

Evaluation Synthesis Report 2020 - 2021

Final Draft
August 2022

DRAFT

Evaluation Office

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME



Credits:

This report is a product of the Evaluation Office of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the UNEP Senior Management.

For further information on this report, please contact:

Evaluation Office of UNEP

P. O. Box 30552-00100 GPO

Nairobi Kenya

Tel: +254 20 762 3389

Email: Michael.Spilsbury@un.org

August 2022

All rights reserved.

© (2022) Evaluation Office of UNEP

Table of contents

Executive Summary	v
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Scope and objectives of the synthesis report	1
1.2 Evaluation Office mandate	1
1.3 Evaluation policy, roles and responsibilities	2
1.4 Types of evaluation	2
2 UNEP’s Results Definitions, Evaluation Criteria and Coverage	4
2.1 UNEP’s results definitions	4
2.2 Evaluation criteria and rating scales	7
2.3 Evaluation coverage	11
2.4 Guidance and tools supporting the evaluation process	17
2.5 Learning from evaluations	18
2.6 Limitations	18
3 Analysis of Project Performance	20
3.1 2020-21 biennium coverage	20
3.2 Performance in the 2020-21 biennium	20
3.3 Strategic relevance.....	24
3.4 Quality of project design.....	25
3.5 Nature of external content.....	25
3.6 Effectiveness	26
3.7 Availability of outputs.....	27
3.8 Achievement of project outcomes	27
3.9 Likelihood of impact.....	29
3.10 Financial management.....	30
3.11 Efficiency.....	31
3.12 Monitoring and reporting.....	32
3.13 Sustainability	34
3.14 Factors affecting project performance	37
4 Key Findings from Strategic Evaluations	43
4.1 Evaluation of the UNEP Sub-programme Environment under Review	43
4.2 Independent review of UNEP’s contributions to poverty reduction	47

4.3 Evaluation of UNEP’s enhanced coordination and implementation of the 10YFP and its programmes .	54
5 Compliance with Evaluation Recommendations	59
5.1 Categorisation of Recommendations	59
5.2 Acceptance of recommendations	63
5.3 Compliance with recommendations	65
6 Performance of the Evaluation Office and Evaluation Quality	68
6.1 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network MOPAN	68
6.2 The OIOS evaluation dashboard study of UNEP Evaluation Office	69
6.3 GEF Independent Evaluation Office assessment of the quality of UNEP evaluation reports	69
6.4 UN System-Wide Action Plan on gender equality and the empowerment of women (UN-SWAP)	70
7 UNEP’s New Evaluation Policy, Strategy and Approach	73

Annexes

Annex 1. List of Evaluations in the 2020-21 Biennial Report	75
Annex 2. List of evaluations in 2020-21 rated in the satisfactory range for responsiveness to human rights and gender equity	78

List of figures

Figure 1. Distribution of evaluated projects by Sub-Programme (MTS 2018- 2021)	12
Figure 2. Distribution of evaluated projects by UNEP Division (MTS 2018-2021)	13
Figure 3. Distribution of evaluated projects by funding modality (MTS 2018-2021)	14
Figure 4. Distribution of evaluated projects by geographic region (MTS 2018-2021)	15
Figure 5. Evaluation consultants by gender and geographic representation (MTS 2018-2021)	16
Figure 6. Alignment of evaluated projects to Sustainable Development Goals (MTS 2020-2021)	17
Figure 7. Summary of project performance against all evaluation criteria (2020-21)	21
Figure 8. Summary of project performance against main evaluation criteria (2020-21)	22
Figure 9. Overall project performance by biennium (2012-2021)	24
Figure 10. Comparison of strategic relevance (overall) by biennium (2012-21)	24
Figure 11. Quality of project design by biennium (2018-21)	25
Figure 12. Nature of the external context by biennium (2018-21)	26
Figure 13. Effectiveness (overall) by biennium (2012-21)	26
Figure 14. Availability of Outputs by biennium (2012-21)	27
Figure 15. Achievement of Outcomes by biennium (2012-21)	28
Figure 16. Likelihood of impact by biennium (2012-21)	29
Figure 17. Financial management (overall) by biennium (2012-21)	30
Figure 18. Financial management by sub-criteria (2020-21)	31
Figure 19. Efficiency by biennium (2012-21)	31

Figure 20. Project monitoring and reporting by biennium (2012-21)	32
Figure 21. Monitoring and reporting by sub-criteria (2020-21).....	33
Figure 22. Sustainability (overall) by biennium (2012-21)	35
Figure 23. Sustainability sub-criteria (2020-21).....	36
Figure 24. Factors affecting performance (2020-21).....	37
Figure 25. Preparation and readiness (2020-21).....	38
Figure 26. Quality of project management and supervision (2020-21).....	39
Figure 27. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation (2020-21).....	39
Figure 28. Project performance in responsiveness to human rights and gender equity by biennia (2018-21).....	40
Figure 29. Country ownership and driven-ness (2020-21)	41
Figure 30. Communication and public awareness (2020-21).....	42
Figure 31. Environmental and Social Safeguards (2020-21)	42
Figure 32. Types of recommendations issued (2020-21).....	60
Figure 33. Submission of recommendation implementation plans (2020-21).....	61
Figure 34. Submission of recommendation implementation plans (2020-21).....	61
Figure 35. Status of recommendations implementation plans by Division (2020-21).....	63
Figure 36. Overall acceptance of recommendations in (2019-18)	64
Figure 37. Overall acceptance of recommendations (2020-21).....	64
Figure 38. Compliance status of recommendation implementation plans by Division (2020-21)	66
Figure 39. Comparison of recommendation compliance status (2018-19 and 2020-21).....	67
Figure 40. MOPAN 2021 Summary findings om performance management including evaluation	68

List of tables

Table 1. UNEP results definitions relevant to evaluations	5
Table 2. UNEP performance evaluation criteria and adjustments over time	8
Table 3. Performance rating scale	9
Table 4. Weightings applied across evaluation criteria for overall performance ratings	10
Table 5. Number of completed evaluations by Sub-Programme and MTS/POW.....	11
Table 6. Projects attaining S/HS ratings for evaluation criteria (2018-19 and 2020-21).....	23
Table 7. Projects attaining S/HS ratings for factors affecting performance (2018-19 and 2020-21)	23
Table 8: Priority Level of Recommendations	59
Table 9. Submission of completed recommendation implementation plans by Division (2018 – 2021)....	62

Executive Summary

1. The mandate for coordinating, conducting and overseeing evaluation in UNEP is vested in the Evaluation Office. This mandate covers all programmes and projects of the Environment Fund, related trust funds, earmarked contributions and projects implemented by UNEP under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The Office undertakes a variety of evaluations and management studies, in accordance with the requirements of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, and in accordance with the Norms and Standards for evaluation of the United Nations system.

2. The work of the Evaluation Office enhances accountability, transparency and learning. Evaluations generate evidence to identify 'what works' and 'what doesn't' and provide feedback for the improvement of planning and management processes. Project evaluations undertaken by the Evaluation Office respond to implementation timelines; evaluations are scheduled and initiated as projects reach, or approach, their operational completion.

3. This Evaluation Synthesis Report summarises all independent evaluations undertaken by the UNEP Evaluation Office in the 2020-21 biennium. The Report utilizes information drawn from the in-depth evaluations of 42 projects that were implemented (or co-implemented) by UNEP. The majority (24%) of these projects were approved in 2015¹. Within this report changes in performance over time are illustrated.

4. The report also presents highlights drawn from a selection of evaluations of high strategic importance including: the UNEP sub-programme on Environment under Review; UNEP's enhanced coordination and implementation of the 10YFP and its programme; and the Review of Poverty Reduction.

Coverage and performance of projects completed during the 2020-21 biennium

5. All projects are evaluated against a standard set of evaluation criteria that are consistent with international good practice. Performance against all criteria is rated on a six-point scale from 'Highly Unsatisfactory' through to 'Highly Satisfactory'. The benchmark for good performance is set by the UNEP Evaluation Office at ratings of 'Satisfactory' or 'Highly Satisfactory' (S/HS). The set of performance evaluation criteria have evolved over time in order to:

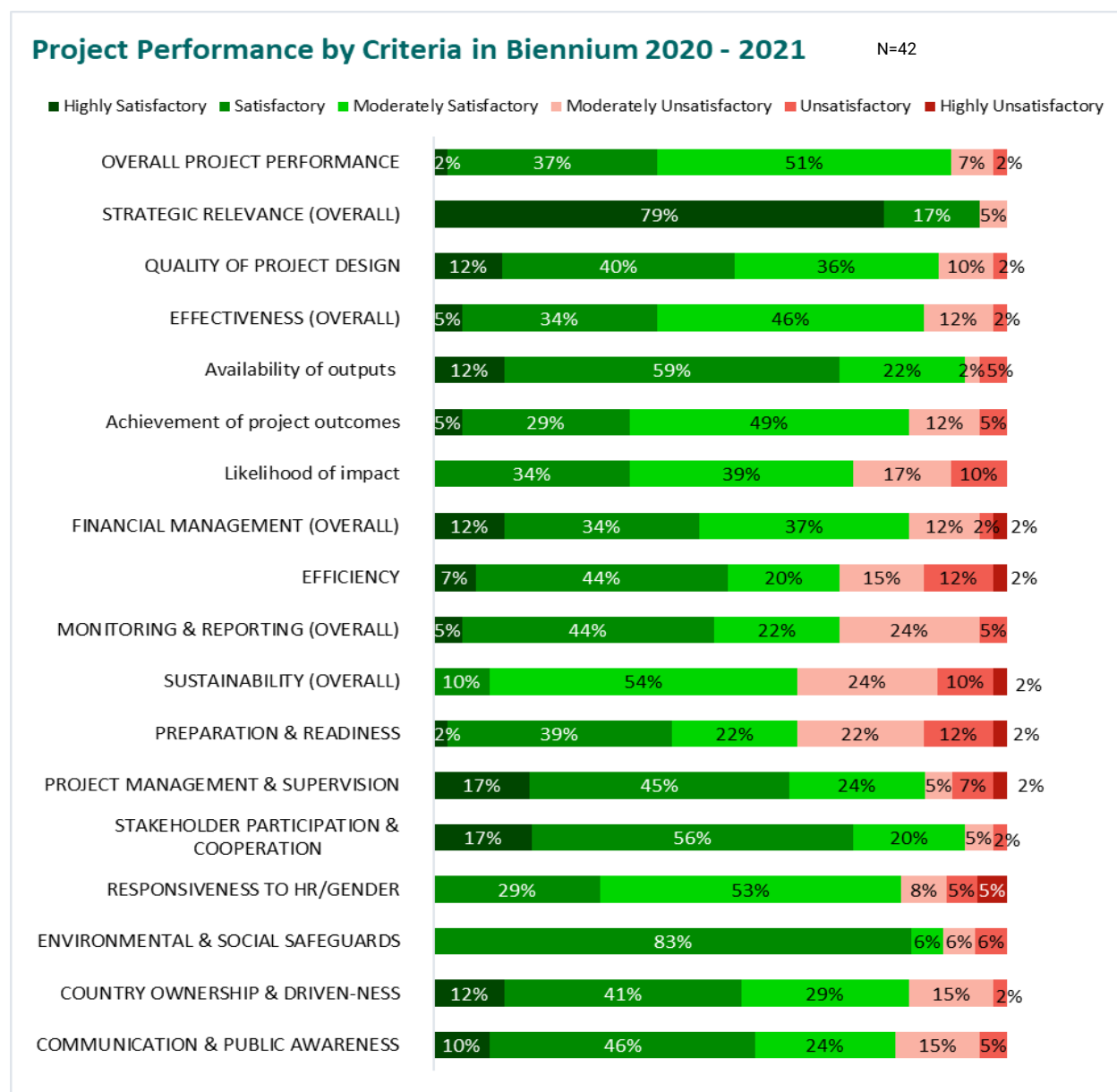
- Be responsive to UNEP's policies and areas of priority as they evolve
- Make significant areas of learning visible
- Maintain a comprehensive and transparent framework against which all performance aspects of UNEP's work can be evaluated

6. Individual evaluation criteria are aggregated in each evaluation using a 'weighted' ratings scale in order to derive an 'Overall Performance' rating. Within this scale the greatest emphasis is placed on the achievement of outcomes (30% of the overall performance score) and the sustainability/ durability of outcomes (20% of the overall performance score). This weighting reflects an emphasis on assessing performance from a results (rather than activities) perspective. A summary of projects

¹ The majority were approved in 2015 (24%) with other concentrations in 2016 (17%), 2012 (17%), 2014 (14%) and 2011 (12%).

attaining 'Satisfactory' or better performance against the **individual evaluation criteria** in 2020-21 is presented in **ES Figure 1** below².

ES Figure 1. Performance against main evaluation criteria (2020-21)



7. A positive performance trend evident from the data is that the proportion of projects attaining ratings in the 'Satisfactory' range remains high across most evaluation criteria as it has for the last 5 biennia. The availability of outputs to intended users remains a strong aspect of performance with 71% of the projects evaluated achieving a 'Satisfactory' or 'Highly Satisfactory' rating.

8. The evaluation of the 'Effectiveness' requires the aggregation of three evaluation sub-criteria: availability of outputs, achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact. The percentage of projects

²Although more than 42 evaluations were conducted, some were of strategic initiatives or arrangements that were not rated against standard evaluation criteria, and could therefore not be included in the comparative data

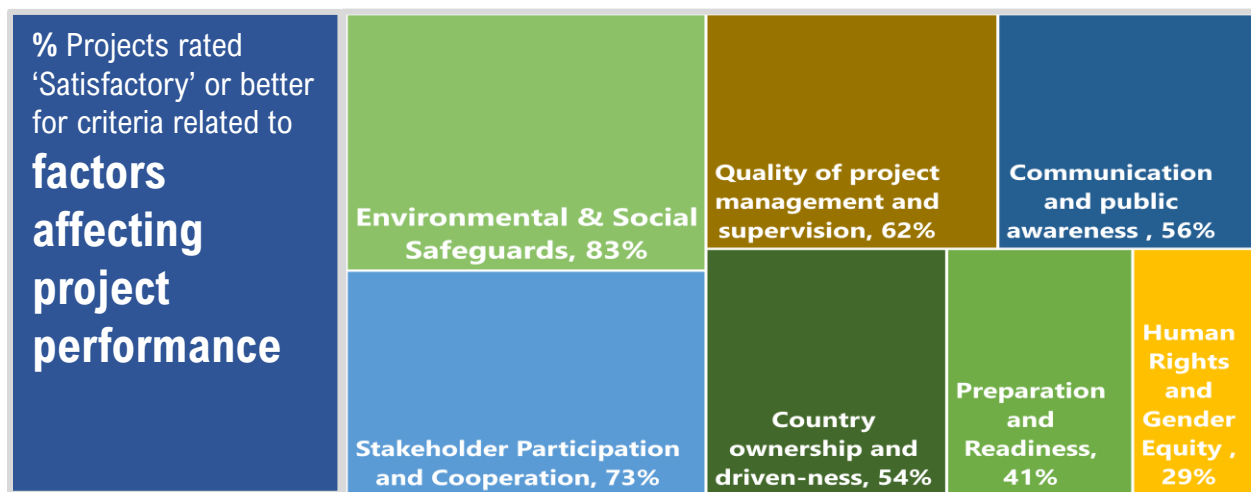
attaining ratings of S/HS for the latter two evaluation sub-criteria was 42% in each case. The Evaluation Office places a high weighting on the 'achievement of outcomes' sub-criterion; an overall percentage of 39% of the projects evaluated in the 2020-21 Biennium attained an S/HS rating for effectiveness. This suggests that project design and implementation actions need to place stronger emphasis in terms of resources allocated and management attention, on activities that drive the intended change processes beyond the delivery of outputs.

9. In an evaluation, sustainability is understood as the probability of project outcomes being maintained i.e. their endurance/persistence beyond project completion. A low percentage of projects (10%) attained an S/HS rating for 'sustainability' in the 2020-21 biennium. However, large percentage of projects (54%) were rated as 'moderately satisfactory' for sustainability. There is a need to pay greater attention to exit strategies and on creating the conditions that help to sustain direct outcomes in both project design processes and during project implementation. Strategies that enhance country ownership can also help ensure the continuance of project outcomes.

10. The likelihood of impact achievement was considered 'Likely' or 'Highly Likely' in only 34% of the projects evaluated in 2020-21, a small reduction compared to the previous biennium (42%). This again highlights the continued need for project designs and implementation actions to focus on, and invest more in, influencing the change processes that lead beyond project outcomes to higher level results

11. A summary of projects attaining 'Satisfactory' or better performance against the criteria related to **factors affecting performance** in 2020-21 is presented in **ES Figure 2** below.

ES Figure 2. Summary of project performance against factors affecting performance (2020-21)



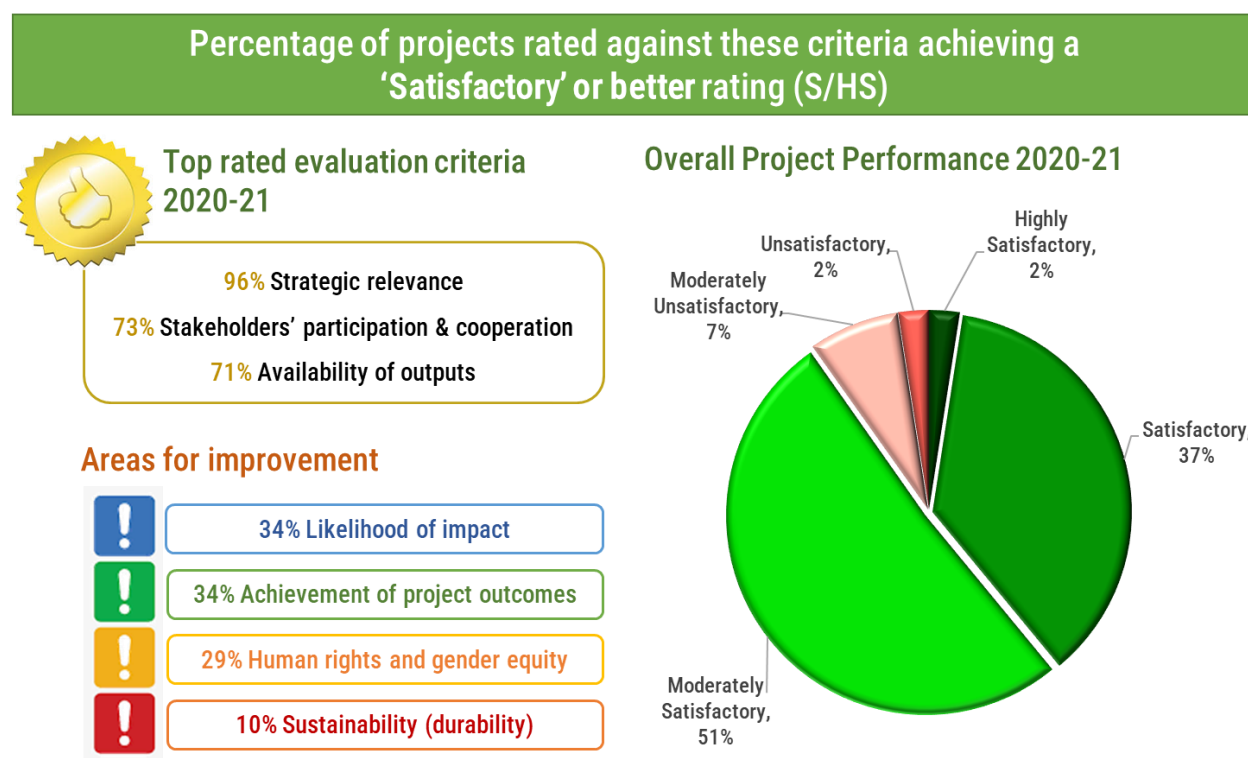
12. Among the factors affecting project performance the strong **engagement of stakeholders** throughout the project lifespan, coupled with good **project supervision** and guidance are of particular importance. The inclusion of a criterion to assess environmental and social safeguards issues is relatively new development, with data for only 18 projects. The limited data shows there is a high proportion of projects (83%) rated S/HS for this criterion in 2020-21, however any inferences should be tentative. Over time the performance trend for this criterion will begin to emerge more clearly.

13. Project performance was evaluated as being weakest with regards to the extent to which project design, implementation and monitoring have effectively applied human rights-based

approaches and/or adhered to UNEP’s policy for gender equality; for this criterion less than one third (29%) of the projects evaluated were rated as S/HS.

14. **ES Figure 3** below provides an overview view of areas of project performance where >70% the projects were evaluated as ‘Satisfactory’ or better, as well as those performance areas that need continued management attention, based on data collated from evaluation reports completed in the 2020-21 biennium³.

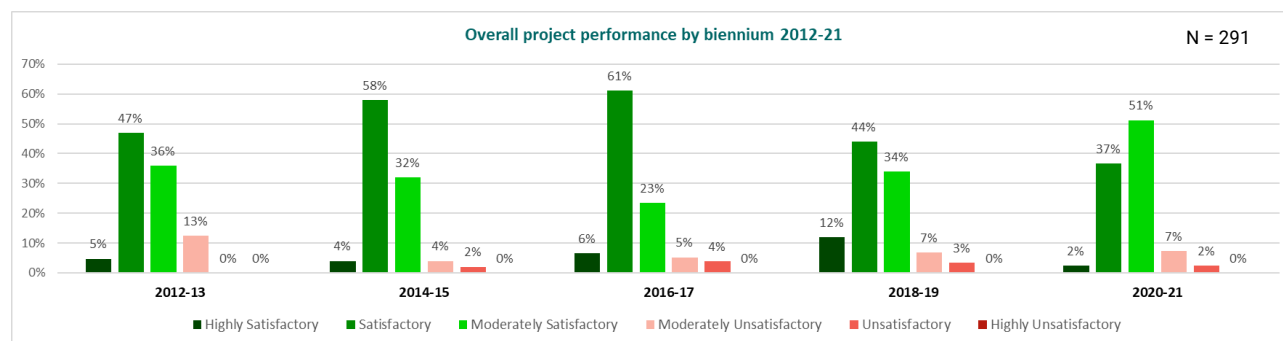
ES Figure 3. Overview of project performance against selected evaluation criteria (2020-21)



15. General trends over the period dating back to the 2012-13 biennium, have been reflected upon, see **ES Figure 4** below. Over the past 10 years, the proportion of projects being assessed as attaining the ‘Highly Satisfactory’ level for their **overall performance**, have generally been low and range from 12% of projects evaluated in the 2018-19 biennium to 2% in 2020-21. The majority of projects evaluated each biennium (on average 55% for the 10-year period 2012-2021) achieved an overall performance rating of ‘Satisfactory’ or better. However, for projects evaluated in 2020-21, 39% achieved an overall performance rating of S/HS. Nevertheless, across the five biennia, the proportion of projects achieving an overall performance rating in the satisfactory range (MS, S, and HS) has remained fairly consistent between 87% and 94% of the project evaluated.

³ Variances in N value due to the actual number of projects evaluated against certain criteria

ES Figure 4. Comparison of overall project performance by biennium



Biennium	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of rated evaluations	64	50	77	59	41
% of projects with overall performance rated Highly Satisfactory	5%	4%	6%	12%	2%
% of projects with overall performance rated Satisfactory or better (i.e. S / HS)	52%	62%	67%	56%	39%
% of projects with overall performance rated Moderately Satisfactory or better	87%	94%	91%	90%	91%

16. As has been reported in previous biennia, the Evaluation Office develops tools and procedures that are intended to help evaluate projects with rigor, consistency and objectivity. In doing so, the Office liaises with other parts of the house to ensure that the way in which projects are evaluated is consistent with the guidance UNEP provides during project design, development and implementation. Such liaison between departments also contributes to an ongoing process of institutional sharing and learning.

Value of evaluated projects

17. The sum total of the reported expenditures declared by the 41 projects evaluated in this biennium is > **USD 213 million**. This amount includes GEF grants, extra-budgetary funding, Environment Fund contributions, co-financing (cash) and resources covered by strategic cooperation agreements (e.g., European Commission, Adaptation Fund, etc.). This amount does not include sources that are recorded as 'in-kind' co-financing.

18. Reporting on project co-financing is not always available, accurate or consistent, and in some cases, there is no disaggregation between 'cash' and 'in-kind' financing, making it difficult to determine the true value of the actual co-financing investment.

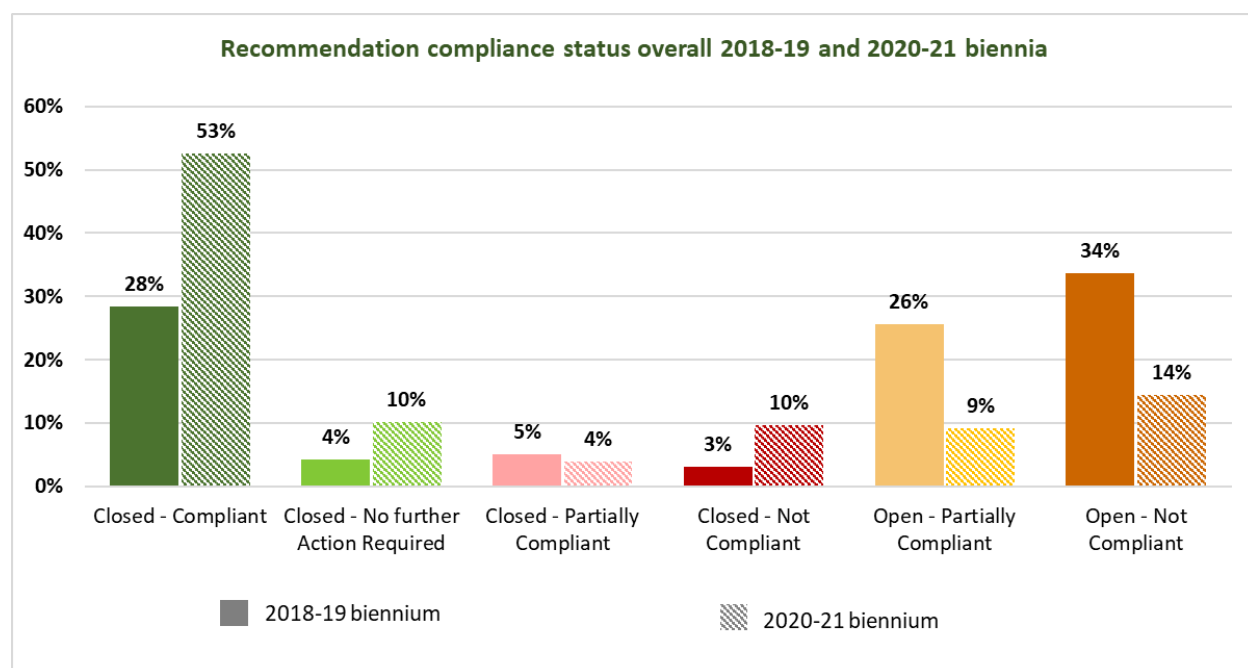
Evaluation recommendation compliance

19. Each evaluation process managed by the Evaluation Office is followed by a recommendation compliance process. In the 2020-21 Biennium there has been a solid improvement in the submission of management responses to evaluation in the form of recommendation implementation plans. Of the 40 recommendation implementation plans submitted, 45% (18) were submitted within the required⁴ timeframe compared to 25% in the 2018-19 biennium. In 2020-21 the percentage of evaluations that received no management response was 10%, a reduction from the 25% reported in the previous biennium.

⁴ Completed Recommendation Implementation Plans are required to be submitted to the Evaluation Office no more than one month after being shared with the relevant UNEP Project Manager.

20. The preparation of a management response in the form of a recommendation implementation plan is a mandatory requirement for all evaluations. Compliance rates for completion of management responses to evaluation should be 100% and the timelines for these standard requirements should be respected. Whilst improvements are evident in the 2020-21 Biennium (i.e. a larger proportion [53%] of recommendations were closed as 'compliant' in 2020-21 compared to 2018-19 [28%]), continued management attention to these issues is required, as evidenced by the 10% of recommendations that reached their implementation deadline and were closed as 'not compliant' (see ES Figure 5).

ES Figure 5. Recommendation compliance status (2018-19 and 2020-21)



Performance of the UNEP Evaluation Office

21. The performance of the UNEP Evaluation Office has been externally and independently assessed in several ways during this biennium. OIOS (2021) prepared an assessment of all evaluation functions in the UN Secretariat, the 2021 MOPAN report for UNEP presented a comprehensive assessment of UNEP's evaluation function and in both years the Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF prepared its Annual Performance report where the quality of UNEP's evaluations of GEF projects is benchmarked against other GEF Agencies, including the World Bank and UNDP. Across all these assessments UNEP's Evaluation Office performed well and useful observations for further improvements were also highlighted (summaries presented in Chapter 6).

New Evaluation Policy, Operational Strategy and Manual

22. During 2021 the Evaluation Office presented a proposal for a shift in focus towards more strategic evaluations whilst maintaining coverage of project level performance through purposive sampling of completed projects that are representative of UNEP's Programme of Work. These changes address the evaluation-related issues raised in the MOPAN assessment of UNEP and require adjustments to be made to the Evaluation Policy as well as alterations to standard management practices, that are documented in UNEP's Programme Manual. A revised draft Evaluation Policy was prepared in 2021 for approval in 2022. In addition, an Operational Strategy that sets out the priorities

for the Evaluation Office for the Medium-Term Strategy period 2022-25 and an Evaluation Manual to support the implementation of this Strategy were also developed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope and objectives of the synthesis report

23. This evaluation synthesis report has been prepared as part of the mission of the Evaluation Office to promote a results-focus in UNEP that reflects an organizational culture of learning, informed decision-making and accountability. According to the Secretary General's bulletin on programme planning, monitoring and implementation (ST/SGB/2018/3), which consolidates the General Assembly decisions on the evaluation function, *"The objective of evaluation is: (a) To determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives; (b) To enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the Organization by altering their content and, if necessary, reviewing their objectives."*

24. This report is prepared as an inter-sessional document of the UN Environment Assembly of UNEP and serves as part of the input of UNEP to the Secretary-General's report on evaluation to the General Assembly. The report provides stakeholders such as Governments, UNEP senior management and partners with an evaluative assessment of UNEP's programme and project performance in the 2020-21 biennium. This report presents **an analysis of evaluations conducted in the 2020-21 biennium**. It utilizes information drawn from in-depth evaluations including: an evaluation of the Environment Under Review Sub-Programme, a review of UNEP's contributions to Poverty Reduction; an evaluation of the enhanced coordination and implementation of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) and **over 40 other evaluations of projects** contributing to the UNEP Programme of Work. The Evaluation Synthesis Report also contains a review of the implementation and compliance status of evaluation recommendations and presents external assessments of the performance of the Evaluation Office.

25. The main objective of the report is to help UNEP reflect on, and learn from, its programme performance through evaluative evidence and lessons drawn from multiple evaluation processes.

1.2 Evaluation Office mandate

26. The Evaluation Office conducts various types of evaluations and management studies in accordance with the requirements of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Norms and Standards for Evaluation of the United Nations system.

27. The mandate for evaluations in UNEP covers all programmes and projects of the Environment Fund, related trust funds, earmarked contributions and projects implemented by UNEP under the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and under partnership agreements. The mandate for conducting evaluations derives from UNEP Governing Council decisions, the UN Secretariat's Administrative Instruction on Evaluation ST/AI/2021/3 and several UN General Assembly Resolutions, summarized in the regulations and "Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation" (ST/SGB/2018/3).

28. Evaluations are conducted in an independent manner and the Evaluation Office reports on evaluation findings without interference. To give it independence from substantive Divisions and operational sub-programmes, the Evaluation Office Director reports to the Executive Director, and through the Executive Director, to the Governing Bodies - Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). UNEA / CPR reviews the Evaluation Synthesis Report, which encompasses findings derived from all UNEP evaluations.

1.3 Evaluation policy, roles and responsibilities

29. The UNEP Evaluation Policy guides the work of the Evaluation Office. It explains the objectives, roles and functions of evaluation within UNEP, the institutional framework and processes by which it is operationalized. The policy seeks to increase transparency, coherence and efficiency in generating and using evaluative knowledge for organizational learning and effective management for results, and to support accountability. The Evaluation Policy was last revised in 2016. To comply with new UN Secretariat requirements (ST/AI/2021/3), and respond to the UNEP 2022-25 MTS, a new draft Evaluation Policy was prepared during 2021, for approval in 2022 (see **Chapter 7**).

30. The Executive Director of UNEP is guardian of the evaluation function and responsible for ensuring that the evaluation policy is implemented on behalf of the Secretary-General and Member States, overseeing the overall evaluation function, and ensuring the function is adequately resourced.

31. The Evaluation Office reports directly to the Executive Director and is responsible for implementation of the evaluation work plan by conducting and managing independent evaluations at Medium-term Strategy (MTS) / Programme of Work (PoW), Sub-Programme, portfolio and project levels. It ensures quality in evaluations conducted, provides analysis of findings and lessons learned, prepares the Evaluation Synthesis Report and disseminates evaluation findings and results to UNEP, Member States and stakeholders. In addition, the Evaluation Office promotes the uptake of lessons and tracks compliance with evaluation recommendations.

32. UNEP Senior Management discusses and comments on strategic evaluations, ensures management responses to all evaluations are provided and that findings are incorporated in the design and implementation of all programme activities. Senior management are also invited to provide input into the evaluation work plan. Other key responsibilities held by Divisional and Regional Office Directors are to ensure that accepted evaluation recommendations are acted upon and that evaluation findings inform strategic planning processes. Sub-programme Coordinators and other project management staff identify projects reaching operational completion, coordinate their review of draft evaluation reports and prepare management responses.

1.4 Types of evaluation

33. Types of evaluation take four main forms: i) strategic and cross-cutting thematic evaluations including sub-programme evaluations; ii) impact/influence evaluations; iii) programme/ portfolio or project evaluations / validations; and iv) joint evaluations with other United Nations agencies, donors and partners.

34. The selection of evaluations is driven by the need to evaluate the performance of the Programme of Work and represent its key features in terms of; themes, sub-programmes, operational divisions / offices, geographic distribution of efforts and funding sources. As such, all UNEP Sub-Programmes are, from late 2021, to be evaluated across a six-year period and a sample of projects

reaching operational completion are to be selected by the Evaluation Office for independent evaluation. The factors that inform purposeful selection of projects for the sample are set out in the new Evaluation Manual.

35. Staff responsible for projects that are not selected for independent evaluation are required to prepare a management-led Terminal Review if the project exceeds the financial expenditure threshold specified in the Evaluation Manual.

36. The Evaluation Office closely follows-up on the implementation of all accepted evaluation recommendations and provides technical backstopping to project and programme managers undertaking management-led Terminal Reviews by: providing a suite of tools, templates and guidelines to support the project review process; providing technical guidance on a needs-basis, including guidance on consultant suitability; and completing a quality assessment and validation of the final project Terminal Review report.

37. Guidelines, formal requirements and practical advice in planning for evaluations and management-led reviews shall also be specified in detail in the UNEP Programme Manual and further elaborated on the UNEP Evaluation website⁵.

⁵ www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/evaluation

2 UNEP'S RESULTS DEFINITIONS, EVALUATION CRITERIA AND COVERAGE

2.1 UNEP's results definitions

38. In 2018/19 the UNEP Evaluation Office collaborated with the Programme Coherence/Assurance Unit (PCA) of the Policy and Programme Division (PPD) and colleagues from other departments in a process to generate a glossary of UNEP results definitions⁶. The application of these definitions has informed project design and evaluation in the 2020-21 Biennium and feedback led to some definitions being further refined. A summary of those terms most closely associated with evaluation processes is shown below in **Table 1**. Several important distinctions continue to need emphasis in the application of Results-based Management principles:

Activity - Deliverable - Output

39. The work on results' definitions provided an opportunity to clarify that **activities** (work performed) and **deliverables** (products or services derived from a completed activity) differ from **outputs** (immediate gains experienced from the work performed and products or services delivered) by the inclusion of the intended beneficiary or user. From a results perspective, the attention is placed on those who are affected by projects rather than those who are responsible for delivering them. Importantly, this refinement in the definition of an output shifts the perspective from that of the supplier (what has been delivered) to that of the beneficiary (what has been gained); it does not change the ambition underpinning the output, nor does it change the timeframe within which outputs are made available. For example, in this way the 'provision of technical assistance' (activity) builds the knowledge and understanding of a target audience (output), which may lead to a change of behaviour, based on that new knowledge and understanding, by the target audience (outcome).

Direct Outcome - Project Outcome

40. Evaluations aim to assess what has been achieved against what was planned (and committed to). To clearly represent the ambition of, and commitment made by, a project the term **Project Outcome** is used by UNEP to refer to those outcomes a project is expected to achieve by the time it is operationally complete. However, it is recognised that some outcomes (i.e., the use or uptake of outputs) occur before the end of the project and these are referred to, in all parts of the house, as **Direct Outcomes**. Project Outcomes are the highest level of result to which UNEP evaluations hold projects to account.

Attribution - Contribution - Credible Association

41. The gold standard of proving that a project has achieved its results is demonstrating attribution between the observed effects and the efforts of the project. However, this is not always possible, and it is helpful to consider a wider range of ways of establishing claims between project efforts and observed results.

⁶ The UNEP results definitions build on those of OECD-DAC, UNDA, UNDP, UNEG, and the World Bank.

42. In order to **attribute** any outcomes and impacts to a project intervention, one needs to consider the difference between what has happened *with*, and what would have happened *without*, the project (i.e., take account of changes over time and between contexts_in order to isolate the effects of a project). This requires appropriate baseline data and the identification of a relevant counterfactual, both of which are frequently not available for evaluations.

43. Establishing the **contribution** made by a project in a complex change process relies heavily on prior *intentionality* (e.g., approved project design documentation, logical framework) and the articulation of *causality* (e.g., narrative and/or illustration of the Theory of Change). Robust evidence that a project was delivered as intended and that the expected causal pathways developed as designed, can be used to support claims of contribution. Such claims can be strengthened where an alternative theory of change can be excluded (e.g., that the ‘business as usual’ behaviour pattern is no longer evident or prevalent).

44. Finally, a **credible association** between the implementation of a project and observed positive effects can be made where a strong causal narrative, although not explicitly articulated, can be inferred by the chronological sequence of events, active involvement of key actors and engagement in critical processes.

Programme - Portfolio

45. There is a tendency, both in UNEP and elsewhere, for these two terms to be used either interchangeably or at least, loosely. There is, however, an important distinction between the two. Whereas the projects within both a portfolio and a programme will share certain common characteristics with each other, only those projects in a programme will be working towards common outcomes and be managed in a coordinated way that generates additional benefits not available when implemented separately.

46. Evaluations of portfolios can provide insights on key issues based on multiple experiences of working on a common theme or in a common geographic area etc., but evaluations of programmes can provide evidence of aggregated and synergistic effects across a group of projects.

Table 1. UNEP results definitions relevant to evaluations

TERM	UNEP Results Definitions - relevant to evaluations
Activity	An action taken, or work performed, through which inputs are utilized to realize specific results
Assumption	An assumption is a significant external factor or condition that needs to be present for the realization of the intended results but is beyond the influence of the project and its partners. Assumptions are often positively formulated risks. (See also Driver)
Attribution	Attribution can be claimed when comprehensive evidence proving the cause-and-effect relationship between the project and the observed results is presented. To make a strong claim of attribution one needs to be able to isolate the effects of an intervention from changes over time and differences in contexts (i.e. have an M&E design that provides data on indicators before and after project implementation and a robust counterfactual).
Contribution	Contribution can be claimed when compelling evidence is presented that supports a cause-and-effect relationship through which intended collective results are achieved by the combined efforts of more than one project.
Credible Association	Credible association can be claimed when compelling evidence supporting a cause-and-effect relationship between the project and the observed results is present. A claim to a credible association between project and results can be made based on ‘intentionality’ (normally reflected in a project design document), the articulation of causality (ideally through a detailed/nuanced TOC) and evidence (through the chronology of events, action of identified key stakeholders etc) that the intention was followed, and the expected causality pathways emerged.

TERM	UNEP Results Definitions - relevant to evaluations
Driver	A driver is a significant external factor that, if present, is expected to contribute to the realization of the intended results of a project. Drivers can be influenced by the project and its partners. (See also Assumption).
Direct Outcome(s)	A direct outcome is an outcome that is intended to be achieved from the uptake of outputs and occurring prior to the achievement of Project Outcome(s).
Deliverable	A deliverable is a specified product or service derived from completed activity(ies). For example, a draft report, a revised manual, X number of workshop facilitation days are all frequent deliverables in a UNEP project context. (Deliverables are viewed from the perspective of the supplier/provider of the product or service).
Effect	An effect is a change which is a consequence of an action or other social, economic, political or environmental cause. These changes can be intended, unintended, positive or negative.
Evaluand	The evaluand is the entity being evaluated.
Evaluand parameters	An evaluand's parameters are the features of an evaluand that define its scope (e.g. timeframe, funding envelope, results framework, geographic dimensions).
Evaluation	Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme, strategy or policy (i.e. 'entities'), its design, implementation, results and likelihood of impact
Expected Accomplishments	Expected Accomplishments are the outcomes of a UNEP Programme of Work (i.e. the outcomes specified in a Sub-Programme).
Goals	Goals are the higher-order result(s) to which a project is intended to contribute.
Impact	Impacts are long-lasting results arising, directly or indirectly from a project. Impacts are intended and positive changes and must relate to UNEP's mandate.
Impact Pathway / Causal Pathway / Results Chain	Impact or Causal Pathways and Results Chains all describe cause and effect relationships between outputs, outcomes and impacts and are the basis of a programme/project's "Theory of Change".
Intermediate states	Intermediate states are changes (i.e. changes at the outcome level) beyond the Project Outcome(s) that are required to contribute towards the achievement of the intended impact of a project.
Lessons learned	Lessons learned reflect the new knowledge or understanding gained by the experience of implementing a project that is applicable to, and useful in, other similar contexts
Logical Framework	A Logical Framework (or logframe) is a tool for summarizing a project or programme's intended results. It specifies project results, indicators and their baseline and target values. It also includes a milestone schedule to deliver the expected output(s) and/or achieve intended result(s). The format or content of a logframe may vary from one organization to the other.
Mid-term Evaluation	A Mid-Term Evaluation is a formative evaluation performed towards the middle of the period of implementation of a project.
Monitoring	Monitoring is a continuing function that uses the systematic collection of data on project / programme implementation (e.g. completion of activities, rate of expenditure, emergence of risks, milestone delivery, inclusive participation of intended stakeholders, etc.) to provide management with indications of the extent of progress against plans and targets.
Objectives	An objective describes the overall intention, which should be achieved at the end of a defined period. (In UNEP, the Project Objective is not considered a higher-order result and does not appear in the Logical Framework or Theory of Change).
Outcome(s)	An outcome is the use (i.e., uptake, adoption, application) of an output by intended beneficiaries, observed as a change in institutions or behaviours, attitudes or conditions
Outputs	An output is the availability (for intended beneficiaries/users) of new products and services and/or gains in knowledge, abilities and awareness of individuals or within institutions. For example, access by the intended user to a report; new knowledge held by a workshop participant at the end of a training event; heightened awareness of a serious risk among targeted decision-makers. (Outputs are viewed from the perspective of the intended beneficiary or user of the output rather than the provider).

TERM	UNEP Results Definitions - relevant to evaluations
Performance	Performance is the degree to which a project is implemented, or a partner operates, according to specific criteria /standards/ guidelines or achieves intended results.
Portfolio	A group of projects and/or programmes that share a common characteristic relevant to the organization's strategic objectives (e.g. funded by the same donor, operating in the same country, thematic area etc).
Programme	A programme is a group of synergistic projects contributing to a common outcome(s) and managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits not available from managing the projects individually.
Project	A project is a time-bound intervention with a specific funding envelope that addresses a defined set of results within an identified implementation context or geographic area ³ . The main components of the project must be interlinked/interdependent to achieve the project outcome(s).
Project Components	A descriptive label related to the way in which work is planned and managed. A Project Component can define a stream of work
Project Outcome(s)	Project Outcome(s) are those outcomes that are intended to be achieved by the end of project timeframe/funding envelope.
Results	Results are intended changes in a state or condition that derive from a cause-and-effect relationship. Such changes must be describable and measurable/discernible. A results statement, the associated targets and their indicators should conform collectively to the SMART4 and/or CREAM5 principles. Outputs, outcomes and impact are considered 'results' (as opposed to inputs and activities).
Safeguard	Safeguards are a management approaches taken to avoid negative unintended effects of a project
Sustainability	Sustainability is the continuation of project outcomes and their associated benefits after the completion of a project
Terminal Evaluation	A Terminal Evaluation is a summative evaluation performed at the operational completion of a project or programme
Theory of Change	A Theory of Change is a method used for planning a project, describing the participation that will be needed by different actors and for evaluating the project's performance. It articulates long lasting intended impact and then maps backward to identify the preconditions necessary to achieve this impact(s). It is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a context. A Theory of Change also allows for unintended positive and/or negative effects to be depicted

2.2 Evaluation criteria and rating scales

47. The UNEP Evaluation Office assesses performance against a total of eight evaluation criteria, six of which have sub-criteria (see **Table 2** below). While these criteria reflect standard internationally accepted⁷ performance criteria (Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact and Sustainability), they are also adapted to be relevant to those areas of performance of most interest to UNEP. For example, UNEP's evaluation criteria allow for assessments against 'financial management' and 'monitoring and reporting', but also cover a range of other factors affecting performance and cross-cutting issues.

48. This set of performance evaluation criteria have evolved over time to: a) be responsive to UNEP's policies and areas of priority; b) make necessary areas of learning visible and c) create a comprehensive and transparent framework against which all performance aspects of UNEP's work can be evaluated. In **Table 2** below the major adjustments made in recent years are noted.

⁷ The evaluation criteria described by the OECD/DAC are widely accepted as an international standard. UNEP Evaluation Office also works in accordance with the descriptions reflected in the UN Evaluation Group Norms and Standards.

Table 2. UNEP performance evaluation criteria and adjustments over time

UNEP Evaluation Criteria	
A. Strategic Relevance	<p>Prior to 2018 this criterion included a sub-category related to gender. At that time this placement reflected the place of gender in UNEP's policies and strategic priorities. In 2018-19 'gender' was moved to its own sub-category under cross-cutting issues to better reflect its central importance, along with human rights, during project implementation.</p> <p>Project alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is covered under sub-criterion A.3.</p> <p>The sub-criterion 'complementarity' (A.4) is consistent with the latest (2019) OECD criterion of 'coherence'.</p>
1. Alignment to the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS), Programme of Work (POW) and Strategic Priorities	
2. Alignment to Donor/GEF/ Partner strategic priorities	
3. Relevance to global, regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities	
4. Complementarity with relevant existing interventions/ coherence	
B. Quality of Project Design	<p>Assessment against this dimension has been longstanding – with formal ratings for the criterion continuous since 2017. The assessment template used in evaluations, was the original basis for, and is consistent with that used during the project design approval process.</p>
C. Nature of External Context	<p>Introduced in 2018, this is not a performance criterion and its rating is not used in the calculation of overall project performance. However, when a project is found to have faced some specific unfavourable external conditions that could not have been anticipated, the ratings on Effectiveness and Sustainability may be adjusted to take unexpected disruptions into account (e.g. conflict, natural disasters and political upheaval). Adjustments in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to be addressed here in the coming years.</p>
D. Effectiveness	
1. Availability of outputs	<p>Since 2019 the emphasis has been placed on the availability of outputs to intended beneficiaries rather than the less specific term 'delivery' of outputs. This is in keeping with UNEP's revised results definitions, 2019.</p>
2. Achievement of project outcomes	<p>Emphasis is placed on those outcomes (project outcomes) that a project is expected to achieve within its project timeframe and with its secured funding.</p>
3. Likelihood of impact	<p>Since 2018 an excel-based tool that supports a combined assessment of a) the extent to which outcomes have been achieved and b) the extent to which contributing conditions needed to create long-lasting change (i.e. assumptions and drivers) have been seen to hold, has been tested and strengthened.</p>
E. Financial Management	
1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures	<p>'Assessment against this sub-criterion has been continuous since 2019</p>
2. Completeness of project financial information	<p>Assessment against this sub-criterion has been continuous since 2018.</p>
3. Communication between finance and project management staff	<p>Assessment against this sub-criterion has been continuous since 2018.</p>
F. Efficiency	<p>Assessment against this criterion has been continuous as a stand-alone criterion since 2014.</p>
G. Monitoring and Reporting	<p>This criterion was changed from 'Monitoring and Evaluation' in 2016 and new sub-categories were defined during 2018-19.</p>
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	<p>The design of monitoring is, since 2018, combined with its budgeting.</p>
2. Monitoring of project implementation	<p>Since 2018, emphasis has been placed on the adequacy and effectiveness of monitoring project implementation rather than the delivery of a monitoring plan. This allows evaluations to give credit to projects that develop a range of ways of monitoring that were not part of the monitoring design.</p>
3. Project reporting	<p>Assessment against this sub-criterion has been continuous since 2018. It allows evaluations to give full credit to those projects that meet reporting requirements outside of an effective monitoring approach.</p>
H. Sustainability	<p>This criterion focuses on the 'endurance'/ longevity of outcomes. Assessment against these sub-criteria has been continuous since 2010, although the way in which the terms are understood and how likelihood should be assessed has been developed and refined over time.</p>
1. Socio-political sustainability	
2. Financial sustainability	
3. Institutional sustainability	
I. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues	

UNEP Evaluation Criteria	
1. <i>Preparation and readiness</i>	Assessment of this factor has been continuous since 2010 although the category included an assessment of the quality of project design up until 2015.
2. <i>Quality of project management and supervision</i>	Project management and supervision were brought together as one factor from 2018 as the boundaries between the two terms was found to be unhelpful in terms of learning and accountability for non-GEF projects. Requirements for evaluation of GEF projects specify that project supervision (by the Implementing Agency) be assessed separately from project management (by the Executing Agency).
3. <i>Stakeholder's participation and cooperation</i>	Assessment of this factor has been continuous since 2018.
4. <i>Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity</i>	Introduced as a stand-alone factor since 2018. Previously assessed as part of UNEP's policies and strategic priorities.
5. <i>Environmental, social and economic safeguards</i>	Introduced as a stand-alone factor in late 2019. Previously assessed as a negative, unintended effects under Effectiveness.
6. <i>Country ownership and driven-ness</i>	Assessment of this factor has been continuous since 2010.
7. <i>Communication and public awareness</i>	Assessment of this factor has been continuous since 2016.

49. Across all UNEP project evaluations, a six-point scale is used to rate performance against each evaluation criterion, as presented in **Table 3** below. The rating system and evaluation quality control processes used by UNEP are consistent with those applied by the GEF, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. UNEP's evaluation ratings are regularly benchmarked against those of other relevant organisations.

50. UNEP Evaluation Office sets the desired performance level at 'Satisfactory'. On a six-point scale, 'Satisfactory' is the fifth category and, therefore, its lower threshold represents a percentage score of 66.6%. Throughout this report, therefore, commentary is provided on the percentage of project evaluations with performance ratings in the 'Satisfactory' or better' category. This means a project has been assessed with either a 'Satisfactory' or 'Highly Satisfactory' rating. The abbreviation used for 'Satisfactory or better' is S/HS throughout this report.

Table 3. Performance rating scale

Criteria	Rating	Abbrev.	Abbrev.*	Range	Desired Performance
Strategic relevance; Quality of project design; Effectiveness; (Availability of outputs; Achievement of project outcomes; Likelihood of impact); Financial management; Efficiency; Monitoring and reporting; Sustainability; and Factors affecting project performance	Highly Satisfactory	HS	HL	↑ 'Satisfactory' range	S/HS ✓
	Satisfactory	S	L		
	Moderately Satisfactory	MS	ML	↓ ↑ 'Unsatisfactory' range ↓	
	Moderately Unsatisfactory	MU	MU		
	Unsatisfactory	U	U		
	Highly Unsatisfactory	HU	HU		

*Sustainability and Impact are rated against a 6-point 'likelihood' scale, ranging from 'Highly Likely' to 'Highly Unlikely'

51. To arrive at an overall project performance rating, the UNEP Evaluation Office applies a **weighted scale** to the individual evaluation criterion ratings. In this weighted scale, 30% of the overall performance score is determined by the rating for 'Achievement of project outcomes' and a further 20% is determined by the rating for 'Sustainability'. This means that the overall performance rating for all UNEP evaluations is strongly **results-oriented** and places great importance on effectiveness and the likelihood that the benefits derived from a project will be enduring.

Table 4. Weightings applied across evaluation criteria for overall performance ratings

Criterion	Sub-criteria/ factor weight	Criterion Weightings
A. Strategic Relevance		6
1. Alignment to UNEP's MTS, POW and strategic priorities	0.5	
2. Alignment to Donor/Partner strategic priorities	0.5	
3. Relevance to regional, sub-regional & national environmental priorities	2.5	
4. Complementarity with relevant existing interventions	2.5	
B. Quality of Project Design		4
C. Nature of External Context *		
D. Effectiveness		45
1. Availability of outputs	5	
2. Achievement of project outcomes	30	
3. Likelihood of impact	10	
E. Financial Management		5
1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures	1.66	
2. Completeness of project financial information	1.66	
3. Communication between finance and project management staff	1.66	
F. Efficiency		10
G. Monitoring and Reporting		5
1. Monitoring design and budgeting	1.66	
2. Monitoring of project implementation	1.66	
3. Project reporting	1.66	
H. Sustainability		20
1. Socio-political sustainability	6.66	
2. Financial sustainability	6.66	
3. Institutional sustainability	6.66	
I. Factors Affecting Performance / Cross-Cutting Issues		5
1. Preparation and readiness	0.71	
2. Quality of project management and supervision	0.71	
3. Stakeholders participation and cooperation	0.71	
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	0.71	
5. Environmental and social safeguards	0.71	
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	0.71	
7. Communication and public awareness	0.71	
Overall Project Rating		100

*The criterion 'Nature of the external context' is not used directly for assessing overall project performance. It is used indirectly in situations where operational conditions are especially challenging.

2.3 Evaluation coverage

52. The mandate of the UNEP Evaluation Office is to evaluate projects implemented under the Programme of Work. During the 2020-21 biennium, the sample of projects taken to represent the Programme of Work was determined by the operational completion date of projects from across all seven sub-programmes. Over time, and as the number of projects has increased, one would expect such a sample to accurately reflect the characteristics of the whole of UNEP’s portfolio.

53. In the period spanning from 2012 to 2021, UNEP’s Evaluation Office completed over 293⁸ project and programme evaluations. With the current staffing complement, the Evaluation Office has the capacity to complete approximately 30 evaluations each year and this number fluctuates depending on the actual duration of evaluation processes.

54. **Table 5** below shows a breakdown by sub-programme of the number of completed evaluations within the MTS/POW time periods listed.

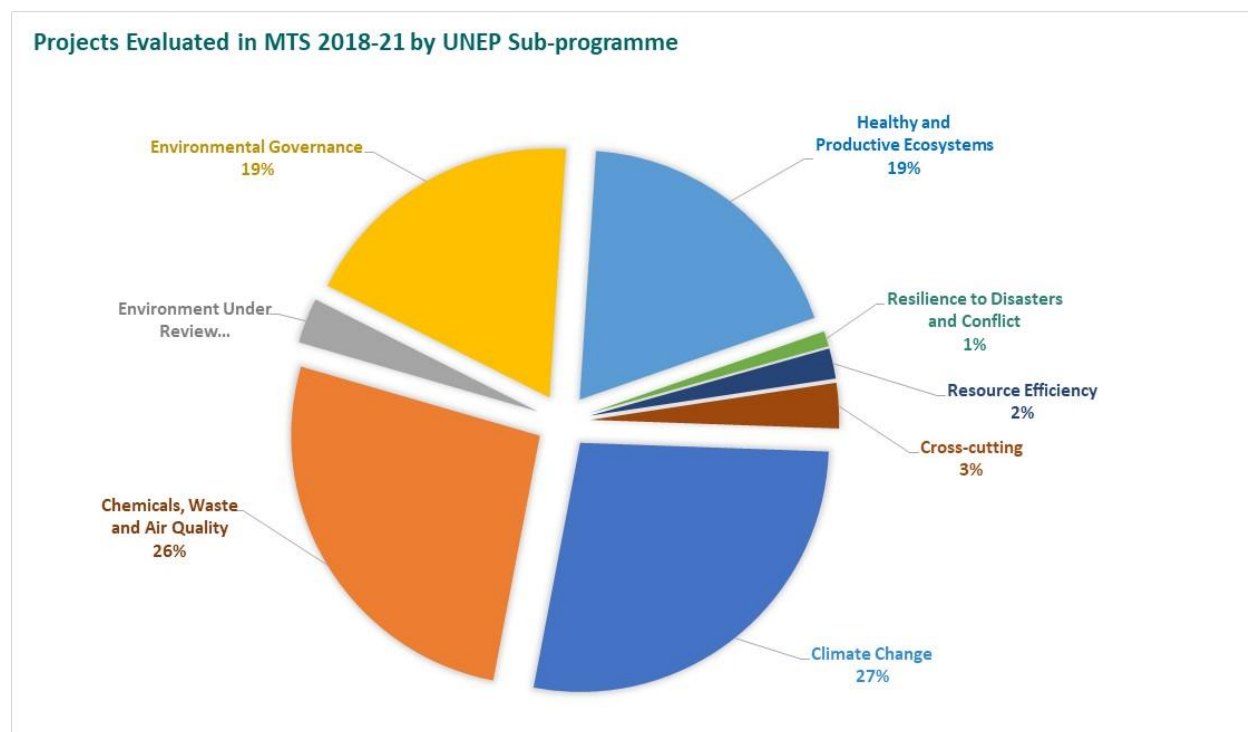
Table 5. Number of completed evaluations by Sub-Programme and MTS/POW

	Climate Change	Resilience to Disasters & Conflicts	Healthy and Productive Ecosystems	Environmental Governance	Chemicals, Waste & Air Quality	Resource Efficiency	Environment Under Review	Cross-cutting	TOTALS
PoW 2020-2021	12	0	8	6	12	1	1	3	42
MTS 2018- 2021	28	1	19	19	27	2	2	0	98
MTS 2014-2017	30	4	41	35	7	9	1	2	129
MTS 2010-2013	40	0	40	14	6	5	0	3	108
2010-2021	98	5	100	68	40	16	3	5	335

55. Apart from the nature of each sub-programme, with some sub-programmes having a small number of projects in their portfolio and others having many, it is noted that the evaluation policy of key donors also plays a part in the overall number of project evaluations, notably, the Healthy and Productive Ecosystems Sub-Programme receives the majority share of GEF grants and the GEF evaluation policy requires a mandatory evaluation, preferably within one year of a GEF project’s operational completion.

⁸ In some cases, evaluations were completed that did not include an evaluation ratings table and are therefore not included in this total.

Figure 1. Distribution of evaluated projects by Sub-Programme (MTS 2018- 2021)



UNEP Sub-programme	No. of Projects
Climate Change	28
Chemicals, Waste and Air Quality	27
Environment Under Review	3
Environmental Governance	19
Healthy and Productive Ecosystems	19
Resilience to Disasters and Conflict	1
Resource Efficiency	2
Cross-cutting	3

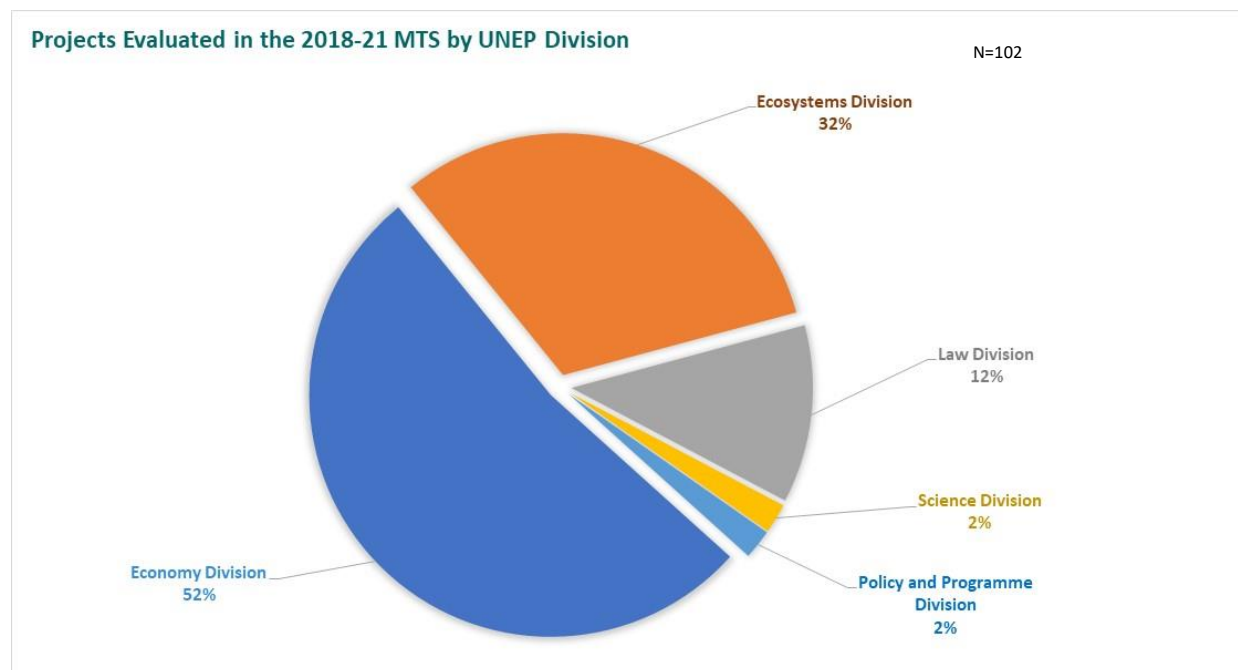
56. The Evaluation Office examines its portfolio of project evaluations across several dimensions relevant to the house, namely: funding modality, UNEP Division, global geographic region and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within each sample there is considerable heterogeneity in the types of projects that have been evaluated (e.g. single country, regional, global, field-based, normative etc.).

57. In addition, each of the dimensions listed above has some element of complexity: some projects contribute to more than one Sub-Programme or are managed by more than one Division; the data on funding modality has only been captured on a few named donors; it is assumed that a common definition of a 'global' project is being applied (i.e. any project operating in more than one region or if there is no involvement of specific countries). Project alignment to the SDGs has been determined retrospectively for projects approved prior to the SDGs being defined.

58. As information on all these dimensions has not been readily available in the past, these data are drawn only from 102 project evaluations completed during the MTS period 2018 - 2021. Once disaggregated across different sample characteristics (e.g. geographic region), this can lead to sample sizes that do not support statistical analysis. Such disaggregation is used for descriptive purposes.

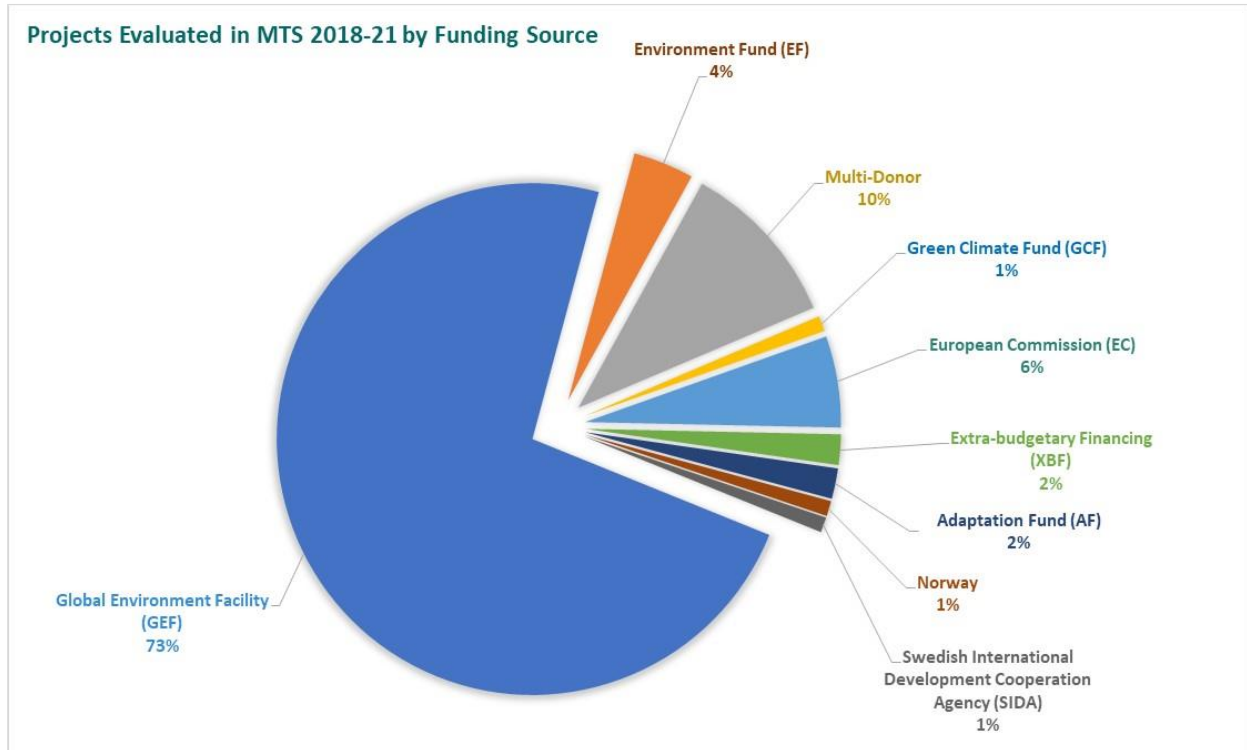
59. The project evaluations completed during the period of the MTS 2018-21 with respect to the UNEP Division under which they were managed are presented in **Figure 2** below. The number of project evaluations in any given time period is tied to project completions but also reflects the nature and composition of the Divisions themselves (e.g. some Divisions have few, large projects while others have multiple Branches and manage/oversee many projects within them).

Figure 2. Distribution of evaluated projects by UNEP Division (MTS 2018-2021)



60. The number of the project evaluations conducted with respect to the project's funding modality (see **Figure 3**) clearly highlights the effect of the GEF mandatory evaluation requirement as the GEF accounts for 73% of the project evaluations carried out in MTS 2018-21. Cognisant of this distribution, the Evaluation Office made efforts to revise the approach to evaluation in UNEP going forward, such that evaluation coverage becomes more representative of the entire UNEP programme. Details of the upcoming changes are briefly described in **Chapter 7**.

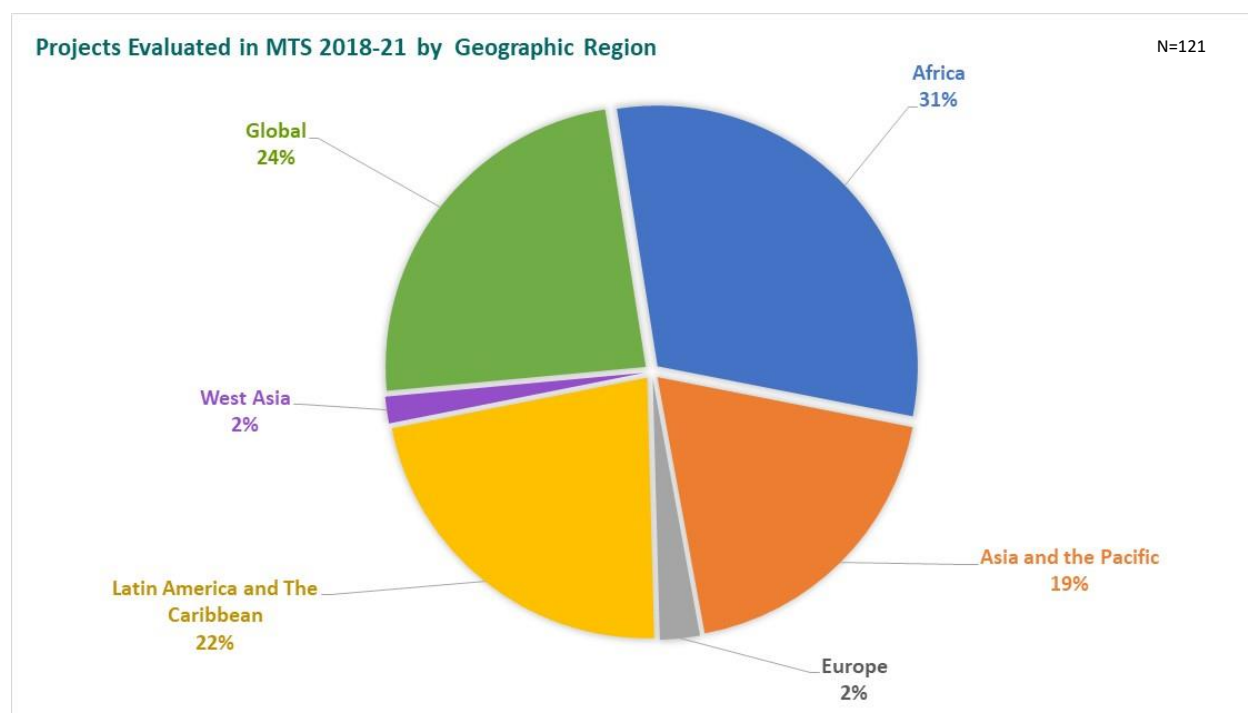
Figure 3. Distribution of evaluated projects by funding modality (MTS 2018-2021)



Funding Modality	No. of Evaluations
Adaptation Fund (AF)	2
Environment Fund (EF)	4
European Commission (EC)	6
Extra-budgetary Financing (XBF)	2
Global Environment Facility (GEF)	76
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	1
Multi-Donor	11
Norway	1
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)	1

61. The proportion of projects evaluated in MTS 2018-2021 by region is shown in **Figure 4** below. There are overlaps expected (hence the larger number of instances - 121) as some projects were operating in more than one region.

Figure 4. Distribution of evaluated projects by geographic region (MTS 2018-2021)



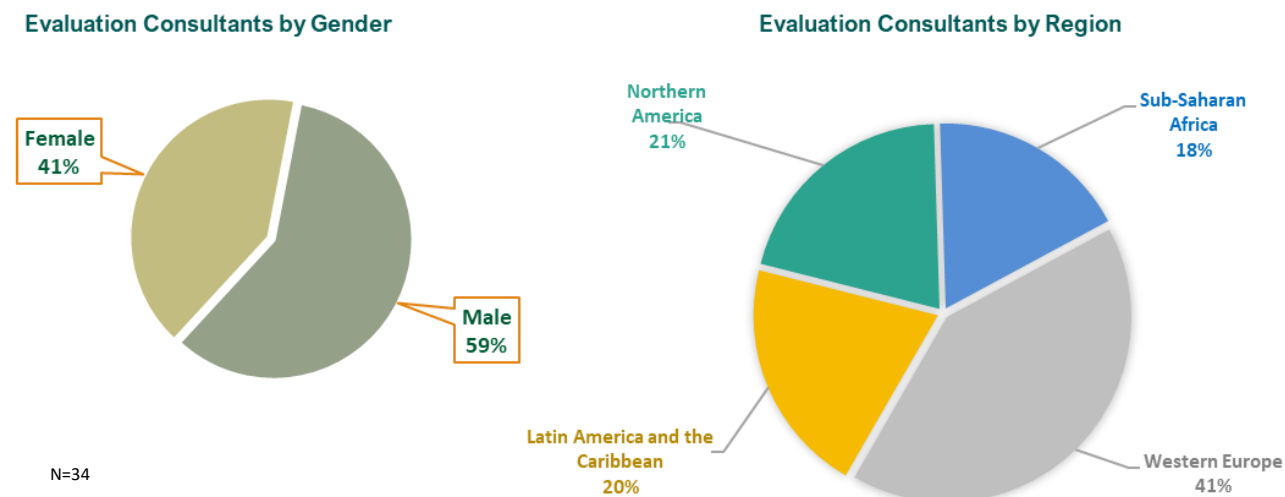
Region	No. of instances
Africa	37
Asia and the Pacific	23
Europe	3
Latin America and The Caribbean	27
West Asia	2
Global	29

62. The Evaluation Office recruits external evaluation consultants to undertake Mid-Term and Terminal evaluations. If we consider the disaggregation by gender of the consultants who completed evaluations in the 2020-21 biennium, 59% were male and 41% were female (see **Figure 5** below). The UN System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity calls for an inclusive workforce; while the strategy’s goal is 50/50 parity, it is recognized that sustainability at that number is unlikely and therefore parity within the 47%-53% margin⁹ may be considered adequate.

63. The Strategy also calls for geographic diversity, particularly from under-represented groups, and considers the twin goals of parity and diversity as mutually reinforcing. The consultants referred to in the preceding paragraph, were recruited from four geographic sub-regions, as shown in **Figure 5** below.

⁹ System-wide strategy on gender parity, October 2017

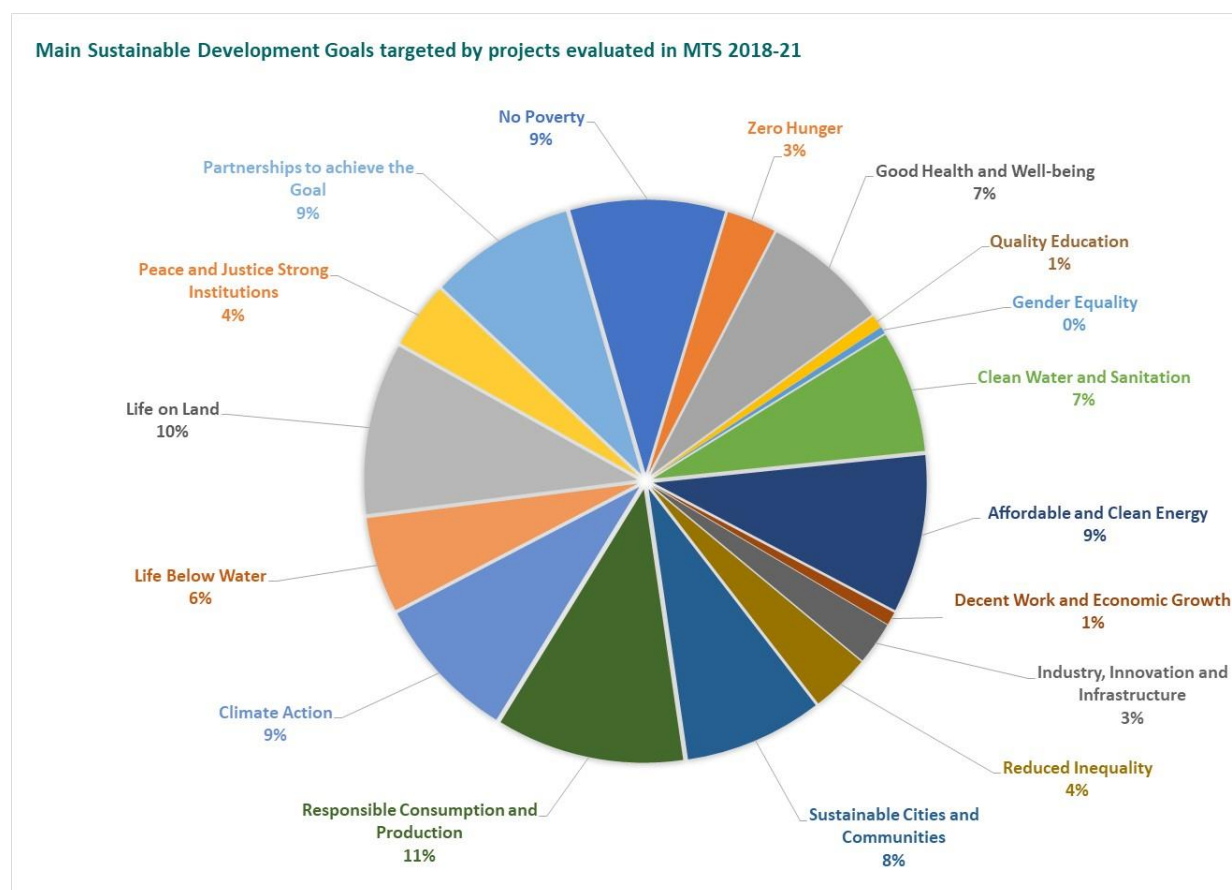
Figure 5. Evaluation consultants by gender and geographic representation (MTS 2018-2021)



64. Regarding the link between a project intervention and its relevant SDGs, it is emphasized that this alignment has been determined retrospectively and that a significant proportion of projects evaluated in this biennium were designed and approved before the SDGs came into play. In addition, where a project has been considered as aligned to more than one SDG, all goals have been counted. This underpins the high number of instances of SDGs recorded in **Figure 6** below (N=514).

65. As suggested by the data, the six SDGs to which UNEP project interventions most frequently link were: SDG 1 No Poverty; SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy; SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production; SDG 13 Climate Action; SDG 15 Life on Land, and SDG 17 'Partnerships for the goals'. It is interesting to note that there were only two instances of projects evaluated having listed a linkage to SDG 5 on Gender.

Figure 6. Alignment of evaluated projects to Sustainable Development Goals (MTS 2020-2021)



Sustainable Development Goal	No. of instances
SDG 1 No Poverty	47
SDG 2 Zero Hunger	15
SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being	38
SDG 4 Quality Education	4
SDG 5 Gender Equality	2
SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation	37
SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy	48
SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	4
SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	13
SDG 10 Reduced Inequality	18
SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	42
SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production	57
SDG 13 Climate Action	44
SDG 14 Life Below Water	29
SDG 15 Life on Land	52
SDG 16 Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	20
SDG 17 Partnerships to achieve the Goal	44
Total	514

2.4 Guidance and tools supporting the evaluation process

66. The Evaluation Office develops and provides guidance notes, tools and templates to inform evaluation consultants and evaluation managers, and to guide evaluation processes. These are continuously updated based on good practice and learning. Common approaches are applied across evaluations to promote transparency, comparability of evaluation ratings and the synthesis of common findings.

67. As has been reported in previous biennia (i.e., between 2010-2019), The Evaluation Office liaises with other parts of the house (e.g., Policy Coordination and Programme Coherence/Assurance Units within the Policy and Programme Division, the GEF Coordination Unit etc.) to ensure that the way in which projects are evaluated is consistent with the guidance UNEP provides during the project design and development process. Such liaison between departments also contributes to an ongoing process of institutional sharing and learning.

68. A significant number of evaluation tools were developed during previous biennia (i.e., 2016-17 and 2018-19) and these have been tested and refined during 2020-21. **Table 2** above summarises this development.

69. With regard to evaluation quality assurance processes, these are applied at inception, draft report and final report stages to ensure: the quality of - and adherence to - the terms of reference, that evaluation processes are in-line with UNEG Norms and Standards and follow UNEP guidance, and that the quality of evaluation reports meets UN system, and internationally agreed, evaluation standards. In addition, UNEP evaluation reports are, periodically, subject to external expert assessments of report quality.

2.5 Learning from evaluations

70. The purpose of evaluations is to meet accountability requirements, inform evidence-based decision-making and contribute to learning. Evidence that learning has been taken up is provided by an assessment of compliance with the recommendations that are derived from evaluations. During 2019, the Evaluation Office developed a revised process to: a) support the development of recommendations based on the findings from project evaluations, and b) to track the uptake of associated actions at both project and institutional levels. This tool takes full advantage of UNEP's adoption of SharePoint as an institution-wide platform which can be used to support more in-depth discussions around desired actions and to record the kind of evidence that will meet compliance reporting needs. This approach was introduced in January 2020 and applied to all projects evaluated during the 2020-21 biennium.

71. In addition to the lessons learned and recommendations developed during an evaluation, the reports themselves contain considerable insights into different aspects of performance.

72. The Evaluation Office uses a compliance procedure to track the progress of recommendation implementation compliance for a period of 12 months. The Office prepares biannual compliance status reports, and these are reported to senior management at regular intervals. Aggregate compliance data are included in this Evaluation Synthesis Report (see **Chapter 5**).

2.6 Limitations

73. To fulfil its mandate of evaluating projects forming the Programme of Work, the Evaluation Office is reliant on information regarding the operational completion of projects from all organizational units managing them, and the provision of adequate financial resources from within the projects to support the direct costs of evaluation processes (consultant evaluator fees, travel etc.).

74. Given the manual nature by which the list of projects eligible for evaluation is currently compiled, there is a possibility of a positive bias in the projects the Evaluation Office evaluates. This is because one can logically assume that completing a project on time and ensuring that an adequate

evaluation budget is available by the time it is needed, are both characteristics of good project management. Strong project management skills are likely to be associated with stronger project performance. By contrast projects that do not complete on time, which do not budget for evaluation, or whose managers fail to inform the Evaluation Office of their completion, will tend to be under-represented in the sample of projects evaluated.

75. While the overall sample size (42 evaluations in the current biennium) forms a robust basis for learning lessons, when this sample is disaggregated by dimensions of interest to the house (e.g., sub-programmes, or projects in Africa, etc.), its reliability for providing insights is more limited because of the small number of projects involved in any sub-category.

3 ANALYSIS OF PROJECT PERFORMANCE

3.1 2020-21 biennium coverage

76. In the 2020-21 biennium, 42 project / programme evaluations were completed for which performance ratings by criteria were included. Projects with evaluations that were completed in 2020-21 biennium had project start-dates ranging between July 2007 and October 2017 with the majority of evaluated projects (24%) having been formally approved in 2015.



77. In the evaluation reports completed during the 2020-21 biennium, the sum total of the reported expenditures is > **USD 213 Million**¹⁰, which includes GEF grants, extra-budgetary funding, Environment Fund contributions, co-finance (in-cash) and resources covered by strategic cooperation agreements (e.g., European Union, Adaptation Fund, etc.).

78. The data used for the analysis in this Chapter cover those projects for which performance ratings by criteria were included in the evaluation reports¹¹.

3.2 Performance in the 2020-21 biennium

79. The Evaluation Office is continually aiming to improve the objectivity and comparability of its evaluation approach across UNEP projects. Standard Terms of Reference for project evaluations and detailed guidance on evaluation processes, report structure, content, and quality are routinely provided to external evaluation consultants to help ensure a consistent approach to the assessment of performance in project evaluations.

80. Nevertheless, evaluation ratings depend on expert judgements from evaluation consultants. Since project interventions are very diverse thematically, geographically and in terms of their resource envelopes, conscious effort is needed to ensure that judgements are being made in a consistent manner.

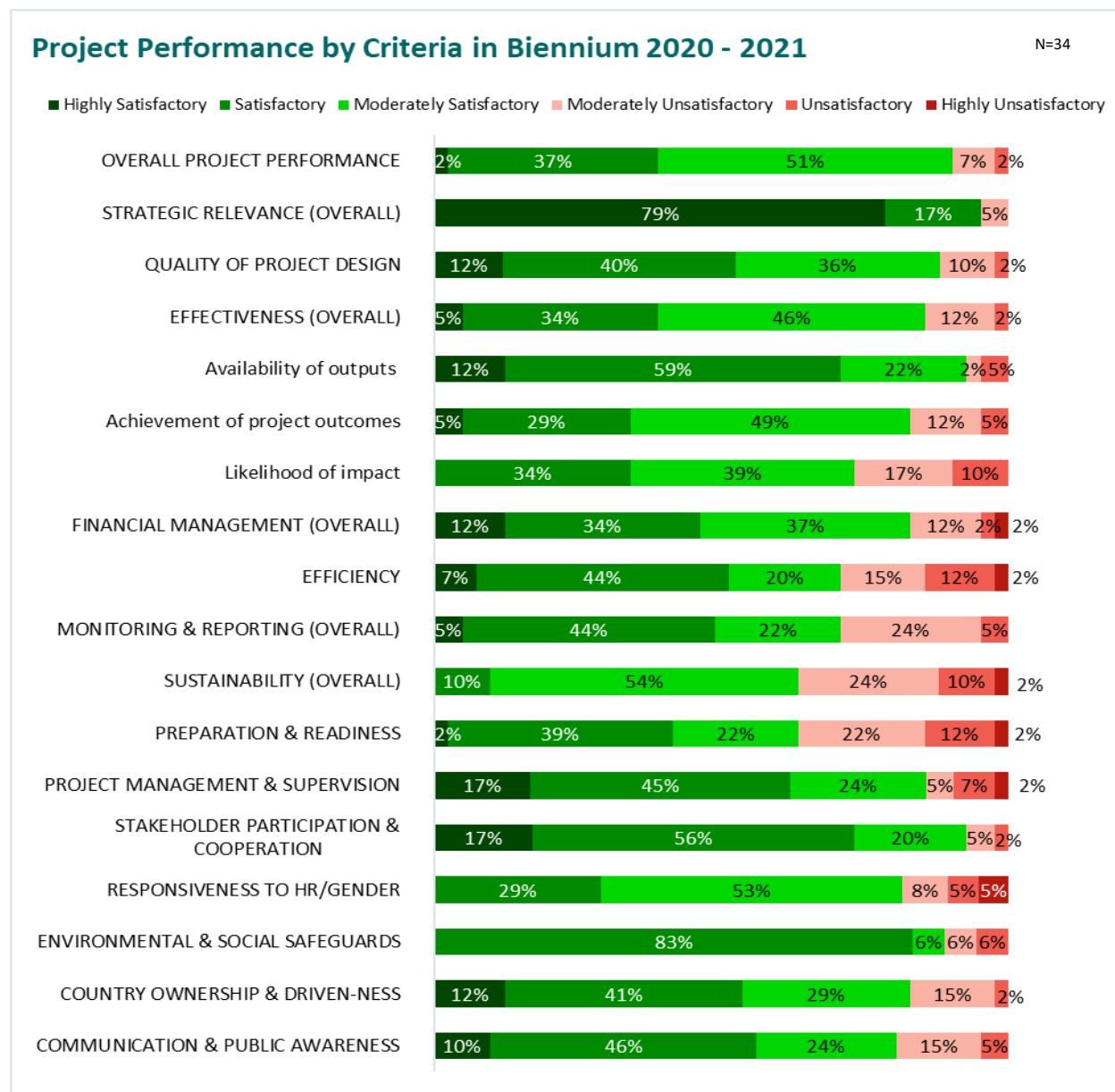
81. To reduce the variability that can be introduced across a large number of individual evaluation consultants and processes, in 2017 the Evaluation Office developed a 'Criterion Ratings Description Matrix' as a basis for making the awarding of evaluation ratings more explicit, in terms of identifying the kind of evidence required for each performance level under each criterion, thus improving the consistency and objectivity of evaluative judgements. All project evaluation ratings from 2018 onwards have been benchmarked against this matrix.

¹⁰ N= 42. This amount does not include sources that are recorded as in-kind co-financing. Reporting on co-financing is not always available / accurate/ consistent. In some cases, there is no disaggregation between cash and in-kind co-financing, therefore such instances have also been omitted from the total estimate indicated here.

¹¹ In some instances, programme evaluations and special studies do not confer any criteria-based performance ratings, so references to the number of completed evaluations may vary within this report.

82. A detailed representation of project performance by criteria, across all six rating categories, based on data collated from evaluation reports completed in the 2020-21 biennium¹² is presented in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. Summary of project performance against all evaluation criteria (2020-21)



83. A brief overview of the data shows an increase in projects attaining S/HS ratings, as compared to the previous biennium (2018-19), for the following criteria: 'Delivery of outputs' to the intended beneficiaries up from 57% of the 2018-19 sample to 71% of the sample in 2020-21 (24.5% increase) and for 'Efficiency' in delivering planned results from 39% of the 2018-19 sample to 51% in the 2020-

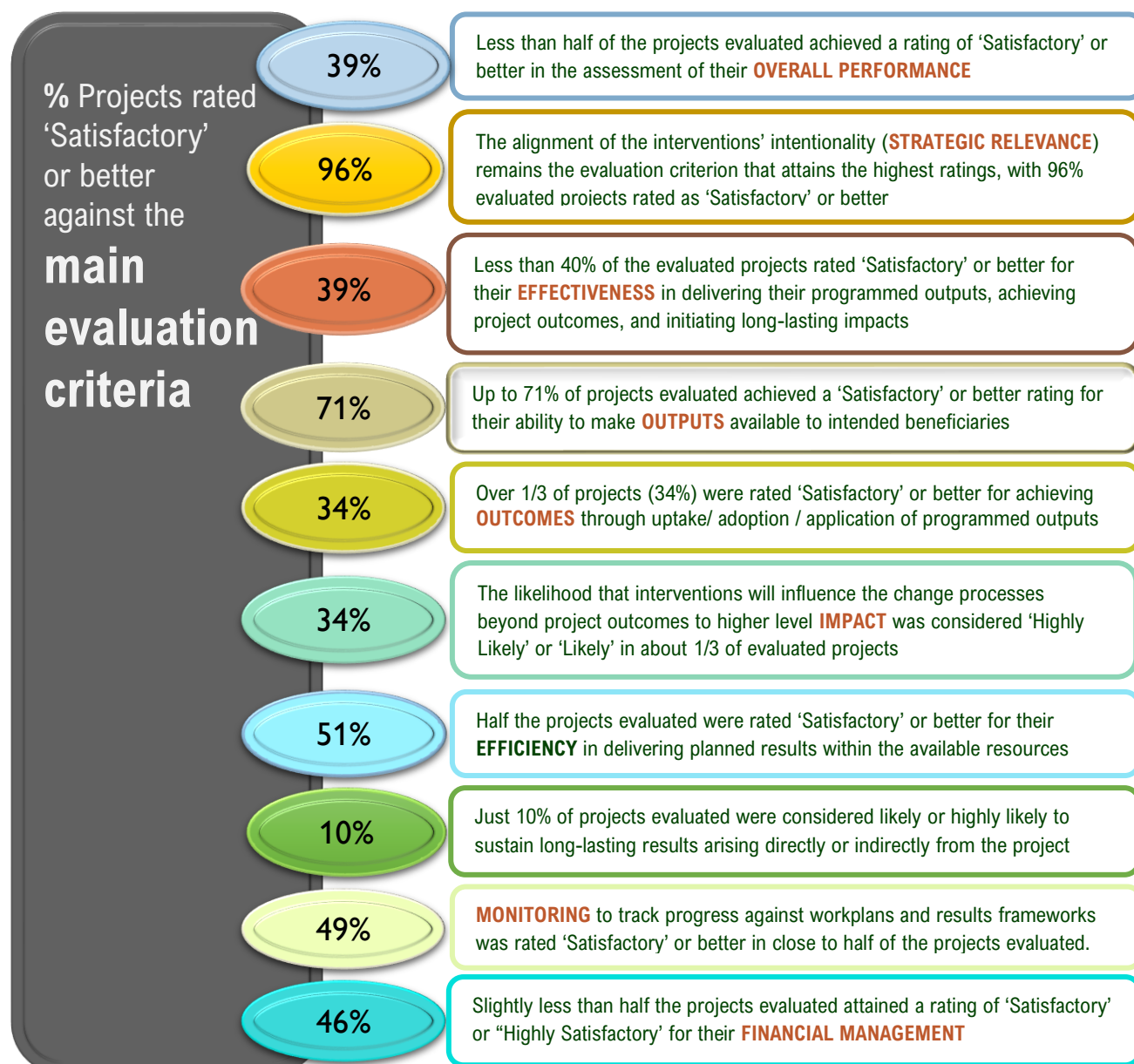
¹² Total number of evaluations with performance ratings is 42 for this biennium. N values will vary for different criteria due to differences in the number of projects rated against a particular evaluation criterion, i.e. some criteria are not rated in all evaluations.

21 sample. Performance against the 'Strategic relevance' criterion remained at a similarly high level in 2020-21 sample, to the previous biennium, with 96% of projects attaining S/HS rating.

84. UNEP Evaluation Office sets the **desired performance level at 'Satisfactory'** (using a six-point ratings scale) and focuses its attention on the percentage of cases where ratings have been awarded at the levels of 'Satisfactory or better' (i.e., either 'Satisfactory' or 'Highly Satisfactory', abbreviated to S/HS).

85. **Figure 8** below provides a general view of the performance by projects evaluated in the 2020-21 biennium, with a focus on the percentage of projects rated 'Satisfactory' or better (S/HS) in the main evaluation criteria.

Figure 8. Summary of project performance against main evaluation criteria (2020-21)



N=42

86. When compared to the 2018-19 biennium (see **Table 6**), the following main evaluation criteria show a reduction in the percentage of projects attaining S/HS rating: 'Sustainability', project 'Effectiveness', the 'Achievement of project outcomes', 'Likelihood of impact', and Financial management'.

Table 6. Projects attaining S/HS ratings for evaluation criteria (2018-19 and 2020-21)

Evaluation Criteria	Percent of evaluated projects rated S/HS 2018-19 Biennium	Percent of evaluated projects rated S/HS 2020-21 Biennium
Effectiveness	55%	39%
Achievement of project outcomes	50%	34%
Likelihood of Impact	46	34%
Sustainability	36%	10%
Financial management	70%	46%
Overall Performance	56%	39%

87. The percentage of projects attaining a S/HS rating for overall performance dropped from 56% of the evaluations completed in 2018-19 sample to 39% in the 2020-21 sample. This is largely driven by the decrease in the 'Effectiveness' and 'Sustainability' ratings which are afforded a heavy weighting in the calculation of overall performance (see **Table 4**).

88. The Evaluation Office also assesses the factors that affect project performance i.e., cross-cutting issues which contribute to project implementation and performance. The proportion of projects evaluated attained an S/HS rating for 'Stakeholder participation and cooperation increased from 68% in the 2018-19 to 73% in 2020-21, whilst the percentage of S/HS ratings for 'Communication and public awareness' during implementation showed a slight increase from 54% to 56% respectively.

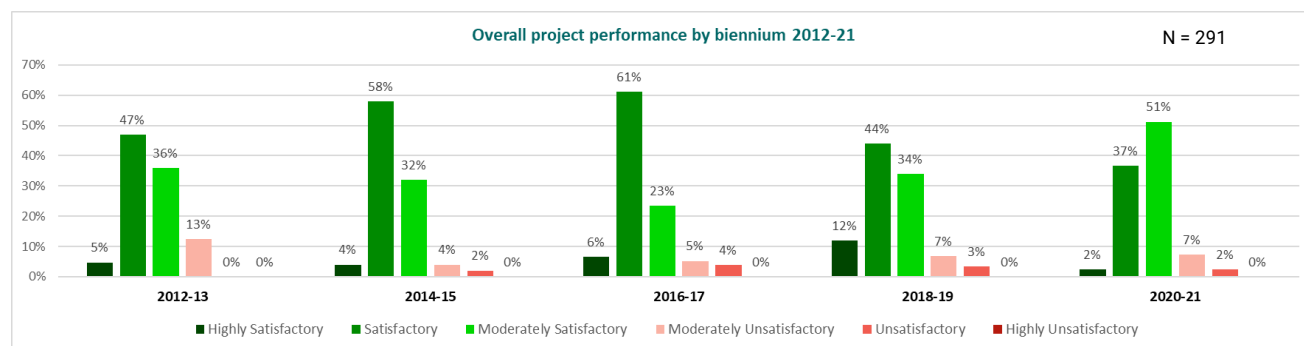
89. Cross-cutting areas where aggregated performance ratings declined in 2020-21, as compared to the 2018-19 Biennium, include project 'Preparation and readiness' at project mobilisation stage, as well as the quality and degree of 'Country ownership' generated by projects to support the realisation of long-term results and the "Quality of project management and supervision' showed a small decrease in the number of projects achieving S/HS ratings in 2020-21 as compared to the previous biennium.

Table 7. Projects attaining S/HS ratings for factors affecting performance (2018-19 and 2020-21)

Criteria	Percent of evaluated projects rated S/HS 2018-19 Biennium	Percent of evaluated projects rated S/HS 2020-21 Biennium
Preparation and Readiness	55%	41%
Country Ownership	68%	53%
Quality of project management and supervision	67%	62%

90. General trends in overall project performance against evaluation criteria, over a longer period dating back to the 2012, also provide a useful perspective (see **Figure 9** below).

Figure 9. Overall project performance by biennium (2012-2021)



Biennium	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	64	50	77	59	41

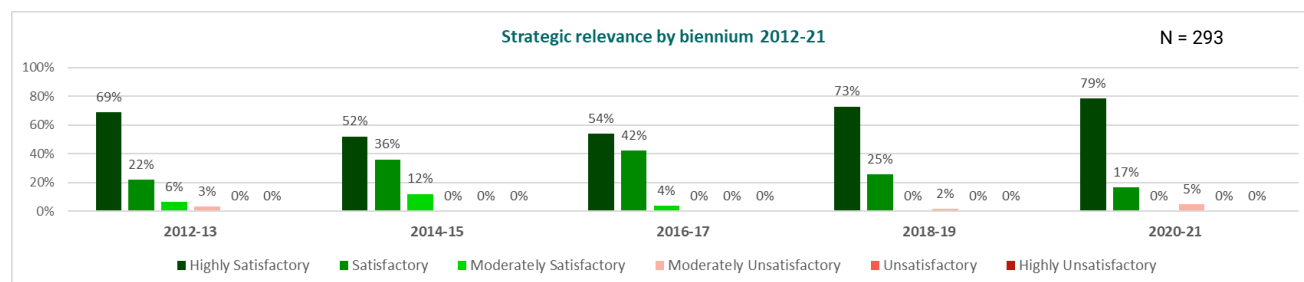
91. To summarize, over the past 10 years, UNEP’s projects have maintained steady performance within the ‘Satisfactory’ range (i.e. Moderately Satisfactory, Satisfactory and Highly Satisfactory) with about 90% of all the projects evaluated falling within this range. However, projects exceeding the fourth point on the six-point scale, i.e. within or above the ‘Satisfactory’ level, reflecting the performance threshold applied by the UNEP Evaluation Office, have decreased in the 2020-21 biennium and represent the lowest percentage recorded in the past five biennia.

92. The proportion of projects being assessed at the ‘Highly Satisfactory’ level in the current biennium is also the lowest recorded with only 2% meeting this mark. However, caution is needed in interpreting this data, over the same period the Evaluation Office has also increased the rigor of its assessments and the standards of evidence now required for S/HS ratings are higher than they were 10 years ago and especially since the ‘Criterion Ratings Description Matrix’ was fully introduced in 2018.

3.3 Strategic relevance

93. Strategic relevance remains the evaluation criterion with a consistently high proportion ($\geq 95\%$) of S/HS ratings over the six biennia, as shown in **Figure 10** below. This criterion assesses ‘alignment’ with strategic frameworks and priorities at the levels of UNEP, donors, regions and countries as well as the complementarity between UNEP’s project and other existing/planned interventions. Consistent alignment is, to a large degree, a function of various approval processes.

Figure 10. Comparison of strategic relevance (overall) by biennium (2012-21)



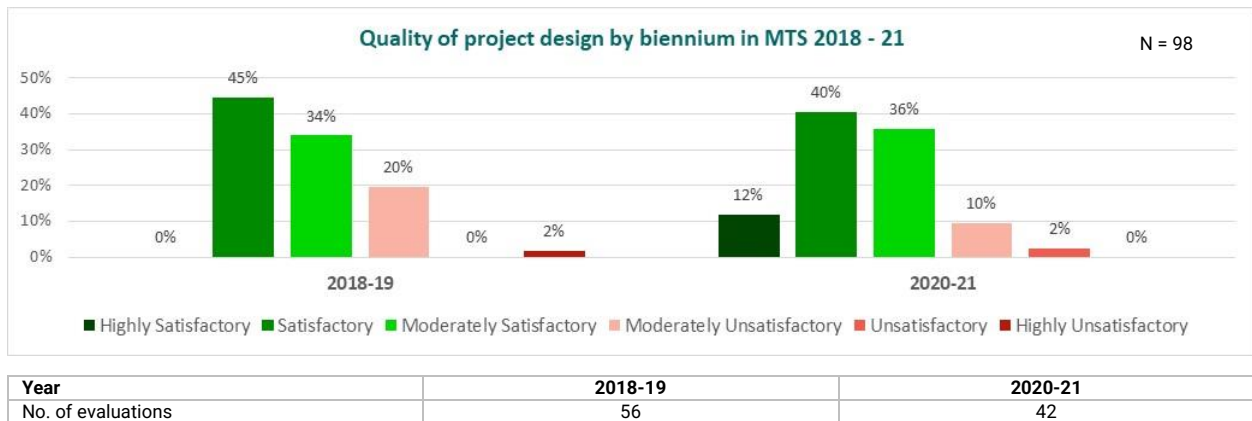
Biennium	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	64	50	78	59	42

3.4 Quality of project design

94. The criterion Quality of Project Design was incorporated into the evaluation ratings table in 2017 and therefore performance against the criterion cannot be compared over the six biennia of data (2010-2021).

95. The Evaluation Office has, however, been assessing and documenting project design quality since 2011, so there is in-depth knowledge within the Office about the strengths and weaknesses under this criterion than can be discerned from the data from the 2018-19 and 2020-21 biennia presented in **Figure 11** below.

Figure 11. Quality of project design by biennium (2018-21)



96. Here, we see an increase in the percentage of projects attaining S/HS ratings in this biennium (52%), as compared to 2018-19 (45%)¹³. Collectively, for the MTS 2018-21 period, close to half (48.5%) of all the projects assessed for this criterion have achieved a S/HS rating.

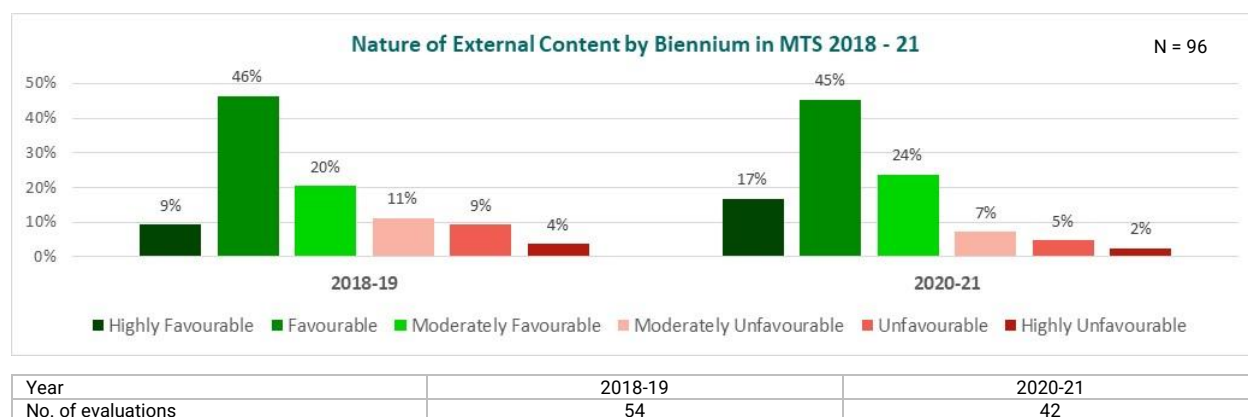
3.5 Nature of external content

97. This criterion was also introduced in 2017 and differs from other criteria in that it is used at the evaluation inception stage to establish the stability of the project’s external operating context¹⁴ (for instance, the prevalence of conflict, natural disasters and political upheaval during the project’s implementation period). The data in **Figure 12** below shows that on average, about one fifth of all projects evaluated during the 2018-2021 MTS period experienced negative external events that could not be anticipated at the time of project design and which adversely affected their implementation.

¹³ An improving trend is also evident in the Policy and Programme Division’s assessment of the quality of project design (2022), however the PPD study focuses on project designs that were only recently approved. (Programme Cohesion and Assurance Unit, Policy and Programme Division, Quality of Project Design Assessment Report Q1-Q2, July 2022)

¹⁴ For this criterion a similar six-point rating scale is used by the labels are changed to: Highly Unfavourable; Moderately Unfavourable; Unfavourable; Moderately Favourable; Favourable and Highly Favourable. The two lowest rating points in the Unfavourable range may lead to an adjustment in the assessment of other performance criteria.

Figure 12. Nature of the external context by biennium (2018-21)

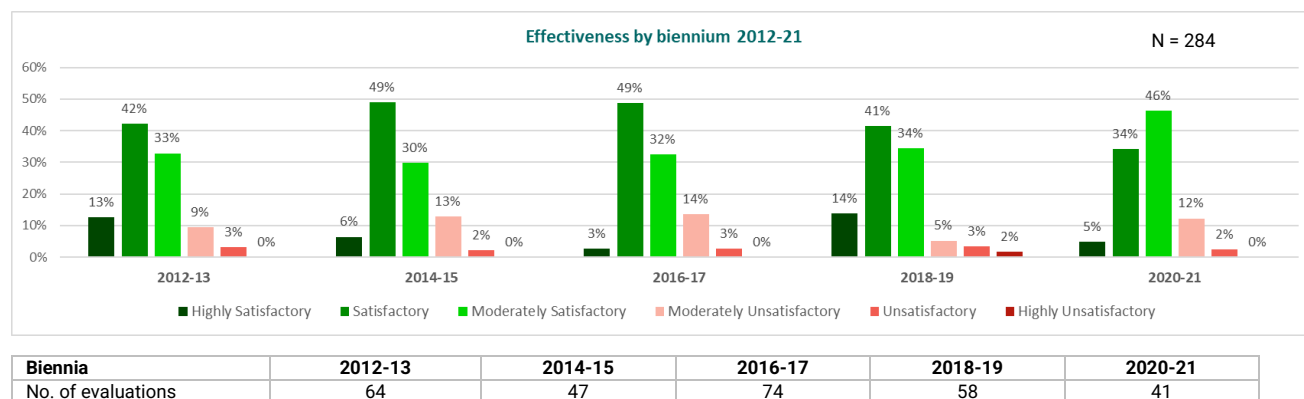


98. Whenever a project has been rated as having encountered either an 'Unfavourable' or 'Highly Unfavourable' external operating context, and/or a negative external event has occurred during project implementation that could not have been foreseen during the design phase, the ratings for Effectiveness, Efficiency and/or Sustainability may be increased at the discretion of the Evaluation Consultant and Evaluation Manager together. This allows the evaluation to give a project 'credit' for what it has achieved, even if the planned project design or implementation plan could not be followed as anticipated. It is anticipated that this criterion may be more frequently applied as projects operating during the COVID-19 pandemic are evaluated.

3.6 Effectiveness

99. Assessment of the effectiveness of UNEP's work is at the core of any analysis of performance. The 'Effectiveness' criterion is further categorised under three performance areas: (i) the availability of outputs; (ii) the achievement of outcomes; and (iii) likelihood of impact. Figure 13 below shows the scores for overall effectiveness of projects evaluated in six biennia.

Figure 13. Effectiveness (overall) by biennium (2012-21)



100. Projects evaluated in the 2020-21 biennium showed a decrease in the proportion rated S/HS against this criterion, with 39% making this mark in 2020-21 compared to 56% in 2018-19. Across the five biennia from 2012-13 to 2018-19 52-55 % projects rated for Effectiveness achieved a S/SH rating, in the biennium 2020-21 there is a departure from this range with 39% of the projects rated as attaining

S/HS for this criterion. We also note that among all projects evaluated in the five biennia, the percentage of projects that attained a rating in the 'Unsatisfactory' range has remained between 12-17%. In the 2020-21 Biennium there is a larger proportion of projects attaining the 'Moderately Satisfactory' rating than in previous biennia.

3.7 Availability of outputs

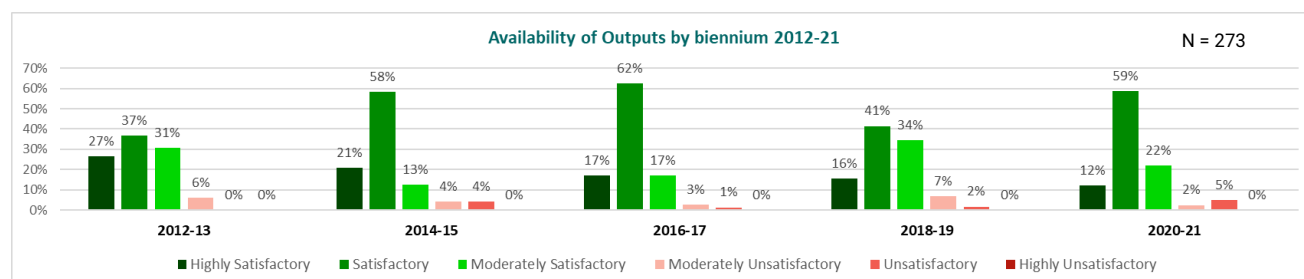
101. Evaluations assess programmed outputs both in terms of **quantity** and **quality**. The success of project outputs reaching their intended beneficiaries or users is reflected through the access to, or the availability of the products and services delivered by a project. Also of importance is the timeliness of their delivery, as well as the ownership by, and usefulness to, the intended beneficiaries.

102. Outputs are typically the level at which evaluations start a project's Theory of Change (TOC). This is because it is at the output level that a project's intended beneficiaries or users come into view, and a potential change process can begin to be discerned.

103. Up until the output level, the focus during project implementation is very much on development and completion of activities¹⁵, all of which are under the strong control of implementing and executing parties. Typically, and as evidenced by the high proportion of S/HS ratings for this sub-category of Effectiveness, UNEP projects perform well at output level.

104. Over the biennia the percentage of S/HS ratings has averaged at 69% and projects evaluated in this biennium have performed at just above this level (71% of evaluated projects attained S/HS for this criterion as shown in **Figure 14** below).

Figure 14. Availability of Outputs by biennium (2012-21)



Biennia	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	49	48	77	58	41

3.8 Achievement of project outcomes

105. Outcomes refer to the use (i.e., uptake, adoption, application) of outputs by intended beneficiaries, observed as changes in their behaviours, attitudes or conditions. Outcomes are also the points in the change process at which agency¹⁶ is clearly transferred from those who are responsible for delivering the project to those who are expected to benefit from, or use and take forward, a project's results.

¹⁵ Activities can also help to drive change processes forward at higher results levels.

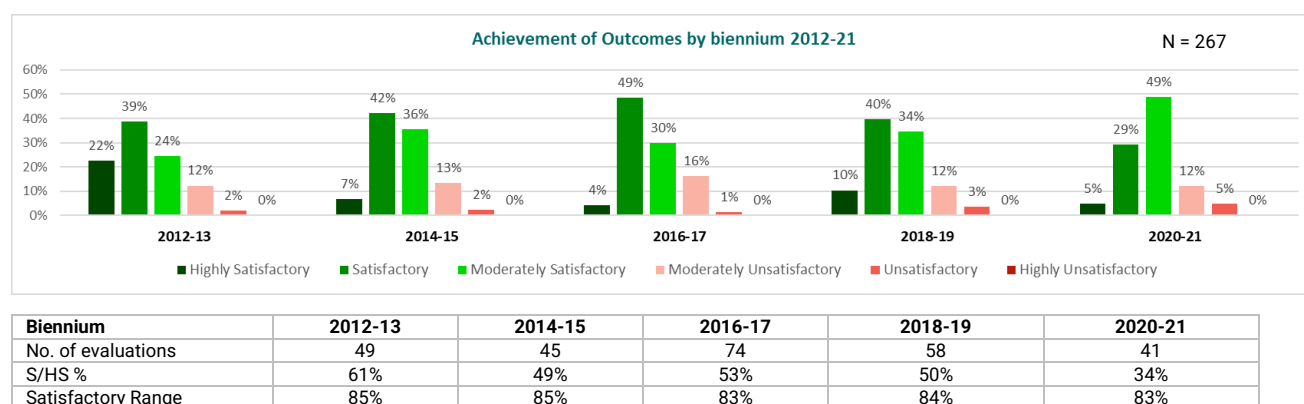
¹⁶ 'agency' - definition "the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power". Merriam-Webster.

106. At the outcome level, evaluations assess levels of achievement (e.g. partial or full) of planned outcomes, and whether achievements can be demonstrated in those outcome areas. Also of interest is establishing whether those conditions that contribute to the intended change process (referred to as ‘assumptions’ and ‘drivers’) have been seen to hold.

107. **Figure 15** below shows that the proportion of S/HS ratings for the achievement of project outcomes is lower in the 2020-21 biennium – 35%. S/HS ratings under this sub-criterion of effectiveness were 55% in 2010-11; 61% in 2012-13; 49% in 2014-15; 53% in 2016-17, and 50% in 2018-19. However, the proportion of projects rated in the ‘Satisfactory’ range has been consistent over time.

108. Specific reasons for the reduction in the proportion of S/HS ratings are difficult to discern with any certainty, but a general observation is that project designs continue to underinvest in the change processes beyond the output level. The processes that support the transfer of agency from UNEP to other actors needs greater emphasis and support.

Figure 15. Achievement of Outcomes by biennium (2012-21)



109. With reference to **Figure 14** and **Figure 15** above, the proportion of S/HS ratings for achievement of outcomes (34%) is noticeably lower than for the availability of outputs (71%) in the 2020-21 biennium.

110. Performance at outcome level is a clear indication of the effect of UNEP’s work, and the difference in the S/HS ratings between the availability of outputs and achievement of outcomes, as shown by these data, is an area that requires strong management attention.¹⁷

111. Through evaluations carried out over the period from 2012 - 2021, challenges often noted in this area have included:

- outcome level results statements being poorly formulated, sometimes without the inclusion of a verb that denotes use, application or uptake;
- the ambitions implicit in outcome level results are often too high, or unrealistic, for the timeframe, budget and scope of work of the project, but may have seemed impressive during approval processes;

¹⁷ This issue was also raised in the previous biennial evaluation synthesis report (2018-19)

- measures to show changes in behaviour (i.e. use of outputs) from before and after project implementation are either not envisaged in the project design or not tracked during implementation;
- no, or few, activities are designed and carried out between output and outcome level. Typically, project designs, logical frameworks, budgets and even TOCs are formulated with activities only feeding into the output level but the activities needed to ensure the uptake or use of those outputs are either not considered or are left at an implicit level; and
- Theories of Change are designed with more regard to how a project will be operationalized and deliver at output level (e.g., components, work packages, areas of activity, etc.) than as a set of interlinked and interdependent causal pathways leading to higher level programmatic impact. The change processes (depicted as arrows in TOC diagrams) need to be made explicit with greater description and elaboration as to which specific actors (and factors) are involved.

3.9 Likelihood of impact

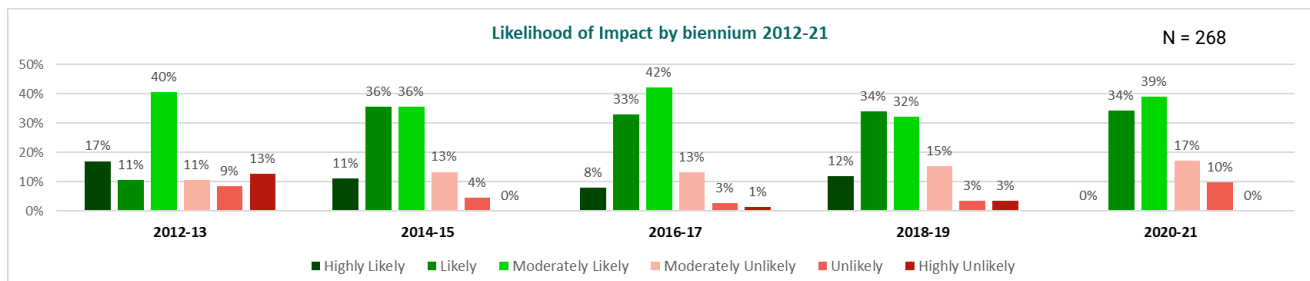
112. Evaluations assess the likelihood of the intended, positive impacts becoming a reality. Evaluations are undertaken as soon after operational completion as is possible, and consequently it is often too early to gather clear evidence of long-term effects i.e. impact. Evaluations, therefore, assess the *likelihood* that the intervention may lead, or contribute to, the intended impact (or even, in some cases, unintended negative effects).

113. The Evaluation Office approach to assessing the likelihood of impact is based on the Theory of Change (TOC), and considers the assessment of the achievement of outcomes, whether contributing conditions have held, and whether there are any nascent signs of long-lasting (i.e. embedded) changes developing, or having developed. The Evaluation Office supports this assessment process by providing structured guidelines, as well as an excel-based flow chart referred to as a ‘Likelihood of Impact Assessment Decision Tree’.

114. As shown in **Figure 16** below, the proportion of projects evaluated in 2020-21 that attained a ‘Likely’ or ‘Highly Likely’ rating for ‘Likelihood of impact’ was 34% compared to 46% in the 2018-19 biennium. There was also an increase in projects that were assessed to be within the ‘Unlikely’ range of achieving their intended impact in the 2020-21 biennium (27%), as compared to previous biennia - 21% in 2018-19 and 17% in both 2014-15 and 2016-17.

115. The TOC method was introduced by the Evaluation Office in the biennium 2012-2013 as a tool to help the assessment of ‘Likelihood of impact achievement’. The systematic use of TOC analysis provides a more robust and objective assessment of the likelihood of impact achievement.

Figure 16. Likelihood of impact by biennium (2012-21)



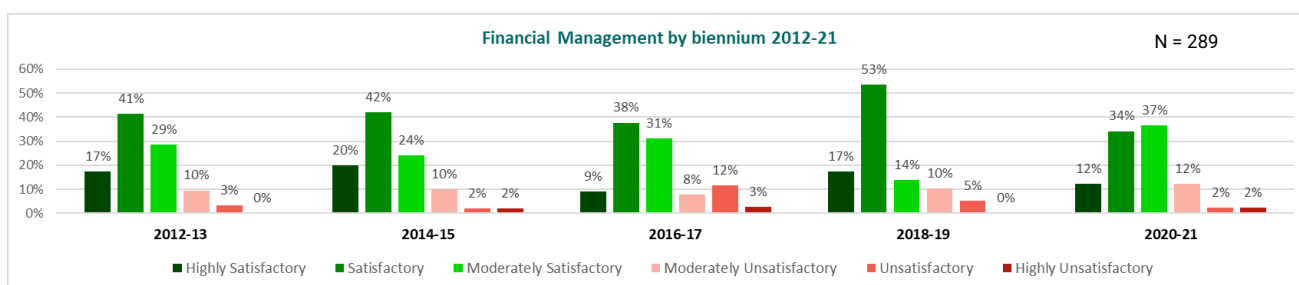
Biennia	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	47	45	76	59	41

116. As observed in prior evaluation synthesis reports, successful projects are likely to be those where all outcomes (including intermediate states) have been (or are on the way to being) achieved and the factors necessary to support the transition from outcomes to impact (referred to in UNEP evaluations as assumptions and drivers) have been set in place and are supported by well-designed strategies that promote forward progression of along explicit causal pathways. To increase the likelihood of achieving impact, therefore, it is important to explicitly articulate the causal linkages between outputs, outcomes and the intended impact and programme project activities that help drive change along these pathways.

3.10 Financial management

117. In 2016, financial management was established as a stand-alone evaluation criterion, whereas in prior years it was assessed as one of the cross-cutting issues affecting project performance.

Figure 17. Financial management (overall) by biennium (2012-21)



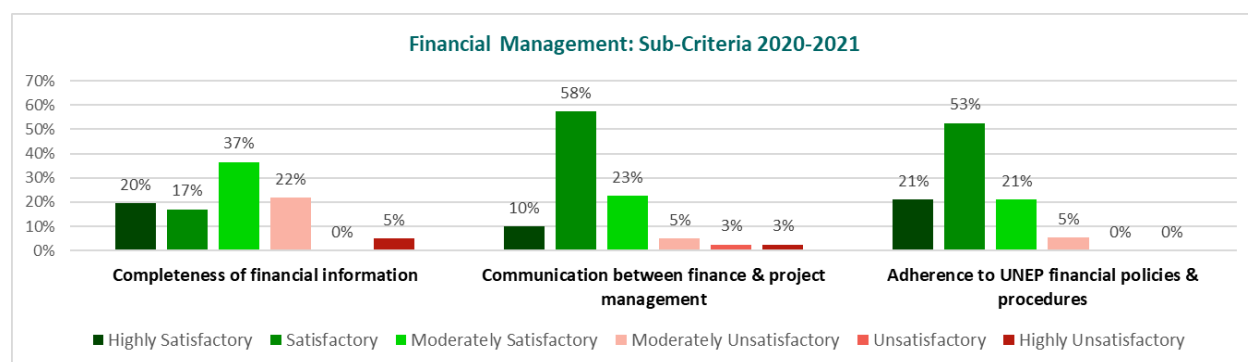
Biennia	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	63	50	77	58	41

118. As shown in Figure 17 above, the proportion of S/HS ratings under this criterion have fluctuated over time and range from 47% in 2016-17 to 70% in 2018-19. On average, over the 10-year period, less than half (48%) of projects evaluated for their overall financial management have achieved S/HS ratings. The corresponding proportion of projects evaluated in the 2020-21 Biennium is slightly below this average at 46%.

119. This criterion is further divided into three sub-criteria: adherence to UNEP’s financial policies and procedures, completeness of financial information and communication between financial and project management staff. Figure 18 below shows the breakdown in S/HS ratings for these three sub-criteria.

120. The data suggest that the completeness of financial data at the time of evaluation can be improved since only 37% of projects achieve a S/HS rating. Communication between project managers and finance staff was rated as S/HS in 68% of the projects evaluated. The low sample size for adherence to financial policies and procedures limits the inferences possible from the data but suggests a generally positive performance across the sample.

Figure 18. Financial management by sub-criteria (2020-21)



Sub-category	Completeness of financial information	Communication between finance & project management	Adherence to UNEP financial policies & procedures
No. of evaluations	41	40	19

3.11 Efficiency

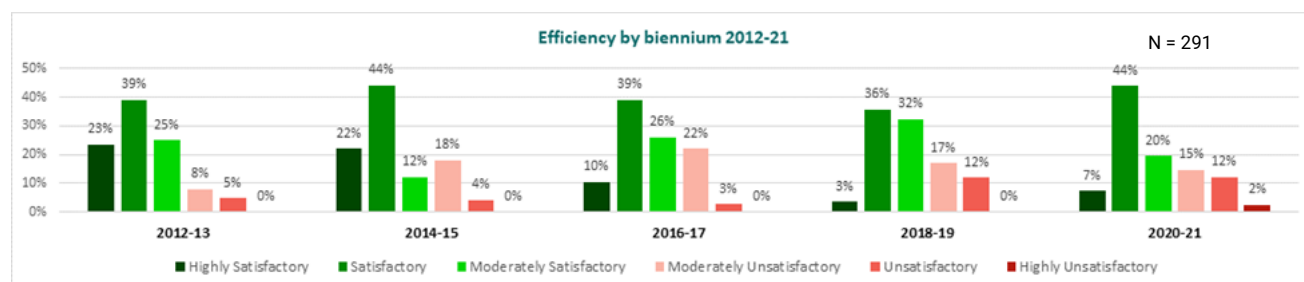
121. This criterion focuses on efficiency in terms of the **cost-effectiveness** and **timeliness** of execution of a project to a successful conclusion within its programmed budget and time frame.

122. Given the lack of disaggregated financial information that is suited to analyses of the costs associated with specific areas of result, the interpretation of performance against this criterion is constrained. Evaluations therefore assess the sequencing and arrangement of activities and the level to which projects have built on existing structures and institutions and complementarities with other initiatives.

123. Project extensions are assessed against the formally approved results framework and evidence is sought to establish whether such extensions were justifiable. No-cost extensions are also considered under efficiency because any extension to the end date of a project brings additional overhead costs to managing entities.

124. **Figure 19** below shows the assessment of efficiency in projects evaluated over the last 10 years. There has been an increase in the percentage of projects rated S/HS in 2020-21 as compared to the previous biennium (from 39% in 2018-19 up to 51% in 2020-21). The average proportion of projects rated S/HS for their efficiency across the entire 10-year period from 2012-2021, is 54%, i.e., just over half of all projects evaluated against this criterion.

Figure 19. Efficiency by biennium (2012-21)



Biennia	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	64	50	77	59	41

125. Drawing from analyses made in previous evaluation synthesis reports, projects that score highly for this criterion are likely to demonstrate the following common features; prudent use of resources to achieve their objectives, timely delivery of activities and outputs and achieving an adequate ratio between the funds used and the effects achieved. Efficiency is also influenced by the utilisation of strategic partnerships, synergies and complementarities with pre-existing related interventions.

126. On the other hand, inefficiencies are often attributed to an array of challenges such as: significant start-up delays which subsequently affect project duration; delays in the signing of counterpart funding agreements with governments; delayed disbursement of funds; political volatility in participating countries; complex government structures and bureaucracies; ineffective partnership arrangements; incongruent administrative procedures and financial reporting requirements and insufficient human/technical capacity/staff turnover, among others.

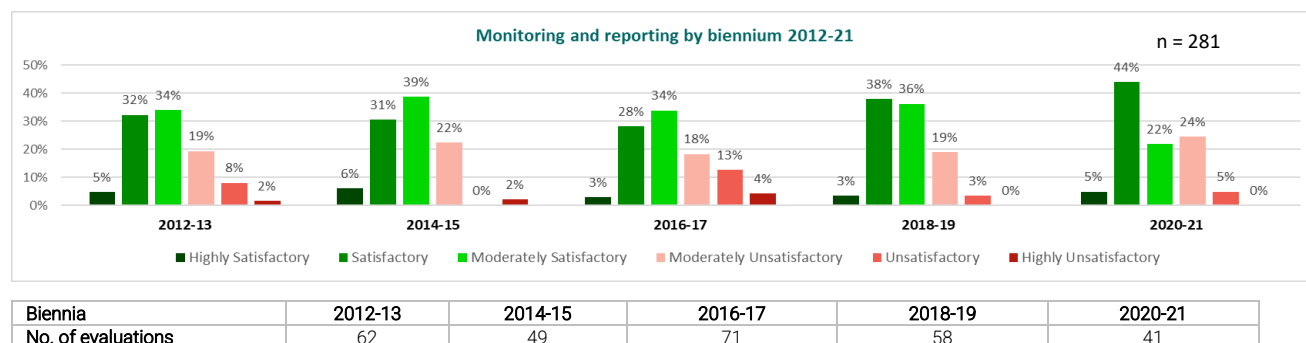
3.12 Monitoring and reporting

127. Monitoring was previously assessed as a sub-criterion under Factors Affecting Performance. Not only was the topic established as a stand-alone evaluation criterion in the 2018-17 biennium, but it was also reframed from 'Monitoring and Evaluation' to 'Monitoring and Reporting'. This is because the responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation lie in different places and only the monitoring aspect is properly evaluable during a project-level evaluation.

128. It is not uncommon for project documents to combine monitoring systems with evaluation processes as 'M&E'. Monitoring is a responsibility of project managers and is essential for effective RBM. Whereas evaluation is a structured assessment process undertaken independently from project management. Ideally, a project should be supported by a sound monitoring plan that is designed to track progress against specified results (i.e., the programmed outputs, outcomes, including the anticipated long-term Impact). Information gathered through monitoring systems informs reporting.

129. The quality of the design of the monitoring plan, as well as funding allocated for its implementation, are particularly important for the success of the monitoring plan as a tool for results-based management. Of particular importance are the suitability of indicators (both for outputs and outcomes) as well as the methods used for tracking progress against these indicators.

Figure 20. Project monitoring and reporting by biennium (2012-21)

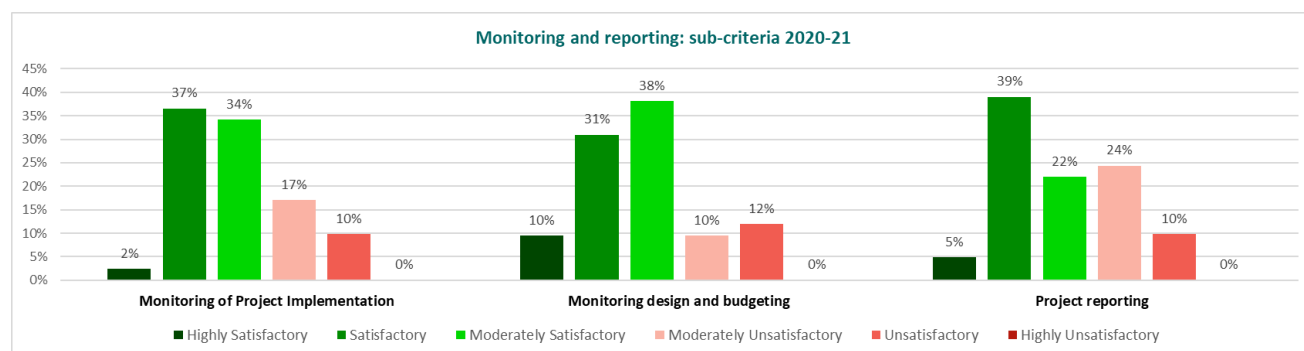


130. Figure 20 above shows the general trend in performance for the 'monitoring' criterion over a 10-year period. The proportion of S/HS ratings for overall project monitoring has shown a gradual increase from the 2012-13 to date. S/HS ratings were 37% in 2012-13; 37% in 2014-15; 31% in 2016-

17; 41% in 2018-19 and 49% in 2020-21. Nevertheless, the most recent figures for 2020-21 show that less than half of all the projects evaluated are reaching the top two performance categories of 'Satisfactory' or better' for this criterion.

131. The Evaluation Office assesses monitoring and reporting using three sub-criteria; i) monitoring design and budgeting (i.e., the quality of the design of the monitoring plan as well as the funds allocated for its implementation), ii) monitoring implementation (i.e., whether the monitoring system was operational and facilitated the timely tracking of results and progress towards projects objectives throughout the project implementation period); and iii) project reporting (i.e., the extent to which both UNEP and donor reporting commitments have been fulfilled).

Figure 21. Monitoring and reporting by sub-criteria (2020-21)



Sub-category	Monitoring design and budgeting	Monitoring of Project Implementation	Project reporting
No. of evaluations	58	58	55

132. At the sub-criterion level (see **Figure 21** above), during the 2020-21 biennium, 41% of the projects evaluated achieved S/HS ratings for having a sound monitoring plan and associated budget, 39% of the projects achieved S/HS ratings for tracking of their results, and 44% for maintaining regular reporting on the same. Project Reporting has the highest proportion of projects (34%) in the Moderately Satisfactory – Highly Unsatisfactory range. Reporting, like monitoring, is a core responsibility of the project management team.

133. One of the key areas of weakness highlighted during the evaluation process and in evaluation reports, is the lack of awareness of the key distinction between the **monitoring of project implementation** (i.e., tracking results and progress towards specified objectives) and **reporting on project implementation** (i.e., describing 'what the project has done').

134. The critical role that monitoring can play in informing management of the need to make corrective action when progress against an agreed workplan (with due regard for timing and funding levels) and results framework is tracked, is frequently overlooked. This means that despite planning and providing funds for monitoring, the substantive contributions that project monitoring can bring to the achievement of results, are not being adequately realized.

135. A text coding software used to analyse 24 projects in the previous biennium (2018-19), showed that in most cases, plans for monitoring are described in the project designs, some level of budget provision is made, and the reporting requirements for both UNEP and donors (especially the GEF) are followed. However, the actual operationalization of the monitoring function during project implementation is still either infrequent or weak. Similar findings and trends were apparent in the 2020-21 biennium. Learning derived from the text coding exercise, presented in the 2018-19 biennial synthesis report, is still pertinent and is reiterated here:

Monitoring design and budgeting

136. Most projects lack a robust monitoring plan, despite evidence of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plans and budgets being included in project design templates from 2010 onwards. An M&E Plan that is well designed should cover all the indicators in the results framework, by their baseline, target, means of verification, as well as the assumptions & risks. It should include a Data Collection Plan, which specifies the tools and methods that ought to be used to collect monitoring data, the minimum frequency of data collection for each indicator, and also provides templates that can be used for reporting on M&E.

137. Costs associated with monitoring are often limited to budgets for undertaking a mid-term review and terminal evaluation. These budgets are, in turn, often under-estimated. Typically, there are insufficient resources dedicated to the M&E Plan, specifying the budget lines reserved for its implementation (e.g., costs related to data gathering, reporting, personnel, etc.)

138. Frequently there is no identified staff member responsible for monitoring, which reduces the likelihood of the role being played in full and has a negative effect on the collection and recording of monitoring data at an institutional level. Gaps in monitoring data are often exacerbated when there is significant staff turnover.

Monitoring of project implementation

139. In the majority of cases, results statements and the associated indicators of project performance are either: a) not SMART or b) not appropriate for the results' level (e.g., a count of number of participants to indicate the achievement of an outcome). Where a proper and systematic monitoring plan is not followed, there is a negative impact on the quality of project implementation (timing and sequencing of activities, adjustments to reach targets and realise results, etc.).

Project reporting

140. Project reporting is not always done in a systematic manner, and reporting guidelines are not always followed. For example, different versions of the same report (different template/same year) may be found for the same project, and in other cases, the report versions provided to the evaluation by the project team are not those that were officially submitted. There are also instances where high rates of staff turnover have not been supported with systematic and institutionalized handover systems, and project implementation records have suffered as a result.

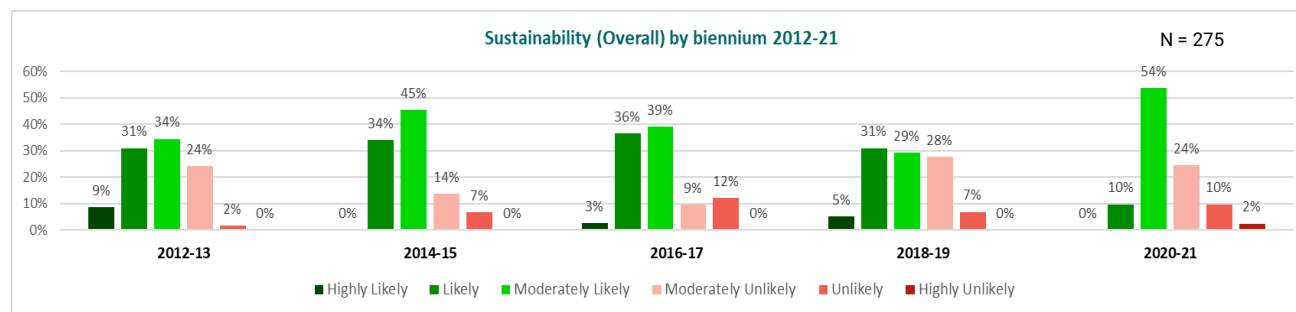
3.13 Sustainability

141. The assessment of project 'Sustainability' considers the key conditions or factors that are likely to either undermine or support the persistence / 'durability' of benefits after the external project funding and assistance ends. It aims to determine if an appropriate exit strategy has been put in place, to ascertain to what extent follow-up work is necessary, has been planned or initiated and includes assessment of any measures to mitigate risks that might threaten the endurance of project benefits.

142. The proportion of projects rated 'Likely' or 'Highly Likely' to sustain project results over time show a reduction in the 2020-21 Biennium compared to previous biennia, with only 10% at this performance level (40% in 2012-13, 34% in 2014-15, 39% in 2016-17, and 36% in 2018-19). The

proportion of projects in the ‘Satisfactory’ range remains fairly consistent over time (see Figure 22 below).

Figure 22. Sustainability (overall) by biennium (2012-21)



Sub-category	2012-13	2014-15	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	58	44	74	58	41
S/HS	40%	34%	39%	36%	10%
Satisfactory Range	74%	79%	78%	66%	64%

143. In calculating overall project performance, the UNEP Evaluation Office applies a 20% weighting to the Sustainability criterion across three sub-criteria of socio-political, institutional and financial sustainability. The likelihood that the benefits achieved at outcome level will endure is assessed based on whether: a) a project’s outcome level achievements are sensitive to socio-political, financial and institutional factors within the implementing context, and b) the project has put measures in place to mitigate these sensitivities.

144. Conceptually, the three sub-criteria are regarded as interrelated limiting factors, and the overall rating for the Sustainability criterion is always set to the lowest rating achieved across these sub-criteria.

Socio-political sustainability

145. Under the first sub-criterion, evaluations assess the extent to which social or political factors are required to support the continuation of project outcomes, including the level of ownership, interest and commitment among government and other stakeholders to take the project achievements forwards, and to what extent the project has responded to the factors that affect this. One would expect good performance in this area to be accompanied with strong levels of country ownership and driven-ness.

146. As shown in Figure 23 below, 53% of projects were rated ‘Likely’ or ‘Highly Likely’ for the socio-political sustainability sub-criterion. UNEP projects show the greatest strength in realizing a good level of ownership, interest and commitment. Generally, socio-political sustainability is enhanced when projects are deemed to be relevant, stakeholders (including those at the community level) actively participate in project management and decision-making, and the project works closely with national and local governments to create a conducive policy environment. Among the factors that have been found to negatively affect socio-political sustainability include political unrest, shifting political and economic priorities and lack of local political goodwill.

Institutional sustainability

147. This sub-criterion is used to gauge the probability that project outcomes will be sustained by the existing institutional and legal frameworks, policies, governing structures and processes. Institutional sustainability largely depends on the degree to which key stakeholders are involved in project execution as well as the extent to which the project contributes to defining clear governance and institutional frameworks that remain in place after the project's end. In the 2020-21 biennium, 50% projects were rated 'Likely' or 'Highly Likely' for the institutional sustainability sub-criterion (see Figure 23 below).

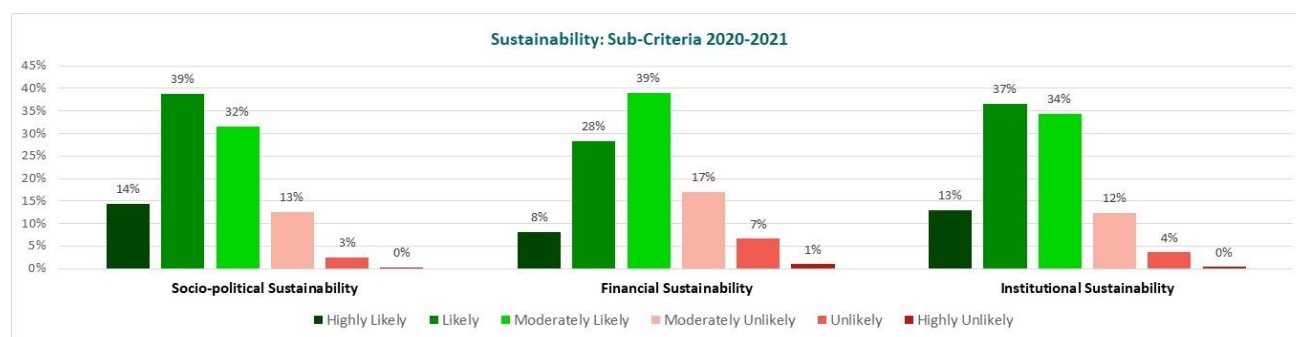
148. Project activities that have been found to enhance sustainability in this regard include: i) supporting countries to update their legal framework to support structures and processes that can sustain project outcomes; ii) building local management/technical capacity to perpetuate project outcomes; iii) establishing effective outreach strategies; iv) institutionalizing project outcomes by supporting the development of relevant policy; and v) continued involvement of international organizations in propagating outcomes.

Financial sustainability

149. Evaluations assess the extent to which the continuation of project results and the eventual impact of the project are dependent on financial resources. Evaluations also assess the likelihood that adequate financial resources will be available to use the capacities built by the project, and whether there are any financial risks that may jeopardize continuance of project results and onward progress towards impact.

150. The ability of projects to achieve longer-term results that are highly dependent on sustained financial resources¹⁸ is often the dimension of the 'Sustainability' criterion where constraints are most apparent. Of the projects evaluated for this sub-criterion in 2020-21, only 36% were assessed as 'Likely' or 'Highly Likely' to achieve financial sustainability after the end of external project assistance (see Figure 23 below).

Figure 23. Sustainability sub-criteria (2020-21)



Sub-category	Socio-political	Financial	Institutional
No. of evaluations	41	38	38

¹⁸ Such resources can be from multiple sources, such as the national budget, public and private sectors, development assistance etc.

151. The continuation of most projects is usually hampered by the lack of financial resources at country level, coupled with competing priorities for these resources. A continued reliance on financial support from donors and international organizations is symptomatic of this.

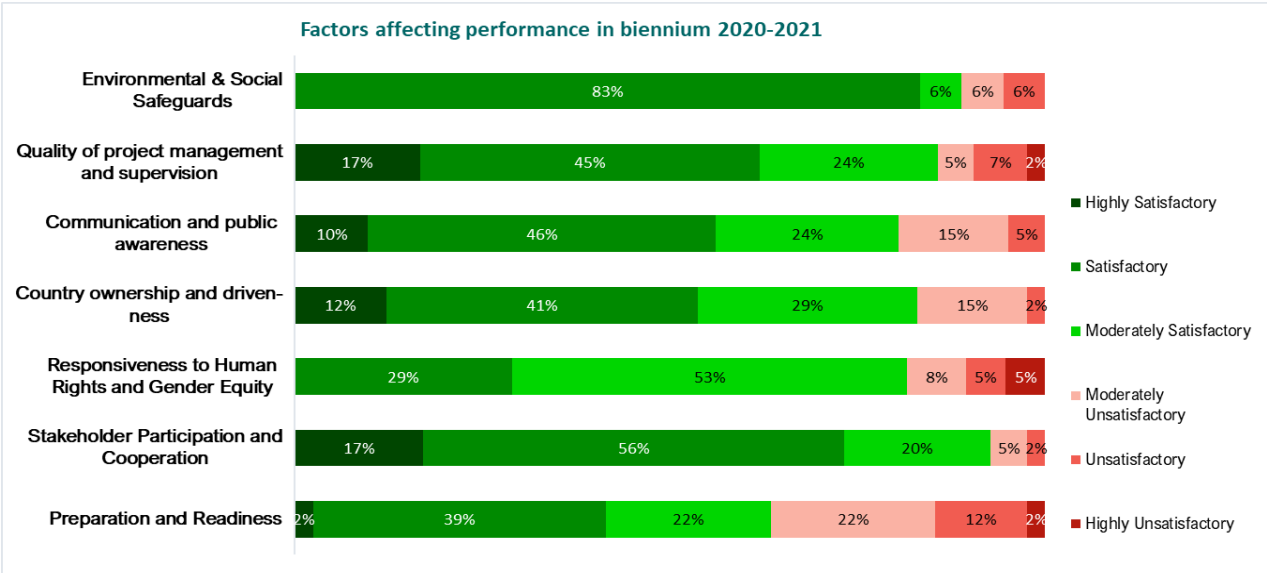
152. Financial sustainability is closely linked to political goodwill at national level as well as among donor communities, as this helps to increase the likelihood of stable and predictable funding. The extent to which financial resources from the private sector can be leveraged also affects this aspect of sustainability. Nevertheless, an overly ambitious implementation plan and lack of means to implement it impedes the financial sustainability of project outcomes, even in the presence of such goodwill.

153. These findings highlight the importance of project design and management paying particular attention to the design and implementation of robust ‘exit strategies’ whereby the project identifies a process for continuance of the benefits realised in the longer-term following completion of the project. Exit strategies that incorporate policy dialogue and advocacy support are often required for normative interventions, to promote the sustainability of results and impacts at a wider level.

154. Where pilot interventions are a component of the results framework, the highest potential for sustainability will likely be among those projects which do not merely implement a number of scattered activities but combine demonstration activities with support to strategic planning and policy development. The duration of projects with pilots should also be sufficient to allow for the demonstration of results as proof of concept; this is more likely to stimulate confidence and socio-political buy-in of the project outputs and outcomes. Often, project durations of 3-4 years may not be sufficient to both complete pilot studies and influence policy processes with their results.

3.14 Factors affecting project performance

Figure 24. Factors affecting performance (2020-21)



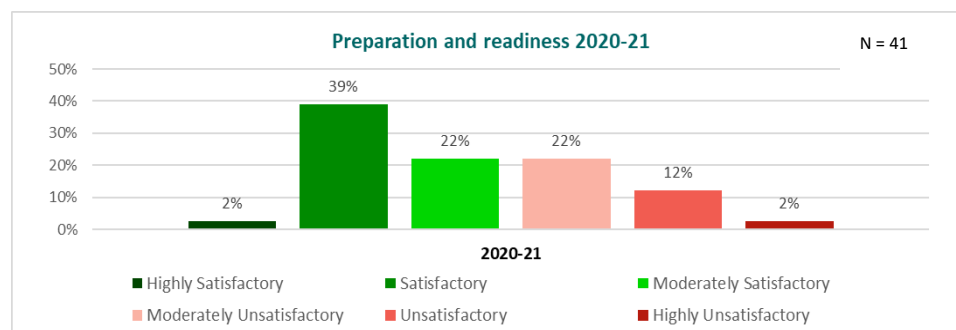
Factors	Preparation & Readiness	Stakeholder Participation & Cooperation	Responsiveness to Human Rights & Gender Equity	Country ownership & driven-ness	Communication & public awareness	Quality of project management & supervision	Environmental & social safeguards
No. of evaluations	41	41	38	41	41	42	18

155. This section describes the assessment of standard dimensions that encompass the main factors that commonly affect project performance: preparation and readiness; quality of project management and supervision; stakeholders' participation and cooperation; responsiveness to human rights and gender equity; country ownership and driven-ness; and communication and public awareness. **Figure 24** above shows the performance of projects assessed for these factors in 2020-21.

Preparation and readiness

156. This criterion focuses on the inception or mobilisation stage of the project, which the Evaluation Office defines as the time between project approval and first disbursement. In particular, the evaluation considers the nature and quality of engagement with stakeholder groups by the project team, the confirmation of partner capacity, development of partnership agreements, as well as initial staffing and financing arrangements.

Figure 25. Preparation and readiness (2020-21)

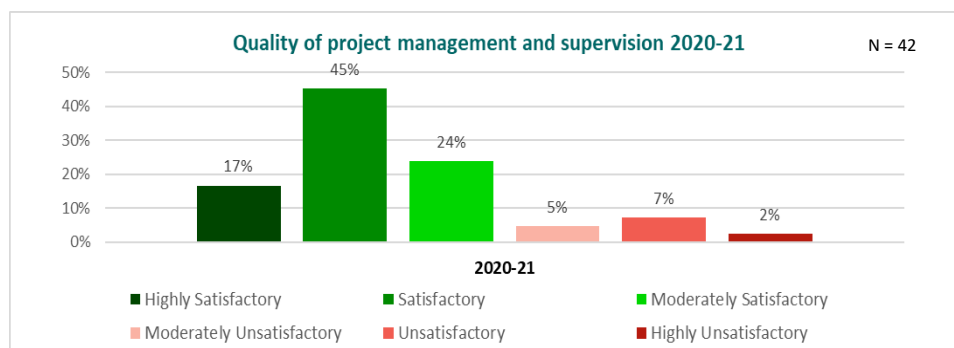


157. As shown in **Figure 25** above, the proportion of projects attaining an S/HS rating against this factor is 41% of the projects evaluated. These projects were assessed as having taken appropriate measures to address weaknesses in the project design and/or respond to changes that took place between project approval, the securing of funds and project mobilisation. The aggregated results for the projects evaluated in the 2020-21 biennium against this criterion show a reduction in the proportion achieving S/HS ratings, from 55% in 2018-19 to 41% in 2020-21. This is an area for management attention, 36% of the projects evaluated were rated as being in the 'Unsatisfactory range'.

Quality of project management and supervision

158. The 'Quality of project management and supervision' is considered under 'Factors Affecting Performance' its definition was adjusted in 2017; as such, data exists from 2018 onwards. In some cases, this factor refers to the supervision and guidance provided by UNEP to implementing partners and national governments, whereas in others it may refer to the project management performance of an implementing partner and the technical backstopping and supervision provided by UNEP.

Figure 26. Quality of project management and supervision (2020-21)



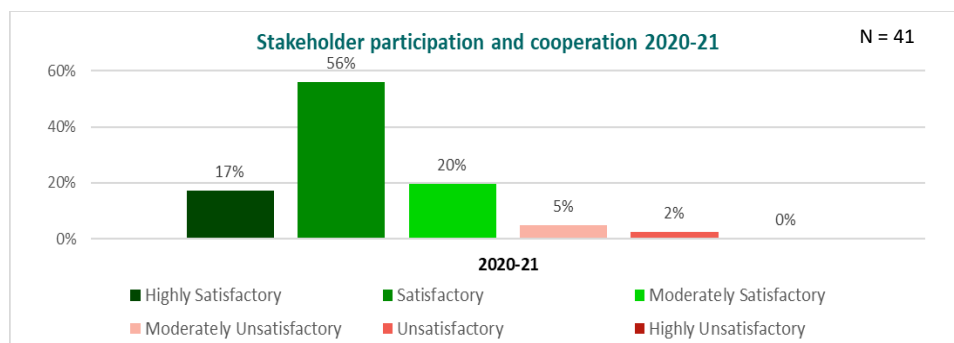
159. **Figure 26** above shows that over 60% of the projects evaluated in the 2020-21 biennium had effective project management, with regard to: providing leadership towards achieving the planned outcomes; managing team structures; maintaining productive partner relationships (including Steering Groups etc.); maintaining project relevance within changing external and strategic contexts; communication and collaboration with UNEP colleagues; risk management; use of problem-solving; project adaptation and overall project execution.

Stakeholders’ participation and cooperation

160. UNEP defines stakeholders as ‘those who are affected by, or who could affect (positively or negatively) the project’s results’. The Evaluation Office advises evaluators to identify the key groups and their roles within the project context at a more disaggregated level, such as: implementing partners; government officials and duty bearers (e.g. national focal points, coordinators); civil society leaders (e.g. associations and networks) and beneficiaries (e.g. households, tradespeople, disadvantaged groups, members of civil society etc.).

161. Under this factor, evaluations consider the quality and effectiveness of all forms of communication and consultation with stakeholders throughout the project life and the support given to maximise collaboration and coherence between various stakeholders, including sharing plans, pooling resources and exchanging learning and expertise. The inclusion and participation of all differentiated groups, including gender groups should also be considered.

Figure 27. Stakeholders’ participation and cooperation (2020-21)



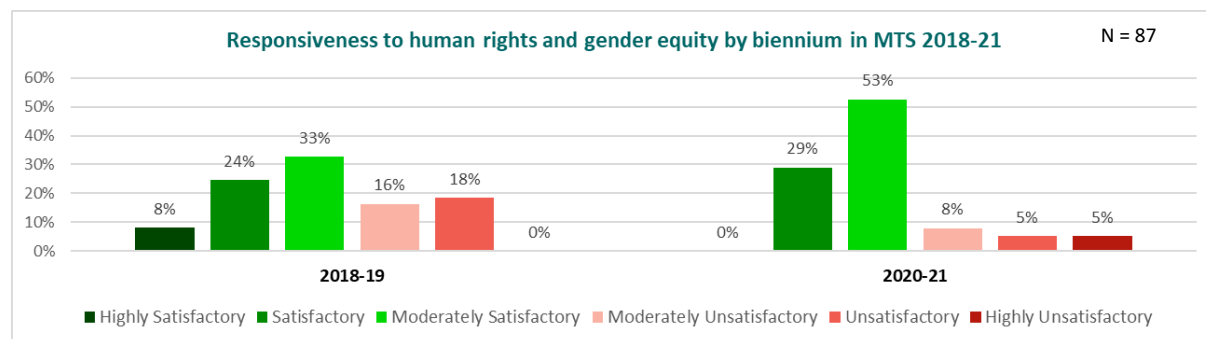
162. As shown in **Figure 27** above, performance against this factor shows that almost three quarters (73%) of the projects evaluated in the 2020-21 biennium were successful in maintaining communication and consultation with stakeholders throughout the project lifespan, to maximise collaboration and coherence between various stakeholders at the S/HS levels.

Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity

163. 'Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equity' was introduced under Factors Affecting Performance in 2018. In the past, the Evaluation Office assessed gender equality as part of the criterion 'Strategic Relevance', as it was a topic being introduced at policy and strategy levels by various organisations. After having isolated the performance criterion, the performance in this area became more evident.

164. On average 30% of the projects assessed for this criterion in the MTS period 2018-2021 received a S/HS rating, whereas 42% were assessed in the same period as performing at a 'Moderately Satisfactory' level (see **Figure 28** below).

Figure 28. Project performance in responsiveness to human rights and gender equity by biennia (2018-21)



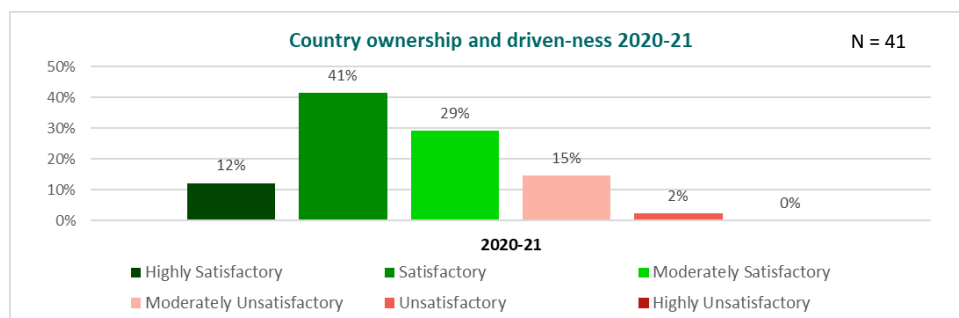
Year	2018-19	2020-21
No. of evaluations	49	38

165. UNEP takes part in the UN Sector Wide Approach on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN SWAP) and, as part of this process, an external consultant is commissioned by the Evaluation Office to review all the project evaluations completed in the year. Although this exercise primarily focuses on how well the evaluation function is addressing gender equality in its evaluation processes and approaches, the exercise also provides some insight into UNEP's performance at project level (refer to the summary on the UN SWAP in **section 6.4**).

Country ownership and driven-ness

166. Evaluations assess the quality and degree of engagement of government / public sector agencies in projects. They consider the involvement not only of those directly involved in project execution and those participating in technical or leadership groups, but also those official representatives whose cooperation is needed for change to be embedded in their respective institutions and offices (e.g., representatives from multiple sectors or relevant ministries beyond Ministry of Environment). This factor is concerned with the level of ownership generated by a project regarding its outputs and outcomes that is necessary for long term effects to be realised.

Figure 29. Country ownership and driven-ness (2020-21)



167. In the 2020-21 biennium, more than half of the projects (54%) assessed for this factor were able to achieve a S/HS rating. The 46% projects falling under the ‘moderately satisfactory and lower’ category in **Figure 29** above, is comprised of 29% projects rated ‘Moderately Satisfactory’; 15% ‘Moderately Unsatisfactory’ and 2% ‘Unsatisfactory’.

168. Lessons learned from projects that have performed well in this criterion reported in previous evaluation synthesis reports, were also supported by findings from the 2020-21 biennium:

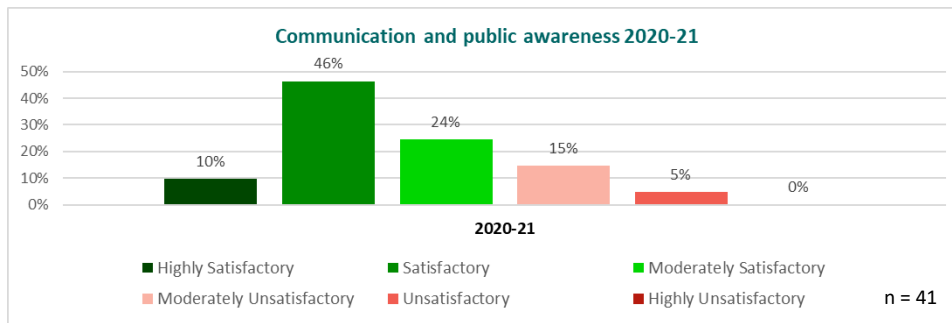
- Alignment of projects with national and local needs and priorities enhances ownership and strong coordination and should be promoted in design and implementation of projects. Strong coordination at country level enhances ownership and opens channels for future collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- Involving partner government intuitions and other important stakeholders in the design and evaluation phases of the project increases their commitment and inputs. This joint learning process helps reduce tensions and strengthens relationships and the decision-making process. It also helps to develop a shared vision that can be useful in formulating creative solutions to challenges/adaptive management.
- Projects need to be owned by the participants, and conditions need to be created for national partners to participate effectively. It is not reasonable to expect national input and participation from countries without their consultation and buy-in during the design phase and sufficient financial resources to enable them to take part in activities.

Communication and public awareness

169. This factor was introduced in 2016 to assess the effectiveness of: a) communication of learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups arising from the project during its life; and b) public awareness activities that were undertaken during the implementation of the project to influence attitudes or shape behaviour among wider communities and civil society at large.

170. The data in **Figure 30** below show that 56% of the projects evaluated for communication and public awareness performed at a ‘Satisfactory’ or better level. For these projects, it may be said that the communication channels and networks, as well as feedback channels, were used effectively, including meeting the differentiated needs of gendered or marginalised groups.

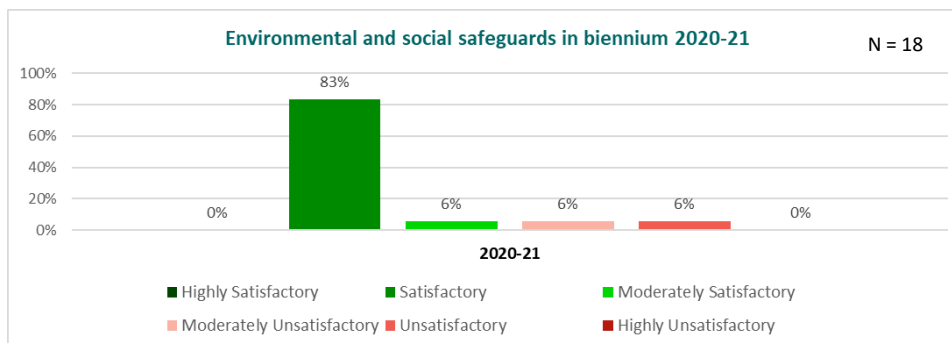
Figure 30. Communication and public awareness (2020-21)



Environmental and Social Safeguards

171. This factor was included for the first time in the 2020-21 biennium, with only 18 projects being evaluated with respect to addressing environmental and social safeguards. The evaluation considers whether; UNEP requirements were met, risk ratings were reviewed on a regular basis; project implementation was monitored for possible safeguard issues; responses (where relevant) to safeguard issues; and reporting on the implementation of safeguard management measures taken. Performance under this new sub-criterion was quite positive, with 83% of the projects assessed in 2020-21 attaining S/HS ratings (see Figure 31 below).

Figure 31. Environmental and Social Safeguards (2020-21)



4 KEY FINDINGS FROM STRATEGIC EVALUATIONS

172. This chapter presents abridged evaluation findings from three evaluations of high strategic importance that were completed during the 2020-21 biennium. The summaries provide links to the full evaluation reports.

4.1 Evaluation of the UNEP Sub-programme Environment under Review

[\[View full document here\]](#)

173. To meet UN Secretariat evaluation requirements, the UNEP Evaluation Office aims to carry out an evaluation of each of the seven sub-programmes over a period of six years. The objective of such evaluations is to fulfil two main purposes: a) supporting accountability by analysing the performance of a Sub-programme, and b) contributing to institutional learning by providing formative reflections based on the evaluation findings.

174. Assessing the extent to which environmental patterns and trends worsen over time or are impacted by policies, normative and legal instruments¹⁹, financial resources, and actions from a wide range of stakeholders is of prime importance. There is a need for 'sound science' to track progress on the implementation of the existing frameworks and to measure and analyse their achievements. Data collection efforts can help governments to; assess their progress towards international goals, improve the focus of their policies, monitor their impact, and direct scarce resources to address the most critical environmental challenges. Keeping the environment under review is required to inform policies and practices, provide guidance on global norms and standards, to strengthen science-policy partnerships and to ensure prompt action on emerging issues and thematic follow-up and reviews.

175. The Environment Under Review Sub-programme (EUR SP) was founded on the precept that emerging environmental issues must be tracked to help ensure early action is taken where needed since inadequacies in the links between policy and science communities could hinder decision-making. The MTS 2014-2017 stated for the EUR SP that "*The objective of the environment under review sub-programme is to empower stakeholders in their policy and decision-making by providing scientific information and knowledge and keeping the world environment under Review*". The MTS 2018-2021 included a slightly reformulated objective for the EUR SP as "*Governments and other stakeholders are empowered with quality assessments and open access to data and information to deliver the environmental dimension of sustainable development*". This statement acknowledges that the expanding coverage of information systems and networks can provide unique and cost-effective opportunities to link science and information to enhance capacities for decision-making.

176. The scope of the evaluation was the Environment under Review Sub-programme during the 2014-2017 and 2018-2021 MTS periods. Since the work carried out under the SP has its roots in the previous MTS periods, and since related work is likely to continue in the future, the evaluation looked back as needed to capture the history of the SP and also looked forward to providing recommendations for the future. The EUR SP was examined against the standard evaluation criteria;

¹⁹ UNEP has estimated that more than 500 international treaties and other agreements related to the environment were adopted between 1972 and 2002 (UNEP, 2006).

relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact and examined the factors and processes which have affected the Sub-programme delivery.

177. A brief overview of the main conclusions and recommendations is presented here whilst the full and very comprehensive report is available online.

Conclusions

178. Conclusion 1: The EUR SP is highly relevant to global environmental challenges and aligned with UNEP's mandate but faces design issues that hamper its fitness for purpose vis-à-vis different types of stakeholders. Making quality science available and providing global platforms for decision-making is highly relevant to global environmental challenges. However, the important question of scoping and targeting data and information for use is not entirely addressed by EUR SP. The EUR SP does not fully leverage UNEP's comparative advantages and lacks thorough needs assessments of target users and more systematic co-design of interventions with target users.

179. Conclusion 2: The EUR SP has pursued the achievement of an ambitious but loosely defined Theory of Change that omits several expected outcomes and intermediate states and overlooks some of the target stakeholders. In lieu of a programmatic approach, the construct of the EUR SP was largely based on housing flagship projects designed with few, but some, potential synergies and complemented with cross-cutting projects aimed at strengthening reach and joint influence through communications, knowledge management, and capacity development. However, resource constraints have prevented the implementation of most of these cross-cutting projects and have not led to adaptive management / redesign of the sub-programme. Furthermore, opportunities for EUR SP to guide UNEP strategic planning were limited. Similarly, EUR SP outputs rarely served other UNEP SPs in helping to; define their programmatic agenda, set baselines and targets, and monitor achievements at the impact level. EUR SP outputs have contributed to the normative work of UNEP but with little influence and contribution to the normative work of other SPs. Regional and country level operational capacity building work has also been overlooked in articulation of the EUR SP results framework.

180. Conclusion 3: The EUR SP should be cutting across other UNEP SPs / Divisions, but in practice cross-Divisional collaboration was found to be reliant on the initiative of individuals and lacking financial and institutional incentives. UNEP Divisions have not markedly informed the EUR agenda of work and EUR data was reported to be of limited use for programme planning and results monitoring except for SDG indicators. The recruitment for the position of Chief Scientist, ongoing in early 2020, may help to set the organization's agenda according to the findings of EUR SP data and assessments. Furthermore, this may establish mechanisms to keep track of scientific assessments across UNEP to improve coordination and quality and reduce overlaps. At regional level, Regional SPCs were recruited between 2015 and 2016 but the transfer of Regional SPC posts from Science Division to Regional Offices has sometimes resulted in differences in the perceived roles of the Regional SPCs as well as having influenced their ability to effectively contribute to the delivery of the EUR SP.

181. Conclusion 4: Despite a range of constraints, the EUR SP contributes to strengthening the statistical capacity of developing countries to measure, monitor, and report on the SDGs. The work of EUR SP on SDGs is consistent with the UN mandate, it is significant and comes with high political visibility and responsibility. However, several factors reduce the EUR SP's ability to better deliver against the SDG commitments, including underfunded EUR SP work on SDGs; lack of integration of SDGs into the broader EUR SP programme of work; insufficient coordination, monitoring and integration of SDG work across UNEP; limited institutional linkages in several regions to service the needs and demands for technical support; and room to strengthen strategic partnerships with other UN agencies to grow environmental statistical capacity.

182. Conclusion 5: Alignment of the EUR SP and contribution to delivering to UNEA resolutions is effective but partial. EUR SP products and services are, to a large degree, aligned to UNEA resolutions, but not in all cases (yet) delivering against them. Furthermore, EUR SP has not yet fully configured the process through which science is presented to UNEA to enable decisions. UNEA resolutions generally stem from UNEP Divisions individual initiatives not from systematic environmental or SDG-related monitoring systems.

183. Conclusion 6: The establishment of a dedicated Sub-programme on EUR has not yet significantly helped UNEP to better respond to its mandate. The relationship between the Science Division/EUR SP and Law Division/Environmental Governance is rather weak and there was limited cross-Divisional collaboration and mainstreaming of the EUR SP in other SPs. The visibility of the EUR SP has improved but without notable outcomes in terms of resource mobilization. The evaluation also found little evidence of UNEP Divisions (through other SPs) supporting countries in adopting EUR SP scientific information and knowledge and using it in their decision making.

Recommendations

184. **Recommendation 1:** The EUR SP should develop a Theory of Change (TOC) that presents strong and robust causalities between intended outcomes, intermediate states and long-term objectives. The TOC should be anchored in UNEP's strategic planning process, the post-Rio+20 mandate and UNEA governance, and the support to the SDGs²⁰. It should leverage UNEP's comparative advantages with a view to addressing the needs and to influencing specific types of target users of EUR SP outputs, including other SPs and Divisions, regions and countries, and different groups of external partners and stakeholders. The EUR SP should develop the TOC to articulate the causal pathways that reflect a forward-looking programmatic approach (rather than flagship projects), making room for synergies and cross-cutting capacity development, knowledge management, and communications and outreach. EUR SP indicators should be strengthened and consider reflecting relevant SDG targets and indicators to elicit a contribution to their achievement. Accordingly, EUR SP monitoring should be improved and take a programmatic approach rather than focusing largely on monitoring parts from individual projects. Furthermore, EUR SP should play a stronger role in helping define higher-level indicators for UNEP and, where feasible, measuring the baselines for these indicators across SPs.

185. **Recommendation 2:** EUR SP Management should strive to improve institutional effectiveness and organizational efficiencies of the SP. At a strategic level, EUR SP management and the Chief Scientist should better ensure coherence of assessments across UNEP and support senior managers in setting the organization's agenda according to the findings of EUR SP data and assessments. EUR SP management should explore performing a cost-benefit analysis on EUR SP products and flagship projects to support decision making to maximise overall programmatic impact. UNEA-4 resolutions could provide a basis from which to begin assessing resource allocation priorities. Furthermore, the EUR SP should continue exercising adaptive management to align its strategic intent with the evolving international agenda and resources available for operationalization. At an operational level, strong attention should be given to; clarifying the means by which SP results and performance are validated and verified; ensuring that PIMS reporting is accurate, comprehensive, and reliable; and reducing the time to fill vacant positions. Furthermore, EUR SP management should consider more actively utilizing outsourcing as a cost-saving or value for money strategy.

²⁰ Whilst the draft MTS 2022-2025 presents only three TOCs for the new 'pillars' each SP should develop a TOC to articulate the causal pathways that lead to higher level results.

186. **Recommendation 3:** The EUR SP should strengthen its capabilities and delivery modalities by developing and implementing cross-cutting strategies and enabling frameworks. EUR SP should formulate capacity development, communication / outreach, and knowledge management as core components of the SP. The EUR SP should develop and implement a programme wide strategy for capacity building that covers inter alia the three focus areas linked to IEG and SDG monitoring. The SP should also develop and implement a knowledge management strategy or framework that fosters the collection and sharing of technical knowledge, both explicit and tacit, but also the development of new normative and organizational knowledge such as standard operating procedures and other directives and/or instructions for a EUR SP portfolio needs assessment and delivery in regions or countries. Furthermore, EUR SP should design and implement a resource mobilization strategy that enhances synergies between projects, maximizes the expertise of staff, and minimizes inefficiencies (aligned entrepreneurship).

187. **Recommendation 4:** The EUR SP should improve the usability and use of flagship outputs. Products and services developed by EUR SP projects should systematically be designed based on needs assessments that capture expectations of target users and help tailoring deliverables to different audiences. EUR SP should consider involving sample groups of target users in the definition as well as the development and pilot testing of products and services, adopting innovative methodologies such as design thinking to product development. The EUR SP should allocate resources to and adopt more rigorous processes for monitoring the use of EUR products and services to draw lessons learned and continuously improve reach, and engagement efforts to influence key target users. Furthermore, EUR SP should consider marketing its service lines and indicate to various target audiences which types of products and services they can expect and benefit from.

188. **Recommendation 5:** EUR SP cross-cutting work should be better reflected in planning documents, institutional setup and/or resources plans. EUR SP should increase synergies and institutional alignment with other SPs and Divisions, Branches and Units. The EUR SP should devise institutional and organizational mechanisms that foster the delivery of products/services that respond to the needs of other UNEP Divisions/SPs and inform UNEP programming at global or regional levels. The EUR SP coordination function should pursue opportunities to influence programming, including cross-cutting issues, beyond providing inputs into project design documents. UNEP should ensure there is a strong internal forum and mechanism for cross-portfolio results monitoring. This should take the form of a technical cross thematic/divisional team that regularly meets to promote synergies across the programme; a role that was formerly played by the global SPCs within the PPD that needs to be reinstated and revitalised. Such joint technical “cross thematic” monitoring on the science to policy interface and assessment, data and monitoring of the EUR “thematic offer” would support coherence, external financing, and resource mobilization. The engagement and joint ownership would improve links to the GEF, GCF, and across resources mobilization/strategic partnerships. EUR SP indicators should be defined to help better align and focus efforts to develop capacities to collect, manage, and use environmental information for keeping the environment under review and therefore should inform other SPs’ indicators and guide SPs’ work on thematic policy influence and results monitoring. The EUR SP should also strengthen planning and collaboration with the Communications Division. Furthermore, the EUR SP should clarify its thematic focus and relevance with respect to regions and countries. The EUR SP portfolio could be further targeted to provide or leverage technical support and capacity-building tailored to regional / country needs, including on integrated assessments, data and information management and SDGs.

189. **Recommendation 6:** EUR SP should assume a stronger leadership role and provide increased momentum within UNEP to work with UN sister agencies and MEA secretariats to increase coherence across the UN system in relation to environmental assessments, and particularly in ensuring the utility of its findings to the work of agencies within the UN system. The EUR SP should spell out more clearly

its focus on normative thematic guidance and elicit the support to be provided to UNCTs and UNSDCF and consider furthering its partnership with the UN regional commissions and with UNDP to strengthen technical cooperation and programme delivery at national and sub-national levels, including in relation to capacity development, statistics, and SDG monitoring. The EUR SP should also consider increasing its partnerships with the private sector as a key target user of EUR SP outputs and key actors of uptake and implementation of policy changes. This would involve, inter alia, strengthening engagement on private sector reporting and monitoring, i.e., how to measure and report private sector action and results. Partnerships with technology companies are urgently needed to support the massive scale of SP services and to support building EUR SP systems including Information Management data collection and infrastructure development, UNEP Live (or WESR), real-time data and monitoring.

4.2 Independent review of UNEP's contributions to poverty reduction

[\[View full document here\]](#)

190. As part of a Programme Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) supported UNEP through softly earmarked funding during the period 2015-2017 and beyond, across selected UNEP sub-programmes, with a focus on sustainable development and poverty reduction²¹ and with emphasis on improving conditions for people living in poverty in developing countries. SIDA also supported UNEP to perform a review of poverty reduction related results that were achieved through UNEP's work and that were evaluated and reported during the period 2014-2018. The review aimed to assess the level to which, and the ways in which, poverty had been integrated in UNEP's projects and initiatives. The review was to provide a forward-looking analysis on how poverty reduction results could be further strengthened within, and catalysed by, UNEP's work in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

191. The review covered the sub-programmes to which SIDA has provided support during the period and focused on the following assessment criteria: relevance, project design, effectiveness, and sustainability and the conduct of a forward-looking analysis. As part of effectiveness, the availability of outputs, achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact was assessed.

192. The review methodology included primarily the desk review of project evaluations and design documentation and semi-structured interviews. A meta-analysis was carried out using a purposive sample of 20 project evaluations and 5 project design documents. A total of 60 interviews were conducted, including SIDA representative, UNEP senior management and programme staff, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) representatives, focusing in particular on the UNEP-UNDP joint Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI), later transformed to the Poverty Environment Action (PEA), and selected representatives of agencies benefitting from UNEP support.

193. The inclusion of multiple stakeholders and the use of a variety of analytical methods allowed for the triangulation of data across the various respondents as well as across methods used, in this way enhancing validation of findings.

²¹ While poverty eradication refers to the ultimate goal of ending all poverty, poverty reduction focuses on contributions made towards this goal. In the present report both terms are used mostly interchangeably. Also, in UNEPs MTS and POWs in the period under review, use is made of both terms.

Relevance of poverty to UNEP's Strategies and Programmes of Work

194. The focus in much of UNEP's strategies and Programmes of Work (POW) is towards human development and well-being, which goes back to the 1972 Stockholm Environment Conference, at which UNEP's mandate originated. This emphasis on human well-being in the MTS of 2014-2017 as well as the present MTS (2018-2021), shows the position of UNEP regarding the conservation of nature, considering it not as an aim in and of itself, but related to human use of natural resources for economic and social development, as the basis for human subsistence, contributing to people's livelihoods and their prosperity. In this respect the concept of sustainability is important as it provides limits to human use, with use meant to be commensurate with the carrying capacities of natural resources and leaving access and related opportunities for future generations. Poverty eradication has been subsumed as part of sustainable development at the level of the objectives of sub-programmes both in the previous and the present MTS and POWs.

195. Although largely left implicit, poverty eradication concerns an important element of enhancing human well-being and prosperity for UNEP. Many UNEP staff interviewed do consider the relationship between UNEP initiatives and poverty eradication as important although they realize that this relationship is often not made explicit. Many believe that UNEP's projects and programmes contribute towards poverty eradication in terms of their results. They consider that it would be beneficial if aspects of poverty and relations with environmental issues were made explicit and as much as possible monitored in order to show UNEPs contribution to poverty related results.

196. An early adopter of a poverty approach in UNEP has been the Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI), developed and implemented in partnership with UNDP. The PEI is one of UNEP's flagship initiatives. The key objective of the initiative has been to enhance the relationship between poverty and environment, i.e. to provide support to country-led efforts to mainstream poverty-environment (P-E) linkages into national and sub-national development planning, including policy-making, budgeting, and monitoring through the provision of financial and technical assistance. Poverty perspectives have, moreover, been integrated in UNEP's development of the Green Economy concept, with its transformation to an Inclusive Green Economy which combines economic growth with environmental health as well as social-well-being. The Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), a joint UN initiative of UNEP together with International Labour Organization (ILO), UNDP, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), provided support to aspects of inclusive green economy at the country level. Moreover, other projects at regional and country level have included a poverty focus in more or less implicit ways in the period 2014-17.

Operationalisation of poverty in UNEP projects and initiatives

197. A focus on poverty in UNEP's programming has been achieved in part through the selection of Least Developed Countries (LDC) and of poor rural regions of other developing countries and other locations with high poverty incidence as the target areas for projects and initiatives. Much of the UNEP support has included a focus on the interests and needs of poor and vulnerable groups and at times these groups have participated in project design. Such inclusion has not always been informed by a formal assessment on the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty incidence in the project area concerned nor has inclusion necessarily been followed through in project implementation and in monitoring and evaluation. The lack of gathering of baseline data at the start of projects has limited the opportunities for impact analysis towards their end. Although all aspects of addressing and affecting poverty, as identified in the SIDA poverty framework, can be found in UNEP sub-programmes, the extent to which this is the case and the poverty – environment linkages concerned differ substantially amongst them.

198. Gender has been recognized by UNEP as an important aspect of economic and social deprivation and included in project design and implementation. A gender marker analysis was conducted in 2016 and, since then, projects have been budgeting for gender action and staff capacities have been developed on gender mainstreaming. Gender has been included in the project design review process, although without a minimum quality assessment threshold on gender, projects without sufficient attention to gender can still be approved with a sufficient aggregate score across all the assessment criteria. Based on the review of project evaluation reports, attention to gender in selected initiatives was varying while the inclusion of gender in the evaluation reports themselves also varied substantially. In particular, longer-term initiatives have been able to enhance the inclusion of gender responsive approaches over time.

199. The UNEP Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF) sets out four guiding principles and a set of social and environmental standards for UNEP support. The framework extends beyond the application of a 'do no harm' principle and includes 'leaving no one behind' as one of the principles of the framework. The original framework dates from 2015 with an updated version approved in February 2020. Although reference is made within this framework to the call to end poverty as part of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, there is no further specification of what minimum requirements would be needed in terms of project design and implementation.

200. Social and other safeguards were not usually referred to explicitly in the evaluation reports that were reviewed, nor have the requirements of the earlier version of the framework been used as a specific assessment criterion for project evaluations until late 2019. Prior to this, evaluation reports more generally addressed any, unintended, negative effects of projects. Given its environmental focus, UNEP has a unique relationship with indigenous and other groups that are highly dependent on natural resources, often in remote and hard to reach areas, aspects which have been included in the ESSF. There is a need, in terms of poverty-oriented interventions, to take the specific needs and requirements of these groups into consideration in line with the ESSF standards.

201. For UNEP, as a non-resident UN agency and a relatively small organization within the UN system, partnerships are key to its programming, including for global flagship initiatives as well as for small or larger scale projects at the country level. UNEP has been able to expand its partnerships with member states beyond Environmental Ministries to work with Ministries of Planning and Finance, which are important partners in terms of enhancing national development planning and budgeting processes through integration of environmental and poverty related concerns, an approach that was started through PEI. It has, moreover, enhanced its relations with Ministries of Industry, Ministries of Agriculture and other Ministries in particular in terms of resource efficiency and climate change programming. This form of multiple ministerial partnerships has enabled UNEP to enhance its ability to address economic, social and poverty issues in relation to environmental challenges.

202. Partnerships with other UN agencies have been important, in particular given UNEP's mandate to enhance environmental perspectives and capacities in sister UN agencies. This has included resident UN agencies with social-oriented mandates that have built longer term country level experience and can provide complementary expertise and capacities for the implementation of country-based support. Even though there have been substantial transaction costs in terms of cooperation with multiple UN agencies at a global level in some of the flagship initiatives, achievements are considered to have outweighed the costs concerned. The UN reform process has provided additional incentives as well as opportunities for partnerships with sister UN agencies. Work with private sector actors has been important, in particular in terms of their investments in 'green' and inclusive economic activities. In addition to the formal sector, the importance of paying sufficient attention to the informal sector has been recognized, which is of critical importance in particular to

poor people who more often depend on the informal part of the economy. Moreover, partnering with civil society organizations and academia has become more prevalent in project design.

Assessment and achievement of results

203. An assessment of poverty related results has been severely constrained by the lack of identification of such results and how they are meant to be achieved in the project results frameworks and the Theories of Change (TOCs) often reconstructed as part of the project evaluations conducted. An exception concerns the PEI, which includes six interrelated pathways of change in its TOC developed over the timeframe of project implementation. These pathways are to lead to improved livelihoods, enhanced poverty reduction and human development as well as improved environment and natural resource management and sustainable natural wealth.

204. The monitoring of poverty related results and intermediate level change has been limited. Use has mostly been made of a varied set of less than ten quantitative indicators, with a focus on process related issues. Human development and poverty related aspects have rarely been included in the monitoring frameworks and the results indicators, with limited attention to gender and other aspects of vulnerability. The assessment of poverty related results, if conducted at all, has depended primarily on qualitative and descriptive approaches. This has made it challenging for the monitoring data gathered to provide the evidence base required for demonstration of proof of concept on poverty related initiatives and to engage in the policy level discussions needed for scaling up and replication of the approach being demonstrated by a project. Moreover, the site selection of pilot projects has often been primarily opportunistic, rather than driven by a rigorous methodology that could enhance the credibility of findings regarding the effectiveness of the intervention.

205. With poverty eradication usually not included as an explicit project objective, UNEP evaluations which assess project performance against their approved designs, did usually not unpack the relationships between environment and people-oriented social development aspects of the interventions. No specific attention was paid to poverty related results in most of the evaluation reports reviewed. The use of stories of change in some of the projects reviewed and the development of the Green Economy Progress Index provide qualitative and quantitative examples of ways to include people's well-being and poverty related issues in UNEP's assessment of results.

206. The effects that UNEP initiatives and projects have on poverty-related issues are usually caused indirectly rather than directly. In many initiatives and projects UNEP does not work directly with beneficiaries at the local level. This is particularly true for the flagship initiatives, which implement activities in multiple countries and work both at global and country levels. With UNEP's focus on the environment, poverty related results are usually achieved in relation to environmental results. With UNEP being one of several organizations that support the changes concerned, results need to be assessed in terms of UNEP's contribution to these changes. Given this indirect approach to addressing poverty, effects of UNEP projects on poverty are often either broad (i.e. in terms of targeting Least Developed Countries), implied (i.e. improving the environmental context and climate conditions) or indirect (e.g. healthier ecosystems can provide better support to families living at subsistence level or on the margins of ecological sustainability).

207. Nevertheless, some poverty related results could be identified. The results of PEI reflect the integration of the understanding of the poverty environment nexus into development planning and budgeting. GEI and PAGE initiatives reached important results in terms of the inclusive green economy, which has been recognized as one of the pathways to achieving sustainable development. Single country projects, which work more often at the sub-national level, at times obtained tangible results at the local level, including for poor and vulnerable groups. Based on their approach, such

results are limited in reach even though some are meant to be pilots and scaled up or replicated elsewhere.

208. The lack of a UNEP presence in-country was seen by many of the interviewees as a constraint, in particular to country level context-based initiatives, although it was realized on the other hand, that partnerships, including those with resident UN agencies, could address this constraint. Some UNEP initiatives have been using a variety of human resource approaches in terms of country level support, including stationing of UNEP staff temporarily in partner UN agency offices. The PEI initiative developed a minimum human resource infrastructure for its support in Africa, with staff stationed at regional level and in participating countries.

209. UNEP's human resource base is regarded as being very technically oriented. Although economists have been recruited more recently, there is less staff with social or political science backgrounds, which would be useful in terms of relating environmental aspects to multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. The lack of a poverty analysis or use of context specific poverty details to inform project design was identified as a limitation in terms of poverty related programming in evaluation reports reviewed. Changes in government priorities based on shifts related to elections or otherwise, were seen at the most important external constraint to UNEP project implementation.

210. The most important enabling factor for enhancing poverty related results concerns UNEP implementation of longer-term flagship programmes, together with other UN agencies. The programmatic approach of in particular the PEI and PAGE longer term initiatives proved beneficial to a focus on poverty concerns as it allowed for a longer-term emphasis on key aspects of environmental, social and economic development connections, supporting systemic change at the policy and institutional levels.

Sustainability of results

211. Project level sustainability, assessed during UNEP project evaluations²², has been constrained by the lack of the inclusion of realistic and practical exit strategies in the design stage of projects, in order to prepare for the phasing out of project support and to ensure the sustainability of results. In PEI, sustainability was enhanced, in particular, through the hiring of national level expertise, making use of a 'learning by doing' approach and building country level capacities in this way. Exit and sustainability strategies were developed for participating countries, setting out the exit process and requirements for sustainability post PEI interventions. Apart from sustainability obtained through PEI in planning processes, this proved less the case in terms of budgeting support, where less results were achieved, in particular in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with relatively high levels of donor dependencies.

212. For poverty to be addressed and results to be sustained, there is a need to include economic and social aspects of poor and vulnerable people and groups, in addition to a focus on the natural environment. While UNEP has been able to develop a clear understanding of the interrelationships between economic development processes and the environment, a similar understanding has not yet been put in place in terms of the social aspects of the sustainable development process, including social aspects of poverty and left behind groups and their relationship with environmental concerns. Such a social development perspective can inform UNEP's programming, clarifying the relationships

²² UNEP project evaluations consider three aspects of the sustainability of project level results: socio-political, institutional and financial sustainability.

between economic, social and environmental parameters within the broader process of sustainable development, making use of an environmental sensitive, people- and poverty-oriented approach.

Lessons Learned

213. A useful set of lessons learned was included in the evaluation reports reviewed, which focused on programmatic contents, means of programming and aspects of programme support. Inclusive green economy was considered an important means to address poverty in the African context. There was the recognition that there is a lack of knowledge and guidance to look at environmental projects from a poverty perspective. Rather than focusing primarily on new policies and legislation, the need to focus on the implementation of existing laws, policies and plans was identified. The need for a central knowledge management system to enhance learning within the organisation and across UNEP sub-programmes and divisions was included. Coordination between government, international organizations, civil society and the private sector, was seen as critical to bringing about the substantive changes in national policy and practices required to achieve an inclusive green economy and support achievement of the SDGs.

214. In terms of lessons from PEI, the practice of UNEP engagement beyond the Ministry of Environment, with Ministries of Planning and Finance, was seen as pivotal to include environmental and poverty related objectives in national development planning and budgeting. P-E mainstreaming concerns a long-term process of institutional change across Government and requires long-term funding to undertake technical studies, broaden ownership, develop co-ordination mechanisms, build capacity and develop and embed tools and approaches. It usually requires engaging in multiple sectors and associated planning and budget processes and engagement in national as well as sub-national level planning and implementation with sufficient attention to monitoring of results across all levels concerned.

Analysis

215. SIDA support has enabled UNEP to explore how its environmentally oriented projects and initiatives can contribute to poverty eradication. This was realized in a period when the relationship between poverty and environment was less clearly identified. UNEP has started to achieve results, in particular through the inclusion of an environmental perspective to economic and social development planning and budgeting processes at the country level, including the valuation of ecosystem services on which poor people depend and the addition of the concept of inclusiveness to the Green Economy agenda. There is substantial potential to further enhance UNEP's programmatic approach to include poverty explicitly as part of its human well-being oriented perspective.

216. Given the limited resources of UNEP, results at scale cannot be expected to be realized through UNEP resources alone, but usually need to be achieved through changes of government and private sector investment, which is what UNEP project support often tries to achieve. Partnerships with UN agencies with an explicit social mandate can help in this respect as these can enable UNEP to focus on environmental aspects from a people perspective as part of the sustainable development process, while other social and economic concerns can be dealt with by other UN agencies, using an environmentally sustainable development perspective.

217. The effects of climate change, the enhanced levels of environmental pollution and the reduction of biodiversity have had substantial negative effects on the environment and have affected people living in poverty, increasing the incidence of poverty. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has directly affected poor and vulnerable people in terms of their health as well as indirectly in terms of their household economics. Part of the gains made on poverty in the last decade are being reversed

by the Covid-19 crisis, which can be expected to have some negative effects on the environment as enhanced poverty is often related to enhanced pressure on the natural environment. The Covid-19 crisis has, moreover, drawn a spotlight to the effects of human encroachment on the natural environment of wildlife, resulting in increased human contact with wild animal species and the related risk of emergent zoonotic diseases.

218. Given these contextual changes in terms of human – environment relationships, there is an enhanced need for UNEP to increase its focus on people and poverty in relation to the natural environment, informed by a broader understanding of the interrelationships of environmental, economic and social development aspects of the sustainable development process. UNEP would need to access the relevant human resources to lead the development and support the implementation of such an approach throughout the organisation.

219. With its focus on the environmental pillar, UNEP is uniquely positioned to validate the role of the natural environment in the sustainable development process, not as an objective on its own, but in its relationship to economic and social development aspects, assisting as well as providing boundaries to the process, in order to support the well-being of both present and future generations.

Recommendations *(abridged)*

220. The recommendations provide the strategic and programmatic pathways for mainstreaming of economic, social and poverty considerations and their relation to environmental issues into all aspects of UNEP's programming. For each of the recommendations the challenges/problems to be addressed are identified as well as actions required, priority levels, responsibilities and time frames concerned.

- Incorporate a people-oriented approach and a social development perspective as part of UNEP's global strategy, including support to poverty eradication and related social development issues in terms of their relation to environmental and economic aspects of sustainable development in the MTS and POW for the period 2022 and beyond. This needs to be informed by clear donor expectations with respect to poverty, made explicit in the PCA.
- Appoint a global poverty eradication / social development advisor to spearhead the integration of the social development pillar of sustainable development into the work of UNEP, in its relationships to the environmental and economic pillars and with a particular focus on the objective of poverty eradication and provide support at regional and country levels through the appointment of regional poverty eradication / social development advisors.
- Develop multiple scenarios for the relevant level of inclusion of poverty eradication related issues into UNEP projects and initiatives as part of the social development perspective, ranging from minimal, intermediate and substantial levels of inclusion of poverty related issues and identify when and where to make use of which scenario.
- Develop the nuts and bolts of the programmatic implementation of a social development perspective in relation to UNEP's approach to sustainable development, including eradication of poverty in its multiple dimensions and its relation with social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development.
- In country level initiatives, partner with the UN Resident Coordinator's office and UN resident agencies, in particular those agencies that can provide complementary support to a people-oriented, social development and poverty eradication approach in the

proposed initiative and the specific country context concerned, in line with the on-going UN reform process.

- Strengthen the likelihood that environmental and poverty related results achieved at project level are sustained by including realistic and practical exit strategies at the project design stage. Enhance the probability of expansion of project results through adequate attention to opportunities for scaling-up and replication of the initiative concerned in its design as well as throughout project implementation.
- Enhance monitoring and evaluation in response to the inclusion of a people-oriented approach, including explicit social development aspects and poverty eradication objectives and results in projects and initiatives in addition to environmental ones, in order to enable assessment of relevant poverty reduction results and enhance learning within the organization on poverty related results and ways to achieve these.
- For SIDA to include explicitly a people-oriented approach and social development perspective in the PCA with UNEP as well as in the PCA performance framework, combining an accountability perspective with a learning-oriented approach, enabling the use of experiences and lessons to inform the development of UNEP's programme on poverty eradication in terms of its relations to environmental and economic aspects of sustainable development, making use of a multi-dimensional poverty perspective.

4.3 Evaluation of UNEP's enhanced coordination and implementation of the 10YFP and its programmes

[\[View full document here\]](#)

221. The project "Enhanced Coordination and implementation of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) and its programmes" - hereafter the Project – was implemented by UNEP under its Resource and Markets Branch (based in Paris) of the Economy Division, from 2014-2017, as part of the European Commission (EC) support to the 10YFP Secretariat. The project was funded by the EC through the Global Public Goods and Challenges (GPGC) Thematic Programme, with an overall budget of USD 2,589,258 under UNEP's umbrella project 613.1/ ID 1730 'Secretariat Services and Functions for the Implementation of the 10YFP'.

222. The project's main **objective** was to support the strategic, action-oriented and coherent delivery of the 10YFP support for the shift towards Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) patterns at all levels, through continuous and strengthened secretariat functions and services; its **main outcome** was to fulfil the 10YFP Secretariat services and functions and provide related financial and information sharing mechanisms to support the delivery of the 10YFP on SCP.

223. The Terminal Evaluation of this EC funded project was conducted by a team of independent consultants between April – November 2020 and covered the 10YFP Secretariat function between 2016-2019; it did not encompass an evaluation of the whole One Planet Network (the Implementing Partner).

224. The 10YFP structure is complex, especially given its level of funding, making the Secretariat's job particularly difficult and open to criticism. The focus of this TE has been on the functions of the Secretariat, and so from a governance perspective it has primarily considered the role of the Secretariat rather than the complex governance structure for the 10YFP as a whole.

225. The project has delivered on its targets, in a cost-effective way through a strong and committed Secretariat. A key achievement of the Secretariat during the project period has been its successful high-level advocacy of the One Planet Network demonstrated through the recognition of the One Planet Network as the implementation mechanism for SDG 12 in the Ministerial Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2018, and its recognition at the 4th UN Environment assembly in 2019.

226. The 10YFP is well reflected and positioned within UNEP's Programme of Work and remains an initiative of fundamental importance to UNEP. Support for SCP has been evident at the highest level, including in the new MTS 2020-2025 where unsustainable consumption and production is identified as the root cause of nature loss and disruption and climate change, and thus underpins all UNEP's responses. However, many stakeholders misunderstand the role of UNEP within the One Planet Network and the boundaries between UNEP and the Secretariat.

227. Cohesion within the One Planet Network has been strengthened through the adoption of the overarching One Plan for One Planet strategy, developed with partners, and through on-going communication and coordination efforts. This cohesion was built through virtual and face to face meetings, although opportunities for improvement remain in terms of systematically engaging with the programmes, the Board, National Focal Points (NFPs) and regional bodies. Under the project, the Secretariat also made significant strides in monitoring and reporting, and knowledge management and communications, although further improvements are still necessary in these areas.

228. While the Secretariat has performed well on a number of its normative global functions, the Network has made limited progress at the country level. The lack of concrete action / implementation at the country level is linked to the 10YFP's unsatisfactory record on resource mobilization, for which the Secretariat is not solely responsible, but has a key role in. Despite the political support for the One Planet Network, it continues to struggle with funding and limited resources for program work.

229. Given that the 10YFP was in its eighth year in 2021, it is now critical to accelerate implementation and show results in countries. The One Planet Network has built a diverse network and has the tools available, but still needs to better position itself to scale up successful practices by strengthening the capacity at the national level and catalysing more resources through a more diversified resource mobilisation approach. During the project, the Secretariat placed more emphasis on prioritizing and supporting country engagement, the development of country portfolios, and the curating of programme portfolios, to make the One Planet Network's knowledge portal more targeted. These initiatives need to be further supported going forward.

230. There is a strong argument for extending the One Planet Network beyond its current phase which expired in 2023 (January) to 2030, given that it is the implementation mechanism for SDG12 and an enabler for many other SDG goals. Significant on-going support is needed to meet SDG 12 targets given the slow progress being made. SCP is also central to the UN response to 'build back better' following COVID-19. Furthermore, there has been substantial investment in the establishment of the network over many years and most of its programmes are now in a better position to reap the benefits of that investment and potentially catalyse an impact with the right amount of funding support.

231. Going forward, the One Planet Network needs to be organised to successfully catalyse and mobilise change. This evaluation has presented two possible options: (i) a Secretariat focused on functions best undertaken by a centralised body and which it is best at (e.g. monitoring progress, knowledge management and dissemination of information and advocacy and networking); or (ii) the Secretariat retaining all its current functions, but better resourced, in particular to address the areas

the 10YFP has fared less well in, and which are critical to achieving an impact, such as resource mobilization and supporting country engagement and implementation.

Lessons Learned

232. Lesson 1: Sustainable Consumption and Production is central to economic and social development, but these links may not be obvious to decision makers and potential funders. It is therefore critical to articulate the benefits of SCP across economic, social and environmental dimensions and engage with a diverse range of Ministries, including Ministries of Finance who can promote the mainstreaming of SCP in national economic plans, financial policy instruments and national budgets. SCP requires stronger coordination, policy coherence and integration across ministries and, crucially, engaging those with key economic and financial portfolios. One main challenge is that SDG 12 / SCP is narrowly perceived by policymakers, donors and the wider public as an environmental goal rather than cross-cutting. Reinforcing this, the 10YFP has largely been working with Ministries of Environment, who typically do not have the political voice and weight to effect change across other Ministries and sectors of the economy and generate finance.

233. **Lesson 2: The ambition and breadth of the SDGs and SCP make them unattainable without robust partnerships.** However, partnerships are challenging, and building trust and collaboration takes time. The benefits to both parties need to be clearly articulated and funded for successful implementation. A shift to sustainable consumption and production requires concerted action from governments, scientific institutions, businesses, civil society and international organisations. Building multi-stakeholder partnerships requires time, effort and resources. Engaging with governments requires consistent / on-going interaction to build trust and to adapt as Government priorities change. Investment in the initial phases of the partnership is critical to build trust and relationships, ensure ownership and a strong engagement of partners, and lay strong and inclusive foundations for a successful implementation.

234. **Lesson 3: Resource mobilization needs to be diversified, with shared responsibility across then One Planet Network.** Given that it is a specialised and time-consuming activity it needs to be well resourced to maximise chances of success. While the mandate of the UNEP Trust Fund was to attract funding from diverse sources, resource mobilisation has been fairly limited to a few core funders. However, given the funding gaps and vast scope of SCP, a diversified funding approach is required, building on all members of the network and types of funding.

235. Lesson 4: Implementation at country level is a large and complex undertaking; country focused approaches, based on enhanced country and regional level support and activities by the Secretariat, the Programmes and other Network partners, need to be adopted to better reach and support countries. It has been challenging for both the Secretariat and programmes to engage with the NFPs and by extension countries in general. Given the large number of countries involved in the network (and the ambition that all countries are covered), a more country focussed approach needs to be designed and funded. Building strategic partnerships with regional bodies and UN agencies with country presence and mainstreaming SCP on existing mechanisms, processes and initiatives at country level should be crucial elements in these efforts

236. Lesson 5: National Focal Points (NFPs) are not experts across all aspects of the six 10YFP programmes and should be supported to play a liaison role, facilitating the programmes to connect with all concerned government ministries and country- and regional-level partners. The engagement between Programmes and NFPs has been challenging but is key for developing work at the country level. The NFPs serve as an official entry point for the One Planet Network, but given the diversity of

the Programmes need to be able to facilitate meetings across a broad range of Ministries and other stakeholders in country.

237. **Lesson 6: Quality needs to take precedence over quantity in terms of tools and guidance and knowledge curation.** There needs to be greater focus on quality rather than quantity, so that users can quickly identify guidance and best practice case studies tailored to their priority needs, be clear on how they can be applied in varying country context and have confidence in their suitability and scientific standing.

238. **Lesson 7: High level political champions are needed to accelerate a move to SCP, at the country and global level.** High level political support is needed to increase the visibility and uptake of the SCP and the mandate of the One Planet Network. Within UNEP, SCP profile has increased as evidenced in the UNEP Mid-term Strategy 2022-2025 which acknowledges that unsustainable consumption and production underlie all crises - climate, pollution, biodiversity. This supports uptake both within UNEP and across the UN agencies.

239. **Lesson 8: Flexibility in terms of hiring service providers through competitive tender and clear and comprehensive technical Terms of Reference can reduce inefficiencies and misunderstandings at project implementation.** The development of the One Planet website was hindered by the requirement that the project used a specific service provider, rather than it being able to select its own service provider and be engaged in the procurement process. Different expectations on scope/ quality of work between the Secretariat and the web development company also affected the quality of the website.

240. **Lesson 9: It is important to manage expectations of partners, including donors, on funding and for the One Planet Network partners to be clear on their roles and responsibilities.** The 10YFP has suffered from over-ambitious and unrealistic promises on funding in the past which has lessened the interest of partners in the 10YFP. It is therefore important that expectations around the MPFT are realistic and reviewed and communicated regularly to partners. It is also important that donors and the One Planet Network are clear about the conditions surrounding the use of funds, and the benefits and costs to both parties, so as to avoid lengthy negotiations and delays to implementation

Recommendations of the evaluation

241. **Recommendation 1:** To Secretariat: Strengthen the case for investment in SCP by: (i) highlighting and communicating clearly to decision makers and stakeholders how SCP is central to realising sustainable development / Agenda 2030, addressing the crises of climate change, pollution, and nature loss and global COVID-19 recovery; (ii) identifying specific areas for intervention.

242. **Recommendation 2:** To One Planet Network: The Secretariat, Board, programmes and Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) steering group should hold collaborative discussions on the functions of the Secretariat, as part of a review of overall governance of the One Planet Network, in the potential second phase of the 10YFP.

243. **Recommendation 3:** To Secretariat / One Planet Network: Review the resource mobilization strategy to clarify the potential roles and responsibilities of all One Planet Network partners, limitations and opportunities for adopting a more diversified approach to financing country level implementation.

244. **Recommendation 4:** To Secretariat / One Planet Network partners: review options for a more country focused implementation approach to effectively mainstream SCP and accelerate implementation at country level in support of the One Planet Network's strategy.
245. **Recommendation 5:** To UNEP Corporate Services: Review implications of sole provider for IT services and benefits of moving towards approved roster of providers or competitive tender process.
246. **Recommendation 6:** To the Secretariat and UNEP Senior Management: Enhance coordination and coherence across the network and with other UNEP interventions.
247. **Recommendation 7:** To the Secretariat: Knowledge management should be focused on country needs and priorities supported by an ongoing use of science. The One Planet Network needs to maintain a standard of excellence, so that only the best tools are promoted, based on expert review.
248. **Recommendation 8:** To the Secretariat: Communications and outreach should be focused on building awareness and drawing investors to the network to accelerate implementation.
249. **Recommendation 9:** To the Secretariat: Explore mechanisms for encouraging reporting by Programmes and simplifying the M&R online system.
250. **Recommendation 10:** To the 10YFP Board, MPTF and the Secretariat: The oversight and governance responsibilities of the 10YFP Board and MPTF Steering Committee should be strengthened, the independence of the Secretariat better articulated and options for better integration of stakeholder groups within the One Planet Network undertaken.
251. **Recommendation 11:** To UNEP Senior Management, the 10YFP Board and the Secretariat: Identify champions to enhance profile of SCP at global, regional and country level.

5 COMPLIANCE WITH EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

252. This section reports on the formal response to evaluations, and the implementation of evaluation recommendations issued. Recommendations are proposals for specific action to be taken by identified people/position-holders to resolve concrete problems affecting a project, programme or policy or the sustainability of its results. They are formulated through a rigorous approach and are distilled from evidence-based findings from evaluation processes involving project managers, evaluation managers, evaluation consultants and a wide range of stakeholders.

253. Evaluations aim to promote accountability and learning. The formal evaluation recommendation compliance system also reinforces the positive feedback and learning opportunities that evaluations can provide to the organization. The 'process benefits' from evaluation work can be considerable in terms of encouraging staff, partners and other stakeholders to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of past performance, and to integrate existing good practices and ideas for improvement into future programme strategies, intervention designs and management actions.

5.1 Categorisation of Recommendations

254. Evaluation recommendations are categorized according to their priority level, defined by the Evaluation Office in the following manner:

- **Critical** (high level recommendations): Address significant and/or widespread deficiencies in governance, risk management, or internal control processes such that likelihood of achieving the programmed objectives is greatly reduced, or the provisions of relevant principles or policies are compromised.
- **Important** (medium level recommendations): Address reportable deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management, or internal control processes such that likelihood of achieving the programmed objectives is reduced, or the provisions of relevant principles or policies are threatened.
- **Opportunity for improvement** (low level recommendations): Address distinctive challenges and comprise suggestions to improve performance that do not meet the criteria of either critical or important recommendations.

255. **Table 8** below shows the proportion of recommendations for each of these priority levels that were issued during 2020-21

Table 8: Priority Level of Recommendations

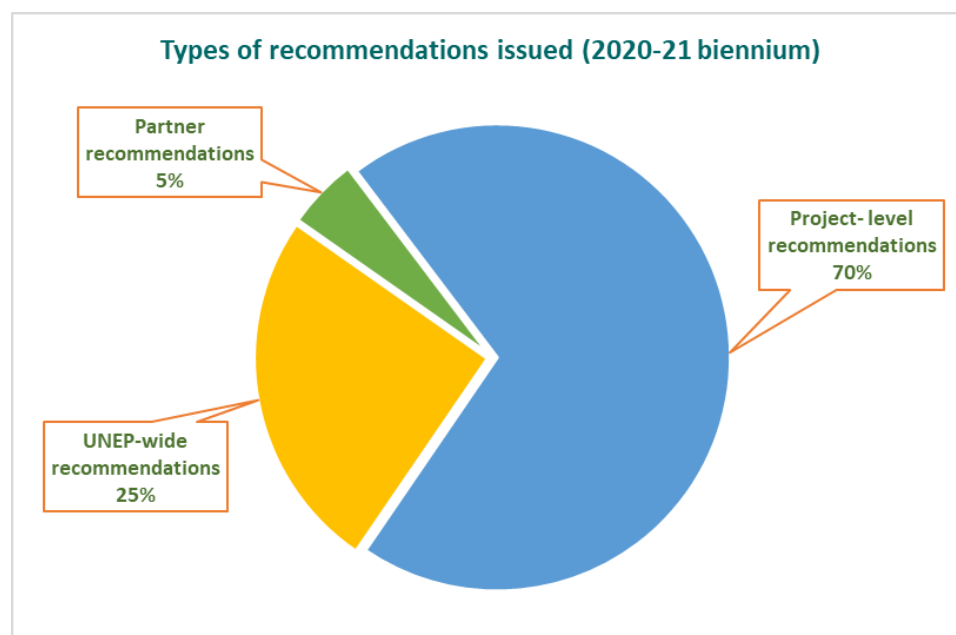
	Critical	Important	Opportunity for Improvement	Total
Ecosystems Division	24	56	50	130
Economy Division	28	52	34	114
Law Division	6	6	8	20
Corporate Division	2	3	0	5
	60	117	92	269

256. The Evaluation Office also characterises recommendations by type based on the ‘span / locus of management’ required to resolve the problem/issue, in the following manner:

- **Project level recommendations:** Where the actions of UNEP staff / those UNEP staff managing the evaluand can address the recommendation or the underlying problem independently.
- **UNEP-wide (institutional/ cross-cutting/corporate) recommendations:** where the actions of UNEP staff/ those UNEP staff managing the evaluand cannot address the recommendation or the underlying problem independently; or where the action(s) to be taken to resolve the problem, which could have been caused by systemic issues or gaps in UNEP’s operational requirements, require approval/leadership from UNEP senior management and/or coordination among several different parts of UNEP.
- **Partner recommendations:** where the actions to be taken to resolve the problem require approval/leadership from UNEP partners (e.g., Executing Agencies; National Governments/Ministries; Research Organisations; Private Sector; Steering Committees; Academia; UN agencies)

257. Figure 32 below shows the proportion of recommendations for each of these categories. In the 2020-21 biennium, a total of 269 recommendations²³ were issued comprising those addressed to projects (184) and their respective partners (14), those addressing projects but also have corporate (UNEP-wide) implications (58), and those that combine elements relevant to both the Project and UNEP (13).

Figure 32. Types of recommendations issued (2020-21)



Type	No. of instances*
Partner recommendations	14
Project-level recommendations	197
UNEP-wide recommendations	71
Total	282*

²³ The N value used in the chart “types of recommendations issued in 2020-21” is higher (282) than the number of recommendations issued in the period (269) because there were some recommendations (13) that addressed a combination of both project and corporate issues, increasing the number of instances that these recommendation categories were applied.

258. The UNEP-wide (corporate/high-level) recommendations category was introduced midway through the 2018-19 biennium to capture recommendations where the required management actions need to be taken by several actors and at levels beyond the management authority of the project or programme manager that received the implementation plan (for GEF projects this may also include recommendations directed at the GEF Secretariat). The nature of such recommendations means they often take more time to implement.

Figure 33. Submission of recommendation implementation plans (2020-21)

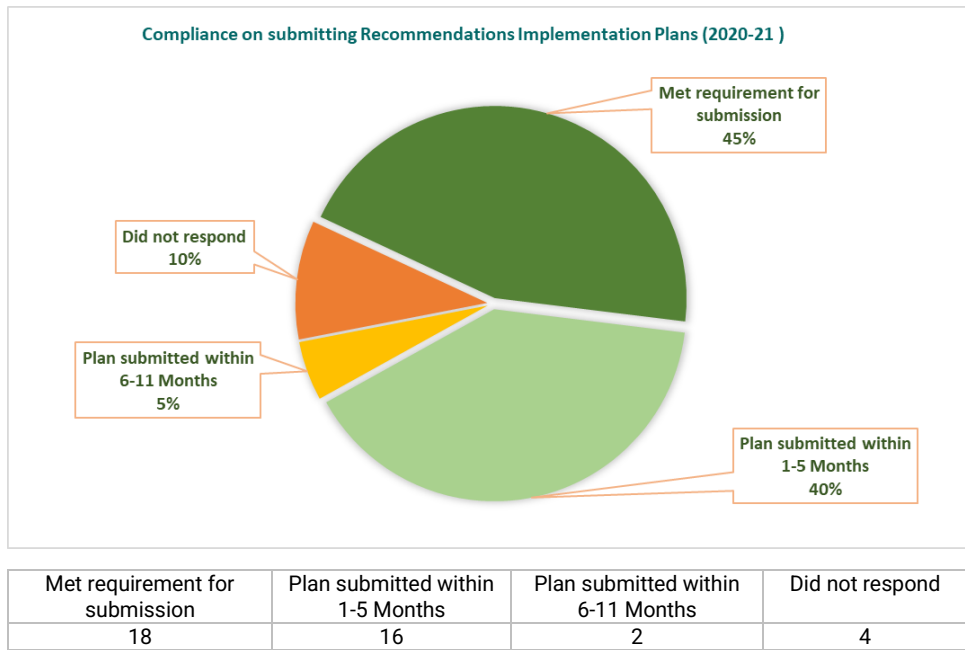
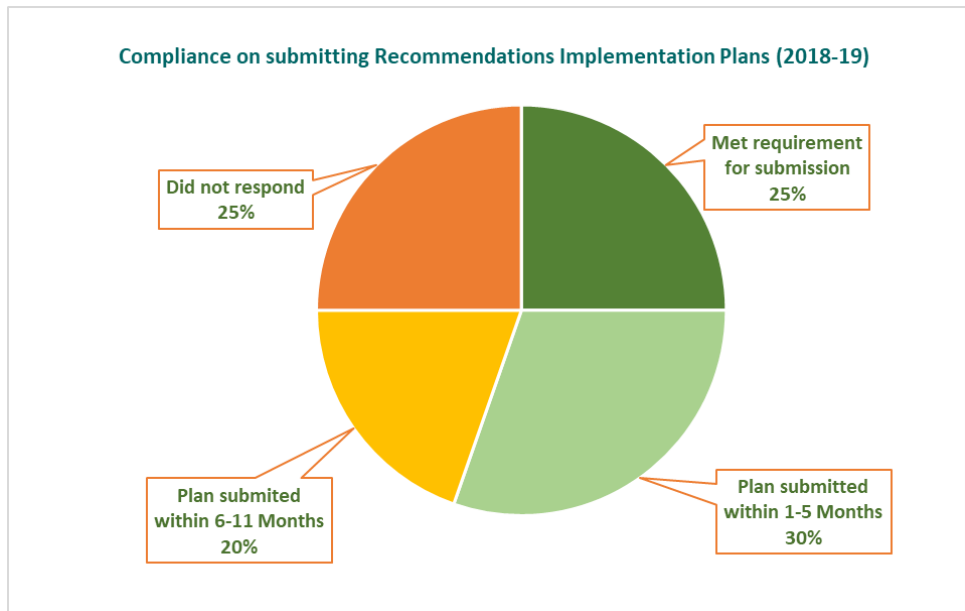


Figure 34. Submission of recommendation implementation plans (2018-19)



Met requirement for submission	Plan submitted within 1-5 Months	Plan submitted within 6-11 Months	Did not respond
14	17	11	14

259. Some evaluations either did not have recommendations or were special evaluations for which tracking of implementation was beyond the mandate / purview of the Evaluation Office. In the 2020-21 biennium, 40 implementation plans for evaluation recommendations were sent to UNEP substantive offices by the end of December 2021. Of these, 36 completed evaluation recommendation implementation plans from the respective offices were completed and returned to the Evaluation Office to assess for compliance.

260. As shown in **Figure 33** above, submission of management responses to recommendation implementation plans by the responsible project officers was at 90% in 2020-21, with half that number (45%) submitting their plans within the required timeframe of 1 month. This is a solid improvement on the previous biennium in which, as highlighted in **Figure 34** above, 56 recommendation implementation plans were sent out to UNEP substantive offices in the 2018-19 biennium, yet 25% of the implementation plans issued did not receive responses by the corresponding Divisions.

261. Compliance rates for completion of management responses to evaluation **should be 100%** and the timelines for these standard requirements should be respected. Whilst the levels of compliance in submitting a management response to evaluation in the form of a recommendation implementation plan have shown considerable improvement since the last biennium, **this is a performance dimension that needs continued management attention.**

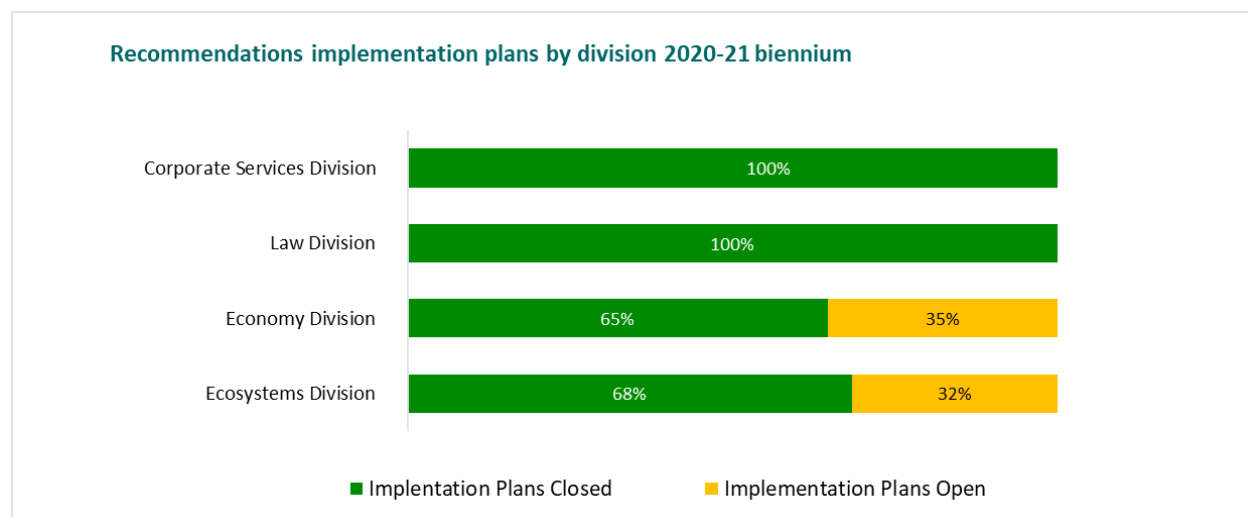
262. **Table 9** below shows a breakdown of the recommendation implementation plans submitted to the Evaluation Office by the substantive Offices in UNEP in the entire MTS period 2018-2021.

Table 9. Submission of completed recommendation implementation plans by Division (2018 – 2021)

	Met requirement for submission	Plan submitted within 1-5 Months	Plan submitted within 6-11 Months	Did not respond
Ecosystems Division	8	13	10	13
Economy Division	24	16	3	5
Law Division	0	3	0	0
Corporate Services Division	0	1	0	0
Total	32	33	13	18

263. **Figure 35** below, shows the status of implementation across the project / programme level recommendations issued. 'Open' recommendations are those that were still within their designated implementation timeframe at the end of the biennium. By contrast 'closed' recommendations had either passed their implementation deadline or had already been deemed as fully implemented (compliant) during the biennium.

Figure 35. Status of recommendations implementation plans by Division (2020-21)



	Implementation Plans Received from UNEP Substantive Offices	Implementation Plans Closed	Implementation Plans Open
Ecosystems Division	19	13	6
Economy Division	17	11	6
Law Division	3	3	0
Corporate Services Division	1	1	0
Total	40	28	12

5.2 Acceptance of recommendations

264. As per the UNEP Evaluation Policy (2016) the findings from evaluations are to be discussed with relevant programme staff and senior management where specific evaluation recommendations will be reviewed. Subsequently, programme staff / senior management will prepare a formal management response to the evaluation that specifies which recommendations were accepted, what action will be taken and a timeline. A response to the evaluation recommendations, in the form of a formal Recommendations Implementation Plan, should be prepared and sent back to the Evaluation Office within one month.

265. The recommendation implementation plan should specify the following: whether a recommendation has been accepted; how the recommendation will be implemented; who is responsible for its implementation; the date by which the implementation of the recommendation is to be completed; and what actions have already been taken (if any).

266. If a recommendation is rejected by the project / programme management, an explanation must be provided as to why the problem/issue highlighted in the recommendation cannot be addressed.

267. In the 2018–19 biennium, two hundred and ninety-six (296) recommendations were issued and in 2020-21, there was a total of 269 recommendations issued.

268. **Figure 36** and **Figure 37** below show the overall level of acceptance by project / programme staff of the evaluation recommendations issued during the 2018-19 and 2020-21 biennia.

Figure 36. Overall acceptance of recommendations in (2019-18)

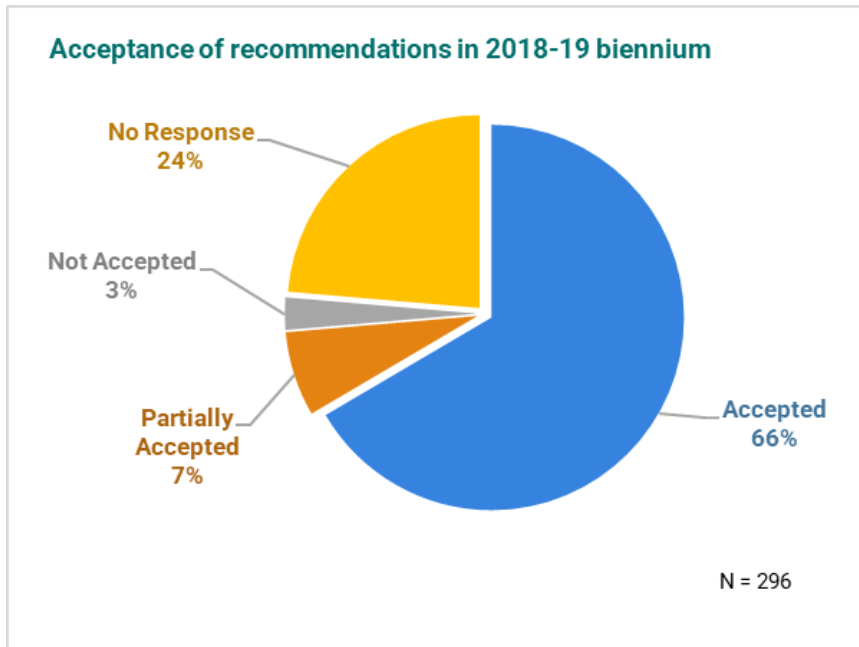
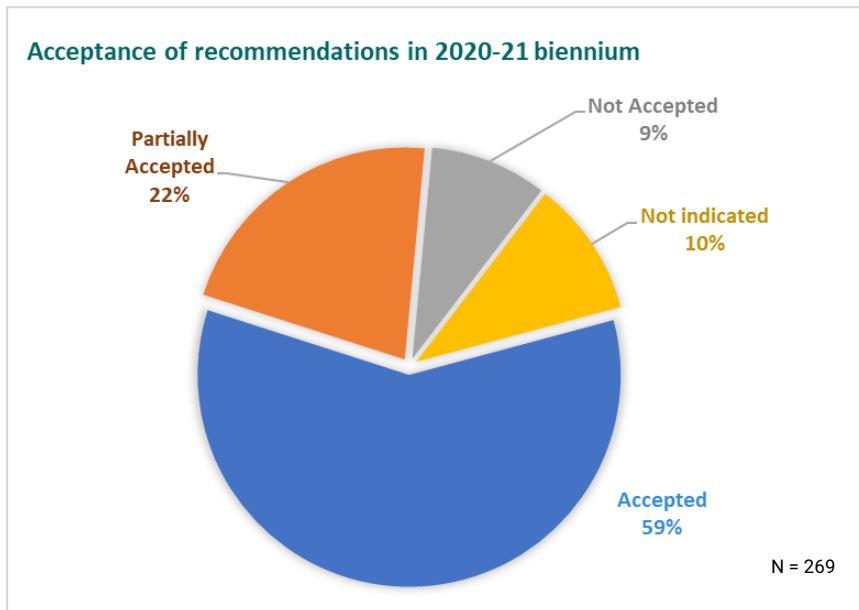


Figure 37. Overall acceptance of recommendations (2020-21)



	Recommendations Issued	Accepted	Partially Accepted	Not Accepted	Not indicated
Ecosystems Division	130	69	28	12	21
Economy Division	114	71	24	12	7
Law Division	20	16	4	0	0
Corporate Services Division	5	3	2	0	0
Total	269	159	58	24	28

269. Partial acceptance of recommendations happens when Project Managers accept the problem / issue identified in the recommendation but propose an alternative course of action to resolve the problem/issue than that suggested by the evaluators. Reasons for non-acceptance of recommendations in this biennium have included:

- One (1) GEF project failing to provide any management response to the Evaluation Office – all recommendations were therefore closed as ‘not compliant’
- One (1) GEF Task Manager regarding the methods used in evaluation process as being ‘unfair’ (the use of a reconstructed Theory of Change approach which is in accordance with both GEF and UNEP guidance) and did not accept the findings. The Task Manager chose not to prepare a management response – all recommendations were closed as ‘not compliant’. The Evaluation Office noted that it is mandated to perform evaluations independently and does not require Task / Project Manager agreement / approval for the Evaluation Report to be finalised, publicly disclosed and submitted to the GEF.

5.3 Compliance with recommendations

270. All recommendations must have a compliance dimension. The Evaluation Office monitors compliance of all issued implementation plans every six months for a total period of 12 months from its finalisation and prepares compliance assessments of the implementation of accepted recommendations, based on submitted compliance reports prepared by the organizational unit responsible for the management response. The compliance performance against the recommendations is then reported to senior management on a six-monthly basis and to member States in the Biennial Evaluation Synthesis Report.

271. At each assessment point, the progress in implementing agreed recommendations is assessed by the Evaluation Office. The compliance level is based on implementation progress updates and supporting evidence provided by the responsible programme staff. Recommendations are deemed to be:

- **Compliant** (fully implemented)
- **Partially compliant** (only partially implemented)
- **Not compliant** (not implemented)
- **No further action required** (if events overtake what is planned)

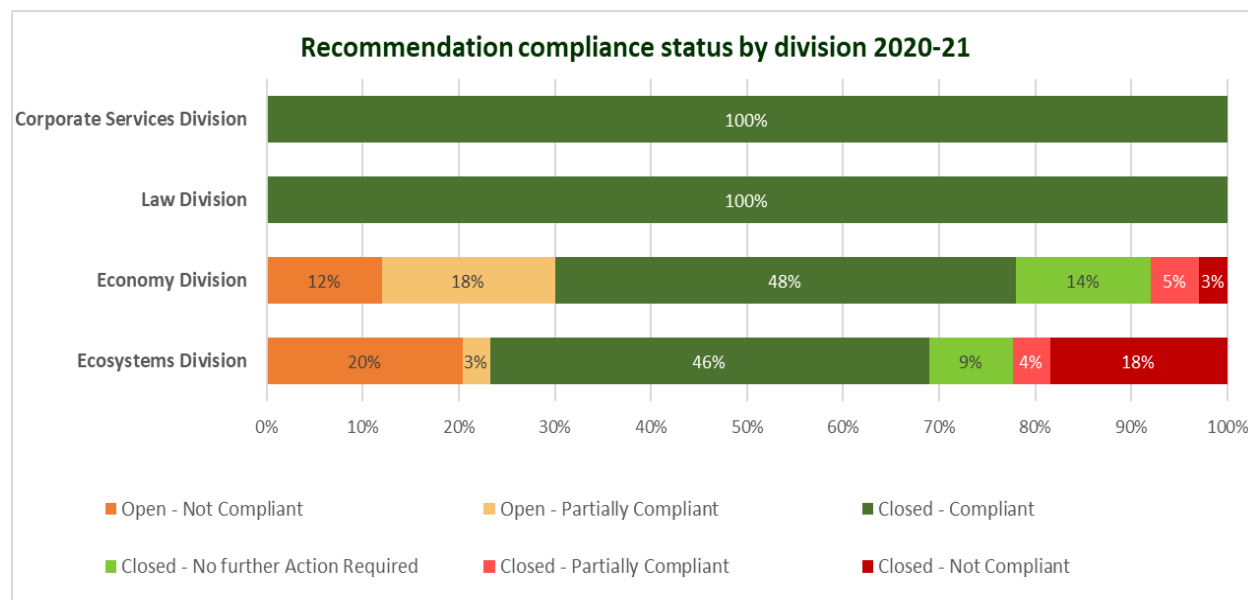
272. UNEP cannot enforce compliance for any recommendation made to a third party unless there is a contractual/legal agreement in force. If no binding legal agreement with the third party in place, UNEP can only communicate the recommendation to the third party for consideration.

273. When 12 months from the date of finalisation of the recommendation implementation plan have elapsed, the implementation status of all recommendations is updated and the compliance status recorded. All recommendations in the plan are then recorded as ‘closed’. This means that staff responsible for implementing the evaluation recommendation have 12 months from the date the implementation plan is received by the Evaluation Office to implement them fully.

274. **Figure 38** below shows the compliance rates by UNEP Divisions in the cases where evaluation recommendations were accepted, and the recommendation implementation plans were completed.

When a recommendation has been assessed as being fully implemented it is recorded as 'compliant' and its status is changed from 'open' to 'closed', and no further follow-up is required. All other recommendations remain 'open'.

Figure 38. Compliance status of recommendation implementation plans by Division (2020-21)



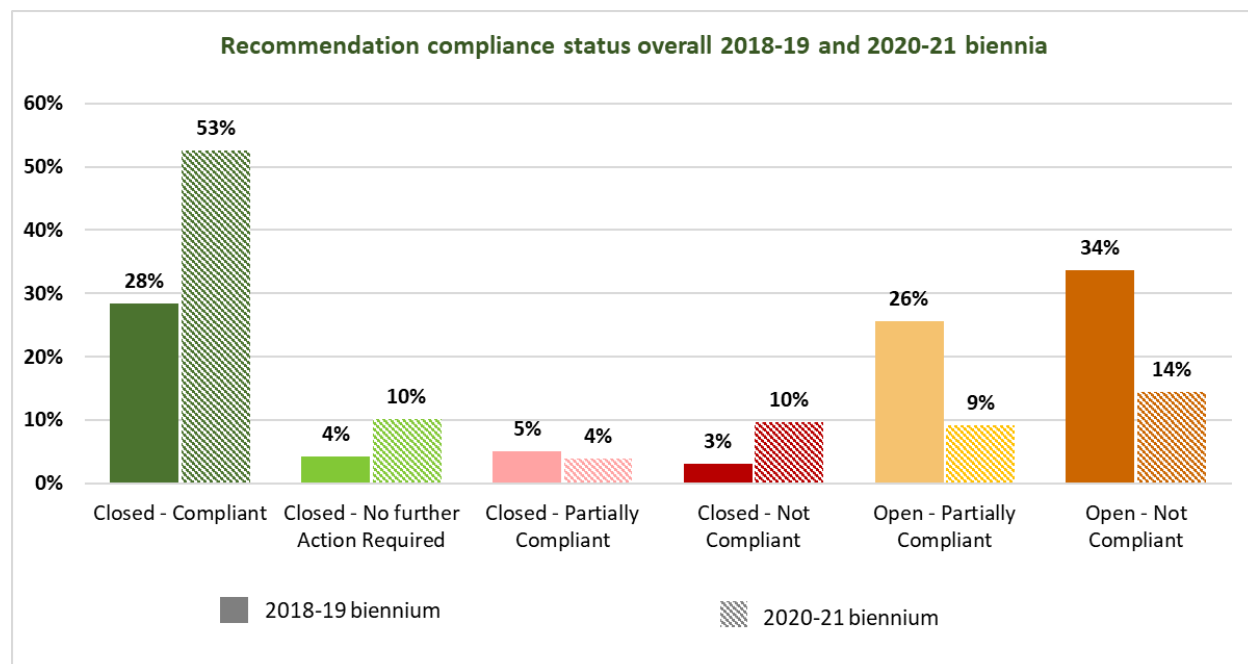
Recommendation Status	Ecosystems Division	Economy Division	Law Division	Corporate Services Division
Closed - Compliant	47	48	20	5
Closed - Partially Compliant	4	5	0	0
Closed - No further Action Required	9	14	0	0
Closed - Not Compliant	19	3	0	0
Open - Partially Compliant	3	18	0	0
Open - Not Compliant	21	12	0	0
Total	103	100	20	5

275. In **Figure 39** below, 'open recommendations' are those that have yet to be fully implemented but have yet to reach their 12-month implementation deadline. The chart clearly highlights a marked improvement in evaluation recommendation compliance this biennium with the proportion of recommendations closed as 'compliant' or 'no further action required' increasing from 32% of recommendations issued in 2018-19 to 63% of recommendations issued in 2020-21. A larger proportion [53%] of recommendations were closed as 'compliant' in 2020-21 compared to 2018-19 [28%].²⁴

276. Nevertheless, continued management attention to recommendation compliance is required to further reduce the number of recommendations that remain unimplemented as evidenced by the 10% of recommendations issued that reached their implementation deadline and were closed as 'not compliant'.

1. ²⁴ If the 174 recommendations that were 'closed' in the 2020-21 biennium is considered as a subset, 69% recommendations were closed as 'compliant', 13% were closed with 'no further action required', 5% were closed as 'partially compliant' and 13% were closed as 'not compliant'.

Figure 39. Comparison of recommendation compliance status (2018-19 and 2020-21)



Overall compliance status	2018-19	2020-21
Open - Partially Compliant	67	21
Open - Not Compliant	88	33
Closed - Compliant	74	120
Closed - No further Action Required	11	23
Closed - Partially Compliant	13	9
Closed - Not Compliant	8	22
Total ²⁵	261	228

277. The 2020-2021 Programme of Work performance indicator for recommendation compliance is the “Percentage of accepted evaluation recommendations implemented within the time frame defined in the implementation plan”. The target level expected by December 2021 was 86%. The actual compliance level achieved was 82%. Recommendation compliance levels need continued management attention to meet UNEP’s POW performance targets.

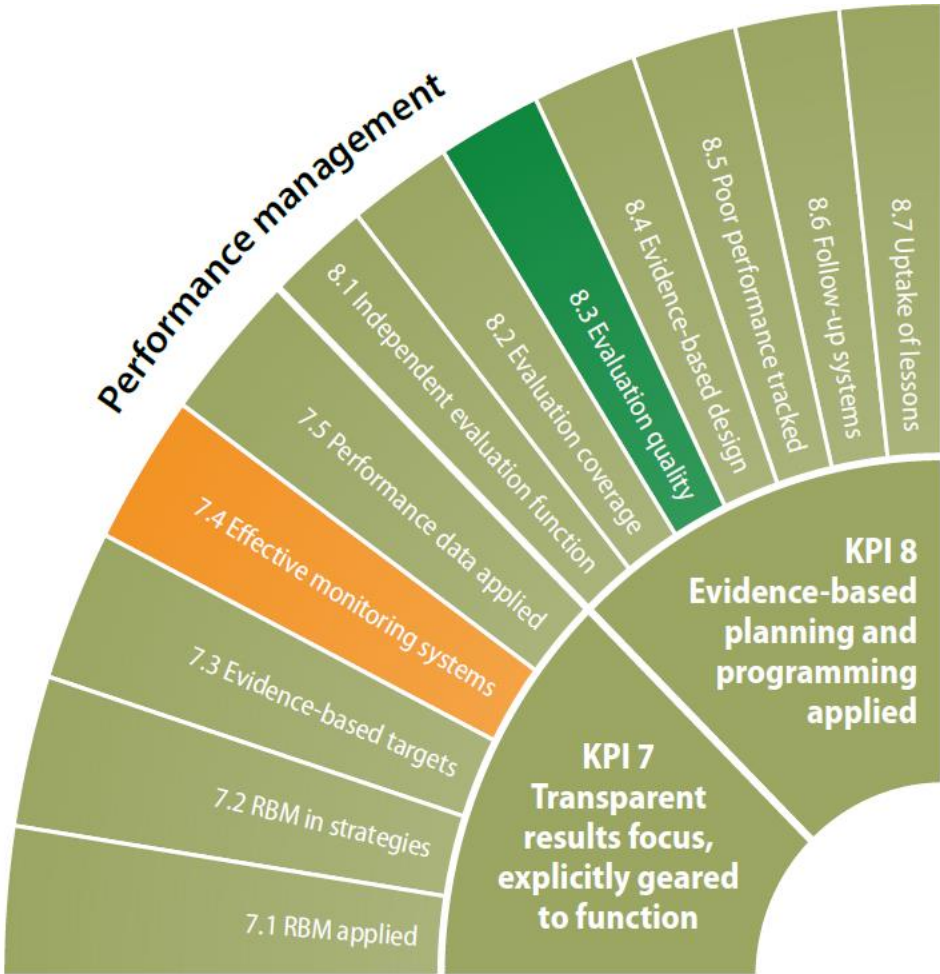
²⁵ The data excludes a category termed as “Closed - Transferred to UNEP-Wide”

6 PERFORMANCE OF THE EVALUATION OFFICE AND EVALUATION QUALITY

6.1 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network MOPAN

278. The November 2021 MOPAN report of UNEP provided a comprehensive assessment of UNEP and made extensive use of findings from evaluations which were cited throughout the report. The MOPAN report also provided an assessment of UNEP’s evaluation function.

Figure 40. MOPAN 2021 Summary findings on performance management including evaluation



279. Figure 40 above and the following bullet points summarise the findings on evaluation in the MOPAN report:

- UNEP’s evaluations are based on design, planning, and implementation; are quality oriented; and use appropriate methodologies. This is ensured through both the current evaluation policy and the Evaluation Office’s frequently issued guidance documents. As a result, UNEP’s independent evaluation function operates effectively, and evaluation processes and products are of good quality.
- Internal mechanisms and incentives exist for ensuring evaluation lessons and recommendations inform new strategic plans and projects. There is greater attention given to incorporating lessons learned from prior experience and programme, sub-programme, and project evaluation recommendations into its evolving MTSs, PoWs, and project designs. These mechanisms and incentives have received renewed support from UNEP’s leadership. Evaluation feedback into project design needs to be timely.
- Current arrangements have led to a donor-driven bias in favour of project evaluations to the detriment of subprogramme evaluations and the assessment of broader initiatives. This suggests a shift in focus of evaluation efforts is needed towards more strategic assessments that may provide richer learning opportunities for the organisation, including an Identified a need to strengthen ex post evaluation of projects and sub-programmes
- Evaluation findings should be systematically presented to and discussed by the governing bodies on a regular basis
- There is a need to strengthen the financing of evaluation and give greater attention to the assessment of PoW outcomes, the results of UNEP’s knowledge products and other normative activities

6.2 The OIOS evaluation dashboard study of UNEP Evaluation Office

280. The Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat (OIOS) conducted an assessment of evaluation capacity and practice for every entity in the UN Secretariat this was published through their ‘Evaluation Dashboard’ report. The report noted that *“UNEP had a robust evaluation system in place. Its function was organized into a stand-alone evaluation unit, and its most senior evaluation professional was at D-1 level. Strong evaluation policy and procedures were in place”,* and *“64% of sampled reports were rated good or very good for their overall quality”*

281. The report identified areas where the Evaluation Office can make improvement which included in evaluation work planning, and greater incorporation of human rights and gender in evaluation reports.

282. OIOS also issued a report in 2021 entitled *“Strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives”* (A/76/69). The report noted in that the UNEP Evaluation Office produced the highest number of evaluation reports in the UN Secretariat for the 2018-19 biennium with more than twice as many (58) as the second most productive function.

6.3 GEF Independent Evaluation Office assessment of the quality of UNEP evaluation reports

283. The Independent Evaluation Office of the GEF publishes an annual comparative assessment of the performance of GEF projects including an assessment of the quality of evaluation reports

received from GEF Agencies. In the most recently published Annual Performance Report (APR), published in May 2020, UNEP project performance compared very favourably against other GEF agencies (primarily UNDP, UNIDO, World Bank and others²⁶).

284. The assessment of the performance of the UNEP Evaluation Office continues to be very strong. The report stated “The Terminal evaluations prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) show improvements in quality: the proportion of terminal evaluations rated in the satisfactory range for quality increased from 81 percent for those prepared through 2009, to 97 percent for those prepared from 2010 onwards. The improvement in the quality of the percentage of terminal evaluations prepared by UNDP and the World Bank that are in the satisfactory range is marginal.” It also noted UNEP’s strong performance, relative to other GEF agencies, in its compliance with GEF evaluation requirements.

6.4 UN System-Wide Action Plan on gender equality and the empowerment of women (UN-SWAP)

285. Standards for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (GEEW) were introduced across the UN network in 2014. The performance against these standards is assessed through 15 GEEW indicators. Fourteen of these indicators assess the progress made within the institution in mainstreaming gender responsive strategies and systems, the evaluand being the institution itself, including its systems and the actions it has taken to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. The scores are based on a self-assessment guided by a common approach developed by UN Women, in conjunction with the UN Evaluation Group. The one exception within the set of 15 indicators is the Evaluation Performance Indicator, which is assessed by an external consultant who reviews the coverage of GEEW in all the evaluation reports completed in the preceding year. The UN-SWAP method for measuring performance against the indicators was revised with more specific sub-criteria by which to examine the evaluations. A new set of indicators was applied from 2018, referred to as UN System Wide Action Plan 2.0, which needs to be considered when comparing the results prior, and since, 2018.

286. An external consultant was engaged in each year of the biennium to undertake a review of the project evaluation reports completed in those years. In 2020 26 evaluation reports were reviewed and in 2021, 18 reports. In both years UNEP was assessed at the level of ‘approaches requirements’, with a slight improvement in the score year on year.

287. In 2020 the main gaps that appear in evaluation reports that do not fully meet requirements, relate to:

- Capturing anticipated and unanticipated effects on women
- Identifying some of the ‘trickle down’ impacts of larger programmatic/multi-country initiatives on women and other marginalized groups
- Clearly identifying different social groups and triangulating their voices
- Providing a gender methodology in the introduction

²⁶ GEF notes ‘other’ agencies as including: Asian Development Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Inter-American Development Bank, and International Fund for Agricultural Development.

- In projects where there is little gender-related data, many evaluators still do not go beyond merely reporting this fact, particularly in highly technical or institutional projects
- Finding creative ways of examining impacts on women on institutional or highly technical projects (impacts on women's time, labour, health, change in leadership, or providing background information on how women are impacted by the issue at hand)
- Gender-disaggregating interviewees
- Providing recommendations that take into account GEWE considerations.

288. In the 2021 review the impact of COVID-19 on how evaluations are carried out was noted. Every evaluation was limited by travel restrictions and by the inability to meet with local stakeholders and beneficiaries and, while efforts were made to compensate for the restrictions, the following limitations were highlighted:

- Consultations were largely with institutional stakeholders (governments, international organizations);
- Unanticipated impacts of projects on local communities were not clearly described;
- Different social groups and triangulation of their voices were not clarified in most of the projects;
- A few evaluations were carried out with large delays meaning that some of the project staff/stakeholders had moved on or had limited contribution to the evaluation process;
- Impacts were often described as told to a secondary party (e.g. project manager, government representative), rather than directly to the evaluator.

289. From a broader perspective the following strengths and weaknesses in evaluation reports were identified. The main achievements in this year's reports included the following:

- Most evaluations provided gender-disaggregated data
- Most evaluations included gender-relevant recommendations and/or lessons learned
- All but one evaluation provided a rating for gender responsiveness
- There was reference to UNEP Evaluation Office providing tools to support assessment of responsiveness to gender and human rights
- Ethical standards and statements on integrity and respect for confidentiality were provided in all but two evaluations
- Some technical projects (see section under Criterion 3) have begun to mention the interaction between the project subject and women.
- Programmatic/institutional evaluations include greater reference to gender results (e.g. Enhanced Coordination and implementation of the 10YFP and its programmes).

290. The main gaps that appear in evaluation reports from 2021 include:

- Diversity of respondents/beneficiaries/stakeholders, and triangulation of their voices is not clear
- Gender approach is not frequently provided in the methodology
- Unintended or intended impacts on women are generally not highlighted. Finding creative ways of examining impacts on women in institutional or highly technical projects (impacts on women's time, labour, health, change in leadership, or providing background information on how women are impacted by the issue at hand) is still not done.
- Lack of intersectional analysis or background on how the subject matter at hand intersects with women's lives or social issues/groups.
- Lack of gender outputs or indicators proposed in the reconstructed theory of change

7 UNEP'S NEW EVALUATION POLICY, STRATEGY AND APPROACH

291. Since the endorsement of UNEP's 2016 evaluation policy, the context in which UNEP operates has changed significantly. The Secretary-General has overseen an extensive UN reform effort and in his report A/72/492 on "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all", indicated his intention to strengthen the evaluation²⁷ capacity within the UN Secretariat to better inform programme planning and reporting on programme performance. He stressed that results of evaluations will be used by programme managers to better plan and adjust their activities. As such, evaluation is integral to learning and supports improved results-based management and increased transparency on programme delivery to Member States. Additionally, UNEP has pursued its own internal reform agenda with the preparation of the 2022-2025 Medium-Term Strategy.

292. In 2021 The Evaluation Office prepared a revised draft evaluation policy for formal approval in 2022. The revised policy takes account of the UN Secretariat requirements for evaluation set out in ST/AI/2021/3 and is consistent with a revised approach to evaluation proposed by the Evaluation Office that responds to the findings of the most recent MOPAN assessment of UNEP.

293. A main thrust of the revised approach to evaluation, set out in an Evaluation Operational Strategy, will involve the allocation of a greater proportion of staff time and available financial resources to strategic or thematic/portfolio evaluations. Strategic evaluations will provide balanced coverage of UNEP's sub-programmes, policies, strategies and core planning instruments to; a) assess UNEP's results in key areas; b) provide evidence-based learning for existing areas of investment and for the development of new areas (i.e., provide evidence to re-examine organisational goals / POWs / investment areas / strategies / etc.) or c) provide insights into cross-cutting issues (e.g. gender, South-South cooperation, poverty reduction etc.).

294. Another important aspect of the revised evaluation approach will be to purposively sample individual projects for evaluation every year in-line with the available Evaluation Office staff capacity, rather than aim for complete evaluation coverage of all completing projects. The selection of project evaluations will be driven by the need to evaluate the performance of the Programme of Work and the projects selected will be representative the key features of UNEP's programme: sub-programmes, funding sources, operational divisions and geographic distribution. The preparation of a known quantity of evaluations in a sample will allow an even greater focus on high quality.

295. The Evaluation Office has articulated its priorities for the 2022-25 MTS period in the Evaluation Operational Strategy. Five strategic priorities have been identified:

- Develop and maintain a strategic evaluation agenda
- Enhance use of evaluation throughout the house
- Maintain a focus on quality of evaluation processes and products

²⁷ The Secretary-General's report (A/72/492) and related resolutions and reports refer to both "evaluation" undertaken by oversight bodies and by entities (i.e. independently from management) and to "self-evaluation" as referenced and defined in Chapter VII of ST/SGB/2018/3. The term "evaluation" as used in this policy refers to independent evaluation while "self-evaluation" is termed "management-led review" in UNEP.

- Build capacity across the house for robust project-level performance assessments (management-led review)
- Establish a stable resource base and funding approach to support the evaluation function

296. A comprehensive Evaluation Manual was also prepared to support the new UNEP evaluation approach.

Annex 1. List of Evaluations in the 2020-21 Biennial Report

Project evaluations

Project Title	Year	Type
Sustainable Management of the Water Resources of the La Plata Basin with Respect to the Effects of Climate Variability and Change	2020	TE
Strengthening Law Enforcement Capabilities to Combat Wildlife Crime for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Species in South Africa (target: Rhinoceros)	2020	TE
Cogen for Africa	2020	TE
Capacity Building for Access and Benefit Sharing and Conservation and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Plants (Ethiopia)	2020	TE
Implementation of Concrete Adaptation Measures to Reduce Vulnerability of Livelihoods and Economy of Coastal Communities of Tanzania - AFB (2G48)	2020	TE
Developing Core Capacity to Address Adaptation to Climate Change in Productive Coastal Zones of Tanzania LDL (4C44)	2020	TE
Enhancing the Conservation Effectiveness of Seagrass Ecosystems Supporting Globally Significant Populations of Dugongs Across the Indian And Pacific Ocean Basins	2020	TE
Strengthening Institutional Capacity of countries in Environmental Law through Training, Sharing Expertise and Legal Guidance Material (SICCEL)	2020	TE
Promoting the Progressive Development of International Environmental Law	2020	TE
Environmental Rule of Law: Advancing Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability	2020	TE
Demonstrating Cost-Effectiveness and Sustainability of Environmentally Sound and Locally Appropriate Alternatives to DDT for Malaria Vector Control in Africa	2020	TE
Supply Change: Securing Food, Sustaining Forests	2020	TE
Special Programme to Support Institutional Strengthening at the National Level for Implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management	2020	MTE
Demonstration of Sustainable Alternatives to DDT and Strengthening of National Vector Control Capabilities in Middle East and North Africa (DDT MENA)	2020	TE
Establishment of Efficient and Effective Data Collection And Reporting Procedures for Evaluating the Continued need of DDT for Disease Vector Control - Global	2020	TE
Advancing the Nagoya Protocol in Countries of the Caribbean Region	2020	TE
Strengthening the implementation of the Biological Diversity Act and Rules with focus on its Access and Benefit Sharing Provisions (India)	2020	TE
Delivering the Transition to Energy Efficient Lighting in Chile	2020	TE
Kalahari-Namib Project: Enhancing Decision-Making Through Interactive Environmental Learning and Action in the Molopo-Nossob River Basin in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa	2020	TE

Project Title	Year	Type
Technology Needs Assessment Phase II - TNA	2020	TE
Pilot Asia-Pacific Climate Technology Network and Finance Center	2020	TE
Assisting Non-LDC Developing Countries with Country-Driven Processes To Advance National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)	2020	TE
Promoting Climate Resilience in the Rice Sector Through Pilot Investments in Alaotra-Mangoro Region (Adaptation Fund)	2020	TE
Climate Change in Action in Developing Countries with Fragile Mountainous Ecosystems from a Sub-Regional Perspective	2020	TE
Secretariat Support to the Global Partnership on Waste Management; ;	2021	TE
Global Waste Management Outlook	2021	TE
PIMS Id 1884 Delivering Integrated Waste Solutions at the National and Local Level	2021	TE
Enhanced Coordination and implementation of the 10YFP and its programme	2021	TE
Implementation Of National Biosafety Framework of Bangladesh	2021	TE
Implementation Of National Biosafety Framework for Lesotho	2021	TE
Market Transformation For Energy Efficient Lighting in Morocco,	2021	TE
Improving Brazilian Capacity to Conserve and Use Biodiversity Through Information Management and Use - SibbR	2021	TE
POPs Monitoring, Reporting and Information Dissemination Using Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR I)	2021	TE
Global Project On the Implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTRs) as a tool for POPs Reporting, Dissemination and Awareness Raising for Belarus, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Peru	2021	TE
Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) Global Coordination Platform	2021	TE
Addressing the Illicit Trade in Wildlife and Forest Products	2021	TE
UNEP project 321.1 Global Coral Partnership: Towards an Ecosystem Approach to Coral Reef Management	2021	TE
Development of a Plan for Global Monitoring of Human Exposure to and Environmental Concentrations of Mercury	2021	TE
Macaya Grand Sud Phase I	2021	TE
"Pacific POPs Release Reduction Through Improved Management of Solid And Hazardous Wastes"	2021	TE
Defining and Demonstrating Best Practices for Exchange of Information on Chemicals in Textile Products	2021	TE
Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change Mitigation Co-Benefits" (SLM-CC)	2021	TE

Strategic/programme evaluations

Project Title	Year
EC DG Environment-UN Environment Strategic Cooperation Agreement under the EU Thematic Programme for Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources including Energy (ENRTP)	2020
Sub-Programme on Environment Under Review	2020
Review of Poverty Reduction	2020
UN SWAP	2020/21

Annex 2. List of evaluations in 2020-21 rated in the satisfactory range for responsiveness to human rights and gender equity

Projects that scored a 'Highly Satisfactory' Rating

None

Projects that scored a 'Satisfactory' Rating

1. Cogen for Africa
2. Capacity Building for Access and Benefit Sharing and Conservation and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Plants (Ethiopia)
3. Implementation of Concrete Adaptation Measures to Reduce Vulnerability of Livelihoods and Economy of Coastal Communities of Tanzania - AFB (2G48)
4. Developing Core Capacity to Address Adaptation to Climate Change in Productive Coastal Zones of Tanzania LDL (4C44)
5. Enhancing the Conservation Effectiveness of Seagrass Ecosystems Supporting Globally Significant Populations of Dugongs Across the Indian And Pacific Ocean Basins
6. Advancing the Nagoya Protocol in Countries of the Caribbean Region
7. Strengthening the implementation of the Biological Diversity Act and Rules with focus on its Access and Benefit Sharing Provisions (India)
8. Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) Global Coordination Platform
9. Global Coral Partnership: Towards an Ecosystem Approach to Coral Reef Management
10. Development of a Plan for Global Monitoring of Human Exposure to and Environmental Concentrations of Mercury
11. Macaya Grand Sud Phase I

Projects that scored a 'Moderately Satisfactory' Rating

1. Strengthening Institutional Capacity of countries in Environmental Law through Training, Sharing Expertise and Legal Guidance Material (SICCEL)
2. Environmental Rule of Law: Advancing Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability
3. Demonstrating Cost-Effectiveness and Sustainability of Environmentally Sound and Locally Appropriate Alternatives to DDT for Malaria Vector Control in Africa
4. Special Programme to Support Institutional Strengthening at the National Level for Implementation of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the Minamata Convention and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
5. Delivering the Transition to Energy Efficient Lighting in Chile
6. Technology Needs Assessment Phase II - TNA

7. Pilot Asia-Pacific Climate Technology Network and Finance Centre
8. Assisting Non-LDC Developing Countries with Country-Driven Processes to Advance National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)
9. Climate Change in Action in Developing Countries with Fragile Mountainous Ecosystems from a Sub-Regional Perspective
10. Secretariat Support to the Global Partnership on Waste Management
11. Global Waste Management Outlook
12. Delivering Integrated Waste Solutions at the National and Local Level
13. Enhanced Coordination and implementation of the 10YFP and its programme
14. Implementation of National Biosafety Framework of Bangladesh
15. Implementation of National Biosafety Framework for Lesotho
16. Improving Brazilian Capacity to Conserve and Use Biodiversity Through Information Management and Use - SibbR
17. Global Project on the Implementation of Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTRs) as a tool for POPs Reporting, Dissemination and Awareness Raising for Belarus, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Peru
18. Addressing the Illicit Trade in Wildlife and Forest Products
19. Pacific POPs Release Reduction Through Improved Management of Solid and Hazardous Wastes
20. Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change Mitigation Co-Benefits" (SLM-CC)