



United Nations Environment Assembly Background Guide 2023

Written by Vikram Sakkia and Bjarne Schinzel





NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2023 National Model United Nations Germany Conference (NMUN • Germany)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). Vikram Sakkia is the Director and Bjarne Schinzel is the Assistant Director. Vikram has a Masters in Computer Engineering from New York University and is currently a Cellular Technologies Software Engineer working at Qualcomm working to provide remote internet access. Bjarne is currently finishing his undergraduate degree in International Relations and Social Sciences and, at the time of the conference, will be doing an internship at Mercedes-Benz.

The topics under discussion for the United Nations Environment Assembly are:

1. Promoting Multilateralism to Combat Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution
2. Promoting Resource Efficiency in Urban Development

UNEA serves as the international community's highest-level decision-making body on environmental issues and as the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEP was initially established as the official body concerned with environmental issues within the United Nations (UN). With universal membership, UNEA strengthens its own role and the role of UNEP in international affairs, and is designed to increase the responsiveness of Member States in developing and implementing environmental policy. In order to accurately simulate the committee, it will be key for delegates to focus on consensus building and best practice-setting approaches of UNEA, as opposed to operational work.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 November 2023 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN • Germany Position Papers](#) page.

Two resources, available to download from the [NMUN website](#), serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

1. [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#) - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact Estefani Morales Zanoletti at dsg.germany@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

Vikram Sakkia, Director
Bjarne Schinzel, Assistant Director

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Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the primary governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is the international community's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters.¹ In partnership with other United Nations (UN) entities, it outlines the international environmental agenda and sets priorities for the international community.² Although its resolutions are not binding, UNEA is key to bringing together relevant actors within the international community to address global environmental issues and shape future environmental governance.³

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

Twenty years after the adoption of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992), the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development called for the strengthening and upgrading of UNEP to better execute its mandate.⁴ UNEA was created in 2012 as the successor to UNEP's Governing Council.⁵ Whereas the Governing Council was composed of 58 Member States and sat within UNEP, UNEA is structured as a distinct entity and enjoys universal membership with 193 Member States.⁶

UNEA is a high-level governance body that reviews and coordinates the work of the international community on environmental matters, whilst serving as an initiator on debates that will generally be continued by other, more specific bodies.⁷ Whilst the following list is not exhaustive, the mandate of UNEA can be summarized as:

- **UNEA will generally:** set broad priorities for global environmental policy; identify emerging themes in environmental governance; develop international environment law and begin negotiations on environmental treaties; define the work and priorities of UNEP; create ad-hoc committees and subsidiary bodies to implement specific environmental objectives when necessary.⁸
- **UNEA will not generally:** engage in operational projects; complete negotiations on environmental treaties, but rather identifying emerging issues and agreeing next steps amongst Member States to create the architecture for environmental governance.⁹

Delegates should recognize the distinction between UNEA and UNEP. UNEA is the primary governing body and priority-setting mechanism of UNEP; it does not operationalize these priorities itself.¹⁰ In

¹ United Nations Environment Assembly. *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022.

² Ibid.

³ United Nations Environment Programme. *Q&A: UN Environment Assembly*. 2022.

⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*. 2012. p. 18.

⁵ United Nations Environment Assembly. *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022.

⁶ United Nations Environment Assembly. *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022; Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme. *Proceedings of the Governing Council at its Nineteenth Session (UNEP/GC.19/34)*. 1997.

⁷ International Institute for Sustainable Development. *The United Nations Environment Assembly's Role as a Governance Architect*. 2022.

⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *What you need to know about the UN Environment Assembly*. 2022.

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *What you need to know about the UN Environment Assembly*. 2022; International Institute for Sustainable Development. *The United Nations Environment Assembly's Role as a Governance Architect*. 2022.

¹⁰ United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. *UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme*. n.d.

contrast, UNEP undertakes programs, projects, awareness campaigns, and provides support to national governments to achieve environmental obligations.¹¹

Governance, Structure, and Membership

In 2013, UNEA became the designated policy-making body of UNEP, superseding the original 58-member Governing Council.¹² UNEA has universal membership, meaning that all 193 UN Member States are represented in the Assembly.¹³ UNEA meets every two years to set priorities for global environmental policy, discuss developments for environmental legislation, and assist in the implementation of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015).¹⁴

Consisting of ten Ministers for a term of two years on geographical rotations, the Bureau is responsible for the general conduct of business of UNEA.¹⁵ The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) was established as a subsidiary inter-sessional organ to UNEA and meets at least four times a year.¹⁶ The CPR was strengthened by Governing Council decision 27/2, and now contributes to the preparation of the UNEA agenda, holds an advisory role in policy matters, and monitors the implementation of decisions.¹⁷ The CPR also holds discussion on key issues, promotes the inclusion of non-resident members of the Committee, and performs other tasks given by UNEA.¹⁸ The CPR consists of all accredited Permanent Representatives to UNEP and is led by a five-member bureau that is elected for two years.¹⁹

UNEP relies on three main financial sources to facilitate its agenda: earmarked funds, the Environment Fund, and the UN Regular Budget.²⁰ Earmarked funds, also known as earmarked contributions, are funds appropriated for specific projects, themes, or countries.²¹ These funds aim to expand and/or replicate the results of UN Environment's work in more countries and with more partners.²² The Environment Fund aids in maintaining the capacity, balance, and efficiency needed for UNEP to function.²³ The UN Regular Budget supports the functions of the Secretariat and its respective governing bodies, as well as the coordination of UNEP with the UN system and cooperation with global scientific communities.²⁴ In order to assist in the action plan of UNEP, UNEA approved an appropriation for the Environment Fund of \$200 million for the years 2022-2025.²⁵ In addition, the budget allocated funding of \$200,000 for program initiatives for 2022-2023 with \$164,000 of that being for UNEP's program of work.²⁶ Earmarked contributions and the Environment Fund are comprised of voluntary contributions, hence 95% of UNEP's income is received on a voluntary basis from Member States.²⁷

¹¹ United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. *UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme*. n.d.

¹² United Nations, General Assembly. *Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation (A/RES/2997(XXVII))*. 1972.

¹³ United Nations Environment Assembly. *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Committee of Permanent Representatives*. n.d.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *How is UNEP funded*. n.d.

²¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *How is UNEP funded*. n.d.; United Nations Environment Programme. *Earmarked Contributions*. n.d.

²² United Nations Environment Programme. *How is UNEP funded*. n.d.; United Nations Environment Programme. *Earmarked Contributions*. n.d.

²³ United Nations Environment Programme. *How is UNEP funded*. n.d.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ United Nations Environment Assembly. *Medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023 (UNEP/EA.5/L.3)*. 2021. p. 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *How is UNEP funded*. n.d.

Annotated Bibliography

International Institute for Sustainable Development. *The United Nations Environment Assembly's Role as a Governance Architect*. 2022. Retrieved 23 October 2022 from: <https://www.iisd.org/articles/unea-governance>

This article succinctly articulates UNEA's role as the central forum for environmental governance in the international community. It provides clear detail on the responsibilities of a norm-setting body such as UNEA, including how it serves as a catalyst for other bodies (including UNEP) and how it identifies emerging themes in the field. Delegates should utilize this source as an approachable introduction to the opportunities and limits of UNEA's mandate and how it coordinates with other organizations.

United Nations Environment Assembly. *Medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023 (UNEP/EA.5/L.3)*. 2022. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: <https://undocs.org/en/UNEP/EA.5/L.3>

Adopted at the fifth session of UNEA, this resolution outlines the medium-term strategy for the period 2022-2025 and budget for 2022-2023. The programme of work for 2022-2023 is also defined in the document, which includes allocation of funds towards addressing issues such as climate action, environmental governance, chemicals and pollution action, and science policy. This resource also highlights the role of the Executive Director in the implementation of the programme of work and budget of the UNEP. Delegates will find this source useful in understanding more about UNEA's current priorities and how funds are allocated with respect to addressing environmental issues.

United Nations Environment Programme. *What you need to know about the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022. Retrieved 9 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-un-environment-assembly>

This web page provides a general overview of UNEA's responsibilities and why the organization's work is important. Although brief, the information provided on this page summarizes the work that was achieved at the first half of the fifth session of the UNEA and includes an explanation on why the second half of the fifth session is important. Delegates should begin with this resource to understand what the UNEA is and why its work matters.

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International Institute for Sustainable Development. *The United Nations Environment Assembly's Role as a Governance Architect*. 2022. Retrieved 23 October 2022 from: <https://www.iisd.org/articles/unea-governance>

United Nations Environment Assembly. *Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session: Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production (UNEP/EA.4/HLS.1)*. 2019. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: <https://undocs.org/en/UNEP/EA.4/HLS.1>

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United Nations Environment Assembly. *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022. Retrieved 4 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/about-united-nations-environment-assembly>

United Nations Environment Programme. *Committee of Permanent Representatives*. n.d. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/cpr>

United Nations Environment Programme. *Earmarked Contributions*. n.d. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment/funding-and-partnerships/funding-facts/earmarked-contributions>

United Nations Environment Programme. *How is UNEP funded*. n.d. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment/funding-and-partnerships/funding-facts>

United Nations Environment Programme. *Q&A: UN Environment Assembly*. 2022. Retrieved 4 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/qa-un-environment-assembly>

United Nations Environment Programme. *What you need to know about the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 2022. Retrieved 9 September 2022 from: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-un-environment-assembly>

United Nations, General Assembly. *Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation (A/RES/2997(XXVII))*. 1972. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: [https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2997\(XXVII\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2997(XXVII))

United Nations, General Assembly. *The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288)*. 2012. Retrieved 5 September 2022 from: <http://undocs.org/en/A/RES/66/288>

United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. *UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme*. n.d. Retrieved 4 September 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/08/unep-united-nations-environment-programme/>

1. Promoting Multilateralism to Combat Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution

The COVID-19 pandemic caused close to six million deaths in two years whereas indoor and outdoor air pollution alone causes seven million premature deaths every year.²⁸

Introduction

The world is facing unprecedented environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.²⁹ As a result the world is experiencing dangerous environmental disruptions across the natural world.³⁰ Species are migrating in search of more livable conditions, nature and biodiversity loss are compromising human health and prosperity, and annually 20-40% of land is being degraded.³¹ These issues are prevalent across the world and require a comprehensive and collaborative approach from the international community to tackle these various issues.³² Promoting multilateralism is key to addressing these challenges as it enables nations to work together towards a common goal, share knowledge and resources, and create a more sustainable future for all.³³

Multilateralism is a core principle of the United Nations (UN), enshrined in the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945).³⁴ It is based on the conviction that cooperation among Member States and the pooling of resources and efforts are necessary to solve global problems and achieve common goals.³⁵ The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) defines climate change as a change in the climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity, altering the composition of the global atmosphere in addition to the natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.³⁶ While the *Convention on Biological Diversity* defines biodiversity loss as the decrease in the variety and abundance of different species, genetic types, and ecosystems that occurs when living organisms are forced to adapt to changing conditions or when they face disruptions to their habitats.³⁷ The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) defines pollution as the direct or indirect introduction by humans of substances or energy into the environment resulting in deleterious effects such as harm to living resources, hazard to human health, hindrance to aquatic activities, impairment of water quality and reduction of amenities.³⁸ Finally, another important phenomenon to consider is climate injustice which refers to the fact that indigenous peoples, and other underrepresented communities, are disproportionately affected by climate change.³⁹

UNEA is at the forefront of combatting these pressing environmental issues while utilizing multilateralism.⁴⁰ UNEA brings together Member States and stakeholders from around the world to discuss and develop solutions.⁴¹ Through UNEA, Member States can discuss and negotiate policies and

²⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *A leap forward for environmental action*. 2022.

²⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Global Environment Outlook - GEO-6: Summary for Policy Makers*. United Nations, 2019.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *A leap forward for environmental action*. 2022.

³² United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

³³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations*. 2020.

³⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations*. 2020; *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Glossary of Climate Change Acronyms and Terms*. 2021.

³⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity. *Biodiversity Loss*. n.d.

³⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Pollution*. n.d.

³⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *A leap forward for environmental action*. 2022.

⁴⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *About UNEA*. 2021.

⁴¹ Ibid.

strategies to address the causes and impacts of climate change, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting the transition to a low-carbon economy.⁴² UNEA focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, recognizing the crucial role that ecosystems and biodiversity play in supporting human well-being and sustainable development.⁴³ UNEA is also the primary organization of the UN that addresses the issue of pollution, particularly in the context of the global ocean crisis, by promoting the reduction and prevention of marine pollution and the sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems.⁴⁴ The importance of multilateralism evident in addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution; while progress has been made, specific challenges still persist, such as tackling plastic pollution and finding innovative solutions.⁴⁵

International and Regional Framework

One of the first international frameworks established to prevent ecological pollution was the *Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matters* (London Convention) by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which was an international agreement aimed at preventing marine pollution caused by the dumping of wastes and other harmful substances into the ocean.⁴⁶ The London Convention was adopted in 1972 and led to the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) which is a comprehensive international treaty that governs the rights and responsibilities of nations regarding the use and conservation of the world's oceans and their resources and was adopted in 1982 and entered into force in 1994.⁴⁷

The *Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer* (Montreal Protocol) was then established in 1987 and is part of the Ozone Treaties alongside the *Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer* (Vienna Convention).⁴⁸ The Montreal Protocol established a timeline to phase out the production and consumption of substances known as ozone-depleting substances (ODS).⁴⁹ It included provisions for the reduction of production and consumption of ODS, the establishment of national ozone units to oversee compliance, the provision of technical and financial assistance to developing countries, and the promotion of research and development of ozone-friendly alternatives.⁵⁰ The Montreal Protocol has been successful in achieving its goals and has led to significant reductions in the production and consumption of ODS worldwide contributing to the recovery of the ozone layer and has had positive impacts on human health, agriculture, and the environment.⁵¹ The Montreal Protocol is considered one of the most successful environmental treaties, demonstrating global cooperation in addressing a pressing environmental issue and serves as a model for international environmental governance, paving the way for future global agreements on environmental protection.⁵²

Other global agreements to tackle climate related issues followed. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro led to the establishment several milestone conventions, known as the Rio Conventions.⁵³ The *Convention on Biological Diversity*

⁴² United Nations Environment Programme. *About UNEA*. 2021.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *A leap forward for environmental action*. 2022.

⁴⁶ International Maritime Organization. *Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter*. 1975.

⁴⁷ United Nations. *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. 1994.

⁴⁸ United Nations Environment Programme, Ozone Secretariat. *The Ozone Treaties*. 2019.

⁴⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer*. 1987.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ United Nations Environment Programme, News. *Thirty years on, what is the Montreal Protocol doing to protect the ozone?* 2019.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ United Nations. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1992; Convention on Biological Diversity. *History of the Convention*. n.d.

(CBD) was one of the Rio Conventions and currently has been ratified by 196 parties.⁵⁴ The CBD aims to conserve biodiversity, promote sustainable use of its components, and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.⁵⁵ The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) was another Rio Convention which aims to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.⁵⁶ The treaty provides a framework for multilateral cooperation on climate change and has been ratified by 197 parties.⁵⁷ It established the Conference of the Parties as the supreme decision-making body of the Convention and they meet annually unless decided otherwise.⁵⁸ The UNCED reconvened in 1994 in Rio de Janeiro and adopted the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification* (UNCCD) and it entered force in 1996.⁵⁹ The UNCCD aims to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in affected regions with its objectives including the restoration of degraded land, sustainable land management practices, and promoting the participation of local communities in combating desertification.⁶⁰

With an increasing rise in plastic usage at the turn of the century, in 2001, the UNEP adopted the *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants* (POPs) in Stockholm.⁶¹ The Stockholm Convention aims to eliminate or restrict the production, use, and release of specific POPs which are chemical substances that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in living organisms, and have the potential to travel long distances through air and water having severe impacts on human health and ecosystems, including causing cancer, disrupting hormonal systems, and harming wildlife.⁶² The convention encourages the development and use of alternative chemicals and technologies that are safer and have lower impacts on human health and the environment.⁶³ The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) are updated reports produced by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and provide a comprehensive assessment of the state of the global environment, including issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.⁶⁴ The reports aim to provide decision-makers with the scientific information they need to develop policies and strategies to address these challenges.⁶⁵ In 2013, UNEP established the *Minamata Convention on Mercury* (Minamata Convention) to address the global issue of mercury pollution and its adverse effects on human health and the environment.⁶⁶ The convention established a framework for multilateral cooperation to promote technical assistance, capacity-building, and technology transfer in order to support the implementation of mercury control measures.⁶⁷

During the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UNFCCC in 2015, the *Paris Agreement* was adopted which is an international agreement treaty that aims to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.⁶⁸ The treaty includes provisions for countries to regularly report on their emissions and

⁵⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity. *History of the Convention*. n.d.; United Nations Environment Programme. *Conference for the adoption of the convention on biological diversity (UNEP/Bio.Dev/CONF/1)*. 1992.

⁵⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Conference for the adoption of the convention on biological diversity (UNEP/Bio.Dev/CONF/1)*. 1992.

⁵⁶ United Nations. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. 1992.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Conference of the Parties*. n.d.

⁵⁹ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. *Convention*. n.d.

⁶⁰ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. *Convention Text*. 2022.

⁶¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPS)*. 2019.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. *Global Environment Outlook - GEO-6: Summary for Policy Makers*. 2019.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Minamata Convention on Mercury*. 2013.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Twenty-first session. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

progress towards their climate goals.⁶⁹ In 2021, the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the UNFCCC established the Glasgow Climate Pact will outline the global commitments and actions to further enhance climate ambition and implementation of the Paris Agreement.⁷⁰

Additionally in 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution 70/1, “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” which initiated the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁷¹ SDG 13 on “Climate Action” focuses on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, calling for strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and integrating climate change measures into Member States’ policies.⁷² SDG 6 on “Clean Water and Sanitation” touches upon the issue of ecosystem restoration, such as wetland conservation and reforestation, contributing to improving water quality, water availability, and overall water resource management.⁷³ SDG 14 on “Life Below Water” aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources addressing issues such as marine pollution, overfishing, and ocean acidification, which contribute to biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.⁷⁴ SDG 15 on “Life on Land” is centered around protecting, restoring, and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems addressing deforestation, desertification, habitat loss, and biodiversity conservation.⁷⁵ The last and most relevant is SDG 17 on “Partnerships for the Goals” emphasizing the importance of multilateralism and global cooperation in achieving sustainable development.⁷⁶ SDG 17 promotes partnerships between Member States, civil society, and the private sector to mobilize resources, share knowledge, and address issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.⁷⁷

Role of the International System

As the UN’s primary governing body on environmental issues, UNEA is crucial in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change, developing policies, and in negotiating strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.⁷⁸ The sixth session of the UNEA (UNEA-6) will be held from 26 February to 1 March 2024 at the headquarters of the UNEP, in Nairobi, Kenya.⁷⁹ The overall theme for UNEA-6 is “Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.”⁸⁰ UNEA resolution 2/17 on “Enhancing the work of the United Nations Environment Programme in facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions” and UNEA resolution 2/11 on “International environmental policy and governance issues: relationship between the United Nations Environment Programme and multilateral environmental agreements” (2016) encourages UNEA to work closely with other UN bodies, governments, and stakeholders to support the implementation of environmental policies and enhance multilateral environmental governance.⁸¹ Additionally, these resolutions call for enhancing the UNEP’s

⁶⁹ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Twenty-first session. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

⁷⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *The Glasgow Climate Pact – Key Outcomes from COP26*. 2021.

⁷¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6)*. n.d.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ United Nations Environment Assembly, Second session. *International environmental policy and governance issues: relationship between the United Nations Environment Programme and multilateral environmental agreements (UNEP/EA.2/11)*. 2016; United Nations Environment Assembly, Second session. *Enhancing the*

work in promoting cooperation, collaboration, and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions, such as the CBD and the UNCCD, to ensure the effective implementation of these conventions and the achievement of their objectives.⁸² UNEA resolution 2/11 on “Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics” and UNEA resolution 4/6 on “Marine Litter and Microplastics” aims to address the growing problem of marine litter through strengthened scientific evidence, enhanced international cooperation, and improved waste management practices.⁸³ Additionally, UNEA resolution 5/2 on “Sustainable nitrogen management” and resolution 3/4 on “Environment and Health” recognize the need for international cooperation and capacity building to support the implementation of sustainable nitrogen management practices and calls for action to address environmental risks to health, including those related to climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.⁸⁴

The UNEA has also worked with several other UN organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), forming a strategic partnership to support the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030.⁸⁵ UNEA and FAO work together to raise awareness, share knowledge, facilitate capacity-building activities, and support Member States in their efforts to restore degraded ecosystems by combining their expertise, resources, and networks.⁸⁶ The partnership recognizes the critical role of ecosystem restoration in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and seeks to promote integrated approaches that link ecological restoration with sustainable agriculture, forestry, and fisheries practices.⁸⁷

Addressing this issue from the development side is the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) which is the United Nations agency for human settlements and works to advance the integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and pollution management into urban planning and development processes.⁸⁸ The United Nations Habitat Assembly, which is the governance body of UN-Habitat convenes every four years and held the second session of the from 5 to 9 June 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya with the theme “A sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in times of global crises.”⁸⁹ UN-Habitat collaborates with other UN agencies, Member States governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to promote partnerships and synergies in tackling challenges pertaining to climate change, biodiversity, and pollution.⁹⁰ UN-Habitat contributes to the global dialogue on sustainable urbanization through participation in international conferences, policy advocacy, and the development of guidelines and tools for urban planning and management.⁹¹

work of the United Nations Environment Programme in facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions: revised draft resolution (UNEP/EA.2/Res.17). 2016.

⁸² United Nations Environment Assembly, Second session. *International environmental policy and governance issues: relationship between the United Nations Environment Programme and multilateral environmental agreements (UNEP/EA.2/11)*. 2016; United Nations Environment Assembly, Second session. *Enhancing the work of the United Nations Environment Programme in facilitating cooperation, collaboration and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions: revised draft resolution (UNEP/EA.2/Res.17)*. 2016.

⁸³ United Nations Environment Assembly, Second session. *Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics (UNEP/EA.2/Res.11)*. 2016; United Nations Environment Assembly, Fourth session. *Marine Litter and Microplastics (UNEA/EA.4/Res.6)*. 2019.

⁸⁴ United Nations Environment Assembly, Third session. *Environment and Health (UNEA/EA.3/Res.4)*. 2018; United Nations Environment Assembly, Fifth session. *Sustainable nitrogen management (UNEA/EA.5/Res.2)*. 2021.

⁸⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*. 2021.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ UN-Habitat. *About Us*. n.d.

⁸⁹ UN-Habitat, Second session. *Draft procedural decisions for the consideration of the second open-ended meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat for the preparations for the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly (HSP/OECPR.2023/CRP3)*. 2023.

⁹⁰ UN-Habitat. *About Us*. n.d.

⁹¹ Ibid.

In 2018, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the UNEP established the United Nations Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) to help the UN system address climate related risks systematically.⁹² The CSM promotes multilateralism in combating climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution by recognizing that these environmental challenges are interconnected with broader peace, security, and development issues, requiring collaborative efforts among nations to find sustainable solutions.⁹³ The latest progress report from the CSM (2021) highlights the growing recognition of climate change as a significant threat to international peace and security, emphasizing the need for coordinated action at various levels while also outlining the impact of climate change on vulnerable regions, including conflicts over natural resources, displacement of populations, and socio-economic disruptions.⁹⁴ In 2022, IMO is marked fifty years since the adoption of the London Convention which, along with the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, constituted the first steps to truly put the environment at center stage and take responsibility for the harm humans have done to the ocean.⁹⁵

Addressing Plastic Pollution

Approximately 7 billion of the 9.2 billion tons of plastic produced from 1950-2017 has remained as non-biodegradable plastic waste, ending up in landfills or dumped into the oceans.⁹⁶ In 2021, a report by the UNEA, *From Pollution to Solution*, UNEP found that plastics constitute at least 85% of all marine litter.⁹⁷ Plastic pollution can alter various habitats and natural processes, reducing ecosystems' ability to adapt to climate change, directly affecting millions of people and animal livelihoods.⁹⁸ The environmental, social, economic and health risks of plastics need to be assessed alongside other environmental stressors, like climate change, ecosystem degradation, and resource management.⁹⁹ Multilateralism is crucial in tackling plastic pollution as it enables coordinated efforts among nations, fostering information sharing, best practices exchange, and collaborative solutions to effectively address the transboundary nature of this global environmental challenge.¹⁰⁰

Despite the efforts to tackle this issue, challenges persist within Member States such as ensuring compliance with plastic bans, lack of available and affordable alternatives to plastic products, and improper disposal facilities leading to the issue of microplastics.¹⁰¹

Plastics pose a particularly difficult challenge to solve due to their pervasive presence in various ecosystems, their potential impacts on human health, and their persistence in the environment.¹⁰² The *Basel Convention on the control of Transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal* (Basel Convention) (1992) was the first global, legally binding instrument that addresses plastic pollution.¹⁰³ It regulates the transboundary movement of plastic waste and commits countries to better managing plastic pollution.¹⁰⁴ In 2019, at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Basel Convention, Member States launched the Partnership on Plastic Waste, which has financed 23 projects

⁹² United Nations Environment Programme. *Climate Security Mechanism (CSM)*. n.d.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ United Nations, Climate Security Mechanism. *Progress Report: May 2021*. 2021.

⁹⁵ International Maritime Organization. *Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter*. 1975.

⁹⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Plastic Pollution*. n.d.

⁹⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *From Pollution to Solution: a global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution*. 2021.

⁹⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Plastic Pollution*. n.d.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Plastic Pollution*. n.d.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Microplastics*. n.d.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ United Nations Environment Programme. *Basel Convention on the control of Transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal*. 1992.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

designed to prevent plastic pollution and encourage businesses and states to reuse plastic products.¹⁰⁵ Those initiatives include efforts to limit ocean pollution in Cameroon, bolster recycling in Thailand, and discourage restaurants in China from using single-use plastic takeout containers.¹⁰⁶ These efforts have proven to be useful at dealing with limiting plastic pollution but only includes half the world's governments among its members.¹⁰⁷ More participants are required to make further inroads to effectively minimize the generation of plastic wastes and bring them under environmentally sound management.¹⁰⁸

Microplastics are small plastic particles measuring up to 5mm in diameter, which have experienced a significant increase in concentrations in ocean surface waters over the past forty years due to plastic debris breakdown, microbeads in personal care products, and synthetic fibers released during washing.¹⁰⁹ Microplastics pose major human health risks and dangers to the bio diverse and rich oceans and waterways.¹¹⁰ Managing microplastics requires a comprehensive approach that combines prevention, reduction, and proper waste management for which there is a lack of policies and regulations to minimize plastic pollution, promoting sustainable production and consumption practices, enhancing waste management infrastructure, and raising awareness among the public and industries about the impacts of microplastics.¹¹¹ Several Member States have already employed recommendations stemming from UNEA to tackle microplastics, one of which is the implementation of legislation that bans or restricts the use of microbeads in personal care and cosmetic products.¹¹²

During the fifth session, the UNEA passed resolution 5/14 titled "End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument," which highlights the urgent need to address the issue of plastic pollution and calls for the development of an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.¹¹³ Resulting with the proposal of establishing an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to work towards a legally binding global agreement.¹¹⁴ The instrument is to be based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic.¹¹⁵ By the end of 2024, the INC is expected to present a legally binding instrument, which would reflect diverse alternatives to address the full lifecycle of plastics, the design of reusable and recyclable products and materials, and the need for enhanced international collaboration to facilitate access to technology, capacity building and scientific and technical cooperation.¹¹⁶

Promoting Innovations for Ecosystem Restoration

UNEA recognizes that the SDGs cannot be achieved without transformative changes in the way societies produce and consume goods and services.¹¹⁷ Transformative change for these processes stress the need for technological and other innovations towards ecosystem restoration to promote sustainable

¹⁰⁵ Basel Convention. *Plastic Waste Partnership: Overview*. 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Microplastics*. n.d.

¹¹⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Microplastics, microbeads, and single-use plastics poisoning sea life and affecting humans*. 2019.

¹¹¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Microplastics*. n.d.

¹¹² US Food & Drug Administration. *The Microbead-Free Waters Act: FAQs*. 2022.

¹¹³ United Nations Environment Assembly, Fifth session. *End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument (UNEP/EA.5/Res.14)*. 2021.

¹¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. *World leaders set sights on plastic pollution*. 2022.

¹¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution*. n.d.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

development.¹¹⁸ SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) directly address ecosystem restoration and illustrate the cross-cutting impacts on environmental, social, and economic challenges.¹¹⁹ UNEA also encourages Member States, international organizations, and other stakeholders to collaborate and share best practices on innovative solutions for sustainable development through several resolutions including UNEA resolution 4/10 on Innovation on biodiversity and land degradation, UNEA resolution 3/5 on Investing in innovative environmental solutions for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs, and UNEA resolution 5/5 on Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development.¹²⁰

UNEA recognizes that ecosystem restoration efforts play a crucial role in addressing climate change since planting trees and restoring forest ecosystems help sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, acting as a natural carbon sink.¹²¹ The UN Forum on Forests discussed how several programs have been initiated in several Member States such as Jamaica, Guatemala, and India to increase forest area, however these efforts require further capacity to meet target goals set for these various regions.¹²² UNEA also recognizes that restoring degraded peatlands and wetlands prevents the release of stored carbon into the atmosphere and helps regulate water cycles.¹²³ The *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat* (Convention on Wetlands) is an international treaty that aims to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands.¹²⁴ This was adopted in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971 and came into force in 1975 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹²⁵ The *Ramsar Convention* has been instrumental in raising global awareness about the importance of wetlands and the need for their protection and it has facilitated international collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the implementation of wetland conservation and management initiatives.¹²⁶ Through its efforts, the convention contributes to biodiversity conservation, water resource management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the overall sustainability of wetland ecosystems but requires further efforts from Member States to effectively use available resources.¹²⁷

Another innovative solution for ecosystem restoration includes the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.¹²⁸ is a 10-year initiative by the UN General Assembly to prevent, halt, and reverse ecosystem degradation while promoting restoration as a strategy for mitigating climate change, conserving biodiversity, and enhancing food and water security.¹²⁹ The UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration runs from 2021 to 2030 and provides a framework for governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders to collaborate and invest in ecosystem restoration activities at a large

¹¹⁸ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ United Nations Environment Assembly, Fourth session. *Marine Litter and Microplastics (UNEP/EA.4/Res.6)*. 2019; United Nations Environment Assembly, Third session. *Investing in innovative environmental solutions for accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNEP/EA.3/Res.5)*. 2018; United Nations Environment Assembly, Fifth session. *Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development (UNEP/EA.5/Res.5)*. 2021.

¹²¹ United Nations Forum on Forests. *Speakers Call for Concrete Forest-Based Actions to Combat Climate Change, Advance Sustainable Development, as United Nations Forum Commences Session*. 2023.

¹²² United Nations Forum on Forests. *Speakers Call for Concrete Forest-Based Actions to Combat Climate Change, Advance Sustainable Development, as United Nations Forum Commences Session*. 2023.

¹²³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat*. 1971.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat*. 1971.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*. 2021.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

scale, with the goal of restoring 350 million hectares of degraded and deforested lands by 2030.¹³⁰ The Decade is led by UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in collaboration with other UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and indigenous peoples' and local communities' groups.¹³¹ The UNCCD also plays a key role in promoting sustainable land management and addressing the underlying causes of desertification.¹³²

Member states are responsible for implementing policies, regulations, and programs that encourage and facilitate ecosystem restoration efforts, as well as providing funding and resources to support these initiatives.¹³³ Ecosystem restoration can help combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while also helping to conserve biodiversity and reducing pollution by improving the health and functioning of ecosystems.¹³⁴ By promoting multilateralism and international cooperation, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration can help to scale up and accelerate restoration efforts, leading to more effective and efficient solutions to these pressing environmental issues.¹³⁵ While progress has been made, ongoing challenges remain, including knowledge-sharing and capacity-building efforts to effectively implement and scale up innovative approaches for ecosystem restoration, ensuring a sustainable future for our planet.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Member States face a multitude of challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, endangering natural habitats and processes.¹³⁷ To tackle these issues, existing efforts need to be appropriately expanded and coordinated by Member States.¹³⁸ UNEA serves as a platform to develop effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to strengthen existing environmental habitat and processes while developing ecosystem restoration plans.¹³⁹ While the INC is developing a legally binding agreement for Member States to comprehensively approach the full lifecycle of plastic and prevent further disruption of the environment, there can be more done by the cooperation of Member States to tackle this issue.¹⁴⁰ UNEA also recognizes that the current targets set by the SDGs cannot be achieved without radical changes in how societies produce and consume goods and services.¹⁴¹ The UN system recommends that Member States work on promoting innovations towards ecosystem restoration which would help achieve SDGs that combat climate change, conserve biodiversity, and reduce pollution thereby improving the health and functioning of the environment.¹⁴²

Further Research

Delegates should consider the following questions when conducting their research: How has UNEA addressed matters relating to climate change, biodiversity, and pollution in the past and how should it look to address these issues moving forwards? How does UNEA promote multilateralism in its mandate and practices? How can Member States combat plastic pollution and prevent the disruption of various

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. *Convention Text*. 2022.

¹³³ United Nations Environment Programme. *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*. 2021.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ United Nations. *Biodiversity – our strongest natural defense against climate change*. n.d.

¹³⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *A leap forward for environmental action*. 2022.

¹³⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6)*. n.d.

¹⁴⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *World leaders set sights on plastic pollution*. 2022; United Nations Environment Programme. *Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution*. n.d.

¹⁴¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹⁴² United Nations Environment Programme. *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*. 2021.

habitats and environmental processes? How can UNEA promote innovations to drive ecosystem restoration?

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The UNFCCC serves as a key resource for understanding the global efforts to address climate change, as well as the various initiatives, mechanisms, and policies that have been developed to mitigate and adapt to its impacts. It provides an essential framework for delegates discussing and debating the topic at hand, provides solutions that have been implemented at both the national and international levels, and can serve as a foundation for creating effective and comprehensive climate action plans.

United Nations Environment Programme. *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*. 2021. Retrieved 03 July 2023 from: <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

This is a valuable resource for delegates because it provides important information on the international effort to restore degraded ecosystems and the role that the UNEA and Member States play in achieving this goal. This resource can help delegates understand the significance of ecosystem restoration in addressing global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and provide them with insights into the innovative approaches and technologies that can be used to achieve ecosystem restoration. It also provides examples of successful restoration projects and initiatives around the world, which can inspire delegates to develop their own innovative solutions to promote ecosystem restoration.

United Nations Environment Programme. *Basel Convention on the control of Transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal*. 1992. Retrieved 03 July 2023 from: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/basel-convention-control-transboundary-movements-hazardous-wastes>

This was the first ever global legislation that dealt with plastic pollution among other disposal of non-biodegradable items. It regulates the transboundary movement of plastic waste and commits countries to better managing plastic pollution. Delegates will find this useful as it establishes a great baseline for dealing with plastic pollution and provides the starting point for all delegates as most Member States ratified this document.

United Nations Environment Programme. *Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution*. n.d. Retrieved 03 July 2023 from: <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment/inc-plastic-pollution>

This is a great resource for delegates to understand the current state of the topic. It provides an up-to-date realistic entity that is working on the same issue that they are presented with. It will enable delegates to work alongside the real UN and develop ideas and strategies in real-time. Delegates will be excited at the prospect of developing their ideas and comparing it with the INC as time progresses.

United Nations Environment Programme. *Sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6)*. n.d. Retrieved 03 July 2023 from: <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea-6>

This can be useful for delegates as it provides the agenda items for the next session to be held in 2024. It is particularly useful since the theme directly ties into the topic at hand. Additionally, it includes information on the participation and engagement of civil society, youth, and other stakeholders in the assembly, which can inspire delegates to seek opportunities for collaboration and advocacy outside of their formal negotiations.

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2. Promoting Resource Efficiency in Urban Development

Introduction

Urban settlements use 75% of all natural resources worldwide and are responsible for 50% of global resource extraction.¹⁴³ The total number of buildings, or building stock, in urban settlements is expected to double from 2020 to 2060.¹⁴⁴ The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) recently estimated that to maintain a certain standard of living as the global population continues to grow, resource efficiency in urban settlements necessary to ensure the responsible use of global resources.¹⁴⁵

UN-Habitat defines resource efficiency as “the sustainable management and use of resources throughout their life cycle, from extraction, transport, transformation, consumption to the disposal of waste, in order to avoid scarcity and harmful environmental impacts.”¹⁴⁶ The International Resource Panel (IRP) adds the concept of decoupling to this, including the requirement for “increasing human well-being and economic growth while lowering the amount of resources required and negative environmental impacts associated with resource use.”¹⁴⁷ The phrase “standard of living” itself has been defined by a UN Expert Committee in the *Report on International Definition and Measurement of Standards and Levels of Living* (1954) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and includes various indicators which mostly concern the economic situation of the people, ranging, among others, from health to social security, food, employment, housing, and human freedoms.¹⁴⁸

One issue persists around the definition of “urban” settlements: The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) points out that there are separate definitions in different regions of the world and that in some industrialized countries, the standard of living does not differ so much between rural and urban areas.¹⁴⁹ It is therefore advised to differentiate according to population density plus other factors such as the way of life of the inhabitants.¹⁵⁰ In the end, it is necessary to adapt the definition according to every Member State and the living practices of their inhabitants.¹⁵¹ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with its main council, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), is the premier organization within the United Nations (UN) that works at the intersection of environmental policies and city planning.¹⁵² The main factor in this sector is the global fight against climate change.¹⁵³

International and Regional Framework

The current international framework on sustainable human settlements dates back to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat-I), held 1976 in Vancouver, Canada.¹⁵⁴ This conference was convened following the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference), and resulted in the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*, which included recommendations on the allocation of resources and addressed limits in the use of resources by urban

¹⁴³ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, City Resilience Profiling Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019. p. 15; World Green Building Council. *Building to COP*. 2023.

¹⁴⁴ Architecture 2030. *Why the Building Sector?* 2023.

¹⁴⁵ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, City Resilience Profiling Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019. p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, City Resilience Profiling Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019. p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Environment Programme, International Resource Panel. *Glossary*. 2017.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Report on International Definition and Measurement of Standards and Levels of Living*. 1954.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, Statistics Division. *Population density and urbanization*. 2017. Paras. 100 – 103.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² United Nations Environment Programme. *Cities and Climate Change*. n.d.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations Conferences. *United Nations Conference on Human Settlements: Habitat I*. n.d.

settlements¹⁵⁵ The second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat-II) was hosted twenty years later in Istanbul, leading to the adoption of the *Habitat Agenda* (1992) by 171 Member States and a revitalization of the efforts by UN-Habitat, as it provided further financing for the Habitat-Secretariat and put the topic into the focus of the Member States again.¹⁵⁶

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on the twentieth anniversary of the Stockholm conference.¹⁵⁷ This conference, also known as “Earth Summit”, resulted in the foundation of the *United Nations Framework on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*.¹⁵⁸ The latter includes the principles of reducing unsustainable consumption patterns, internalizing environmental costs, and protecting the environment.¹⁵⁹ The UNFCCC has been ratified by 198 parties, including all UN Member States.¹⁶⁰ It is currently addressing climate-friendly human settlements as part of the Climate Action Pathway, an initiative launched in the scope of the Marrakesh Partnership.¹⁶¹ The Marrakesh Partnership is an initiative on the implementation of measures to fight climate change that has been launched as part of the *Paris Agreement* at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21) in Paris, France, in 2015.¹⁶²

In 2002, the Plan of Implementation of the Johannesburg Declaration, which was adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, included some measures on sustainable urban development like efficient transport solutions and urban land use.¹⁶³ In 2016, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat-III) in Quito, Ecuador, resulted in another document that now contains the latest comprehensive international framework on human settlements: The *New Urban Agenda and the Quito Declaration on Cities and Human Settlements for All* (New Urban Agenda).¹⁶⁴ This was the first official international declaration on human settlements after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹⁶⁵ The SDGs were established by the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.¹⁶⁶ The 2030 Agenda sets the goals that Member States want to achieve in their fight for sustainable development.¹⁶⁷ The New Urban Agenda includes a clear framework on the implementation of measures for achieving the SDGs.¹⁶⁸ SDG 11, titled “Sustainable Cities and Communities” is particularly relevant as it pushes towards the goal of achieving inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban settlements and communities for Member

¹⁵⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*. 1976.

¹⁵⁶ United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *Learn more about us*. 2023.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations Conferences. *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*. n.d.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations, Conference on Environment and Development. *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*. 1992.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. n.d.

¹⁶¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Human Settlements – Climate Action Pathway*. n.d.; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Report of the Conference of Parties on its twenty-first session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015 (FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1)*. 2015.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*. 2002.

¹⁶⁴ United Nations Conferences. *United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development: Habitat III*. n.d.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development Goals. *The 17 Goals*. n.d.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ United Nations Conferences. *United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development: Habitat III*. n.d.

States.¹⁶⁹ This goes hand in hand with SDG 12, titled “Sustainable Consumption and Production”, which aims to ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns in all areas.¹⁷⁰

Role of the International System

The topic of resource efficiency in urban development is addressed by various specialized agencies and committees, as it intersects with various fields of work, including human settlements, the environment, climate change and greenhouse gases, and resource usage.¹⁷¹ Some bodies that are dealing with this issue are UN-Habitat, UNEP, UNFCCC, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).¹⁷² Some major initiatives have been launched by those bodies: The Greener Cities Partnership as a collaboration between UN-Habitat and UNEP has been founded after the Habitat-III conference and has one of its focus areas in the field of resource-efficient urban settlements.¹⁷³ The Greener Cities Partnership utilizes information sharing, analysis and advice, tools development, and practice and actions to address the issue of resource efficient urban development.¹⁷⁴ The World Urban Forum (WUF) is a conference that was founded in 2001 and is regularly convened by UN-Habitat to discuss sustainable urbanization and act as an inclusive, non-legislative platform for it.¹⁷⁵ The last WUF took place in Katowice, Poland, in 2022 under the title “Transforming our cities for a better urban future.”¹⁷⁶ The upcoming WUF will take place in Egypt in November 2024 and shall serve as a review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁷⁷ The UNEA Cities and Regions Summits are hosted under the umbrella of UNEA’s regular sessions and focus on specific topics, with the first one in 2019 dealing with the topic of “Innovation for Livable and Sustainable Cities: Multi-Level and Integrated Urban Systems” and the second one in 2022 with the topic of “Flip the Script: Cities and Nature.”¹⁷⁸

The issue of resource efficiency in urban development is also subject to initiatives launched by several regional organizations including the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), and their subsidiary organizations.¹⁷⁹ In the European Union (EU), best practices and

¹⁶⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. n.d.

¹⁷⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 12: Ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns*. n.d.

¹⁷¹ UN-Habitat, City Resilience Profiling Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019.

¹⁷² UN-Habitat, City Resilience Profiling Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019; United Nations Environment Programme. *Cities and Climate Change*. n.d.; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Human Settlements – Climate Action Pathway*. n.d.; United Nations Environment Programme, International Resource Panel. *Reports*. 2021; United Nations Development Programme. *Sustainable Urbanization Strategy*. 2016; United Nations, International Telecommunications Union. *United for Smart Sustainable Cities*. 2023..

¹⁷³ United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *Greener Cities Partnership (UN-Habitat and UN-Environment)*. 2023.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *World Urban Forum*. 2022.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *WUF11*. 2022.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *The Government of Egypt and UN-Habitat announce dates for the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum*. 2023.

¹⁷⁸ United Nations Environment Assembly. *Fourth United Nations Environment Assembly – City Summit*. 2019.; United Nations Environment Programme. *2nd UNEA Cities and Regions Summit – “Flip the Script: Cities and Nature”*. 2022.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. *Urbanization and Development Section*. n.d.; United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific. *Cities for a Sustainable Future*. n.d.; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Sustainable Development and Human Settlements*. 2023.; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. *Sustainable urban development*. 2022.

reports were published by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) in 2015, highlighting the need for resource-efficient cities and proposing solutions for reaching resource efficiency.¹⁸⁰ The African Union (AU), included sustainable human settlements in its *Agenda 2063* (2013), expressing the aspiration to have a modern infrastructure that provides all human necessities in sustainable cities.¹⁸¹ The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) launched the Smart Green ASEAN Cities program in 2021, funded by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the EU.¹⁸² It aims to mitigate problems from high urbanization rates in ASEAN by focusing on green technology and digital solutions.¹⁸³ The Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA) contributed to a data collection on the effects of urban policies and interventions in the field of health and environment as part of the ongoing Salud Urbana en América Latina (SALURBAL) project.¹⁸⁴

Promoting Resource Efficient Urban Transport Solutions

Transport activity for passengers and freight is predicted to double from 2005 to 2050 globally.¹⁸⁵ Two-thirds of the global fleet in 2050 is expected to be in Member States that are not a part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).¹⁸⁶ Half of the population in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is estimated to still be living in rural areas in 2030, thereby relying on suburban and regional transport to get into urban settlements.¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile, an increase in individual automobile usage leads to more congestion, noise, air pollution, road accidents, and thus health problems.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, it leads to low density city expansion and suburbanization, which in turn results in an ineffective resource usage.¹⁸⁹ Increased road congestion leads to an increase in public spending on road building and maintenance.¹⁹⁰ This is considered to be ineffective government investments, as congestion costs for the local economy are only reduced by about eleven cents for every dollar that is invested in road construction to fight road congestion.¹⁹¹

A study estimates 20% of all premature mortality worldwide may be preventable by changing current urban transport practices.¹⁹² This premature mortality mainly comes from the detrimental health effects of the increased exposure to air pollution, noise, heat, and a lack of green spaces in urban settlements.¹⁹³ The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the current, automotive transport-based, urban transport system leads to at least four million premature deaths per year just due to air pollution, not including road accidents.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁰ European Environmental Agency. *Resource-efficient cities: vital step towards urban sustainability in Europe*. 2020.

¹⁸¹ African Union. *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. 2013.

¹⁸² United Nations, Capital Development Fund. *Smart Green ASEAN Cities: New initiative to promote sustainable and smart cities in ASEAN*. 2021.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Urban Health Network for Latin America and the Caribbean. *Policy Evaluations*. 2020.

¹⁸⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable transport and air pollution*. 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable transport, sustainable development – Interagency report for the second global sustainable transport conference*. 2021.

¹⁸⁸ Peñalosa. *The Role of Transport in Urban Development Policy*. 2005.

¹⁸⁹ European Environmental Agency. *Urban sustainability issues — Resource-efficient cities: good practice*. 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Peñalosa. *The Role of Transport in Urban Development Policy*. 2005; Langer et al. *The effect of government highway spending on road users' congestion costs*. 2006.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Mueller et al. *Urban and Transport Planning Related Exposures and Mortality: A Health Impact Assessment for Cities*. 2017.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ United Nations, World Health Organization. *Ambient (outdoor) air pollution*. 2022 ;

As such, UNEP supports its partners for a green ground transport sector primarily by promoting eco-friendly, low-carbon transport solutions to prevent growing emissions.¹⁹⁵ This includes several initiatives: first, the Share the Road-initiative, which aims to systematically include non-motorized transport (NMT) infrastructure in urban road investments.¹⁹⁶ It was launched in 2008 and provides technical assistance and guidance in NMT projects to Member States.¹⁹⁷ Next, the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV) is a public-private initiative established in 2002 working on cleaner and more ecofriendly fuels.¹⁹⁸ Its main achievement has been the reduction of sulfur levels in fuel and the end of leaded gasoline in most countries.¹⁹⁹ The partners of this initiative are meant to meet every two years, with the last meeting having taken place in 2019.²⁰⁰ Beginning in 2002, UNEP in collaboration with UNECLAC introduced the Global Initiative on Promoting Bus Rapid Transit and Promoting Sustainable Transport in Latin America: The initiative was meant to create awareness among decision makers on the need of public transport in Latin America.²⁰¹ The first round of this project ended in 2014 as three pilot projects for the cities of Concepción in Chile, San Salvador in El Salvador, and Guatemala City in Guatemala, reached their designated end for this program.²⁰²

The UN Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport for three years from 2014 to 2017.²⁰³ The policy recommendations of this group were later passed on to the Secretary-General, who included the issues and recommendations put forward by the High-Level Advisory Group in the agendas of various summits, including Habitat III and COP 22.²⁰⁴ On a regional level, the European Union called on each of its Member States to implement national support programs for Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) in March 2023.²⁰⁵ ASEAN adopted the *Phnom Penh Declaration on Sustainable Urban Mobility* in 2021.²⁰⁶ It encourages all its Member States to implement SUMP and provides hands-on tools and guidelines for local executives in ASEAN metropolitan areas on drafting these documents, similar to the European SUMP.²⁰⁷

Developing Sustainable and Resource-efficient Building Construction and Operation

The construction and operation of buildings is responsible for 40% of all energy-related emissions worldwide and 50% of all extracted materials.²⁰⁸ While the emissions from the operation of buildings decreased in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it rebounded to about ten gigatons of CO₂ equivalents in 2021.²⁰⁹ The International Energy Agency (IEA) constantly evaluates emissions from the

¹⁹⁵United Nations Environment Programme. *Why does transport matter?* 2021; United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable transport and air pollution*. 2022.

¹⁹⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable transport and air pollution*. 2022.

¹⁹⁷ United Nations Environment Programme. *Why does sharing the road matter?* 2022.

¹⁹⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Partnership for Green Fuels and Vehicles*. 2023.

¹⁹⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, Partnership for Clean Fuel and Vehicles. *PCFV evaluation report*. 2010.

²⁰⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Why does partnership for clean fuels and vehicles matter?* 2021.

²⁰¹ United Nations Environment Programme Collaborating Centre on Energy and Environment. *NESTLAC endorsements*. 2003.

²⁰² Global Environment Facility. *Promoting Sustainable Transport in Latin America (NESTLAC)*. 2023; United Nations Environment Programme Collaborating Centre on Energy and Environment. *NESTLAC endorsements*. 2003.

²⁰³ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. *Sustainable Transport*. 2022; International Union of Railways (UIC) Sustainable Development Unit. *Sustainable Development*. 2018.

²⁰⁴ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. *Sustainable Transport*. 2022.; Vandycke et al. World Bank Blog. *Getting a global initiative off the ground: What can transport learn from energy?* 2017.

²⁰⁵ European Commission. *COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION (EU) 2023/550 of 8 March 2023 on National Support Programmes for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning*. 2023.

²⁰⁶ Association of South-East Asian Nations. *Phnom Penh Declaration on Sustainable Urban Mobility*. 2021.

²⁰⁷ Association of South-East Asian Nations, Sustainable Design of Urban Mobility in Middle-Sized Metropolitan Regions. *Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans*. 2023.

²⁰⁸ World Green Building Council. *Building to COP*. 2023.

²⁰⁹ International Energy Agency. *Buildings*. 2022.

building sector and determines that this sector is not on track to reach the goals of the *Paris Agreement*, demanding rapid change in this sector.²¹⁰ For a net-zero emission scenario, energy consumption of buildings needs to drop by 25%, fossil fuel use for building operation needs to decrease by 40%, and the traditional use of biomass needs to be abandoned in its totality.²¹¹ A major issue in the construction of buildings remains the use of concrete, which is responsible for 8% of global carbon dioxide emissions.²¹² The some solutions to addressing this problem are the usage of wood and injecting CO₂ into the concrete during its curing process.²¹³ The issue remains, however, that wood itself is a scarce resource in some parts of the world, and CO₂-injection and other carbon-capture techniques are not tested at a large enough scale.²¹⁴ Additionally, while efficient buildings are considered a major investment opportunity, there are still major gaps in national building construction codes, with only 26% of all Member States having a mandatory building code.²¹⁵ Another challenge that remains is the potential loss of entire cities due to rising sea levels, as 570 cities, with a total of 800 million inhabitants, are expected to be threatened by rising sea levels by 2050.²¹⁶ This is an issue that policymakers need to consider as they decide upon building codes and locations for the construction of new buildings.²¹⁷

One of the main initiatives in this sector is the Building to COP-coalition, which was founded by the World Green Building Council in preparation for the COP 26 in 2021, in cooperation with the C40 cities initiative of mayors and the UN High-Level Champions in the UNFCCC Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action.²¹⁸ It prepares policies and gives recommendations on their implementation throughout the year between the COPs by UNFCCC.²¹⁹ Some of achievements of its members have been the WorldGBC Guide to Climate Resilience and Adaptation in the Built Environment, which provides guidelines for the implementation of climate resilience strategies across the building sector and the ongoing reporting on progress in greening the construction sector.²²⁰ Another initiative by the UNEP is the Sustainable Buildings and Climate Initiative (SBCI) which has been launched in 2006 and aims to promote energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reduction in building construction.²²¹ It is complemented by the Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction, which was founded at the COP 21 in Paris, France, and which is hosted by UNEP.²²² It aims to provide a trusted platform to set targets and to track progress in the buildings sector, with yearly reports on the issue and regular meet-ups of its members.²²³

Conclusion

While urban settlements still cause large quantities of pollution and use a large amount of resources for their development, they have the ability and opportunity to contribute towards solutions to the climate

²¹⁰ International Energy Agency. *Buildings*. 2022.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Niranjana. Deutsche Welle. *Fixing concrete's carbon footprint*. 2022.

²¹³ Bergman et al. *Comparative Life-Cycle Assessment of a Mass Timber Building and Concrete Alternative*. 2020; Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *Climate Portal – Concrete*. 2021.

²¹⁴ Bergman et al. *Comparative Life-Cycle Assessment of a Mass Timber Building and Concrete Alternative*. 2020; Niranjana. Deutsche Welle. *Fixing concrete's carbon footprint*. 2022.

²¹⁵ World Green Building Council. *Building to COP*. 2023.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ World Green Building Council. *Building to COP*. 2023; C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. *C40 Cities – A global network of mayors taking urgent climate action*. 2023; United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change. *The High-Level Champions*. 2022.

²¹⁹ World Green Building Council. *Building to COP*. 2023.

²²⁰ World Green Building Council. *All built environment initiatives announced at COP27*. 2021.

²²¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable Buildings*. 2022.

²²² United Nations Environment Programme. *GlobalABC – Mission and Vision*. n.d.

²²³ United Nations Environment Programme. *GlobalABC – Mission and Vision*. n.d.; United Nations Environment Programme. *GlobalABC – Tracking Progress*. 2022.; United Nations Environment Programme. *GlobalABC – Events*. 2023.

crisis.²²⁴ UNEA plays a key role in the intersection between environmental policies and urban development.²²⁵ Comprehensive frameworks have been developed including the New Urban Agenda, Paris Agreement, and Global Greener Cities Partnership, but these initiatives still lack effective implementation by national authorities in many cases.²²⁶ There are still major changes needed to reach the objectives set for the achievement of the SDGs 11 and 12.²²⁷ In the field of urban transport, there is a need for a switch from automobile-driven urban transport to NMT and public transport.²²⁸ Another important sector on the path towards resource efficiency remains the construction and operation of buildings, where more investments and innovations are necessary to reach the climate goals set in the *Paris Agreement*.²²⁹ The UNEP plays an important role in these processes through partnerships and the preparation of policy frameworks through its subsidiary bodies.²³⁰

Further Research

As they get into their research, delegates should consider the following questions: What can be done to effectively get the construction and operation of buildings on path to reach the sustainability goals? What should be put on the agenda of the upcoming COP by UNFCCC in the United Arab Emirates in the field of resource efficient urban development? What can be done to promote NMT and public transport in urban settlements? Which possibilities exist to accelerate the implementation of existing initiatives in this sector?

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<https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/cities/>

This webpage provides an overview on the links between resource efficiency and urban settlements. While providing some data and details on the issue, the webpage also offers information on existing resource-efficiency-focused collaborations for the urban sector and available web platforms by the UN. This webpage provides delegates with a good starting point for further research on urban settlements.

United Nations, Secretary-General. *Progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda*. 2022.

Retrieved 09 May 2023 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/76/639>

This is a Quadrennial Report by the UN Secretary-General, which is published every four years in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 71/235. It shows current obstacles and challenges in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda while also providing suggestions for a successful implementation. The most recent quadrennial report was published in 2022 and highlights on the one hand the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation process and the setbacks that occurred while, on the other hand, pointing out successful initiatives and pilot projects that have the potential for expansion.

United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019.

Retrieved 03 May 2023 from: <https://unhabitat.org/urban-resilience-enhancer-resource-efficiency>

This document, published by UN-Habitat, aims to provide a common basis to sketch out possible future fields of action for the promotion of resource efficiency in urban environments. For this sake, it provides data on the so-called “urban metabolism” as well

²²⁴ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, City Resilience Profiling Programme. *Urban Resilience Enhancer: Resource Efficiency*. 2019.

²²⁵ United Nations Environment Programme. *Cities and Climate Change*. n.d.

²²⁶ United Nations, Secretary-General. *Progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda*. 2022; International Energy Agency. *Buildings*. 2022.

²²⁷ United Nations, Statistics Division. *Sustainable Development Goals Progress Chart 2022*. 2022.

²²⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable transport and air pollution*. 2022.

²²⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Sustainable Buildings*. 2022.

²³⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Cities*. n.d.

as hands-on suggestions for stakeholders to evaluate resource efficiency in their projects. It furthermore connects the idea of resource efficiency to the existing framework including the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.

International Energy Agency. *Buildings*. 2022. Retrieved 06 June 2023 from: <https://www.iea.org/reports/buildings>

This is the tracking report for the building sector and the fulfilment of its objectives concerning the Paris Agreement by the International Energy Agency. While highlighting that the building sector is not yet on track to reach the target, it points out key fields of action for the achievement of them. It also provides detailed data on all parts of the issue, facilitating the oversight of where action is most urgently needed and which parts are currently on track.

World Green Building Council. *Building to COP*. 2023. Retrieved 06 June 2023 from: <https://buildingtocop.org/>

The Building to COP-coalition is a group of stakeholders from the building sector who want to work together in preparation for the upcoming COP in the United Arab Emirates. On this webpage, they highlight the needs and possibilities for the buildings sector to reach sustainability within the next years. Main members of the coalition are, among others, the C40 cities campaign, GlobalABC, and the World Resources Institute.

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