



**Review Highlights** JIU/REP/2025/1  
JIU/REP/2025/1 [Expanded report]  
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## REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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### Background

The United Nations Environment Programme was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 to promote international cooperation in the environment field and to coordinate environmental matters within the United Nations system. Its mandate was reaffirmed through the "The Future we want" resolution at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. In the same year, the General Assembly granted universal membership to UNEP's governing body, which is since called the Environment Assembly and which convenes on a biennial basis.

UNEP secretariat is integrated in the organizational structure of the Secretariat of the United Nations and is subject to the strategies, policies and initiatives approved by the General Assembly and the directives of the Secretary-General. Over time, UNEP's activities have diversified and expanded to address operational and programmatic aspects of the objectives set forth in its medium-term strategies and the resolutions adopted by the Environment Assembly. The environmental framework of the United Nations system in which UNEP operates also includes Multilateral Environmental Agreements, each with their own governance arrangements and secretariat structure. UNEP provides support services for the secretariats of 15 such entities and for 2 Action Plans.

UNEP headquarters is in Nairobi, Kenya and its workforce comprised almost 1,400 staff members and about 1,500 affiliate personnel as of end 2024. For the biennium 2022-2023, UNEP's income reached \$1.35 billion, surpassing its projected budget of \$872.9 million.



### Objectives & Purpose

The objective of the review was to provide an independent assessment of organizational arrangements and processes, regulatory frameworks and related practices concerning the management and administration of UNEP. The following areas were examined: (1) governance; (2) organizational structure; (3) management; (4) administrative services; (5) financial framework; (6) strategic planning; (7) partnerships; (8) risk management; (9) human resources management; (10) communications and knowledge management; (11) information and communications technology and (12) oversight.

Two JIU outputs were produced: (a) a report, issued under the symbol "JIU/REP/2025/1", focusing on the main findings, conclusions and recommendations and available in the six official languages of the United Nations; and (b) an expanded report, issued under the symbol "JIU/REP/2025/1 [Expanded report]", providing a broader analysis, detailed findings and related supporting information.



### What the JIU found

#### 1. Governance

Historically, Environment Assembly sessions have tended to emphasize programmatic topics, while management aspects have received comparatively less attention. Therefore, the role and the organization of work of the Committee of Permanent Representative, as intersessional governing body of the Environment Assembly, has been the subject of attention among Member States in recent years for improving its work and decision-making process.

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However, despite certain progress, its decision-making process remains difficult to grasp. JIU also found that its current working arrangements entail significant number of meetings, formal and informal, that require attention and support by the UNEP secretariat. A further matter of clarification is the Committee's capacity to request to UNEP secretariat actionable measures derived from oversight conclusions, in-between sessions of the Environment Assembly. **(Recommendation 1)**

## 2. Organizational structure

The Secretary-General Bulletin issued under ST/SGB/2006/13 describes the organization of the UNEP secretariat. This document has not been updated since its issuance and it no longer reflects the way in which UNEP management has structured the organization to function and execute the delivery of its mandate. The current UNEP structure comprises three corporate divisions, five technical divisions, six regional offices and several sub-regional and country offices and programmes and liaison offices. Regarding field presence, UNEP was not initially designed to have a large one, but the evolution of its funding model and portfolio of activities steered the organization towards further deployment at country level. In 2024, 47 per cent of UNEP staff was posted in offices away from headquarters.

## 3. Management

As of 2019, UNEP management progressively reviewed and further developed the management framework of the organization. UNEP operates under two delegation of authority frameworks: one from 2019 (covering UNEP and regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements and Action Plans) and the second from 2021 (specific to global Multilateral Environmental Agreements). JIU analysis points to two major areas for attention: one is the update of the current policy framework and the second is the clarification of certain provisions within it. **(Recommendation 2)**

A significant operational shift for UNEP came in 2022 with the adoption of the One UNEP Delivery for Better Collaboration and Country Support Policy. This shift refers in particular to the redistribution of: (i) accountability for programmatic implementation roles and (ii) responsibilities between regional offices and technical divisions. While the rationale for the initiative is well supported across the organization, concerns emerged linked to the lack of implementation guidelines or an action plan of the change management process, which in practice led to different interpretations of the model's application across divisions and offices.

**(Recommendation 3)**

The JIU also found that a monitoring framework for the delivery model was missing which makes it difficult to quantify whether it has progressed towards achieving its intended results. **(Recommendation 4)**

## 4. Administrative services

UNEP secretariat relies on the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) for most of its business operations and conference services. Most of these services are in fact integrated processes and involve UNON, UNEP Corporate Services Division and administrative and financial teams in other UNEP divisions and offices which are also responsible for certain steps in the processes, hence functioning as a three-tier model for support services. Despite having the information that distinguishes the prerequisite actions (UNEP) and the performance indicators (UNON) in the service level agreement, challenges emerge when implementing actions within such integrated end-to-end processes. These can be linked to the involvement of stakeholders from different time zones and locations, as well as to how reporting lines for administrative and financial teams/units are organized within UNEP. As a result, JIU suggests an internal functional review of administrative and financial processes and division of labour in UNEP and a review of the current process architecture for each integrated service involving UNEP and UNON.

## 5. Financial framework

Even though the UNEP regular budget has almost tripled in the past 12 years, it accounts for less than 5 per cent of the organization's annual budget and around 3 per cent of its income, while 97 per cent comes from extrabudgetary resources. In this context, the Environment Fund budgeted at \$100 million per year, while being an extrabudgetary resource, is the most important source of flexible contributions to UNEP budget. It has never reached though its intended budget, falling short by \$10 million in the past two years. The earmarked funds accounted for 43 per cent of UNEP income in 2022–2023 and the global funds for 41 per cent, but these categories of resources remain unpredictable and lack flexibility, generating a dependency situation which may pose risks for the organization's financial management and strategic focus. As a mitigation action, the Planetary Funds established by UNEP in 2022 aim to encourage softer earmarking of funds in broader thematic areas. This initiative is still only in its first years and the resources arising from this funding stream are so far limited. The latest resource mobilization strategy was formulated in 2021, but it has not been revised to reflect the changes introduced by the 2022 delivery model, and no guidance note has been issued to clarify the updated approach to resource mobilization.

**(Recommendation 5)**

## 6. Strategic planning.

During the implementation of the medium-term strategy for 2022–2025, which includes 7 sub-programmes, UNEP management developed an initiative referred to as the “programmatic approach”, featuring 13 programme coordination projects. As a result, for certain sub-programmes, this meant an additional layer of complexity, duplicating management responsibilities.



The operationalization of the medium-term strategy 2022-2025 was made through programmes of work covering a two-year timespan. Through its decision 5/4 (2022), the Environment Assembly decided to extend the validity of the Programme of Work and Budget agreed for 2022-2023 by two years until the end of 2025, having the budget and indicator targets pro-rated accordingly. This unusual approach should be avoided in the future, to properly reflect necessary strategic and budgetary shifts at the mid-point in the implementation of mid-term strategies. JIU also found that the UNEP performance framework requires further strengthening through a reflection on the nature of indicators used, and the issuance of indicator methodologies. In addition, the organizational arrangements for oversight and internal control at the project level raised certain capacity concerns.

### 7. Partnerships

The year 2024 marked the approval of the revised policy framing the principles followed by UNEP for engaging in and managing its partnerships, following extensive preparatory work over several years. Due to significant differences from the previous policy version dating from 2011, UNEP management has adopted a cautious approach by implementing a one-year transition period ending in June 2025. Certain challenges remain, especially in relation to the due diligence process of implementing partners and the approach to terminations of partnerships. As at the end of 2024, UNEP was engaged in almost 1,300 partnerships, mostly for project implementation, with 3,600 registered partners. UNEP management increased its attention towards the philanthropy sector in the past years, while the engagement with private sector is approached with caution. JIU suggests further clarifying how the engagement of the organization with the private sector and recent attention to philanthropy are articulated in the broader framework of the partnership policy.

### 8. Risk Management

JIU found a consensus among internal stakeholders that additional efforts must be pursued to ensure an effective corporate approach to risk management. The Enterprise Risk Management implementation strategies and guidelines were endorsed by UNEP management in 2021; however, UNEP management acknowledges the need for improvements to align the organization to the benchmarks proposed by the JIU in 2020. While an Enterprise Risk Management Committee exists, it has convened only once since its creation in 2021. The risk management function is assigned to small team with a part-time focus on this subject and a network of risk focal points in divisions/offices mostly junior and/or assistant level staff members. Currently UNEP has a risk register, last uploaded in 2023 in Umoja, and an internal risk dashboard which is being updated for further alignment with the organization's current operational and programmatic context. Within existing resources, the designation of a Chief Risk Officer with sufficient authority could contribute to strengthening the risk management culture across the organization. **(Recommendation 6)**

### 9. Human Resources Management

The United Nations Secretariat People Strategy (2022-2025) is the main reference document and provides the overarching framework for the management of human resources. UNEP does not have an entity-specific human resource management strategy that would factor in its own operational requirements but implements specific workstreams. JIU found that the area of human resources, which involves several internal stakeholders, is perceived by UNEP staff as being among the least efficient administrative process in the organization, especially when considering the practical implementation of existing procedures. JIU suggests considering a full review of the human resources processes and associated procedures aiming at simplification, as possible. UNEP workforce has significantly expanded in the last four years (+38 per cent), mostly due to an increase in affiliate personnel. The reporting of human resources related data to UNEP management is comprehensive and contains a high level of detail and real-time information. Given its increasing share in UNEP total workforce, statistics on the affiliate personnel should be also presented to UNEP governing bodies. The recent budgetary constraints in the context of the UN80 initiative led to a prudent budget management approach which translated into the use of FTA-limited contractual modalities for all new job opening as of March 2025. Caution and strict oversight should be applied with this approach considering that the selection process for this type of appointment does not include an external review by a central review body. Regarding geographical diversity, JIU observed progress as compared to 2022, while acknowledging that the rebalancing of ratios between regional groups requires sustained efforts on a medium to long-term horizon. As regards gender balance, 62 per cent of staff were female in December 2024. JIU draws attention to the fact that gender balance should be continuously pursued as an objective, including from the perspective of the male staff component of the workforce.

### 10. Communications and knowledge management

Monitoring and oversight of the communication function can be improved, with a view to better quantifying the outcomes and impact of communication efforts and to strengthen the oversight on project-level communications. Knowledge management and knowledge-sharing are important features but require improvement, considering the normative and policy-science-setting role of UNEP. An organization-wide approach should ensure that programmatic learning and scientific publications are integrated with each other, as well as with other products, for example those pertaining to administrative and support functions. The development of a revised knowledge management strategy is essential in this regard, since the most recent one dates back to the period 2014–2017. **(Recommendation 7)**

Regarding publications, JIU acknowledges the efforts for improving publications management in recent years, one example in this regard being the automated system functioning since January 2024. However, JIU research indicates that the planning of publications needs to be more aligned with actual delivery capacities.

11. Information and communication technology

One point for attention is the fragmentation of systems and tools and the lack of integration of the systems used for information management in general. This issue was repeatedly brought to JIU’s attention, especially concerning the limited interoperability of internal platforms and, consequently, the duplication of work for reporting purposes. Also, the security standards for UNEP administered websites are still not fully in line with the guidelines of the United Nations Secretariat.

12. Oversight

UNEP falls under the purview of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Board of Auditors and the Joint Inspection Unit. In addition, UNEP has also established its own evaluation office. In the latest annual programme performance report for 2022-2023, the implementation rate for OIOS audit recommendations was 88 per cent, while for Board of Auditors recommendations it was only 42 per cent. JIU thus suggested working towards improving the implementation rates of recommendations from external oversight bodies and to include also information on the respective acceptance rates in its annual performance reporting. As regards the work of the Evaluation Office in UNEP, the current distribution of resources towards strategic and cross-cutting evaluations does not allow sufficient focus on this workstream, with project, programmatic and portfolio assessments constituting the bulk of the work of the Office (**Recommendation 8**). In addition, JIU stresses the importance of properly discussing in the formal meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives the findings and conclusions of audit and evaluation reports and the management responses, especially as oversight issues are currently not discussed at the level of the Environment Assembly.



Approach & Methodology

The review was conducted between September 2024-June 2025. Information used in the report is current as of April 2025. JIU applied a range of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, using various sources to ensure the consistency, validity and reliability of the findings. It included:



**A desk review.** JIU reviewed extensive documentation pertaining to the meetings of the Committee of the Permanent Representatives and the Environment Assembly, reports produced by internal and external oversight bodies, strategic documents, internal policies, administrative instructions and other related internal documents.



**Questionnaires.** UNEP secretariat provided replies to a corporate questionnaire prepared by JIU covering the main areas of management and administration. In addition, UNEP secretariat provided relevant data and documentation. In addition, two online questionnaires gathered information and opinions from the heads of field and programme offices as well as from the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements.



**Interviews with UNEP senior managers and resource persons.** Leveraging insights from the responses to the questionnaires, JIU conducted 58 interviews in which 93 internal and external stakeholders participated, including Member States representatives. In November 2024, JIU undertook an on-site mission to UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.



**Online surveys to UNEP personnel.** Two online surveys designed and administered by JIU were distributed to all categories of personnel at all locations: one for staff members and one for affiliate personnel. In total, more than 1,000 individuals responded to the JIU surveys. Due to the high participation rate of staff member, the results of their survey are statistically valid with a margin of error of 3 per cent and a confidence level of 95 per cent.

**Online surveys to Member States.** JIU conducted two online surveys: one addressed to the members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and one to the representatives of Member States to the sixth session of the Environmental Assembly in 2024. The Inspector regrets that the participation in these surveys was insufficient to inform the analysis.





## What the JIU recommends (formal recommendations)

The JIU makes 8 formal recommendations: three are addressed to UNEP governing bodies and five to the Executive Director. The formal recommendations are complemented by 27 informal recommendations (18 in the report and 9 additional in the expanded one).

### UNEP governing bodies are called on to:

1

The United Nations Environment Assembly should, at its eighth session at the latest, clarify the mandate and role of the Committee of Permanent Representatives as its intersessional body and examine the frequency of its formal meetings, as appropriate.

4

The Committee of Permanent Representatives should request the Executive Director to present in 2026 a monitoring framework for the Policy for One UNEP Delivery for Better Collaboration and Country Support that would enable the assessment of progress against expected results.

8

The Committee of Permanent Representatives should request the Evaluation Office to consider the inclusion of a higher number of strategic or corporate evaluations in its annual work programme and to report back on their findings and conclusions.

### The Executive Director of UNEP is called to:

2

The Executive Director should conclude, by the end of 2025, the review of the UNEP Delegation of Authority Policy and Framework and update it, as appropriate, in the context of the implementation of the Policy for One UNEP Delivery for Better Collaboration and Country Support.

3

The Executive Director should issue, by the end of 2025, a corporate guidance document to support the consistent implementation of the Policy for One UNEP Delivery for Better Collaboration and Country Support across the organization.

5

The Executive Director should review and update, as appropriate, the current resource mobilization strategy and present it to the Committee of Permanent Representatives in 2026.

6

The Executive Director should designate, by the end of 2025, a Chief Risk Officer to accelerate and coordinate measures aimed at strengthening the mechanisms, tools, systems and procedures for enterprise risk management and ensure their effective implementation at all levels of the organization, including the functioning of the Enterprise Risk Management Committee.

7

The Executive Director should approve, by the end of 2026, a comprehensive strategy to support an organization-wide approach to knowledge management and knowledge-sharing.



## 2024-2025 JIU Reports and Notes

### Reports:

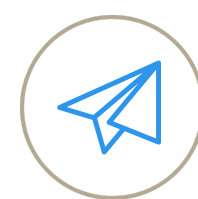
- JIU/REP/2025/2**, Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system organizations
- JIU/REP/2024/4**, Review of the implementation of the principle of mutual recognition within the United Nations system
- JIU/REP/2024/3**, Budgeting in organizations of the United Nations system Part I - Comparative analysis
- JIU/REP/2024/3**, Budgeting in organizations of the United Nations system - Part II Reference tables
- JIU/REP/2024/2**, Review of consideration of and action taken on the reports and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit by United Nations system organizations
- JIU/REP/2024/1**, Review of management and administration in the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)



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### Notes:

- JIU/NOTE/2024/2**, Note to the International Telecommunication Union from the review of the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of health insurance schemes in the United Nations system organizations
- JIU/NOTE/2024/1**, Note to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from the review of quality, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of health insurance schemes in the United Nations system organizations



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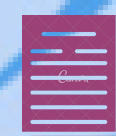
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28 Participating  
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