

STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY MANAGEMENT IN THE UN SYSTEM 2020-2030:

Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management

Mid-Term Review

GREENING THE BLUE | UN environment programme

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASR	Annual Statistical Report
BIG	Business Innovation Group
BREEAM	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method
CEB	Chief Executives Board for Coordination
CER	Certified Emission Reduction
EMG	Environment Management Group
EMS	Environmental Management System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GtB	Greening the Blue
HLCM	High-level Committee on Management
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IPSAS-B	International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
SUN	Sustainable UN Facility
tCO2e	Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNON	UN Office at Nairobi
UNOPS	UN Office for Project Services
US $	United States (of America) Dollar

INTRODUCTION

The *Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020–2030*[1] comprises two parts, the first of which, entitled *"Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management"* (hereafter "Strategy I") was endorsed by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in 2019.[2]

Strategy I was developed in response to calls by the Secretary-General for the United Nations to "raise the level of its internal ambitions and intensify its efforts to 'walk the talk' on environmental sustainability and climate change."[3] It seeks to demonstrate that the United Nations "aligns its own performance with the principles that it has pioneered internationally."

Strategy I outlines a series of objectives and indicators for environmental management across key topics and operational support functions. Further, it acknowledges the role of the UNEP- Sustainable United Nations facility (UNEP/SUN) and of the Environment Management Group (EMG) in providing leadership, coordination and support to UN system entities to implement the individual and collective environmental commitments.[4]

ABOUT THE REVIEW

Scope

Strategy I requires a review to be undertaken at its midpoint *to "**confirm and, as necessary, adjust ambitions on the basis of an analysis of progress and emerging factors**."*[5]

- The review refers to the following elements of the Strategy I.
    - Five environmental impacts: greenhouse gas emissions, waste, air pollution, water and wastewater, biodiversity degradation.
    - Six operational areas: procurement, human resources, travel, facilities management, events, information and communication technology.

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[1] https://unsceb.org/strategy-sustainability-management-united-nations-system-2020-2030

[2] The second part, 'Towards Leadership in Environmental and Social Sustainability' (Strategy II) was approved in 2021, and encompasses a broader and fuller picture of environmental and social sustainability, expanding on but not replacing the commitments for improving in-house environmental management outlined in Strategy I. Following decisions of the EMG Senior Officials Meeting in 2024, implementation of Strategy II is effectively on hold, pending the identification of a host entity (or entities) to coordinate its implementation at UN system level: this process remains ongoing.

[3] Content 1. Art 1 of Summary of deliberations Addendum Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations system, 2020–2030 Phase I: Environmental sustainability in the area of management CEB/2019/1/Add.1 (https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/CEB.2019.1.Add_.1%20-%20Sustainability%20Management%202020-2030_Phase%20I_0.pdf)

4 C. 54 (f) of the above Strategy I.

[5] paragraph 59d Monitoring and reporting mechanisms, in section VIII of Strategy I

Methodology

UNEP-SUN and members of Greening the Blue community including UNDP, UNESCO, UNOPS, FAO and WFP formed a drafting team to review relevant UN and external documentation with inputs from UN *Greening the Blue* focal points through a questionnaire survey, consultations, and interviews with key stakeholders were undertaken during 2025 and 2026. FAO, in particular, provided additional resources for drafting this review. The draft review paper was presented at the Greening the Blue Community meeting (23 April 2026) and the EMG Midterm Meeting of the EMG Technical Segment (19 May 2026) and then revised further following the feedback from the EMG and Greening the Blue Community members.[6]

ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS

The highlights below represent significant progress documented through Greening the Blue annual reports[7] covering around 60 UN entities, 310,000 personnel, deployed across 1,500 duty stations in more than 100 countries, case studies, and other relevant reports.

- Total reported **Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions** have **decreased by 29.7%,** from 2.0 million tonnes of greenhouse gases (tCO2e) in 2019 when Strategy I was endorsed[8] to 1.43 million tCO2e in 2024.
- **Per capita emissions** have **reduced by 29.5%** from 6.5 tCO2e per person in 2019 to 4.57 tCO2e in 2024. When compared with 2010 (8.3 tCO2e per person), [9] this represents a 55% reduction of per capita emission over the 2010 – 2024 period, calculated without normalization and adjustments for changes in data coverage.
- **Air travel emissions have also reduced by 33%**, from 913,000 tCO2e in 2019 to 612,000 tCO2e in 2024.

[6] Feedback received from CEB, DOS, ECA, ECLAC,FAO, ICAO, IFAD, IOM, UNDP, UNESC, UNOG, WB and WFP.

[7] https://greeningtheblue.org/

[8] 2019 is the year of adoption of Strategy I, and the last year of normal operation before COVID-19. The 2021 Greening the Blue report (data from 2020) 'reveals the impacts of COVID-19 on the UN system's environmental footprint. With significant worldwide travel restrictions and many UN personnel working from home, the UN system generated approximately 25 per cent fewer GHG emissions than in 2019.' Abstract of the Greening the Blue report 2021: The UN System's Environmental Footprint and Efforts to Reduce It (https://wedocs.unep.org/items/e1147dde-282e-4317-9c37-3c39bf22b033)

[9] Moving towards a climate-neutral UN The UN system's footprint and efforts to reduce it 2011 edition https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/cdn.unenvironment.org/s3fs-public/2020-10/2011CNeutral_UN_final_0.pdf?null=

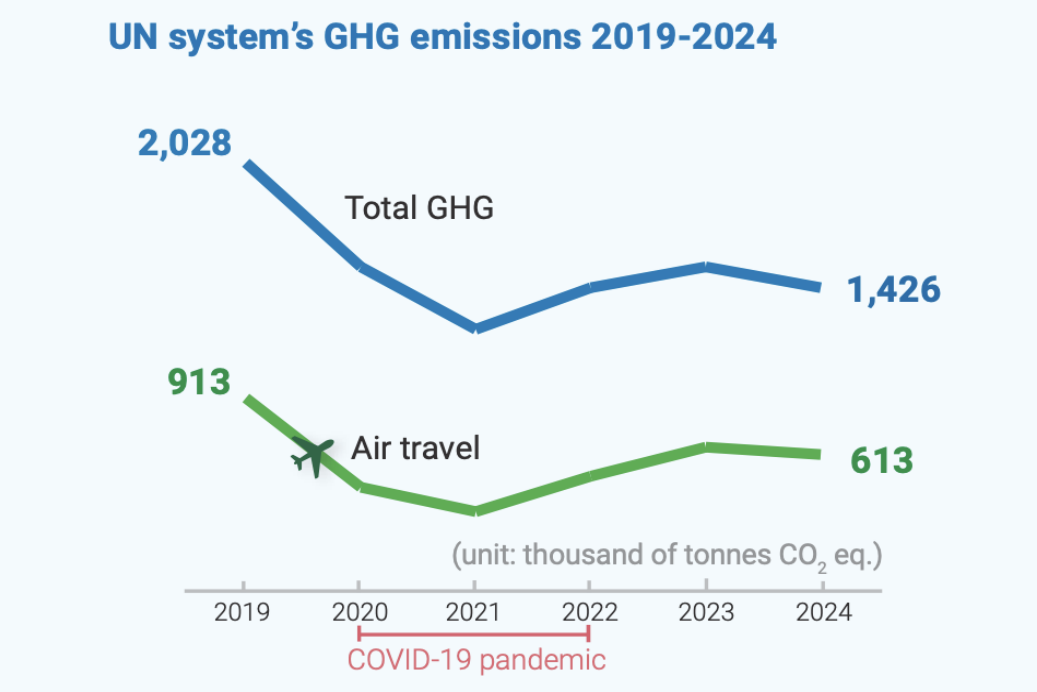


Figure 1: GHG Emissions in the UN System 2019-2024
Source: Greening the Blue Report 2025

- Since 2019, the United Nations system has intensified its efforts to use renewable electricity. The United Nations system generated at least **34.9 million kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity from onsite renewables** in 2024.
- UN entities have undertaken a number of initiatives over the past years to reduce the environmental footprint from its operation and facilities; the following examples highlight some of these initiatives:

    - UN facilities in at least **17 countries have been certified by leading green building standards such as LEED (US Green Building Council) and BREEAM (UK Greening Council)**, including in Jordan, South Sudan and Viet Nam. UN Headquarters in New York, UNON in Nairobi and UNOG in Geneva, and numerous other UN common premises have undergone, or are undergoing, substantial retrofitting to reduce energy and water use, and other environmental impacts.
    - At least eight entities[10] have **leveraged sustainable procurement practices** to **reduce single-use plastics** in packaging and products including medical supplies, mosquito nets and shelter kits, and to **reduce and recycle construction waste, printed paper and e-waste**.

[10] Including FAO, IOM, UNDP, UNHCR, UNRWA, UNICEF, UNOPS and WFP, drawn from annual Greening the Blue reports and the 2023-2024 Good Practices guide. See https://greeningtheblue.org/news-and-stories, https://greeningtheblue.org/gtb_reports and https://greeningtheblue.org/sites/default/files/good-practices-2023-2024.pdf

- UN compounds from large headquarters to small country offices have ongoing efforts and initiatives to minimize **the usage of single-use plastics** from canteens and common services.[11]
- Share of solid waste managed through improved methods raised from 40% to 60% of total waste generated in the UN peace operations
- Water efficiency and reuse measures have been incorporated into new and existing buildings by at least eight UN entities, often **reducing water consumption at each site by 30 to 50 per cent.**[12] The UNON compound in Nairobi, which hosts more than 5,000 personnel and is home to **biodiverse wetlands**, features an onsite wastewater treatment plant.
- Biodiversity gardens have been installed at UN premises in Paris, Geneva and Rome
- Forty-one UN entities have **voluntary or mandatory environmental training** in place for staff, with many using the Greening the Blue tutorial, launched in 2021.
- As of the end of 2024, 13 UN entities have an **Environmental Management System (EMS) that fully meets or exceeds UN requirements** (which are based on the ISO 14001:2015 standard) and a further 19 are approaching requirements. Together, these entities represent **86.3 per cent of UN personnel.**[13] **33 UN entities have an environmental and social safeguards process** in place to review risks in projects and programmes and a further 14 are developing one.
- Data coverage and quality have continued to improve. Since 2020, the number of reporting locations has increased, a wider range of environmental impacts are reported, and a **state- of- the-art, integrated Greening the Blue online data platform** (with over 550 users entering data from more than 1,000 UN duty stations) was launched in 2025 to drastically increase efficiency of data collection, reduce staff burden, and to further increase accuracy and allow for improved analysis.

[11] The 2025 Greening the Blue community questionnaire survey results indicate such initiatives are taking place in UN headquarters (Bangkok, Geneva, Nairobi, New York, Paris, Rome) and in a number of countries offices including Armenia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Myanmar, Panama, Yemen. Font size

[12] Entities include ECLAC, FAO, IOM, UNICEF, UNMISS, UNON, WFP, WIPO. ECLAC in Chile reports reductions of 42 per cent, UNICEF in Afghanistan 52 per cent. See sources in the immediately preceding footnote.

[13] Data collection on EMS progress in 2025 is underway.

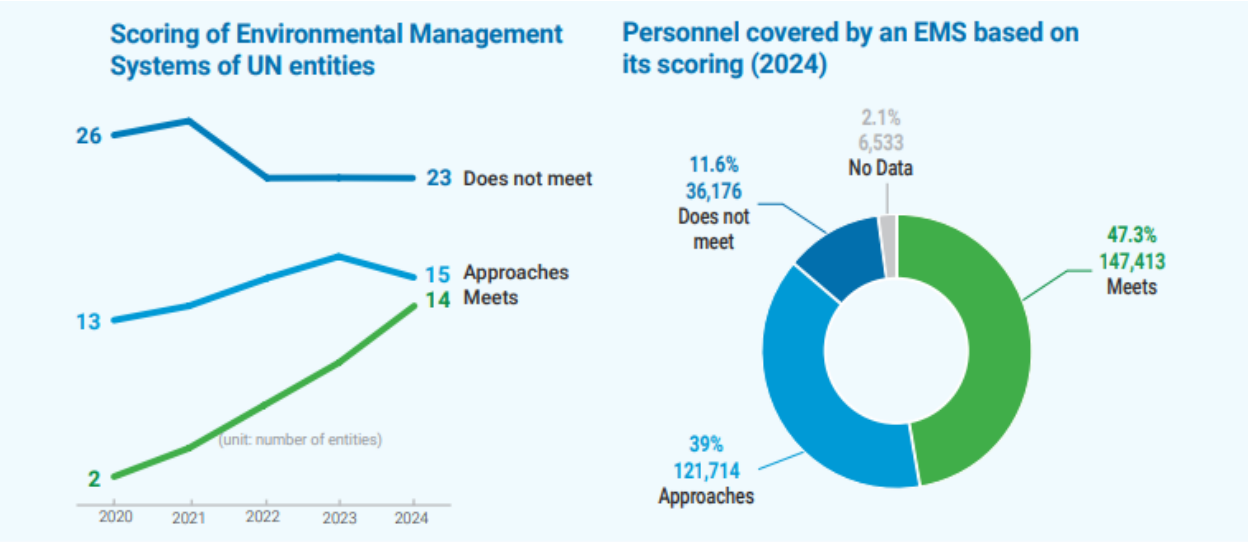


Figure 2: Environmental Management Systems
Source: Greening the Blue Report 2025

SUMMARY OF EMERGING FACTORS

A 2025 survey of Greening the Blue focal points identified several emerging factors, including:

a) New approaches to 'Climate Neutrality' and 'Net Zero' commitments;

b) Advancing discussions on the role of offsetting mechanisms, the coming end of Certified Emission Reduction (CER) mechanism with the switch to the Paris Agreement's Article 6 mechanisms;

c) New and updated international standards, i.e., ISO 14001:2026 (EMS), The International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSAS-B) Climate-related Disclosures, and expansion of requirements and good practices in reporting boundaries, such as Scope 3 GHG emissions;

d) Increasingly stringent donor requirements on environmental risk assessment, reporting of environmental impacts;

e) Advancements in policy and technology that contribute to reducing environmental footprints; and

f) Evolving political climate and multilateral challenges.

In addition to these, since the 2020 and 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, Member States have called the United Nations in the development system to mainstream environmental and climate considerations at all levels, continue to advance a system-wide approach and implement measures and reporting on their efforts to reduce the climate and environment footprint ensuring consistency of

programming and operations with climate, biodiversity and pollution pathways.[14] Regular reporting is done by the Secretary-General on this on an annual basis,[15] using the data provided via the Greening the Blue Report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The review has noted key successes in both tangible reductions in environmental impacts, and ongoing improvements to environmental practices, data management, tools and other interagency collaboration. Its findings and recommendations range across five areas, as follows:

A. Level of Ambition

Findings:

The Secretary-General has set the tone at the top in terms of the UN system's level of ambition. In November 2025, he stressed that '*the United Nations system must lead by example – shrinking its carbon footprint, reducing waste and resource use, and mobilizing the full weight of our organization to move further, faster'*[16]

Presently, the level of ambition of Strategy I remains well-aligned with UN leadership aspirations. However, on-going developments in international standards (IPSAS-B, ISO, etc.) highlight a need for further review of the UN system's reporting and actions to see what, if any, changes may be advisable.

Recommendations:

1. Senior management continues to prioritize the absolute reduction of environmental impacts from UN operations and facilities in line with Strategy I and the current efforts for efficiencies in the context of UN80.
2. UNEP-SUN with the Greening the Blue community should continue to ensure the UN system's level of ambition remains well-aligned with international good practice by reviewing evolving international sustainability standards.
3. Review, through a consultative process within the EMG, the UN system's methodological approach to climate neutrality and residual emissions in light of evolving international standards and accounting frameworks, to ensure that UN

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[14] A/RES/79/226 #35 *also calls upon* the entities of the United Nations development system to adopt and mainstream a more climate- and environment-responsive approach into their programmes and strategic plans, where appropriate, as well as in cooperation frameworks and their policy advice to programme countries, in accordance with national development policies, plans, priorities and needs, and continue to advance a system-wide approaches, implement measures, and report regularly to their respective governing bodies, through existing reporting and mandates, on their efforts to reduce their climate and environmental footprint, and ensure consistency of their operations and programmes with low emissions and climate-resilient development pathways and addressing pollution, halting biodiversity loss and restoring, conserving, protecting and sustainably using the environment"

[15] 2025 Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the QCPR | Economic and Social Council

[16] Greening the Blue report 2025

claims and expenditure remain credible, transparent and consistent with the integrity principles advocated externally.

4. Looking beyond the 2030 horizon and with the QCPR requests in mind, UNEP-SUN with the Greening the Blue community should develop a draft 'Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2030-2040," commencing during 2028, covering the period 2030-2040.

B. Measuring and Reporting

Findings:

The UN system has made considerable progress in measuring environmental impacts and reporting progress annually. However, opportunities remain to report on a more comprehensive range of elements within the existing strategy as well as the UN system's Common Approaches on Biodiversity and Towards a Pollution-free Planet, and to update reporting practices in line with evolving methodologies and emerging standards.

It is strongly recommended to continue strengthening the Greening the Blue Data Platform and linking it, where possible, to other data systems and exploring automated data capture to reduce reporting burden, particularly for smaller entities and/or offices with limited capacity. These efforts will have added value in reducing personnel's reporting burden and improve efficiency in the reporting processes.

Recommendations:

1. UNEP/SUN, along with the Greening the Blue community should review current and developing international standards to ensure the UN system's reporting methodologies remain well aligned to the extent possible with international good practices.
2. Enhance reporting on UN operations and facilities in support of the UN system common approaches on biodiversity and pollution with Strategy I.
3. Senior management to further strengthen the capacity and ensure relevant staff provide necessary data from facilities and operations through the Greening the Blue Data platform.
4. UNEP/SUN along with the Greening the Blue community review and adjust UN system-wide baselines, as required, to measure progress while incorporating updated methodologies.

C. Accelerating Implementation

Findings*:*

UN entities need to accelerate the pace of implementation in order to realize the vision of Strategy I. This is increasingly challenging in light of the current operating

context, which is impeding progress and may even undo some of the gains made to date. Focal points reported three main limitations to meet the ambitions of Strategy I:

a) low engagement of senior management on environmental sustainability, limited knowledge-sharing among senior managers to promote good practice uptake;
b) limited financial and human resource availability; and
c) inconsistent consideration of the economic savings from implementing the environmental commitments of Strategy 1.

Recommendations:

1. Elevate environmental sustainability visibility, action and knowledge sharing through more regular exchanges of knowledge and good practices with key senior management networks such as HLCM, EMG, BIG and relevant inter-agency networks.
2. Senior management should develop modalities to document, and disseminate cost effectiveness, financial savings, environmental benefits and other operational and strategic benefits resulting from the implementation of environmental sustainability measures.
3. Advocate for the use of environmental data to drive analysis, prioritize actions and inform financial planning, business cases and funding proposals that enhance environmental performance.
4. UN system leadership should consider mechanisms to ensure adequate resources for the required level of effort, including joint fundraising, advocacy to member states to support funding for joint internal sustainability efforts, and cost-sharing arrangements.

D. Strengthening Partnerships

Findings:

In order to achieve the stated level of ambition and accelerate the implementation of Strategy I objectives, the full breadth of experience across the UN system and beyond needs to be leveraged more systematically and strategically, through a combination of strategic partnerships, knowledge brokering, capacity strengthening and fundraising.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen engagement with relevant UN collaborative platforms/mechanisms, external entities, and technical networks to bolster technical knowledge on priority topics.
2. UNEP-SUN and the Greening the Blue community to further engage in UN-wide efforts for efficiencies (e.g., UN data commons), better management and

innovation such as UN 2.0, regional and national inter-agency collaboration frameworks, such as Common Premises Business Operations Strategies.

E. System Coordination Mechanism

Findings:

Strategy I's first commitment called for the establishment of "a strengthened system-wide coordination mechanism" to maintain long-term coherence but also specifically to deliver, as the Environment Management Group and the Sustainable United Nations team have done so far, the coordination services needed to reach the individual and collective goals as a system. These services include: support to sustainability management and experience sharing (catalyst function); technical advice (helpdesk function); advocacy (communication function); and progress tracking (reporting function).[17]

While the role of UNEP-SUN is commonly recognized, there is a need to clearly define the governance structure and operational modality to ensure long-term resource needs. The governance structure should both affirm UNEP-SUN's leading and coordination functions while also recognizing the key role of UN entities' focal points in delivering Strategy I.

Recommendations:

1. The EMG membership reaffirms the UNEP-SUN role to provide leadership, coordination and support to enable UN system entities to implement Sustainability Strategy I.
2. UNEP-SUN to lead development of a new Terms of Reference with the Greening the Blue Community to be drafted and endorsed by the EMG and shared with HLCM/CEB.
3. Transition the Greening the Blue community to an Inter-Agency Network of Environmental Sustainability Management as the implementation vehicle for Sustainability Strategy I. The network will be coordinated by UNEP-SUN and consist of designated technical representatives of UN entities.
4. Define clear modalities to report on Strategy I progress to EMG, CEB High Level committees and other relevant inter-agency mechanisms.
5. Raise awareness of initiatives and results with Member States through appropriate UN fora (e.g., Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, Climate Conferences of the Parties, the UN Environment Assembly, etc.).

[17] 54.f of Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations system, 2020–2030 Phase I: Environmental sustainability in the area of management (https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/CEB.2019.1.Add_.1%20-%20Sustainability%20Management%202020-2030_Phase%20I_0.pdf)

CONCLUSION

The mid-term review demonstrates that the United Nations system has made substantial progress in implementing the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020-2030: Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management.

Significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, strengthened environmental management systems, improved data quality and reporting, and growing integration of sustainability considerations into facilities management, procurement, and travels. At the same time, more can be done, emerging international standards and good practices, evolving stakeholder expectations and an increasingly complex operating environment underscore the need to maintain momentum and continuously strengthen the United Nations system's approach to environmental sustainability.

Looking ahead, achieving Strategy 1objectives by 2030 will require enhanced commitment at both individual entity and system-wide levels. Sustained leadership engagement, adequate and predictable financial and human resources, and stronger integration of environmental sustainability into broader United Nations management reform and efficiency efforts are all essential for success. Conversely, by reinforcing collaboration, accountability and investment in environmental sustainability, the United Nations system can lead by example and lay a solid foundation for an even more ambitious environmental sustainability agenda beyond 2030.

ANNEX 1 Greening the Blue 2025 Full Report

(https://greeningtheblue.org/sites/default/files/interactive-report-landing/Annual-Report-2025-GtB.pdf



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