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UNEP and the European Commission

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UNEP and the European Commission have a strong and long-standing partnership, translating policy efforts into concrete programmatic results that advance the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNEP, including the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) it administers, and the European Commission have worked together since UNEP's creation in 1972 and further strengthened their relationship through the agreement of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2004. The MoU was renewed in 2014 and in 2021 to include a new Annex with common areas of interest in view of the global environmental agenda and the new European Union (EU) policy context for the period 2021-2025.

Guided by the shared policy priorities defined in the MoU, the cooperation between UNEP and the European Commission has evolved over the years into a solid partnership, promoting the ambitions agreed at the United Nations Environmental Assembly and delivering more than a large variety of projects.

Since 2011, this cooperation has resulted in the implementation of innovative framework agreements, offering an opportunity to increase impact in priority areas through allocating seed funding and fostering a coordinated and coherent approach to tackling global challenges.



Photo: UNEP | Stéphanie Foote

European Commission and UNEP fighting the triple planetary crisis

Combating the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste is at the heart of the cooperation between UNEP and the European Commission. A joint response to these challenges is informed by the Medium-term Strategy (MTS) of UNEP for 2022-2025 and the European Green Deal.

The new MTS strengthens UNEP's role in delivering the promises of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and its outcome document, "The Future We Want." UNEP will continue supporting countries to deliver on their environmental commitments under international agreements. As the leading global environmental authority, it is uniquely positioned to advance the global environmental agenda and the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations. In the period of 2022-2025, UNEP will support an integrated and balanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda and deliver transformational results, drawing on its expertise in science, environmental law and financial and economic transition towards sustainable consumption and production. It will contribute to systematizing, integrating and democratizing environmental data, knowledge and insight for innovative and inclusive collaboration opportunities and enhanced impact.

The EU launched the European Green Deal Communication at the end of 2019 as a blueprint for transformational change. Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world. To overcome these challenges, the European Green Deal will transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, ensuring:

- no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050
- economic growth decoupled from resource use
- no person and no place left behind

The EU aims to work with partner countries and international organisations to tackle these challenges which do not know any borders.

The joint policy cooperation, building on UNEP's MTS and PoW and the European Green Deal principles, centrally focuses on the science-policy interface, environmental multilateralism, climate and energy, nature, pollution, and sustainable consumption and productions and resource efficiency to enable transformation at the pace and scale required to achieve planetary sustainability for people, prosperity and equity. UNEP and the European Commission frequently engage in policy discussions to strengthen cooperation in the prioritized areas and promote their implementation at the global, regional and country levels. The recent policy engagements have provided an opportunity to jointly reflect on the external dimensions of the Green Deal and its role in fostering environmental multilateralism and green transition in countries and regions.



Photo: UNEP | Stephanie Foote

Climate

The joint action on climate is centered around enhancing climate resilience and promoting climate neutrality focusing on sustainable energy deployment, clean technology transfers and reducing methane emissions. The cooperation is based on a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral approach, promoting mitigation and adaptation win-wins such as Nature-based Solutions and economy-wide green transition, backed by science, sustainable investments and broader energy and resource efficiency strategies. It also contributes to supporting sustainable livelihoods and peace and security in fragile contexts. Both, the European Commission and UNEP are committed to building strong multilateral alliances in the view of international milestone events such as the UNFCCC COPs, and to strengthening synergies between climate, biodiversity and pollution agendas to ensure they are addressed in an integrated manner.

In recent years, the EU has contributed considerably to the development of the International **Methane Emissions Observatory (IMEO)**, established in March 2021.

Officially launched at the G20 Leaders' Summit in October 2021, the IMEO aims to dramatically reduce emissions of methane by integrating and reconciling

emissions data, linking findings to ambitious action, and providing policy-relevant data that supports sound methane reduction policies and regulations by governments. The IMEO will reach its objectives by improving the availability and quality of information on methane emissions by collecting and reconciling four data streams:

- **Oil and Gas Methane Partnership 2.0.** Member companies submit annual reports detailing emissions from each of their assets and corroborated by the applicable assessment methodology.
- **Direct measurement of data from scientific studies.** IMEO will commission scientific studies to close the knowledge gap on methane emissions and improve our understanding of the magnitude and location of emissions around the world.
- **Methane-measuring satellites.** IMEO will have access to a variety of satellites data: area sources data produced by Copernicus' TROPOMI and MethaneSAT that provide methane emissions data at a global scale.
- **National inventories.** Reporting from countries to the UNFCCC and data from other sources will be considered and incorporated as appropriate based on the methodology used to derive emissions estimates.



Photo: UNEP | Lisa Murray

Nature

The joint collaboration in the area of nature has contributed to advancing towards an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, which remains a key priority in 2022 ahead of the CBD COP15 in Kunming, China and support of UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The partnership also focuses on accelerating and scaling-up the deployment of Nature-based Solutions (NBS), which are of crucial importance since they present multiple co-benefits not only to nature restoration, but also climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, as well as human health, security and sustainable livelihoods. Both partners recognize the importance of investing in nature as an essential solution for tackling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, especially in the context of green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the occasion of the 2020 High-Level Policy Dialogue, the European Commission and UNEP committed to further strengthen the synergies between these three agendas, promote nature-based solution investments and ensure links to other relevant policies such as forestry, agriculture, tourism and ocean governance. UNEP also stands ready to continue supporting the EU's international leadership and domestic ambition, e.g. through the implementation of the EU Action Plan to Protect and Restore the World's Forests, as well as the EU Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies which open doors for strengthened cooperation.

The European Commission has been a strong partner and contributor to the different Multilateral Environmental Agreements focusing on biodiversity issues, such as the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) which has benefitted from over ten years of substantial targeted support next to its assessed contributions.

The main objective of the CBD is to support Parties in their efforts to mainstream biodiversity within and across all relevant sectors through supporting activities related to business engagement, sustainable development, human health, and communication. It provides Parties with support to:



- Implementation of the [Convention, Protocols and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity](#) by supporting activities related to the clearing-house mechanism, and protected areas.
- Actions related to [invasive alien species, marine and coastal biodiversity](#), climate change, forest, sustainable wildlife management, ecosystem restoration, and synthetic biology.
- Follow up to the [Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020](#) by supporting activities related to review mechanisms, such as the long-term Strategic Framework for capacity building beyond 2020.

The EU funds have particularly allowed progress towards engaging the business community to contribute to the achievement of the Strategic Plan, including strengthened collaboration, outreach, and enhanced coordination with the private sector. They further strengthened the Secretariat's support to Parties in five regions in the field of protected area management, as well as reinforced collaborative partnership on sustainable wildlife management and the progress towards preparing for a well-developed strategic framework for the Post-2020 era.

Pollution

The joint priorities in the area of pollution are to strengthen science-based policies that promote a pollution-free and healthier planet for people, animals and plants, which is key to interrupting zoonotic transmission pathways and preventing future pandemics. The European Commission-UNEP joint pollution action is driven by a One Health approach, recognizing close interlinkages between planetary and human health. Both parties are committed to promoting a global coordinated response on pollution prevention and abatement, across air, water and soil, as well as including cross-cutting sources of pollution (e.g., nutrients, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and waste management). A recent European Commission-UNEP Policy Dialogue on Pollution (November 2021) identified priority areas for strengthened cooperation, in support of the UN Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan, especially to its external dimension. The joint action on pollution will focus on sectors with the highest environmental impacts, such as textiles, agriculture, e-waste, plastics, mining and transport. The Dialogue also helped to define opportunities for further scaling up zero pollution action from the science, advocacy and regulation perspectives. The outcomes of the dialogue will be further refined and adjusted based on dedicated follow-up meetings.

One prominent example of the long-lasting political and programmatic partnership, is the establishment of the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#), which was concluded in 2013 as a legally binding agreement to protect human health and the environment from the harmful effects of mercury in economic and industrial uses.

The Convention was finally triggered into force on 18 May 2017, thanks to its ratification by the EU and seven of its Member States. The first Conference of the Parties took place in September 2017 and the Convention now has 137 parties, with 37 countries in Africa, 34 in Asia Pacific, 16 in Central & Eastern Europe, 24 in Latin America and the Caribbean and 26 in Western Europe and other groups.

The European Commission has financially supported the preparation and the set-up of the Minamata Convention on Mercury since 2011 and continues to support the Conventions activities, with two projects focusing on the implementation support to:

- the supply and trade of mercury and Parties obligations to control the emissions of mercury. The project also supports parties to ascertain their current stock of mercury and ensure all parties fully understand the obligations and provisions set out under Article 8 of the Convention.
- Parties to meet the 2020 deadline on phasing out the manufacture, import and export of certain mercury-added products including batteries, compact fluorescent lamps, cosmetics including skin lightening soaps and cremes. The other aim of the project is to ensure Parties put in place measures so that mercury-added products listed in the Convention are phased out by 2020.

With the textile sector being an important sector in tackling environmental pollution, the two organisations joint efforts to set up of the project [“Innovative Business Practices and Economic Models in the Textile Value Chain \(InTex\)”](#). The project has five components, with two having global reach, and three components focusing on national implementation in three African countries, where textiles is a key economic sector and where companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are part of multinational value chains. The overall objective of the InTex project aims to:

- Increase the knowledge on resource efficiency, life cycle thinking, circularity and eco-innovation in the textile value chain among SMEs and governments
- Train textiles stakeholders on eco-innovation and product environmental footprint
- Accompany textiles businesses to transform their approach and business models to increase sustainability and circularity in the textile value chain
- Increase the access to environmental and lifecycle data so that textiles businesses and policymakers can make better informed decisions and implement relevant strategies
- Provide evidence of the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the different sustainable economic models in the textiles value chain and raise awareness on the potential impacts of adopting and fostering innovative sustainable and circular policies and practices

Cross-cutting Issues

UNEP has equipped policymakers with the scientific evidence necessary for making important decisions related to climate, biodiversity and pollution and received significant support from the European Commission. In 2021, ahead of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) 5, UNEP produced its first synthesis report “Making Peace With Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies,” funded by the EU and Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment. By synthesizing the latest scientific findings from the global environmental assessments, the report communicates the current status of the world’s urgent issues and opportunities to solve them. The findings of this report informed multiple policy engagements of the UN with the EU as well as other actors.

The UNEA, hosted by the UNEP, brings together representatives of the 193 Member States of the UN, businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders to agree on policies to address the world’s most pressing environmental challenges.

[The resumed fifth session of the UNEA \(UNEA 5.2\)](#) is an opportunity for Member States and Stakeholders to share best practices for sustainability and create momentum for governments to build back better through green and sustainable recovery plans, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The European Commission has, amongst others, provided financial support for travel and accommodation for Member States delegates from Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States and representatives of major groups and stakeholders to different UNEA meetings, including UNEA 5.1 and 5.2, and support to IT platforms and interpretation.

The partners have strengthened their policy cooperation on circular economy in view of the growing scientific evidence produced by the International Resource Panel about the multiple benefits of transitioning to circularity and resource efficiency, a number of UNEA resolutions, and joint global and regional initiatives, such as the launch of the ‘[Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency](#)’ (GACERE) or the ‘[Partnership for Green Economy Action](#)’ (PAGE). The recent European Commission-UNEP policy dialogue on circular economy (May 2021) strengthened the commitment

of partners to scale up circular economy and resources efficiency in view of implementing the 2030 Agenda and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan.

Another prominent joint global initiative is the [10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production \(10YFP\)](#). The 10YFP is a global commitment made by the 193 United Nations Member States at the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, to accelerate the shift to sustainable consumption and production in both the developing and developed world. The European Commission has been a main contributor to the activities of the 10YFP Secretariat since its inception.

Over the last eight years global multi-stakeholder partnership has formed to lead the shift to Sustainable Consumption and Production and implementation of the 10YFP - The One Planet network (www.oneplanetnetwork.org). The One Planet network is a global community of practitioners, policymakers and experts, including governments, businesses, civil society, academia and international organisations, that sets the agenda and provides tools and solutions to deliver on SDG 12: ensuring sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

The original mandate of the 10YFP was from 2012 – 2022. In 2021 the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly approved [the extension of the 10YFP](#) mandate until 2030. The new 10-year strategy will be built on what has been achieved during the first decade and will showcase the ambition in addressing the triple planetary crisis and scaling up implementation, focusing on changing the way we think, act and share about Sustainable Consumption and Production.

UNEP and the European Commission closely collaborate on promoting environmental multilateralism and support to regions and countries in implementing the MEAs. This cooperation also reinforces synergies in implementing MEAs to ensure a coordinated contribution to sustainable development.

As such, [the Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific - MEAs programme \(ACP MEAs\)](#) is a joint partnership between the European Commission, the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which aims to build the capacity of 79

countries in ACP to support them fulfil their obligations as parties to the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The European Commission has been supporting UNEP in implementing the MEAs support programme since 2009. UNEP and FAO, the primary implementors of the programme, have achieved some major milestones, such as the launch of Youth Engagement and Training Initiative (YETI), providing youth mentorships in Africa and Europe, as well as the environmental journalists forum sessions, providing for example support to African Network on Environmental Journalists (ANEJ). The programme has also managed to form regional and national MEA negotiators and strengthen partners gender equity and equality considerations.

The currently implemented third phase has the following objectives:

- [Enforcement of and compliance with MEAs related to biodiversity and chemicals and waste;](#)
- [Better management of coasts and oceans and effective implementation of the related regional seas conventions;](#)
- [Enhanced mainstreaming of biodiversity and of the sound management of chemicals and waste in agriculture in ACP countries in line with related MEAs](#)

