

The United Nations System — Common Approach Towards a Pollution-Free Planet

Pollution¹ is one of the triple planetary crises, together with climate change and biodiversity loss. It impedes progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty, food insecurity and hunger, health, inequality, peace, and justice.

Pollution is an insidious and pervasive problem. It poses significant impacts on human health and well-being, the environment, and the overall well-being of our planet. Its deleterious effects are staggering in both scope and scale.

In 2017, recognizing this pressing issue, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) prioritized pollution in the global agenda, issuing a Ministerial Declaration - “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”. In response, an Implementation Plan, “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”, was developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and welcomed in the following year at the fourth session of the UNEA.

In this context, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) decided to establish a Consultative Process on a pollution-free planet to prepare:

- a mapping exercise was conducted to provide a review of current activities and initiatives related to pollution within the UN System.²
- a UN System Common Approach to transitioning towards a pollution-free planet (hereafter referred to as the Common Approach to Pollution).

After seven-month consultation and through a Small Drafting Team (SDT) composed of representatives from FAO, IAEA, OHCHR, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UNIDO, WB, and WHO, (led by three co-chairs from FAO, UNEP, and WHO), the draft Common Approach to Pollution was shared in May 2023 with the wider consultative process and the EMG members and it was finalized in July 2023 for approval of the EMG Senior Officials on 10 October 2030.

Through the Common Approach to Pollution, the UN System expresses a shared recognition of the urgency of acting and a commitment to mainstreaming pollution prevention and reduction through better coordinated efforts. With adequate resources and the integration of this approach

¹ For the purposes of this Common Approach, pollution is understood as the presence or introduction into the environment of substances or energy that cause adverse effects on human health, the environment or living organisms; or exceed the quality or quantity criteria established for certain environmental media.

² Access the report here: EMG (2023). *An Overview of UN Activities and Initiatives Related to Pollution*. Geneva.
<https://unemg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/20.02.23-Mapping-Efforts-Pollution.pdf>

into the UN entities' strategies and work programmes, the UN Systems shall pave the way for a stronger, more coordinated global response towards a pollution-free planet. Through the Common Approach to Pollution, the UN system:

- a. Demonstrates a shared recognition of the urgency of action and a commitment to mainstreaming pollution prevention and reduction into their programmes and operations.
- b. Promotes collaboration and advances coordination to mobilize, accelerate, and scale up the sustainable, inclusive and just transition towards a pollution-free planet;
- c. Provides a framework to leverage and advance existing interagency arrangements that address pollution-related issues.

Following the endorsement of the Common Approach to Pollution, the EMG Senior Officials decided to create an Issue Management Group (IMG) to prepare an implementation plan of the Common Approach to Pollution and report on progress achieved. This plan will guide UN entities in integrating the Common Approach to Pollution within their respective programmes and inform the design and delivery of their assistance strategies to Member States. The implementation plan will be informed of the outcomes of the 2023 SDG Summit, the recently adopted Global Framework on Chemicals, the Science-Policy Panel (whose negotiations are to be concluded in 2024), and other instruments.

Framework of the Common Approach to Pollution

Principles		
Intergenerational equity; participation, access to information and access to justice; polluter pays principle; precautionary principle; leave no one behind; human rights-based approach; prevention; science and evidence-based decision making; circular economy; and the One Health approach.		
Goal	Related SDG	
A pollution-free planet for the health and well-being of people and the environment, where the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all is ensured. This goal implies that pollution is prevented and reduced to levels that are not harmful to human and planetary health and includes the sound management of chemicals and wastes.	All. SDG1: No Poverty Cleaner environments	
Impact Areas		
<u>People</u>: emphasizing the protection and promotion of human rights, health, food security and nutrition, and the well-being of individuals, groups, and communities. <u>Planet</u>: focusing on the preservation and restoration of healthy and productive ecosystems to sustain life on Earth and continue providing ecosystem goods and services for society. <u>Inclusive and sustainable growth</u>: focusing on fostering economic and societal transformation that balances the short-term needs of the present generation with the long-term needs of future generations.		
Objectives	Outcomes	Related SDGs
1. Respect, protect and fulfil human rights, particularly the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.	1.1. The right of access to information about pollution and pollutants for all is promoted and supported.	SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG4. Target 4.7. SDG5. Target 5.5.

		SDG12. Target 12.6 and 12.8. SDG16. Target 16.7 and 16.10.
	1.2. The meaningful and informed participation of all in decision-making processes addressing pollution is enhanced.	SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG5. Target 5.5 Target 6.a and 6.b SDG10. Target 10.2 and 10.6. SDG16. Target 16.7 and 16.b.
	1.3. Accountability and access to effective remedies for harm caused by pollution are increased.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9 Target 6.3 and 6.b SDG10. Target 10.4.
1. Generate and make available knowledge, data and information on pollution to all to facilitate risk-informed decisions and actions.	2.1. Data and knowledge generation, availability and accessibility are enhanced, while progress towards a pollution-free planet is measured.	SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG4. Target 4.7. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG9. Target 9.5. SDG12. Target 12.6 and 12.8. SDG14. Target 14.a. SDG17. Target 17.6.
	2.2. Science-based, evidence-based, risk-informed decision-making is promoted.	SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG9. Target 9.5.

	2.3. Opportunities provided by digital transformation are harnessed.	SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG4. Target 4.7. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG17. Target 17.6, 17.7 and 17.9.
3. Develop and implement policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks, strategies, plans and actions addressing all types and sources of pollution, including promoting circular economy at the international, national, regional and local level.	3.1. The sound and integrated management of chemicals and waste is achieved throughout their life cycle in an integrated manner, in accordance with international frameworks, and through the leveraging of the role of the public and private sectors and engagement of all sectors of development.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.1, 6.3 and 6.a. SDG11. Target 11.6 and 11.b. SDG12. Target 12.3, 12.4 and 12.5 SDG13. Target 13.2. SDG14. Target 14.1. SDG15. Target 15.1, 15.3, 15.4 and 15.5.
	3.2. Policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks, including protocols and incentives, are compliant with human rights obligations and informed by health, environmental, and social standards.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG10. Target 10.4. SDG11. Target 11.6 and 11.b. SDG14. Target 14.1. SDG15. Target 15.9.
	3.3. Policies and legislations, including incentives addressing pollution are implemented, enforced and complied with strengthening capacities.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG11. Target 11.6 and 11.b. SDG12. All targets. SDG13. Target 13.2. SDG14. Target 14.1. SDG15. Target 15.1, 15.3, 15.4 and 15.5.

4. Increase systematic use of cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches to health, notably the One Health approach, to address pollution.	4.1. Linkages between pollution, health, human rights and other societal priorities, such as climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, food security and nutrition, and universal health coverage and primary health care, are understood and taken into account in policy and management.	All SDGs
	4.2. The application of the One Health approach is expanded to encompass pollution prevention and reduction.	SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. SDG6. Target 6.1, 6.3, 6.a. and 6.b SDG12. All targets.
5. Protect vulnerable ecosystems and restore those damaged by pollution, while simultaneously managing ecosystems for pollution prevention and reduction.	5.1. Measures to protect, conserve, manage and restore ecosystems to prevent and reduce pollution and enhance ecosystem resilience are developed and implemented.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.6 SDG9. Target 9.1. SDG11. Target 11.b. SDG12. All targets. SDG14. Target 14.2 and 14.5. SDG15. Target 15.1, 15.3, 15.4 and 15.5.
	5.2. Nature-based solutions are widely recognized as effective means for pollution prevention and reduction.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.6 SDG12. Target 12.2.

	5.3. Pollution prevention and reduction is mainstreamed into landscape and watershed management that takes into account the interconnectedness of resource uses, ecosystems and source-to-sea approach.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.5 and 6.6. SDG12. All targets. SDG14. Target 14.2. SDG15. Target 15.1, 15.3, 15.4 and 15.5.
6. Transform high impact sectors for a pollution-free planet throughout value chains.	6.1. Multi-stakeholder action for pollution prevention and reduction is accelerated in high-impact sectors.	SDG2. Target 2.3 and 2.4 SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG7. Target 7.2, 7.a and 7.b. SDG 8. Target 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4. SDG12. All targets. SDG9. Target 9.1 and 9.4. SDG11. Target 11.6. SDG 17. Target 17.7.
	6.2. Less polluting trade is promoted.	SDG2. Target 2.b SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG 8. Target 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4. SDG12. All targets.
	6.3. Harmful subsidies are removed, subsidies are repurposed, and incentives are provided for pollution prevention and reduction action.	SDG2. Target 2.b SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG7. Target 7.2, 7.a and 7.b.

		SDG17. Target 17.1. SDG 8. Target 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4. SDG9. Target 9.1 and 9.4. SDG11. Target 11.6. SDG12. Targets 12.c. SDG14. Target 14.6.
7. Identify, promote and implement safer and cleaner alternatives and sustainable and resilient infrastructure development.	7.1. Availability and use of safer alternatives are increased.	SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG7. Target 7.2, 7.a and 7.b. SDG9. Target 9.1 and 9.4. SDG11. Target 11.4, 11.5 and 11.6. SDG12. All targets.
	7.2. Infrastructure for pollution prevention and reduction is promoted and strengthened.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG3. Target 3.9 SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG9. Target 9.1 and 9.4. SDG12. All targets. SDG11. Target 11.4, 11.5 and 11.6. SDG13. Target 13.2.
	7.3. Infrastructure resilience is strengthened to prevent and manage pollution risks.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG9. Target 9.1 and 9.4. SDG11. Target 11.4, 11.5 and 11.6. SDG12. All targets.

		SDG13. Target 13.1.
8. Identify, incentivize, and mobilize predictable and sustainable financial resources for pollution-free action and risk reduction.	8.1. Pollution externalities are better accounted for through economic analysis and tools to redirect investments to less-polluting economic activities.	SDG2. Target 2.b. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG7. Target 7.2, 7.a and 7.b. SDG12. All targets.
	8.2. Access to finances for pollution prevention and reduction is increased, including development aid in particular, by realizing co-benefits across environmental and development priorities.	SDG2. Target 2.a. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.a. SDG7. Target 7.a and 7.b. SDG9. Target 9.a. SDG11. Target 11.c. SDG12. All targets. SDG17. Target 17.1, 17.2 and 17.3.
	8.3. Industries are incentivized to follow the polluter pays principle and to internalize the costs of pollution.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG7. Target 7.2, 7.a and 7.b SDG 8. Target 8.2. SDG12. All targets. SDG17. Target 17.1.
9. Raise global awareness about adverse impacts of pollution and the role of consumers in driving sustainable consumption and production, so as to inform and inspire action.	9.1. Awareness of pollution impacts on human rights, health and a healthy environment, food security and nutrition, and the economy is raised through unified messaging and coordinated campaigns.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG4. Target 4.7. SDG6. Target 6.1, 6.3 and 6.a. SDG 8. Target 8.4. SDG12. Target 12.1, 12.7, 12.8, and 12.a SDG13. Target 13.3.

	9.2. Increased demand for fair and just consumption, resulting in adoption of sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods, and responsible consumerism.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG4. Target 4.7. SDG6. Target 6.1 and 6.3. SDG 8. Target 8.4. SDG12. Target 12.1, 12.7, 12.8, and 12.a
10. Prevent and reduce pollution, risks and impacts associated with man-made and natural hazards, conflicts, and humanitarian response.	10.1. Knowledge generation and exchange, on the impact of pollution in protracted crisis and fragile settings is increased among and across the environmental, development and humanitarian communities.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.a and 6.b. SDG11. Target 11.5.
	10.2. Pollution prevention and reduction through emergency preparedness and early warning systems is integrated in the disaster response, conflict prevention and peace building strategies.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3. SDG11. Target 11.5. SDG13. Target 13.1.
	10.3. Pollution associated with a humanitarian response is reduced.	SDG1. Target 1.5. SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3.
11. Mainstream pollution prevention and reduction and maximize resource use efficiency in UN System operations and programming: Lead by example.	11.1. Environmental sustainability is enhanced in the management of UN facilities and operations and championed by each agency, funds and programmes.	SDG3. Target 3.9. SDG6. Target 6.3 and 6.a. SDG12. Target 12.4 and 12.7
	11.2. Pollution prevention and reduction is effectively	SDG3. Target 3.9

	mainstreamed within the UN System and its entities in their programmatic work, as part of the system-wide effort for addressing environmental and social standards in programming.	SDG6. Target 6.3 and 6.a. SDG12. All Targets.
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