United Nations Environment Assembly
Background Guide 2022

Written by: Courtney Indart and Gamaliel Perez, Directors
Kendrick King and Ryan Michael Prieto, Assistant Directors
Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). This year’s staff are: Directors Courtney Indart (Conference A) and Gamaliel Perez (Conference B), and Assistant Directors Kendrick King (Conference A) and Ryan Prieto (Conference B). Courtney lives in Washington DC, USA and holds a Masters in International Affairs from the George Washington University. She has been both a NMUN•NY and NMUN•DC volunteer staff member since 2015. Gamaliel has a Bachelors in Political Theory from the University of California San Diego. Kendrick King holds a Masters in Public Health from Georgia Southern University. Ryan has a Bachelors in Political Science and International Business from University of South Florida, and a Masters in Political Science from Rutgers University.

The topics under discussion for the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) are:
1. Dramatically Reducing Maritime Pollution, including Plastic
2. Implementing a Circular Economy for the Sustainable Development Goals

As the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme, the UNEA is the world’s highest-level decision-making entity on matters concerning the environment. Membership of the UNEA has been universal since it was created in June 2012 during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (RIO+20) to act as the “parliament of the environment.” Member States meet biennially to provide leadership and establish priorities for environmental protection, foster intergovernmental collaboration, and build partnerships with civil society, the academic community, the private sector, among other stakeholders. At NMUN•NY 2022, we are simulating the Environment Assembly in terms of composition and size. However, in addition to making budgetary and programmatic decisions for UNEP, delegates in the 2022 UNEA may also propose global priorities, policies, and legal frameworks under the mandate of UNEP.

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 March 2022 in accordance with the guidelines in the Position Paper Guide and the NMUN•NY Position Papers website.

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 the Under-Secretaries-General for the Development Department, Vincent Carrier (Conference A) and Martin Schunk (Conference B), at usg.dev@nmun.org

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

Sincerely,

Conference A
Courtney Indart, Director
Kendrick King, Assistant Director

Conference B
Gamaliel Perez, Director
Ryan Prieto, Assistant Director

NMUN is a Non-Governmental Organization associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization of the United States.
# Table of Contents

**United Nations System at NMUN-NY**...........................................................................................................2

**Committee Overview**......................................................................................................................................3

- Introduction .......................................................................................................................................................3
- Governance, Structure, and Membership ........................................................................................................4
- Mandate, Functions, and Powers ...................................................................................................................5
- Recent Sessions and Current Priorities ........................................................................................................6
- Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................................7
- Annotated Bibliography ................................................................................................................................7
- Bibliography ...................................................................................................................................................8

1. **Drastically Reducing Maritime Pollution, including Plastic** .................................................................11

   - Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................11
   - International and Regional Framework ......................................................................................................11
   - Role of the International System ...............................................................................................................13
   - Addressing Marine Litter and Debris .........................................................................................................14
   - The Role of Technology in Reducing Pollution in Oceans and Seas ....................................................15
   - Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................16
   - Further Research ....................................................................................................................................16
   - Annotated Bibliography .........................................................................................................................16
   - Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................17

2. **Implementing a Circular Economy for the Sustainable Development Goals** ..................................21

   - Introduction ................................................................................................................................................21
   - International and Regional Framework ....................................................................................................22
   - Role of the International System ..............................................................................................................23
   - Environmental Restoration in a Circular Economy ..................................................................................24
   - Private Sector, Trade, and Finance in a Circular Economy ....................................................................25
   - Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................................26
   - Further Research ....................................................................................................................................27
   - Annotated Bibliography .........................................................................................................................27
   - Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................28
United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee’s position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.
Committee Overview

Introduction

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 the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) so that it could better execute its mandate. In 2013, the 58-member Governing Council of UNEP adopted resolution 27/2, which expanded the Governing Council to universal membership and requested the General Assembly change its designation to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which was done with General Assembly resolution 67/251 of the same year. UNEA is now the governing body of UNEP and is the international community's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters. UNEA's universal membership strengthens its own role and the role of UNEP in international affairs, and is designed to increase the responsiveness of Member States in developing environmental policy. UNEA meets biennially and has held five regular sessions, the most recent of which was held in February 2021 with the theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.” In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fifth session was split into two sessions, with the first part held online in February 2021 and the second session to be held in-person in March 2022.

UNEA is mandated to “ensure the active participation of all relevant stakeholders in the governance of UNEP and to promote a strong science-policy interface.” UNEA is also tasked with making major strategic and policy decisions at the international level, which UNEP then works to promote and implement. UNEA works with Member States, regional bodies, United Nations (UN) entities, and civil society organizations in order to achieve these goals.

UNEP was originally a result of a concerted effort made during the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. Subsequently, the General Assembly established UNEP as the official body concerned with environmental issues within the UN. Since 1972, UNEP has played a significant role in coordinating environmental policy across the UN system. UNEA governs and sets policy for UNEP, whose mission is to “provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment” in order to develop environmental-friendly practices and policies in the UN system. UNEP encourages international, regional, and local coordination for environmental issues, while also ensuring various other UN entities take environmental impacts into account when executing their missions. UNEP reports both to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

UNEP served as the secretariat and was a main contributor for the planning and execution of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, the outcomes of which included the *Rio declaration*, the *Future We Want* and the *Rio Conference*.

---

2 UNEP, About the United Nations Environment Assembly.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 UNEP, Fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.
6 UNEP, Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.
7 UNEP, United Nations Environment Assembly of the UNEP (UNEA), 2014.
8 UNEP, Engaging with UN Environment Assembly and Member States.
9 Ibid.
13 UNEP, About UN Environment Programme.
15 Ibid., p. 263.
Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) and Agenda 21 (1992). UNCED marked a turning point for international collaboration to preserve biodiversity and the climate with the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (1992) and the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992) both opening for signature at the summit. The *Convention to Combat Desertification* (1994), another major agreement, was adopted two years later.

At NMUN•NY 2022, we are simulating the Environment Assembly in terms of composition and size. However, in addition to making budgetary and programmatic decisions for UNEP, delegates in the 2022 UNEA may also propose global priorities, policies, and legal frameworks under the mandate of UNEP.

**Governance, Structure, and Membership**

In 2013, UNEA became the designated policy-making body of UNEP, superseding the original 58-member Governing Council. UNEA has universal membership, meaning that all 193 UN Member States are represented in the Assembly. 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). The mandate of the UNEA Secretariat is to organize and prepare the meetings for the governing bodies and to assure transparency with civil society. The President for the fifth UNEA session is H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn of Norway.

The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) was first established as a subsidiary inter-sessional organ to UNEA and meets at least four times a year. The CPR was then strengthened by Governing Council decision 27/2, and now contributes to the preparation of the UNEA agenda as well as holding advisory role in policy matters, and monitoring the implementation of decisions. 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. The CPR consists of all accredited Permanent Representatives to UNEP and is led by a five-member bureau that is elected for two years.

UNEP relies on three main financial sources to facilitate its agenda: earmarked funds, the Environment Fund, and the UN Regular Budget. Earmarked funds, also known as earmarked contributions, are funds appropriated for specific projects, themes, or countries. These funds aim to expand and/or replicate the results of UN Environment’s work in more countries and with more partners. The Environment Fund aids in maintaining the capacity, balance, and efficiency needed for UNEP to function. When contributing to the Environment Fund, Member States are encouraged to make financial contributions to the fund based upon the Voluntary Indicative Scale of Contributions (VISC), which considers their respective socio-economic background to determine the predictability of a continued financial contribution. The UN Regular Budget supports the functions of the Secretariat and its respective governing bodies, as well as

---

17 *Convention on Biological Diversity*, *The Rio Conventions*.
18 Ibid.
20 UNEP, *About the United Nations Environment Assembly*.
21 Ibid.
22 UNEP, *Secretariat of Governing Bodies and Stakeholders*.
23 UNEP, *UNEA 5 Presidency and Bureau*.
24 UNEP, *Committee of Permanent Representatives*.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 UNEP, *How is UNEP funded*.
29 Ibid, *How is UNEP funded; UNEP, Earmarked Contributions*.
30 Ibid, *How is UNEP funded; UNEP, Earmarked Contributions*.
31 Ibid, *How is UNEP funded*.
32 UNEP, *Environment Fund*. 
the coordination of UNEP with the UN system and cooperation with global scientific communities. 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. 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. 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.

**Mandate, Functions, and Powers**

With the adoption of General Assembly resolution 27/2997 (XXVII) of 1972 on *Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation*, UNEP was created with a mandate to "promote international and regional environmental cooperation, develop environmental policy, highlight global and regional problems, facilitate the transfer of scientific knowledge, assist developing Member States in environmental matters, review reports of the Executive Director, and approve the annual program on the allocation of the Environment Fund." The first expansion of UNEP’s mandate came after the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992) via *Agenda 21* (1992), which outlined a list of priority areas for UN Environment’s future work and called for the program to gain “access to greater expertise and […] adequate financial resources,” as well as closer collaboration with the rest of the UN system to fulfil these new tasks.

In 1997, during its 19th regular session, the Governing Council of UNEP discussed the future role of UNEP, which resulted in the adoption of the *Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme* (1997). As the 19th special session of the General Assembly was scheduled to address the implementation of *Agenda 21* later that year, the *Nairobi Declaration* represented a call to the UN system and its Member States to acknowledge UNEP’s role in sustainable development. The General Assembly endorsed the *Nairobi Declaration* (1997), which reaffirmed UNEP "as the leading global environmental authority.”

UNEP’s authority was further affirmed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who advocated for the reform and strengthening of its role as "the focal point for harmonization and coordination of environment-related activities." In October 1998, the Secretary-General provided recommendations to the General Assembly that further modified UNEP’s mandate, based on the recommendations by the UN Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements. As a result of one of the recommendations, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) was created with the Executive Director of UNEP serving as its chairperson. The EMG mainly coordinates information-sharing and facilitate discussion on essential priorities in order to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective allocation of resources.

---

33 UNEP, *How is UNEP funded*.
36 UNEP, *How is UNEP funded*.
40 Ibid., p. 52.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
As the governing body of UNEP, UNEA develops international environmental law and policy that serves as a catalyst for intergovernmental action through the practice of multilateral agreement.\footnote{UNEP, About the United Nations Environment Assembly.} Under UNEA’s guidance, UNEP assesses the environment on a global, regional, and national scale and uses that information to hold relevant stakeholders accountable in developing proper action.\footnote{Ibid., p. 32.} As the UN recognizes climate change as a predominant issue in its global efforts, UNEP continues to partner with various stakeholders to highlight the complexity of environmental issues in terms of conflict, disaster, security, and education.\footnote{UNEA, 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.} UNEA also has the ability to create ad hoc committees and subsidiary bodies to implement specific environmental objectives when necessary.\footnote{Ibid.}

\textit{Recent Sessions and Current Priorities}

The theme of the fifth session of the UNEA (UNEA 5) was centered on “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” and called for strengthened action to protect and restore nature and promote nature-based solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).\footnote{UNEP, Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.} The three main themes of the session were focused on the climate crisis, land degradation and loss of biodiversity, and pollution.\footnote{Ibid.} The work towards solutions was highlighted in UNEP’s \textit{Making Peace With Nature Report} (2021) that noted that the international community has not met the environmental targets set to reduce the damage being afflicted to the planet by human activity.\footnote{Ibid.} The Assembly in its session adopted three decisions aimed at achieving this work addressing the environmental funds and the program of work of UNEP.\footnote{UNEA, Proceedings of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session (UNEP/EA.5/25), 2021.} UNEA will also hold a special session in March of 2022 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the UNEP in 1972.\footnote{Ibid.} The special session will be held in Nairobi, Kenya alongside the continuation of the fifth session and led by the Bureau and President of the sixth session of UNEA.\footnote{Ibid.}

In response to the three environmental crisis, UNEA adopted its decision 5/2 \textit{For people and planet: the United Nations Environment Programme strategy for 2022–2025} (2021) to tackle climate change, loss of nature, and pollution.\footnote{UNEA, For people and planet: the United Nations Environment Programme strategy for 2022–2025 to tackle climate change, loss of nature and pollution (UNEP/EA.5/3/Rev.1). 2021, p. 7.} A major issue emphasized was the increase of human activity and its relation to the contribution of the climate crisis, land degradation, and pollution.\footnote{Ibid., p. 7.} In the last 50 years, the human population has doubled, and as such has vastly increased its activity, needs as well as its primary energy production.\footnote{Ibid., p. 7.} Through the combined efforts of the 2022-2025 Strategy, UNEP will deliver a three pronged approach that will consist of applying scientific advances in data collection and utilization, multilateral cooperation ranging from stakeholders to indigenous communities, and will also collaborate with local and regional governments and organizations for greater environmental governance.\footnote{Ibid.}
According to UNEP’s Adaptation Gap Report 2020, a major shift of funds traditionally allocated for environmental action plans were diverted to medical needs as the COVID-19 pandemic affected the international community. With climate adaptation becoming increasingly important, the redirection of funds back into environment programs will be crucial in advancing towards the targets set by the SDGs.

In this context, on World Environment Day 2021, UNEP launched a youth activism campaign called #GenerationRestoration, which focused on youth participation in the preserving of ecosystems and calls for governments to preserve ecosystems. On World Environment Day 2021, UNEP also launched the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. This was launched to support the decade of restoration adopted in General Assembly resolution 73/284 (2019) on the “United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030),” with the goal to encourage global citizens to become more active in ecosystem preservation and green community initiatives.

**Conclusion**

UNEA’s inception represents a key step in UNEP’s mission to ensure the work of all UN entities, its Member States, and respective stakeholders aim to be environmentally sustainable and align with international law and policies concerning the environment. The establishment of an international authority for environmental issues with a universal membership reflects the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach for environmental protection. Moreover, a retroactive assessment of nature-based solution will reaffirm the necessity of a healthy ecosystem.

**Annotated Bibliography**


This document serves as the action plan for UNEP that was approved at the first part of UNEA 5 for the years 2022-2025. It outlines the plan and programs established by UNEP in efforts to address the three planetary crises. The document also provides details on the usage and collaboration efforts of the UNEA to create a successful initiative for achieving the SDGs. Delegates will have access to the information on UNEP’s programmes and initiatives that help drive forward action towards the 2030 Agenda.


This page serves as the main page for an overview of the discussions and topics of the UNEA 5. The outcome of the session discusses the major themes and the three-climate crisis discussed by UNEA in its fifth session. Member States at the first part of UNEA 5 also discussed the impact of nature on sustainable food and health systems for human beings that has caused an inequitable distribution of goods and services that have caused overproduction and inconsistent consumption rates leaving many without basic needs. This will provide delegates with a clear perspective of the issues as they relate to environmental crises and the fulfillment of the SDGs.

---


61 Ibid.


67 UNEP, *Fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly*. 

This report serves as the basis for the scientific and governance-based understanding of the main environmental crisis that are affecting the sustainable development goals and human well-being. The report discusses the details of the degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity as well as the practices of Sustainable Consumption and Production that need to be implemented to reduce land degradation. The document also provides an in-depth explanation of the economic and social aspects of the environmental impact and how it affects the well-being of the economy, people, and the environment. Delegates will be able to understand from a technical perspective the causes of the climate crisis, land degradation, and the pollution crisis that UNEA has set as priorities for UNEA 5.

**Bibliography**


1. Drastically Reducing Maritime Pollution, including Plastic

Introduction

In 1972, the United Nation Conference on Human Environment established the General Principles for Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution, which defined marine pollution as the introduction of any man-made substance or energy into the marine environment that results in harmful effects towards living resources, hazards outcomes to human health, hindrance of marine life and reduction on water quality. As reported at the 2017 United Nations Oceans Conference, plastics typically constitute the most significant part of marine pollution, sometimes accounting for up to 100% of floating litter, and impacting economies, ecosystems, animal welfare and human health worldwide. Approximately 80% of this plastic waste begins on land, carried to the ocean by wind or drainage systems. This means that around one garbage truck of plastic enters the ocean systems every minute worldwide. Maritime pollution has contributed to the progression of over 500 dead zones covering more than 245,000 km² globally, which is equivalent to the surface of the United Kingdom. By 2050, experts believe that 12 billion tons of plastic litter will be circulating on land and in oceans. Hazardous contaminants like polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), sewage, and agricultural runoff are also other examples of marine pollution. The high input of fertilizers from agricultural activities in seawater can lead to the lowering of oxygen levels in seawater and also create dead zones. In addition, waters that are fertilized can lead to blooms of harmful algae that are severe choking hazards for marine life and kill an estimated 100 million marine animals annually.

Through its mandate as global leading authority in environmental preservation, promoting pollution-free marine environment is a major area of focus for UNEP. For example, in response to the increasing levels of pollutants and marine litter, UNEP launched the Clean Seas campaign in 2017. Since the inception of that campaign, 63 Member States have committed to the campaign, which accounts for 60% of global coast lines. To sustainably and holistically address marine litter, UNEP reported that significant gaps exist in knowledge on the effects of micro- and macro-plastics and impact of human behavior and consumption; in cohesive and consistent global polices to implement value chain shifts; and in innovative technological responses to address litter at all cycles. The United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA), the governing body of UNEP, continues to address marine litter in its agenda.

International and Regional Framework

In 1982, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea established Member States’ responsibilities to address increasing pollution in marine environments and ensuring that ships under Member States’ flags adhere to environmental regulations, adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). These regulations were drafted during the International Convention for the

_________________________________________________________________________

69 UN Ocean Conference, Latest Ocean Data.
70 UNEP, Why do oceans and seas matter?.
71 Pennington, Every minute, one garbage truck of plastic is dumped into our oceans. This has to stop, World Economic Forum, 2016.
75 Ibid.
77 UNEP, Why do oceans and seas matter?.
78 UNEP, Clean Seas: About.
79 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p. 4.
Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973 as modified by the Protocol of 1978 (MARPOL 73/78), which hoped to prevent the further spread of maritime pollutants that are discharged from ships via oil, noxious liquid, sewage, garbage, and air pollutants. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development adopted the Agenda 21 that also strengthened international efforts towards reducing and addressing damages to the ocean.

With the 1995 Washington Declaration on the Protection of Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities calling for sustainable action against marine litter, Member States were encouraged to create sustainable alternative and developed programs tasked with addressing land-based litter runoff. Afterward, the UNEP adopted the 1995 Global Program of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Action (GPA), which outlines a policy framework for identifying and prioritizing marine litter concerns at multiple levels called the National Programme of Action (NPA). These NPAs utilized within the GPA have led to the formation of multiple regional entities that address maritime pollution within their coastal areas, such as the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the reduction of maritime pollution has become 1 of the 3 focal issues of the GPA through the passage of the Manila Declaration (2012) that highlighted 3 major environmental issues that the GPA must prioritize between 2012-2016: nutrients, wastewater, and marine litter.

During the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Member States adopted the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, which called for Member States to commit to tangible environmental change with suggested deadlines. The Johannesburg Declaration included the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) by 2012 and the creation and implementation of national legislation protecting the marine environment from land-based activities. As of 2018, MPAs make up only 3.4% of oceans and less than 1% of the high seas. MPAs are predominantly coastal and have the strongest legal protections in developed countries.

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guiding the international community’s action toward creating a socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable world. The harmful effects of marine litter and other maritime pollutants created a major challenge in achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 13 (“climate action”) and SDG 14 (“life below water”). SDG 3 (“good health and well-being”) is also affected by the consumption of seafood and water that contains or has encountered plastic pollutants. SDG 12 (“responsible production and consumption”) calls for a significant reduction in global plastic production.

---

85 Ibid., p. 73.
86 UNEP, Progress in Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA) and specifically the Manila Declaration (UNEP/WBRS.17/5), 2015, pp. 3-5.
88 UNEP, Progress in Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA) and specifically the Manila Declaration (UNEP/WBRS.17/5), 2015, pp. 3-5.
90 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1), 2015.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
and sustainable consumption practices as well as efficient and effective waste management systems to reduce the release of waste and pollutants into water systems.\textsuperscript{96}

As the outcome of the 2017 UN Oceans Conference, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/312 on \textit{Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action}, which encourages Member States to decrease or eliminate the production of single-use plastics and microplastic beads to prevent further damage to marine environments via the integration of SDGs 13 and 14 into national development plans.\textsuperscript{97} Through the resolution, nine of the world’s largest fishing companies agreed to the Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship (SeaBOS) Initiative that aims to end unsustainable practices, like using non-biodegradable material.\textsuperscript{98} In addition, the resolution reaffirmed the UN’s commitment to achieving SDG 13 by preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution by 2025.\textsuperscript{99} To achieve the goals highlighted at the 2017 Oceans Conference, UNEA adopted resolution 4/6 on \textit{Marine Plastic Pollution and Microplastics} (2019) that took note of the recommendation by the Open-ended Working Group of the \textit{Basel Convention the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal} (1989) to establish the Partnership on Plastic Waste.\textsuperscript{100} The Partnership on Plastic Waste was initiated with the purpose of UNEP working in collaboration with regional sea programs to address the removal of maritime pollution and understand the transboundary migration of plastic waste.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{Role of the International System}

In March 2011, the UNEP hosted the 5\textsuperscript{th} International Marine Debris Conference (IMDC) to adopt the \textit{Honolulu Strategy}, which outlines three strategic goals for the reduction of marine debris through collaboration with local governments and non-government organizations (NGO).\textsuperscript{102} The \textit{Honolulu Strategy} aims to help organizations align their plan of action with other NGOs, civil societies, or local governments to reduce the ecological, human health, and economic impacts of marine debris both locally and regionally.\textsuperscript{103} The success of the \textit{Honolulu Strategy} led UNEP to the adoption of the \textit{Manila Declaration} (2012) during the 3rd Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities.\textsuperscript{104}

The \textit{Honolulu Strategy} also forms the basis of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML), which is made up of Member State representatives, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, and specialists, to combine resources in order to better protect marine environments.\textsuperscript{105} GPML was launched in 2012 to protect human health and the global environment by the reduction and management of marine litter.\textsuperscript{106} It provides a platform for the establishment of regional nodes in the Mediterranean Sea and Pacific Ocean for better regional specific interventions against marine litter.\textsuperscript{107} In addition, GMPL provides massive open online courses on marine litter to increase collaboration and coordination amongst these groups, to promote a collaborative dialogue, and to educate individuals on the threat of marine litter.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{96} UN General Assembly, \textit{Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development} (A/RES/70/1), 2015.
\textsuperscript{97} UN General Assembly, \textit{Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action} (A/RES/71/312), 2017.
\textsuperscript{98} UN Ocean Conference, \textit{Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship} (SeaBOS).
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} UNEA, \textit{Marine plastic litter and microplastics} (UNEP/EA.4/RES.6), 2019.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} NOAA, \textit{Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities}.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} UNEP & NOAA, \textit{The Honolulu Strategy: A global framework for prevention and management of marine debris}.
\textsuperscript{106} UNEP, \textit{Global Partnership on Marine Litter}.
\textsuperscript{107} Global Partnership on Marine Litter, \textit{Who we are}.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
Since its very first session in 2014, UNEA has addressed maritime pollution, particularly through plastic.\(^{109}\) In 2018, UNEA in its resolution 3/7 on “Marine litter and microplastics” signaled that marine litter, especially plastic debris, is a major priority, as highlighted by the establishment of the ad-hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics in 2017.\(^{110}\) UNEA mandated the group to explore barriers to combating marine litter; identify national and regional responses; identify environmental, social, and economic costs and benefits; examine different response options; and recommend continued work by UNEA.\(^{111}\)

UNEP actively seeks partnerships with civil society and gives them a platform in their Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF).\(^{112}\) The GMGSF is meant to help NGOs and other organizations prepare their input and participation in UNEA meetings.\(^{113}\) Through the GMGSF, NGOs were able to collaborate with UNEP stakeholders to establish the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment.\(^{114}\) The New Plastics Economy Global Commitment is an engagement that unites businesses and other stakeholders behind a circular economy that will phase out economic and production measures that will increase output of marine pollution by 2025.\(^{115}\)

Apart from UNEP, other actors within the international system also address maritime pollution.\(^{116}\) For instance, the Group of Twenty (G20) adopted the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter in 2017.\(^{117}\) This action plan comprises seven areas of concern to reduce marine litter, including highlighting the socio-economic benefits of reducing marine litter, promoting waste prevention and waste management as well as engaging all relevant stakeholders.\(^{118}\) To support the implementation of the action plan, the G20 further launched a Global Network of the Committed that is linked to UNEP’s GPML.\(^{119}\)

**Addressing Marine Litter and Debris**

In 2019, a study published in the Marine Pollution Bulletin highlighted how the international community spends roughly $2.5 trillion annually on cleaning maritime pollution, especially plastic.\(^{120}\) This economic burden plagues all Member States regardless if they possess oceanic territory, as pollutants negatively impact international trade and marine industries.\(^{121}\) According to the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA), the accumulation of maritime pollution has led to the formation of two large garbage patches located West of Japan and East of the United States of America.\(^{122}\) Ocean currents are determined by large circulation systems, called gyres, which pull coastal plastic debris from coastlines into open water.\(^{123}\) These ocean current patterns have collected millions of tons of plastic litter into whirlpool-like “garbage patches.”\(^{124}\) These concentrated areas of marine litter often move with currents into areas densely populated by vulnerable microscopic marine life that are killed easily by plastics.\(^{125}\)

---

\(^{109}\) UNEA, Marine plastic debris and microplastics: Draft resolution submitted by the Committee of the Whole (UNEP/EA.1/L.8), 2014.

\(^{110}\) UNEA, Marine litter and microplastics (UNEP/EA.3/RES.7), 2018; UNEP, Ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics.

\(^{111}\) UNEP, Ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics.

\(^{112}\) UNEP, Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum.

\(^{113}\) Ibid.


\(^{115}\) Ibid.


\(^{117}\) Ibid.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.


\(^{121}\) Ibid.

\(^{122}\) Logistic Management, Moore on Pricing: The Cost of Ocean Pollution.


\(^{124}\) Ibid.

With the presence of maritime pollutants, shipping industries will have to continually change their routes to avoid any potential dangers, which causes delay in international trade leading to between $10,000 to $20,000 daily loss of revenue. In addition, maritime pollutants have affected the fishing and aquaculture economy of various Member States with the industries receiving 1-5% less the typical output from excavation of marine resources. Despite awareness of marine litter's hazardous effects, removal of the plastic, glass, and other solid waste is costly. Scientists estimate that removing plastic debris from less than 1% of the northern Pacific Ocean could cost upwards of $489 million per year.

In partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UNEP introduced a methodology to identify plastic pollution hotspots. In 2017, UNEP launched the Clean Seas platform, a global campaign including governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals on ending marine litter. The gathering of plastic litter on beaches is effective in preventing some debris from entering the ocean but does little to address microplastics already in coastal areas, or in deeper waters, as well as plastics in the open ocean and in gyres. Member States are starting to address the source of these pollutants by drafting legislation that aims to eliminate plastic usage or use biodegradable matter.

The Role of Technology in Reducing Pollution in Oceans and Seas

The declining health of oceans and seas caused by maritime pollution is visible in coral reefs, which are highly diverse ecosystems that are particularly vulnerable to changes in the environment. The multitude of threats highlights the need for innovative approaches to protecting oceans and seas, for which there is a wide variety of technologies that may have useful applications. The Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology (2005) of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) notes that marine technology refers to instruments, equipment, vessels, processes and methodologies required to produce and use knowledge to improve the study and understanding of the nature and resources of the ocean and coastal areas.

The NGO The Ocean Cleanup has recently invested in the production of artificial coastlines outside Eastern California, USA where the Pacific trash patch is located. The organization proposed that this innovation will guide marine litter and debris into a retention zone for efficient future cleaning. Their approach is to use technology to turn the cleaning process into a profitable endeavor for future project funding by recycling marine waste. In 2020, The Ocean Cleanup organization presented the first durable and completely recycled sunglass that was created from marine plastic. Technology development therefore presents many possibilities for marine conservation, and in recent years, innovative breakthroughs in marine technology have resulted in new ways to protect oceans and seas.

---

127 Hodal, Marine plastic pollution costs the world up to $2.5tn a year, researchers find, The Guardian, 2019.  
128 UNEP, Ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics.  
129 Ibid.  
130 IUCN, As UNEA5 kicks off, ground-breaking Plastic Pollution Hotspotting Results Published for Seven Countries in Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean, 2021.  
131 UNEP, Clean Seas: About.  
132 Ibid.  
134 UN General Assembly, The Future We Want (A/RES/66/288), 2012, p. 34.  
136 Ibid., p. 9.  
137 The Ocean Cleanup, Oceans, 2021.  
138 Ibid.  
139 The Ocean Cleanup, About the Ocean Cleanup, 2021.  
140 The Ocean Cleanup, Updates, 2021.  
141 UNEP, Smart new technologies can play a vital role in addressing plastic pollution crisis in our waters – new study, 2020.
Conclusion

Marine litter and chemicals damage marine ecosystems, impact seafood supply and quality, and harm human health and economic stability, affecting the achievement of many of the SDGs.\(^{142}\) Oceans, rivers, and coastal waters must be cleared of plastic litter and microplastics to protect marine biodiversity and achieve SDG 14 (“life below water”).\(^ {143}\) Without drastic action, ineffective plastic waste management and the continued production of microplastics will result in the seas becoming home to more plastic waste than fish by 2050.\(^ {144}\) Member States hold a shared responsibility for the planet’s oceans and the life that inhabits it, so swift and meaningful intervention on marine plastic litter and microplastics is of the utmost importance to UN Environment.\(^ {145}\)

Further Research

Delegates should consider these questions to further their research: What are the major obstacles for Member States to implement strategies to protect oceans from plastic litter? What steps can Member States take to phase out single-use plastics? How can Member States minimize chemical runoff entering oceans? How can the international community protect marine biodiversity from the effects of marine plastic litter and microplastics? How can Member States contribute to the efforts to remove plastic litter from seas? How can states minimize the negative effects on human health from plastic and chemical ingestion? How can they develop a green culture among citizens? What can the international community do to support Member States’ efforts?

Annotated Bibliography


The G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter identifies areas of need and gaps in evidence-based knowledge on this topic while promoting actionable policies. Delegates will find this source useful as it identifies areas of need, such as data collection and plastic litter prevention, in a concise manner. The document also describes the economic benefits of policies that reduce plastic consumption as well as suggests ways to improve waste management. Delegates will find this source to be informative and succinct, as well as a launching point for research as it lists relevant resolutions in its annex.


Adopted in Nairobi, Kenya in December 2017, this is one of the recent resolutions adopted by UNEA on “Marine Plastics and Microplastics.” This resolution prioritizes the “cleaning up” of plastic and microplastics in the world’s oceans through gathering and extracting microplastic waste. In this document, Member States commit to implementing policies that would halt the increase of plastic litter and microplastics in marine systems by 2025. This document provides outline of the direction that UNEA is heading in, in the fight against marine plastic litter and microplastics.


This resolution is the body’s latest document on land-based pollution from its fourth session in 2019. It focuses on capacity building and knowledge transfer in order to protect the marine environment. Furthermore, multi-stakeholder partnerships on the

---

\(^{142}\) Center for Biological Diversity, Ocean Plastics Pollution: A Global Tragedy for Our Oceans and Sea Life.

\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) Cronin, There Will Be More Plastic in the Oceans Than Fish by 2050, One Green Planet, 2017.

global and regional level are central to UNEA’s future strategy. Delegates can again an understanding of UNEA’s current position on the topic at hand.


The website of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML) presents a comprehensive overview of the GPML’s activities. It highlights the historical context of the GPML and details the work of the partnership across various action areas. Because of the importance of GPML in fighting marine pollution, leveraging the resources this website offers will be crucial. For delegates, this website is an ideal starting point to explore one of UNEP’s successful initiatives to address maritime pollution. Delegates may use the website to access related UNEP content on the GPML’s work as well as the GPML’s very own website.


This report by the Executive Director of UNEP was published as basis for discussion on pollution in general during UNEA’s third session in 2017. It gives an extensive overview of the pollution challenge, presents past strategies, and offers solutions to all forms of pollution. Delegates can use this document to research all aspects related to marine pollution and compare actions already in place.

Bibliography


2. Implementing a Circular Economy for the Sustainable Development Goals

“Circularity and sustainable consumption and production are essential to deliver on every multilateral agreement, from the Sustainable Development Goals, to the Paris Agreement to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework that we must agree on soon.”

Introduction

According to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), a circular economy is a potential economic system whereby “products and materials are designed in such a way that they can be reused, remanufactured, recycled or recovered.” Reusing, remanufacturing, recycling, and recovering are important, as they are the components that connect make a circular economy sustainable. UNEA first acknowledged this concept in its resolution 4/1 (2019), Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production.

By contrast, a linear economy is where businesses, both publicly and privately owned, gather raw materials to produce products that are utilized and discarded without concern for the environment or reuse possibilities. According to the Ellen McArthur Foundation, a charity dedicated to the creation of circular economies, 95% of all plastics are single-use plastics that are thrown away after a one-time use. This results in roughly 8 million tons of plastic in the world’s oceans each year. Once in water, these plastics dissolve into microplastics, which kill seabirds and marine mammals alike. However, the negative impacts of microplastics are not only seen in the oceans: approximately 83% of public faucets contain microplastics and many fish species consumed by humans have been found to ingest microplastics. To combat this problem, plastic waste is often burned. Yet, in doing so, the toxic fumes resulting from the burning of plastics lead to reduced air quality and acidification of many bodies of water. Instead, reusing, remanufacturing, recycling, or recovering plastic demonstrates how circular economies are better for the environment than linear economies.

UNEA can help phase-out linear economies by continuing as a forum for Member States to discuss policies behind shifting to more circular economies. Likewise, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the agency governed by UNEA, engages with various stakeholders on the benefits of circular economies, in particular on their positive impacts on the environment. Similarly, UNEP addresses the need for transforming trade and finance towards circularity to ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns.

---

147 UNEA, Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP/EA.4/Res.1), 2019, p. 2.
148 Ibid. p. 1.
149 UN Environment, Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP/EA.4/Res.1), 2019, p. 2.
150 The Green Brain, How is a Circular Economy Different from a Linear Economy.
152 UNEP, Our Planet is Drowning in Plastic Pollution: it’s Time for Change, 2018.
154 UNEP, Closing the Loop: How a Circular Economy Helps us #BeatPollution, 2017; Global Change Biology, Plastic Ingestion by Marine Fish is Widespread and Increasing, 2021.
159 UNEP, About the United Nations Environment Assembly; UNEP, Understanding Circularity.
**International and Regional Framework**

For a circular economy, sound waste management and waste reduction is key. The *Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and their Disposal* (1989) is a legally-binding international treaty on waste management for the 188 governments which have ratified the agreement. The Basel Convention presents prerequisites and restrictions which aim to minimize the movement of waste across international borders. In some cases, the regulations from the Basel Convention intend to completely prevent the movement of waste if exporting nations have the capacity to repurpose the materials, thus keeping such materials in the economic cycle.

The Basel Convention was later expanded by the *Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemical and Pesticides in International Trade* (1998) and the *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants* (2001). The Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions severely restrict or outright ban the production and movement of specific pesticides and chemicals that were flagged by a plurality of the governments which ratified the agreements. The Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions work together to mutually reinforce each of their goals.

These three conventions led to a regulatory framework, which has made it difficult to dump waste using linear economic practices. This is beneficial to circular economies because the synergies of these three conventions highlight the importance of sustainability in waste management and waste reduction, a key principle in circularity.

In the aftermath of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the three so-called Rio Conventions were adopted: the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) in 1992, the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) in 1992, and the *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa* (UNCCD) in 1994. The UNFCCC process specifically led to further legally binding treaties on climate issues, such as the *Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1997) and the *Paris Agreement* (2015). In particular, the Paris Agreement is crucial because of its universally agreed upon goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep global average temperature to well below 2°C over pre-industrial levels with the aim of reaching 1.5°C.

Similarly, *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a crucial framework. In particular, SDG 12 (“sustainable consumption and production

---

164 Ibid., p. 23.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
patterns”) focuses on implementing sustainable economic models, including circular economies. SDG 12’s progress is evaluated by several indicators, all of which are centered around efficiently utilizing resources and reducing waste.

**Role of the International System**

In March 2019, UNEA held its fourth regular session. There, UNEA further explored the relationship between circularity and SDG 12. For example, UNEA resolution 4/1 on *Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production* (2019) established the concept of a circular economy in a UN resolution. Furthermore, UNEA resolution 4/4 on *Addressing Environmental Challenges Through Sustainable Business Practices* indirectly underscored the importance of the circular economic model by highlighting programs mainly designed around implementing circularity. Another example was UNEA resolution 4/8 on *Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste*, which reaffirmed the regulatory frameworks on waste management and their association to sustainable economic models, such as the circular economy. These are among 23 resolutions adopted during the fourth UNEA session, most of which referenced aspects of circularity. They each outlined a detailed plan for addressing current and future problems within the realm of sustainable consumption and production.

UNEP supports the implementation of UNEA resolutions by establishing and operating various projects and programming. The 10 Year Framework of Programmes was adopted in 2012 during the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, focused on developing, replicating and scaling sustainable consumption and production policies and initiatives amongst local, regional, and international organizations and governments. The 10 Year Framework of Programmes has six areas of concentration: Public Procurement, Buildings and Construction, Tourism, Food Systems, Consumer Information, and Lifestyles and Education. The One Planet Network is responsible for overseeing the implementation of these six areas of concentration, including promoting or incorporating circularity into their sustainable consumption and production projects wherever possible. For example, One Planet Network recently promoted circularity across the textile industry by hosting discussions, both at conferences and behind closed doors, with representatives from textile companies, governments, and other international organizations.

Other UN agencies and international organizations, such as World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and Organisation for Economic Co-Operation (OECD) have also played a role in establishing circularity, all of which are members of the United Nations Environment Management Group.

---

175 UNEP, *Goal 12: Sustainable Consumption and Production*.
183 UNEP, *What We Do*.
184 UNEP, *One Planet Network*.
185 UNEP, *One Planet Network*.
UNEMG was created by the General Assembly following the adoption of its resolution 53/242 on the "Report of the Secretary-General on Environment and Human Settlements." The mission of UNEMG is to increase coordination between UN agencies and international organizations on specific issues pertaining to the environment and human settlements, including sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Regional organizations have also pursued their own circularity initiatives. The EU developed the European Green Deal (2019), which included a section titled the Circular Economy Action Plan. This action plan helped create the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency, a partnership of 42 countries in collaboration with UNEP, UNIDO, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy, and the World Circular Economy Forum. In a similar fashion, UNEP launched a circular economy coalition for Latin America and the Caribbean in February 2021, which aims to support the transition towards a circular economy in the region within the context of COVID-19 recovery. Likewise, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) also recently began discussions on a draft Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community and the African Development Bank launched the Africa Circular Economy Facility in 2019 to promote circular approaches on the African continent.

**Environmental Restoration in a Circular Economy**

The world is currently facing three environmental crises: climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. In the latest contribution to its Sixth Assessment Report from August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that humanity has already increased global temperatures by 1.07°C since pre-industrial times. The 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimates that roughly 1 million animal and plant species face extinction in the coming decades. Similarly, there are roughly 5 trillion plastic particles currently in the world’s surface water, contributing to plastic pollution. Circularity in consumption and production can help address and prevent these problems.

The circular economic model could help eliminate as much as 62% of greenhouse gas emissions from extraction and 38% of greenhouse gas emissions from transportation of materials and products that are released under a linear economic model. Likewise, the circular economic model can help preserve...
biodiversity and combat land degradation, a leading cause of desertification. Lastly, the circular economic model can help decrease yearly volumes of plastic into our oceans by as much as 80% by 2040. UNEP is also addressing the three environmental crises through circular approaches. For example, UNEP’s Circularity Platform presents solutions that build upon three dimensions: user-to-user, user-to-business, and business-to-business. These dimensions allow the tracking of products during their lifecycle, with the intention of repurposing or recycling once they have gone through each dimension. The business-to-business loop has been particularly successful in repurposing and recycling resources to eliminate waste. For example, Parley for the Oceans and Adidas are two businesses which have partnered to turn plastics collected from the oceans into a series of shoes. However, the 2021 UNEP report *Making Peace with Nature: A Scientific Blueprint to Tackle the Climate, Biodiversity, and Pollution Emergencies* provides that users can make a difference too by educating themselves on circularity and advocating for circularity in their local communities. The Circular Economy Club, a social media platform for circularity advocates, has allowed users to establish local circularity clubs which have then gone on to organize regional circularity projects. Overall, this highlights how a circular economy contributes to sustainable consumption and production patterns while reducing waste and also minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Private Sector, Trade, and Finance in a Circular Economy**

There are two problems with the linear economic model: open access to limited resources and the resulting price instability. The vast majority of manmade products are from natural resources that are non-renewable. Consequently, as these natural resources become less available, their prices and the cost for the resulting products increase. The circular economic model makes non-renewable resources sustainable by consistently reusing what has already been extracted, thereby keeping the materials in an economic cycle. The circular economic model achieves this by creating secondary markets that sell and repurpose used products containing those non-renewable resources. In doing so, these non-renewable resources remain available, and their value remains unchanged.

Some items already have well-established secondary markets, such as glass, paper, and plastics. For example, in the EU glass, paper, and plastics are recycled 73%, 72%, and 26% of the time respectively. However, this same example also saw the EU produce $98.4 billion in waste fromUnced, *Convention on Biological Diversity*, 1992; UNCCD, *The Great Green Wall Initiative*, 2020; Halbac-Cotoara-Zamfir et al., *From Historical Narratives to Circular Economy: De-Complexifying the “Desertification” Debate*, 2020.  
203 Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *Designing Out Plastic Pollution*.  
204 UNEP, *Understanding Circularity*.  
205 Ibid.  
206 Ibid.  
207 Ibid.  
210 Circular Economy Club, *Bringing the Circular Economy to Every Corner of the World: The CEC*.  
211 UN Environment, *Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP/EA.4/Res.1)*, 2019, p. 2  
213 Ibid., p. 75.  
214 Ibid., pp. 97-107.  
215 UNEP, *Understanding Circularity*.  
217 Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *New Research Shows that the Circular Economy has a De-Risking Effect and Drives Superior Risk-Adjusted Returns*.  
219 Ibid.
unrecycled resources over the course of ten years.\textsuperscript{220} This shows that companies can continue incorporating circularity into their practices, which in turn should increase their potential to recapture the expenses incurred from wasted materials.\textsuperscript{221} In addition to strengthening secondary markets, the private sector can also contribute by creating company cultures, from the top on down, that strives to design solutions around sustainability.\textsuperscript{222} This, in combination with a healthy secondary market, will also help the average person by creating about 700,000 new jobs by 2040.\textsuperscript{223}

UNEP has provided various tools to foster green initiatives in international trade through circular approaches.\textsuperscript{224} For example, UNEP funded an environment and trade hub, a platform where various stakeholders share research and collaborate to make trade environmentally sustainable.\textsuperscript{225} In this context, UNEP worked with the International Resource Panel on a report on \textit{Sustainable Trade in Resources: Global Material Flows, Circularity and Trade} (2020), which provides recommendations on transitioning trade towards a circular economy.\textsuperscript{226} UNEP has also developed and shared some metrics to evaluate the environmental impact of potential economic and trade policies after implementation.\textsuperscript{227} UNEP has moreover sought to evaluate Member States’ policies by drafting policy reviews that assess existing economic and trade policies against their outcomes for the environment.\textsuperscript{228}

Another proposal by UNEP has suggested through those assessments has been the need for finance to help promote circularity through investments.\textsuperscript{229} For example, Italy has created a sustainability bond to fund sustainable solutions, such as businesses looking to increase the durability of their products or improving resource efficiency in their manufacturing process.\textsuperscript{230} Another potential solution could involve more widespread use of taxes that penalize businesses which develop products or services without considering circularity.\textsuperscript{231} For example, carbon taxes are another example, having successfully reduced the dependence on fossil fuels for the 45 countries where such measures have been adopted.\textsuperscript{232}

\textit{Conclusion}

Circular economies are sustainable because they seek to recycle or repurpose products made from non-renewable natural resources, which is essential to preventing further environmental degradation caused by mining under linear economies.\textsuperscript{233} In this context, UNEA outlines the circular economy as a core concept in this transition, such as in its resolution 4/1 on \textit{Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production}.\textsuperscript{234} Likewise, UNEP continues to promote circularity throughout its program of work.\textsuperscript{235} Moreover, circular economies can help restore the environment by reducing waste in our oceans and landfills.\textsuperscript{236} Circular economies can also improve trade and finance by reducing costs by wasting materials.\textsuperscript{237} In order to achieve the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda and address the planetary

\textsuperscript{220} UNCTAD, \textit{The Circular Economy in International Trade}, 2016.
\textsuperscript{221} Ellen MacArthur Foundation, \textit{Designing Out Plastic Pollution}.
\textsuperscript{222} UNEP, \textit{Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP/EA.4/Res.1)}, 2019, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{224} UNEP, \textit{Environment and Trade Hub}.
\textsuperscript{225} UNCTAD, \textit{The Circular Economy in International Trade}, 2016.
\textsuperscript{227} UNEP, \textit{Metrics and Measurements Frameworks}.
\textsuperscript{228} UNEP, \textit{Green Economy Policy Review}.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{231} Earth, \textit{What Countries Have a Carbon Tax}, 2021.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{233} UNEP, \textit{UnderstandingCircularity}.
\textsuperscript{234} UNEP, \textit{Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP/EA.4/Res.1)}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{235} UNEP, \textit{UnderstandingCircularity}; UNEP, \textit{One Planet Network}.
\textsuperscript{236} UNEP, \textit{UnderstandingCircularity}.
\textsuperscript{237} UNCTAD, \textit{The Circular Economy in International Trade}, 2016.
crises, more sustainable consumption and production patterns are necessary, and the circular economy will be crucial in this progress.\textsuperscript{238}

\textit{Further Research}

In their research, delegates can consider the following guiding questions: what other topics pertaining to the circular economy have not been addressed so far? What can UNEA and UNEP do to further address and promote circular economic models? What is the role of the private sector in promoting circular economic models? What are the challenges and obstacles in transitioning towards a circular economy? How can Member States implement circular economic models through trade and finance policies?

\textbf{Annotated Bibliography}


This report was published by the Secretariat of the Basel, Stockholm, and Rotterdam Conventions. It provides an overview on what each of these conventions have collectively achieved by working together. These conventions helped lay the groundwork for conversations on circularity. Therefore, it is crucial to familiarize oneself with what each convention seeks to accomplish.


This outcome document was adopted by Member States at the General Assembly’s 69th Session. The 2030 Agenda essentially greatly expanded upon everything the MDGs sought to accomplish. Every single discussion that the UN has on Sustainability ties back to the 2030 Agenda, so delegates should begin prepping for the conference by reviewing the 2030 Agenda and its 16 SDGs. Delegates should also reference any relevant SDGs in their draft resolutions.


The UNEP circularity platform is a website containing comprehensive information on circular economic models. It provides an overview on the guiding principle and core processes of circularity and serves as a repository for crucial resources on advancing circularity. Delegates will find this website useful as it can help them visualize circular approaches at various stages of a product cycle. The website can further guide delegates towards implement circularity in various sectors, such as plastics, textiles, or electronics.


This resolution was agreed upon by Member States during the UNEA-4. The resolution goes in detail about the problems and solutions for implementing sustainability in products and services developed by the public and private sectors. It is a useful resolution because of how informative each clause is, but also because it was the first resolution passed at a UNEA session that for the first time focused heavily on sustainable

\textsuperscript{238} UNEP, \textit{Understanding Circularity}. 
patterns of consumption and production. Delegates should reference this in almost any potential draft resolution, as resolution 4.1 addresses many issues.


This report was published by UNEP ahead of UNEA-5. This report is one of many signature reports that delegates should do research on, but this one is made special by the fact that it provides insight into how humanity is doing in achieving sustainability thus preventing climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution emergencies. The conclusions found in the report are bleak, but they do give a detailed roadmap for how Member States can still achieve sustainability before irreversible damage is done to the planet. Delegates should review and echo recommendations this report in potential draft resolutions.

Bibliography


