are. It shows us how to get to where we need to be. The UNEP-hosted International Resource Panel released a summary of its new report *Resource Efficiency and Climate Change* at the Madrid summit in December. The report shows how material efficiency strategies applied to cars and residential buildings could help countries further reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. G7 countries alone could save up to 170 million tonnes of carbon emissions from homes by 2050, compared to 2016 levels. In this same sector and period, China could save some 350 million tonnes and India some 270 million tonnes. All of this could happen through strategies and technologies that are available today.





Clean energy and efficient cooling on a warming planet

The technical assistance provided by the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), the operational arm of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Technology Mechanism, has contributed to anticipated emission reductions of 11.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year and benefited 90 million people. The CTCN knowledge platform is the world's largest source of online technology information, including technology descriptions, webinars, thousands of case studies and country plans. By December 2019, the Centre, co-hosted by UNEP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, had provided 188 technology solutions to 100 developing countries.

In 2019, we successfully raised additional funding for our **Seed Capital Assistance Facility**, which has mobilized over US\$2.6 billion in development co-financing, project finance and fund capitalization for renewable energy development across 27 developing countries in Africa and Asia.

Efficient, climate-friendly cooling offers significant potential for cuts in emissions. Last April, together with partners, we launched the **Cool Coalition** to invigorate the search for solutions. We are already working in 25 countries and with 90 partners. Cooling is an important blind spot in climate action: a 30 per cent improvement in the energy efficiency of room air conditioners could avoid the need for 2,500 power plants and save almost US\$3 trillion by 2050. At the Secretary-General's **Climate Action Summit**, partners of the Cool Coalition announced new commitments, including national cooling plans, business reform and funding.

Stronger environmental governance, together

We are honoured to work with and through many critical multilateral environmental agreements to advance progress on critical issues from biodiversity and ecosystems to regional seas and chemical waste management. UNEP serves as a "docking station" for these accords, which illustrate the power of collective action to tackle environmental issues that are too big for any one nation alone. One such example came in 2019 when the world took an important step to drastically reduce the production and consumption of damaging greenhouse gases, known as hydrofluorocarbons, and limit global warming. On 1 January 2019, the **Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer** came into force. At that time, it had been ratified by 65 countries. By the end of the year, that number had grown to 91.

Detoxifying planet and people

Environmental degradation is not just bad for the natural world. Air pollution is a life-and-death issue for too many people, and it is also the largest driver of climate change. Reducing some short-lived pollutants, like black carbon and methane, could slow down the warming expected by 2050 by about 0.4 to 0.5°C.

UNEP organized the **World Environment Day**, which was dedicated to air pollution in 2019, and saw millions of people supporting calls for better air quality. On that occasion, nine additional governments joined **BreatheLife**, a joint initiative of the UNEP-hosted Climate and Clean Air Coalition with WHO and the World Bank. **BreatheLife** combines public health and climate change expertise with guidance on implementing solutions to air pollution in support of global development goals.



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By the end of the decade we will be on one of two paths. One is the path of surrender, where we have sleepwalked past the point of no return, jeopardizing the health and safety of everyone on this planet. The other option is the path of hope. A path of resolve, of sustainable solutions. A path where more fossil fuels remain where they should be – in the ground

— Secretary-General António Guterres,
20 September 2019, New York





In 2019, we expanded our **Clean Seas campaign**, a global drive to reduce plastic pollution. The number of countries involved in the campaign rose to 60 in 2019, and the issue was front-and-centre at the United Nations Environment Assembly, where Member States adopted a resolution to significantly reduce single-use plastic products by 2030. While on a visit to Fiji in May, the Secretary-General warned, “Our precious oceans are being used as a trash heap and are drowning in plastic pollution. It’s time to break the habit of single-use plastics.”

Addressing pollution also involves advancing sound chemicals management. **The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)**, hosted by UNEP, is a policy framework to promote chemical safety around the world. In 2019, an intersessional process continued the preparation of recommendations regarding SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, when the current SAICM strategy expires. UNEP also concluded its Quick Start Programme, which mobilized US\$47.9 million for 184 projects in 108 countries over 13 years. The Programme was instrumental in helping developing countries identify and address national priorities for chemicals management, according to SAICM guidelines.

Advancing sustainable consumption and production patterns, as well as a sustainable financial system

For far too long, economic progress has come at the expense of the environment. It is beyond time to break that toxic equation and decouple growth from environmental destruction. Environment ministers at the United Nations Environment Assembly laid the groundwork for a transformative shift to a more sustainable future, where innovation will be harnessed to tackle environmental challenges, where the ‘take, make, waste’ culture will be a thing of the past, and where development will no longer cost the Earth.

Launched at the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly, the *Global Resources Outlook 2019*, prepared by the International Resource Panel, found that “the extraction and processing of materials, fuels and food make up about half of total global greenhouse gas emissions and more than 90 per cent of biodiversity loss and water stress”.

Ministers pledged to address environmental challenges by promoting innovative solutions and adopting sustainable consumption and production patterns. “We reaffirm that poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development,” the ministers said in a final declaration. Financial institutions must be at the heart of the transformation to a more sustainable economic model. So, the day before the Climate Action Summit, we launched the *Principles for Responsible Banking*, a powerful new commitment by some of the world’s leading financial institutions to align themselves with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. More than 130 banks, with US\$47 trillion in assets, have signed up to the Principles and their strong implementation framework, which includes ambitious target-setting and transparency through public reporting. We now have the means to spark a transformation of the entire banking system. At the Climate Action Summit, UNEP’s Finance Initiative convened the Net-Zero Asset Owner



Alliance, a group of 12 of the world's largest pension funds and insurers committed to fully decarbonizing their portfolios by 2050. In December, four more large investors, including Axa and Aviva, joined the Alliance, which today includes 177 businesses with total assets under management of nearly US\$4 trillion.

Empowering women and promoting gender equality

Research shows that gender norms and inequality too often leave women disproportionately affected by drought, floods and extreme weather. When crops fail or waters dry up, women oftentimes bear the burden of finding ways to feed their families. But they are held back by myriad factors including restricted land rights, lack of access to financial resources, training and technology, and limited access to political decision-making. Tackling these is a priority.

In Sudan's North Kordofan State, women took charge of family farms after drought and environmental degradation drove many men to seek work in cities or migrate with livestock to greener pastures. UNEP is working with UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to empower women to succeed in farming, natural resource management and conflict resolution. They are taught how to use rain-fed farming techniques, how to harvest gum Arabic – a staple export of the region – and how to access credit from local financial institutions.

Just 30 per cent of researchers are women. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) tells us that women in science, technology, engineering and math are published less, paid less for their research and do not advance as far as men in their careers. At UNEP, we are implementing the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality 2.0 to harmonize gender mainstreaming actions from 2018 to 2022. UN Women has commended UNEP for publicly championing gender equality, but we must still do more. I expect to be held accountable on these issues.



UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNEP Deputy Executive Director Joyce Msuya (right) in conversation with H.E. Paula Cristina Francisco Coelho, who was Minister of the Environment for Angola at the time.

We cannot say that our generation did not know the consequences of the destruction of nature, biodiversity and ecosystems.

— Emmanuel Macron, President of France,
fourth session of the United Nations Environment
Assembly, Nairobi, March 2019





Taking the Oath of Office with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres



Transforming UNEP to be fit for purpose

Tackling multiple environmental challenges under the most relentless of deadlines requires UNEP itself to evolve.

With this in mind, in late 2019, I launched with my senior management a transformation process. In its diagnostic phase, we heard the voices of more than 400 staff and other personnel, identifying aspirations for the organization and opportunities to improve how we operate. These voices were unanimous in their joint desire to build a more focused, aligned, effective and impactful UNEP.

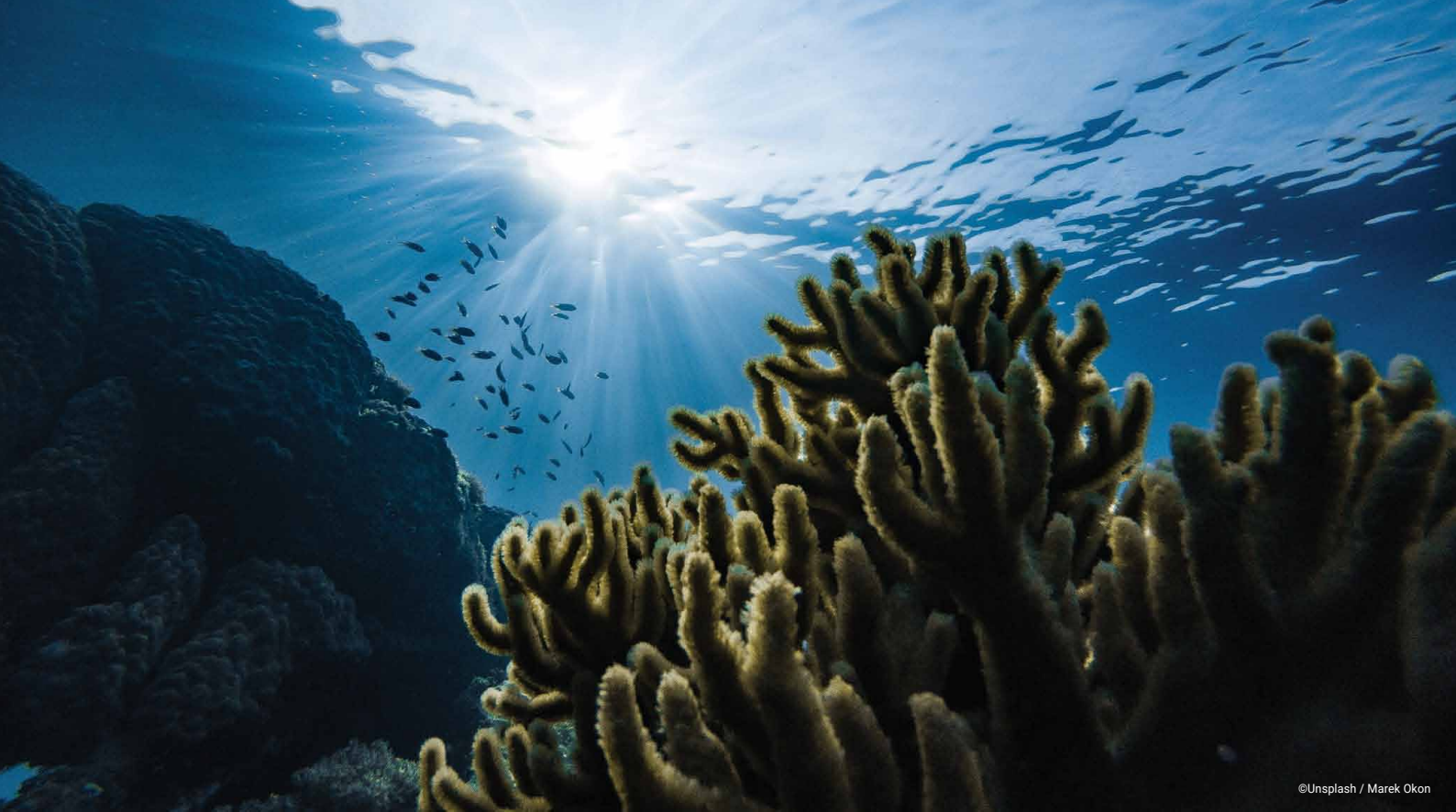
In parallel, we have started to look at our organizational focus to ensure we are effectively addressing the most urgent environmental challenges. I look forward to continuing these conversations with colleagues and Member States in the months to come. Both of these tracks are just the start of a journey to ensure UNEP is as fit as it can be to deliver on our mandate.

At the same time, I started a dialogue with UNDP and I look forward to reviewing and strengthening our engagement with other entities across the United Nations system. Seeking a smarter way to influence environmental agendas and serve Member States through a reform of the United Nations and a more active engagement with the United Nations Development System and United Nations country teams is, in my view, the only way forward.

In 2019, we also pursued our own sustainability efforts and continued to measure our climate emissions, mitigate these where possible and offset them by using certificates of emission reduction. The United Nations Environment Assembly was a green meeting, carbon neutral as well as both plastic- and paper-free.

The task before us is enormous. But I am confident that the much-needed leap in ambition and collective action is within reach. In the context of the critical United Nations reform and with the vital support of Member States, partners, the private sector, youth, civil society, communities and the public at large, UNEP is determined to make 2020 a worthy start to a decade of action and delivery on the vision of planetary sustainability for people, prosperity and equity. Through multilateral and collective action, we can stabilize the Earth systems, thereby setting a determined new path towards sustainable development.





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A healthy planet depends on all of us

Background

Since 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme has been setting the global environmental agenda, promoting the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serving as an authoritative advocate for nature.

Mission

Our mission is to provide leadership and to encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

Who we are

Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, we also have staff working in regional, liaison and out-posted offices

and a growing network of collaborating centres of excellence.

We also host the secretariats of many critical multilateral environmental agreements and research bodies, bringing together nations and the environmental community to tackle the greatest challenges of our time.

Structure

We categorize our work into seven broad thematic areas: climate change, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, chemicals and waste, resource efficiency, and environment under review.

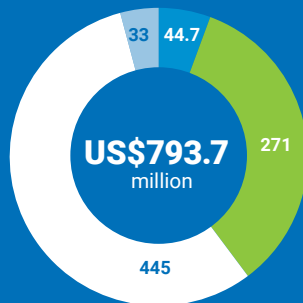
In thanks

We are grateful to our Member States and partners who fund and champion our mission.

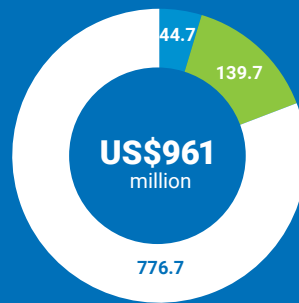
Financial facts

* 2018 – 2019 financial status in US\$ millions
 * As at 31 December 2019

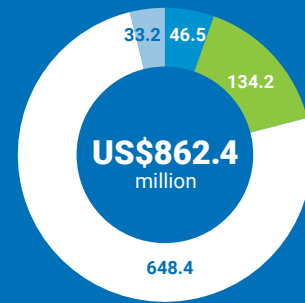
Budget



Income

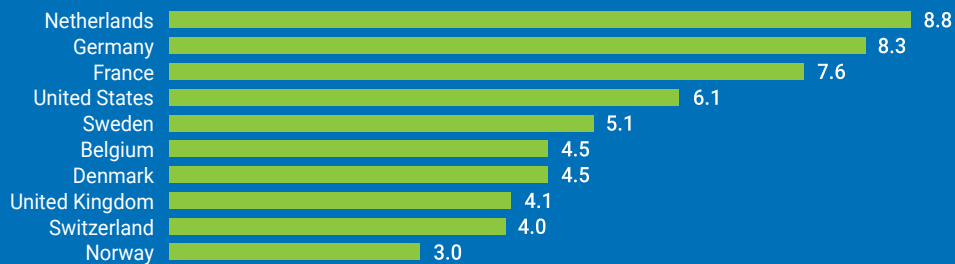


Expenditure

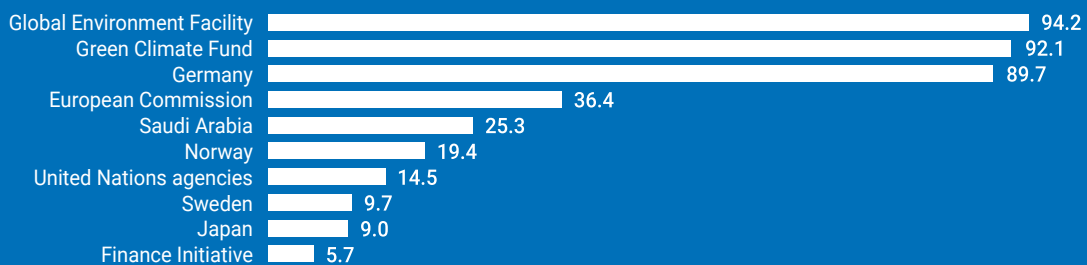


● Environment Fund
 ● Trust and earmarked funds
 ● UN regular budget
 ● Programme support cost

Top 10 contributors to the Environment Fund in 2019 in US\$ millions



Top 10 earmarked funds in 2019 in US\$ millions



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