

April  
**2022**

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## Evolution of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO)

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is often referred to as United Nations Environment Programme's flagship environmental assessment as it fulfills the core functions of the organization which date back to the [United Nations General Assembly resolution](#) that established the United Nations Environment Programme in 1972.

These core functions include:

- Keeping the world environmental situation under review in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments;
- Promoting the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and, as appropriate, to the technical aspects of the formulation and implementation of environmental programmes within the UN system.
- Maintaining under continuing review the impact of national and international environmental policies and measures on developing countries, as well as the problem of additional costs that may be incurred by developing countries in the implementation of environmental programmes and projects, and to ensure that such programmes and projects shall be compatible with the development plans and priorities of those countries.

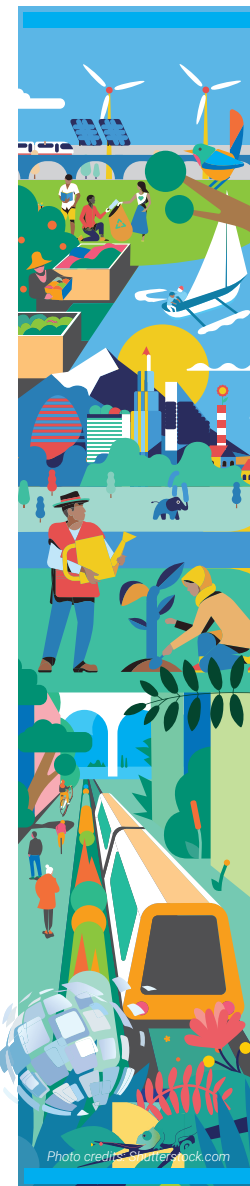
UNEP's science-policy interface has developed since 1972 and with the United Nations celebrating 50 years of global environmental action in June 2022, the GEO process represents a key function in the science policy interface sphere. The [Stockholm+50](#) celebrations will commemorate the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment that resulted in the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme.



The **first Global Environment Outlook (GEO-1)** launched in 1997 was the first product of the Global Environment Outlook series. It was a snapshot of an ongoing worldwide environmental assessment process. The report incorporated regional views and perceptions and aimed at building consensus on priority issues and actions. Input was solicited from 20 collaborating centers, from United Nations organizations and through regional policy consultations. It described the environmental status and trends in seven regions; it summarized developments over time in regional policy responses and concluded with an exploration, based on model analysis, of what we might expect in the future for a selected number of environmental issues if no major policy reforms are initiated.

The **GEO -2000: UNEP'S Millennium Report on the Environment** launched in 1999, outlined the progress in tackling existing environmental problems and pointed to serious new threats. The report concluded by setting out recommendations for immediate, integrated action. The GEO-2000 report analyzed both global and regional issues. Its key finding was that: ***"The continued poverty of the majority of the planet's inhabitants and excessive consumption by the minority are the two major causes of environmental degradation. The present course is unsustainable and postponing action is no longer an option."***

The **third Global Environment Outlook (GEO-3)** report was launched in May 2002. At its launch, the former UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer stated: ***"GEO-3 is neither a document of doom and***



**gloom, nor a gloss over the acute challenges facing us all. It is the most authoritative assessment of where we have been, where we have reached, and where we are likely to go.** GEO-3 looked back over 30 years of environmental change and human development and presented four scenarios for the next 30 years giving the likely environmental and socio-economic impacts of various development policies. GEO-3 set out to provide global and regional perspectives on the past, present and future environment, linked together with telling examples from within the regions to form a comprehensive and integrated assessment.

The **fourth Global Environment Outlook** (GEO-4) was launched on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007. The year 2007 was a major milestone in marking what was achieved in sustainable development and recording efforts – from local to global – to address various environmental challenges. The report on environment for development (GEO-4) placed sustainable development at the core of the assessment, particularly on issues dealing with intra- and intergenerational equity. The analyses included the need and usefulness of valuation of environmental goods and services, and the role of such services in enhancing development and human well-being and minimizing human vulnerability to environmental change.

The **fifth edition of the Global Environmental Outlook** (GEO-5), and its **Summary for Policy Makers** were launched on the eve of the Rio+20 Summit on 6 June 2012. The report assessed 90 of the most-important environmental goals and objectives. The Global Environment Outlook: **Environment for the future we want** (GEO-5) was part of this broad sweep of history, and was a major contribution to the public understanding of the way ecosystems and the atmosphere were responding to patterns of unprecedented consumption and production – patterns taking place on a planet of 7 billion people that was expected to rise to more than 9 billion by 2050.

The GEO-5 main report also gave way to some advocacy products that were aimed at specific audiences such as business, local governments, and youth. **GEO-5 for Business** was written for business leaders who are responsible for ensuring that risks and opportunities are understood, addressed, and turned into long-term competitive advantage for their companies. **GEO-5 for local government** highlighted the rich local policies, initiatives and projects around the world and how they were rapidly evolving and becoming more integrated and offered possible pathways for tackling environmental challenges and reaching international targets. The **GEO-5 for youth, TUNZA: Acting for a Better World** was a call to action for young people and showcased how young people were challenging the status quo.

Published in time for the Fourth United Nations Environmental Assembly in 2019, the **sixth Global Environment Outlook** (GEO-6) called on decision makers to take immediate action to address pressing environmental issues to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals as well as other Internationally Agreed Environment Goals, such as the Paris Agreement. GEO-6 showed that a healthy environment is both a prerequisite

and a foundation for economic prosperity, human health and wellbeing. It addresses the main challenge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: that no one should be left behind, and that all should live healthy, fulfilling lives for the full benefit of all, for both present and future generations.

In keeping with the GEO-5 practice of producing advocacy products for various target audiences, GEO-6 produced four major advocacy products, aiming to communicate the scientific analysis in the main report to various audiences. These key groups include Youth, Cities and Local Governments, Business and Academics.

**GEO-6 Technical Summary** launched in 2020 synthesizes the key evidence and messages of GEO-6 for students and scientists and is more useful for teaching and learning at the university level. It provides more specific knowledge about sustainable approaches to health and environmental problems described in GEO-6.

**GEO for Youth** launched in 2021 is a one-stop-shop for a young person to understand the state of the environment, what they can do every day to drive markets to adopt environmentally sustainable products and services and how to develop their skills and choose environmentally sustainable careers.

**GEO for Business** is a series of 5 different briefs that were launched in 2021 which look at the GEO findings through a business lens. Written 'by business for business', the briefs bring the science of the GEO to the business community to support them in developing plans, business strategies, technology pathways, mechanisms and enablers towards building a green and circular economy.

**GEO for Cities** launched in November 2021 is a project set up by and for city people. It looks to provide real-world pathways for achieving the vision of environmentally sustainable and just cities.

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Evolution of GEO 1997-2022



# GEO7

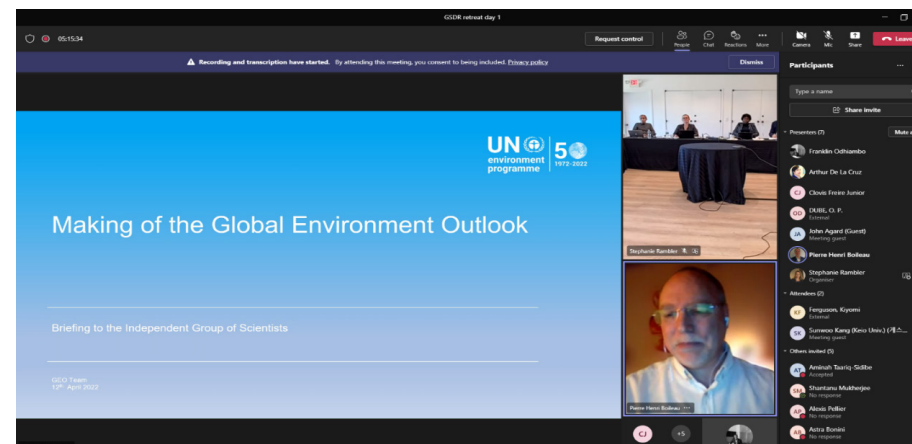
## Global Environment Outlook 7

Following the successful resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2), the future of GEO resolution was approved by Member States. This was the culmination of 2 years of work by the **Steering Committee on the future of the Global Environment Outlook** that completed its work and issued its final report along with the results of **broad consultations** that were conducted to support this work. UNEA 5.2 requested UNEP's Executive Director to prepare the **seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook**. GEO-7 aims to foster increased digital cooperation which is also in line with UNEP's approach to digital transformation. This digital cooperation approach of GEO-7 is part of the new governance and administrative model for GEO outlined in the resolution. It will focus on 5 new functionalities built into one digital platform. These new functionalities for GEO include: a collaboration tool, an online graphing and mapping tool, an enhanced online development of terms and glossaries, an online management and automated peer review tool and an online presentation of GEO-7 in an interactive and user-friendly way.

UNEP is launching the preparation of GEO-7 by holding an inaugural meeting to decide on the Procedures and Supporting Services of GEO-7. This meeting that is tentatively set for September/October 2022 will focus on the approval of the procedures for conducting GEO-7 and discuss and approve the supporting functions that GEO-7 will engage in between 2022 and 2025. This meeting will be followed by a scoping meeting before the end of the year that will scope out the outline and 'hot topics' to be covered in the seventh edition of the report. Nomination letters for the advisory bodies of the GEO-7, the Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (IMAG) and the Multidisciplinary Expert Scientific Advisory Group (MESAG) will be sent out to governments, stakeholder and expert institutions in due course.

GEO-7 will be the most solutions-focused, innovative, useful and impactful GEO yet as it will aim to provide solutions and answer 'how' the three systems identified in GEO-6 (Food, waste and energy) can be transformed in order to achieve a fully sustainable world by 2050.

## OUTREACH: GEO Presentation at GSDR



Screen Capture of the presentation

During the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) meeting held on 12-15 April in Glen Cove, NY, Pierre Boileau, head of the Global Assessment Unit at UNEP, made a presentation on the making of the Global Environment Outlook and the preparation plans of an innovative, impactful, solutions focused GEO-7 to the Independent Group of Scientists. The short virtual presentation of the GEO process was well received by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals and GSDR authors who are working on the latest GSDR report set to be launched sometime in 2023.



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## From the GEO Team: Spring sailing in the Mediterranean

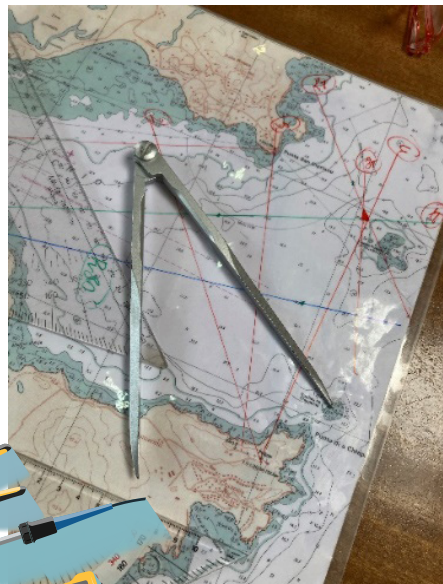
By **Edoardo Zandri**, Chief, Big Science Branch

The global fleet of sailing catamarans is growing very quickly on a global scale, as these boats are offering a perfect platform for charter holidays as well as for a live-aboard 'life changing' experience. I have a passion for sailing and the ocean since childhood and I have often dreamt of 'leaving the secure harbour' and sailing off to explore the world living on a sailing boat. One day I noted an advert in a sailing magazine for a 'skipper training course' for chartered catamarans. The duration, location and timing were right for me. It took only a few minutes to reflect on this opportunity and my application was in!



*Edoardo learning some electrical engineering*

*Plotting and navigation*



*Some photos from the various training sessions*



"I have a passion for sailing and the ocean since childhood and I have often dreamt of 'leaving the secure harbour' and sailing off to explore the world living on a sailing boat."



But the best and most amazing part of the experience was the personal and human interaction aspect. A group of 7 students and two coaches managed to blend in and work together seamlessly, for three weeks, living aboard in close quarters and in conditions that are very different from our normal life at home. Living space, water and electricity were limited, and we all cooked, cleaned, moved and maintained the boat working as one crew. That could have gone terribly wrong in many ways! However, quite amazingly, such a diverse group of people aged from 27 to 72, coming from all over Italy and from a wide range of professional and personal backgrounds (but all of us with some shape or form of significant prior sailing experience), started working and living as one family, helping each other as students and roommates, spontaneously taking on different roles and carrying out chores on board, and always in good spirits and having fun doing so! I really enjoyed this part of the training most of all; meeting and learning about people's stories, perspectives, aspirations and their very different lives. It was the most enriching and rewarding experience, and we all made some new friends for life. The two coaches who alternated on board were also extremely knowledgeable and I was amazed at how they always managed to keep our attention and focus levels for 8-9 hours every day for three weeks! They did that through a combination of sheer in-depth knowledge and ability to share their expertise through concrete examples and practical work, a great sense of humor and their ability continuously challenge our intellect!

Of course, the beauty of the locations we visited while sailing in the Mediterranean Sea did help. It was a great reward for our daily efforts as students. We spent most of the time around the beautiful island of Elba, just off the coast of Tuscany. The spring weather had not yet really kicked-in, and we endured some spells of truly cold weather at the outset of the programme (per Mediterranean standards, of course). However, later in April we were rewarded with some splendid sunny days during which meant we could work underwater to fix the boat hull, and learn how to single-handedly move a 57Kg anchor lying on the sandy sea bed at 6m depth – without using scuba-diving gear (thankfully we had to move it just a few meters away)!

From a professional perspective, I was most interested in the environmental impact of such charter sailing holidays, including; waste management, renewable power generation, impact on marine habitats and biodiversity. On this front, a lot more can and should still be done to reduce and minimize the environmental footprint in this segment of the tourism industry. But this would bring me off-topic (the focus here is on my 'personal experience'...) and it would require a lot more space than what we have here. I will treasure and carry forward the many elements of this learning experience, sharing the environmental focus with our colleagues working on oceans and marine protected areas management. I will also take stock of lessons learned about teamwork, coaching and training approaches, resource management, that are most relevant in my job at UNEP!

