

Environmental Performance Index 2026



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Policymakers Summary

Compounding environmental pressures threaten global prosperity and sustainable development. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, pushing global temperatures toward critical thresholds. Resource mismanagement and climate change are degrading ecosystems and biodiversity, while polluted air and water remain leading causes of premature death in the populations of many developing countries.

Although environmental progress is visible in some places, humanity's impact on the natural systems that sustain life has intensified, demanding carefully designed, evidence-based policy action. Rigorously constructed environmental metrics have never been more important – as they allow policymakers and other stakeholders to track trends, identify successful policy interventions, share best practices, and hold governments and polluters accountable.

Harnessing advances in data, science, and technology, the 2026 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) provides a comprehensive assessment of sustainability worldwide. The 2026 EPI ranks 177 countries on 47 indicators across 12 issue categories spanning three policy objectives: Environmental Health, Ecosystem Vitality, and Climate Change. The 2026 EPI introduces several important methodological advances:

- More than half of all indicators now incorporate artificial intelligence to expand geographic and temporal coverage.
- A new grasslands indicator captures the condition of a previously undermeasured ecosystem.
- Climate change performance is benchmarked against a 1.7°C warming pathway, providing a more rigorous standard for assessing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions control efforts.

These innovations extend the EPI's reach and deepen its analytical power. The metrics provided serve as a key tool for tracking progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the emissions targets of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and the biodiversity protection commitments of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The 2026 EPI results and supporting materials are available at epi.yale.edu.

Leaders and Laggards

European nations dominate the top of the 2026 Environmental Performance Index. Estonia leads the world, propelled to the top position by its dramatic reduction of GHG emissions following closure of its oil shale power generators in 2019. Such big single-shot gains (in this case reducing emissions 40% in a fell swoop), however, can only occur once. Further reductions in emissions will require broader GHG control strategies and continuous effort. Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, Finland, and the Netherlands round out the top five.

Outside Europe, Japan ranks 16th in the world, with Australia (25th), the United States (27th), and Canada (29th) in the top 30. Among major emerging economies, Brazil leads at 50th in the world, followed by Russia at 89th, South Africa at 111th, and China at 129th. India comes in second from the bottom at 176th place.

Alongside India, a number of South Asian and sub-Saharan African nations face severe challenges across a range of issues. Laos finishes last out of 177 countries. Bangladesh, Mali, and Vietnam round out the bottom five. Common pressures facing these nations include unsafe air and water as well as mounting ecosystem stress from agriculture, deforestation, and climate change impacts.

Wealth is a strong predictor of environmental performance. High-income countries score dramatically better than low-income countries on nearly every indicator. This correlation is partly due to their capacity to invest in environmental infrastructure and better governance. But some of the out-performance reflects the outsourcing of dirty industries to the Global South. To close this sustainable development gap, underperforming nations need resources to invest in better sanitation and drinking water systems but also improved regulatory frameworks and better natural resource management.

Closer review of the 2026 results demonstrate that income is not destiny. At every income level, some countries out- or under-perform their peers. The data demonstrate that sound environmental governance, carefully structured economic plans, and strategic investments can produce strong outcomes even in resource-constrained settings.

Progress on Climate Change Remains Insufficient

The 2026 EPI delivers an unambiguous verdict on global progress for climate change: the world remains far off track. Despite a decade of intensifying international commitments under the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and real gains in renewable energy deployment and energy efficiency in many places, GHG emissions continue to rise globally. The 2026 EPI benchmarks emissions reduction performance against a 1.7°C warming pathway, a science-based target consistent with avoiding the most catastrophic climate change impacts. The results are sobering: the vast majority of nations are not reducing emissions at a pace compatible with this threshold, and many have not reduced their emissions at all.

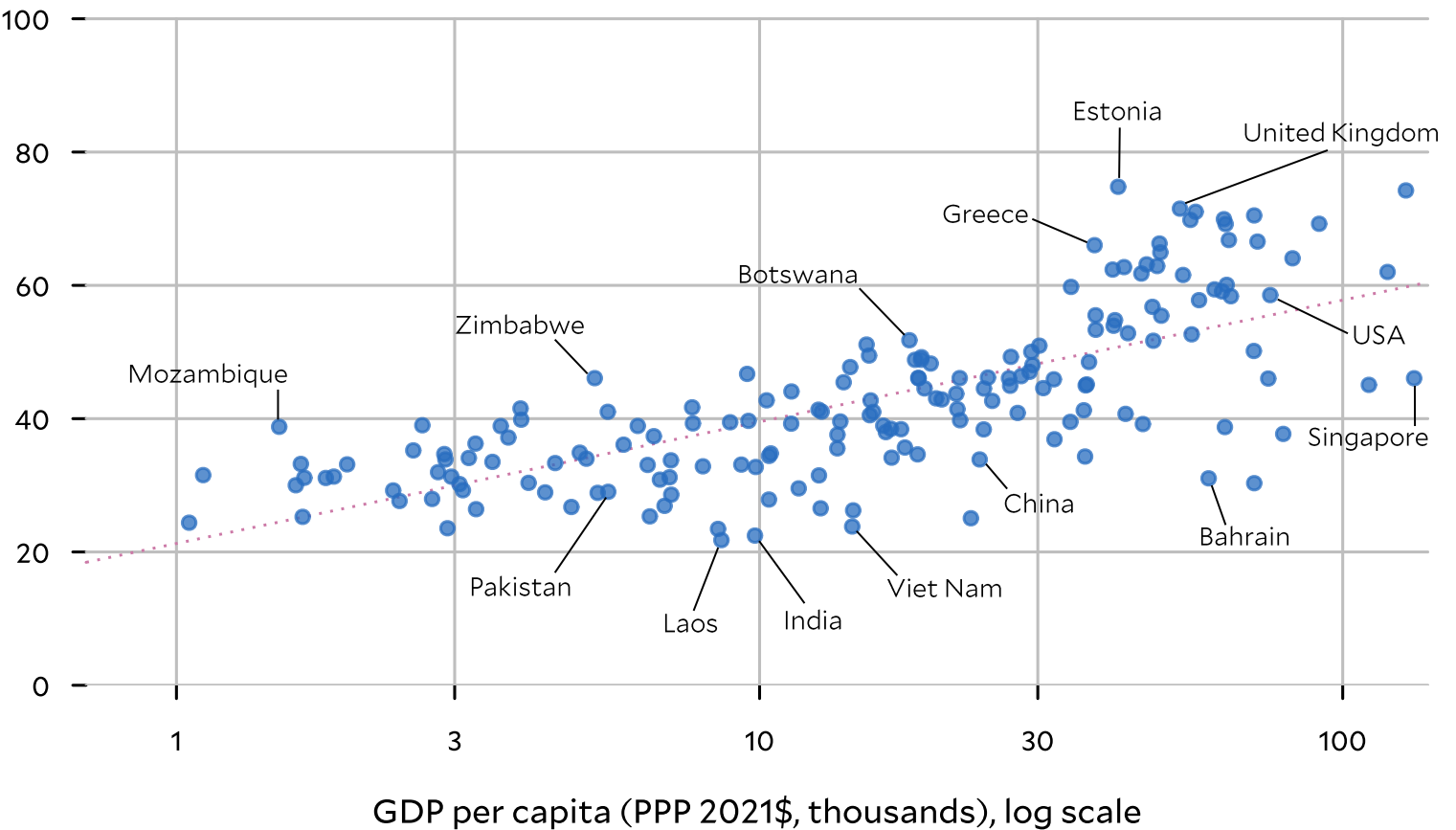
European nations dominate the 2026 EPI climate change rankings, taking most of the top positions on the leaderboard. Countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark benefit from ambitious EU-defined GHG emissions control policies including carbon pricing through the Emissions Trading System, as

well as decades of investment in low-carbon energy infrastructure. France’s extensive nuclear fleet and the Nordic countries’ commitment to wind and hydropower give them among the lowest GHG intensities of electricity generation in the world. Yet even these leaders are not fully on track against the 1.7°C benchmark. In highlighting the fact that the world’s top climate change performers are still falling short of the net-zero emissions by 2050, the 2026 EPI makes clear just how challenging the required energy transformation will be.

At the other end of the spectrum, the world’s largest GHG emitters continue to lag behind. China, the world’s single largest emitter, scores poorly on climate change indicators despite rapid growth in renewable energy capacity. Its coal-heavy power sector and energy-intensive industrial base generate emissions that dwarf its renewable power gains in absolute terms. India, whose per-capita emissions remain relatively low but are growing rapidly, faces an acute development-versus-pollution tension as hundreds of millions of people gain access to modern energy services but at the price of serious urban air pollution and spiking GHG emissions.

Scores in the 2026 EPI are highly correlated with country wealth ($r = 0.69$), but within any level of income, some countries outperform their peers while others underachieve.

EPI Score



Russia scores near the bottom on climate change metrics, reflecting an economy deeply dependent on fossil fuel extraction, an inefficient and aging industrial base, and a policy framework that provides few incentives to decarbonize. The United States performs below its peer group on climate change metrics, reflecting the combined effects of high per-capita emissions, a politically contested energy transition, and policies that fail to match the scale of transformation required.

Closing Data Gaps with Artificial Intelligence

Major data gaps continue to hinder efforts to track progress toward a sustainable future, including limits on the indicators available to track on a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous basis water use and availability, agricultural sustainability, wetlands protection, biodiversity loss, ocean contamination, and waste management. Without consistent indicators and empirically grounded analysis, policy progress is slower, less effective, and more costly than it needs to be. More disaggregated metrics are also needed to trace emissions and other harms to sectors, firms, and supply chains.

The 2026 EPI takes a significant step toward closing these gaps through systematic integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning into its data pipelines. More than half of the EPI indicators now incorporate AI-assisted data collection, gap-filling, anomaly detection, validation, or estimation methods. By training models on satellite imagery, remote sensing data, ground-truth observations, and socioeconomic variables, our data partners can produce credible estimates for metrics that previously lacked sufficient monitoring. The result is broader geographic coverage, greater temporal consistency, and a more complete picture of global environmental conditions.

A major methodological advance in the 2026 EPI is a new grasslands indicator built with data from the Global Pasture Watch research consortium, led by Land & Carbon Lab. Grasslands are among the world's most ecologically significant and most overlooked biomes, covering roughly 40% of the Earth's ice-free land surface, supporting a disproportionate share of global biodiversity, sequestering substantial carbon in soils, and sustaining the livelihoods. Yet grasslands have historically received far less policy and measurement attention than forests. Previous EPI editions tracked forest cover change in detail but lacked a comparable metric

for grasslands. The 2026 grasslands indicator, built on remote sensing data and AI-assisted analysis, fills this gap, providing for the first time a globally consistent measure of grassland health and degradation that can inform national and international conservation policy.

A Comprehensive Environmental Index for a Sustainable Future

A core belief of the EPI team and data partners is that environmental progress can be measured, that measurement drives accountability, and that accountability drives policy change. Since its launch in 2000, the EPI has evolved into a multidimensional sustainability assessment tool relied upon by diverse audiences around the world.

Policymakers use EPI scores and rankings to benchmark performance against peers, identify strengths and weaknesses, and track progress over time. International organizations and development banks find that the EPI analysis allows them to target environmental finance and technical assistance for the greatest effect. Researchers and academics rely upon the underlying data to study the drivers of environmental performance across countries and over time. Civil society organizations and the media value the EPI rankings because the data provides a reliable source for efforts to call out environmental problems and hold governments accountable for the outcomes they are delivering. Likewise, business leaders across the world track EPI metrics as they seek to assess the environmental operating context in countries where they invest and operate.

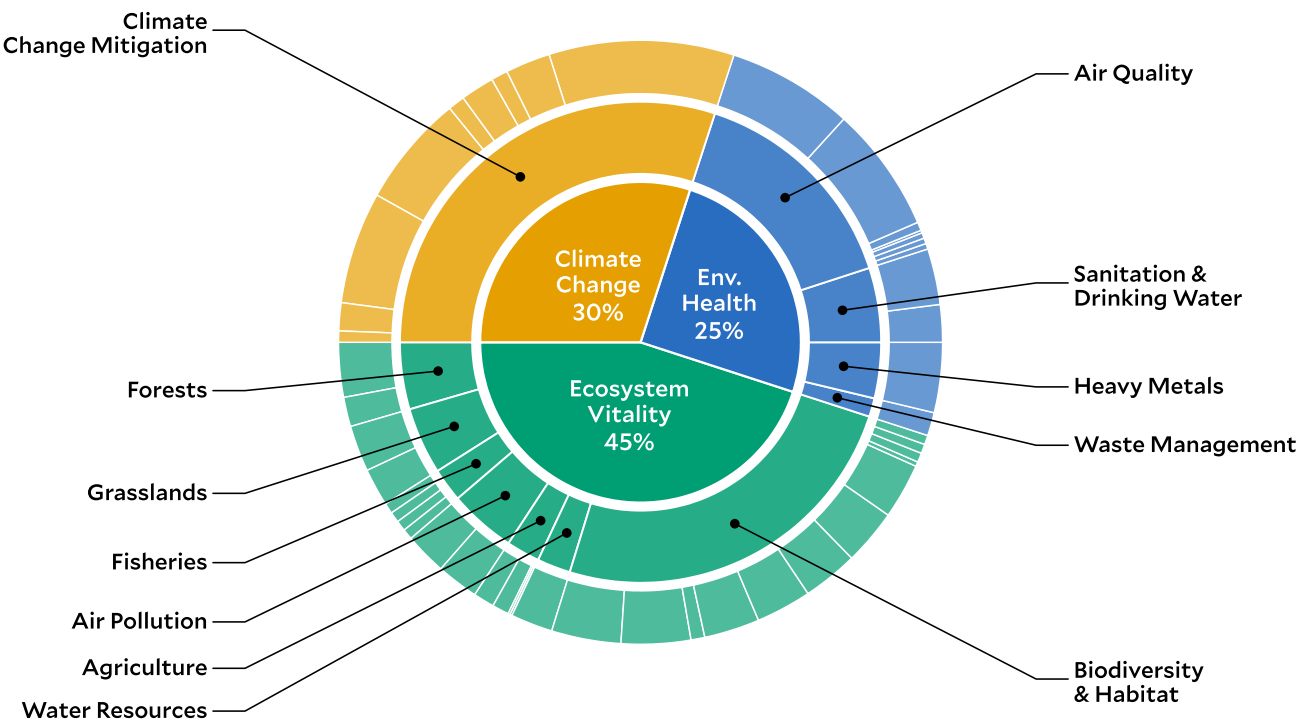
The EPI team is proud of the contribution its metrics and analyses have made in advancing evidence-based environmental policy. Looking ahead, the EPI will be relaunched in a new format with updated data foundations designed to capture emerging opportunities in the AI era. Updates will be posted at epi.yale.edu.

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The 2026 EPI Framework organizes 47 indicators into 12 issue categories across three policy objectives. The weight of each component is shown as a percentage of the next level of aggregation.



Ecosystem Vitality		45%
7 issue categories · 27 indicators		
FORESTS		10%
Tree cover loss	65%	
Tree cover loss within KBAs	35%	
GRASSLANDS		10%
Grassland conversion	55%	
Grassland conversion within KBAs	45%	
FISHERIES		5%
Fish catch discarded	25%	
Bottom trawling in the global ocean	25%	
Bottom trawling in domestic waters	25%	
Regional Marine Trophic Index	25%	
AIR POLLUTION		10%
NO _x emission trend	50%	
SO ₂ emission trend	50%	
AGRICULTURE		5%
Sustainable Nitrogen Management Index	50%	
Phosphorus surplus	40%	
Relative crop yield	5%	
Pesticide pollution risk	5%	
WATER RESOURCES		5%
Wastewater treatment	100%	
BIODIVERSITY & HABITAT		55%
Marine habitat protection	15%	
Marine KBA protection	15%	
Marine protection stringency	3%	
Terrestrial biome protection	12%	
Terrestrial KBA protection	12%	
Protected Area Representativeness Index	12%	
Protected Area Connectedness Index	12%	
Species Protection Index	12%	
Species Habitat Index	1%	
Red List Index	2%	
Biodiversity Habitat Index	2%	
Bioclimatic Ecosystem Resilience	2%	

Environmental Health		25%
4 issue categories · 11 indicators		
AIR QUALITY		60%
Ambient PM _{2.5}	45%	
Household solid fuels	45%	
Ozone exposure	3%	
NO ₂ exposure	1%	
CO exposure	2%	
SO ₂ exposure	2%	
Volatile Organic Compound exposure	2%	
SANITATION & DRINKING WATER		20%
Unsafe drinking water	60%	
Unsafe sanitation	40%	
HEAVY METALS		15%
Lead exposure	100%	
WASTE MANAGEMENT		5%
Sustainably managed solid waste	100%	

Climate Change		30%
1 issue category · 9 indicators		
CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION		100%
CO ₂ emission trend	33%	
CH ₄ emission trend	8%	
N ₂ O emission trend	3%	
F-gas emission trend	6%	
Black carbon emission trend	3%	
GHG emissions: trend vs. per capita	20%	
GHG emissions: trend vs. per GDP	20%	
Projected GHG emissions in 2050	5%	
Carbon flux from land use change	2%	

Notes: KBA = Key Biodiversity Area, PM_{2.5} = particulate matter (>2.5 µm)

RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	REG	RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	REG	RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	REG
1	Estonia	74.79	1	60	Dominica	46.06	8	121	Uzbekistan	34.79	9
2	Luxembourg	74.24	1	60	Singapore	46.06	4	122	Uganda	34.69	20
3	United Kingdom	71.51	2	63	Taiwan	46.02	5	123	Turkmenistan	34.64	10
4	Finland	71.04	3	64	Trinidad & Tobago	45.90	10	124	Eswatini	34.41	21
5	Netherlands	70.49	4	65	Ecuador	45.46	11	125	Türkiye	34.32	19
6	Germany	69.93	5	66	Panama	45.14	12	126	Mongolia	34.15	13
7	France	69.82	6	67	Qatar	45.07	5	127	Vanuatu	34.10	14
8	Norway	69.24	7	68	Bahamas	44.99	13	128	Nepal	33.99	3
9	Sweden	69.20	8	69	Serbia	44.94	17	129	China	33.88	15
10	Austria	66.80	9	70	Saint Kitts & Nevis	44.58	14	129	Ethiopia	33.88	22
11	Denmark	66.57	10	71	Suriname	44.54	15	131	Kyrgyzstan	33.75	11
12	Spain	66.28	11	72	Saint Lucia	44.52	16	132	Comoros	33.52	23
13	Greece	66.03	2	73	Jamaica	44.08	17	133	Senegal	33.34	24
14	Slovenia	64.95	3	74	Thailand	43.74	6	134	Malawi	33.21	25
15	Switzerland	64.06	12	75	Armenia	43.05	3	135	Afghanistan	33.14	4
16	Japan	63.15	1	76	Bosnia & Herzegovina	42.88	18	136	Morocco	33.11	13
17	Czechia	62.90	4	77	Namibia	42.75	5	137	Tonga	33.06	16
18	Portugal	62.74	13	78	Algeria	42.74	6	138	Nigeria	32.85	26
19	Slovakia	62.37	5	79	Georgia	42.67	4	139	Cabo Verde	32.75	27
20	Ireland	62.01	14	80	Nicaragua	41.70	18	140	Haiti	31.97	28
21	Poland	61.77	6	81	Timor-Leste	41.53	7	141	Central African Rep.	31.53	28
22	Italy	61.56	15	82	Barbados	41.43	19	142	Guatemala	31.49	29
23	Belgium	60.08	16	83	Belize	41.35	20	143	Sudan	31.31	14
24	Bulgaria	59.77	7	84	Kazakhstan	41.26	5	144	Togo	31.30	29
25	Australia	59.40	17	85	Tunisia	41.05	7	145	Cambodia	31.21	17
26	Malta	59.09	18	86	São Tomé & Príncipe	41.03	6	146	Madagascar	31.13	30
27	United States	58.54	19	87	Peru	41.01	21	147	Niger	31.10	31
28	Iceland	58.37	20	88	Mauritius	40.86	7	148	Bahrain	31.05	15
29	Canada	57.78	21	89	Russia	40.72	6	149	Côte d'Ivoire	30.85	32
30	Lithuania	56.78	8	90	Equatorial Guinea	40.52	8	150	Guinea	30.37	33
31	Latvia	55.51	9	91	Benin	39.85	9	151	Guyana	30.32	30
32	New Zealand	55.45	22	92	Azerbaijan	39.76	7	152	Gambia	30.19	34
33	Hungary	54.78	10	93	Lebanon	39.67	8	153	Dem. Rep. Congo	30.01	35
34	Romania	53.94	11	94	Sri Lanka	39.58	2	154	El Salvador	29.54	31
35	Cyprus	53.34	12	95	Malaysia	39.52	8	155	Sierra Leone	29.26	36
36	Croatia	52.82	13	96	Angola	39.46	10	156	Solomon Islands	29.23	18
37	South Korea	52.65	2	97	Samoa	39.29	9	157	Pakistan	29.03	5
38	Botswana	51.77	1	98	Bolivia	39.25	22	158	Papua New Guinea	28.94	19
39	Israel	51.69	1	99	Kuwait	39.19	9	159	Myanmar	28.87	20
40	Ukraine	51.12	1	100	Lesotho	39.01	11	160	Ghana	28.60	37
41	Chile	50.95	1	101	Paraguay	38.95	23	161	Guinea-Bissau	27.95	38
42	United Arab Emirates	50.16	2	102	Republic of Congo	38.91	12	162	Philippines	27.87	21
43	Seychelles	50.03	2	103	Tanzania	38.89	13	163	Chad	27.65	39
44	Palau	49.47	3	104	Mozambique	38.78	14	164	Djibouti	26.92	40
45	Costa Rica	49.28	2	105	Saudi Arabia	38.74	10	165	Tajikistan	26.75	12
46	Albania	49.22	14	106	Egypt	38.48	11	166	Iraq	26.55	16
47	Gabon	48.84	3	107	Iran	38.42	12	167	Rwanda	26.42	41
48	Colombia	48.83	3	108	Dominican Republic	38.39	24	168	Indonesia	26.24	22
49	Oman	48.50	3	109	Moldova	37.98	8	169	Mauritania	25.34	42
50	Brazil	48.27	4	110	Brunei Darussalam	37.71	10	170	Liberia	25.27	43
51	Antigua & Barbuda	48.04	5	111	South Africa	37.60	15	171	Maldives	25.06	6
52	Bhutan	47.74	1	112	Honduras	37.37	25	172	Burundi	24.39	44
53	Belarus	47.03	2	113	Zambia	37.17	16	173	Viet Nam	23.82	23
54	Jordan	46.72	4	114	Uruguay	36.91	26	174	Mali	23.56	45
55	Montenegro	46.38	15	115	Kiribati	36.26	11	175	Bangladesh	23.46	7
56	North Macedonia	46.17	16	116	Kenya	36.10	17	176	India	22.46	8
57	St. Vincent & the Gren.	46.12	6	117	Grenada	35.67	27	177	Laos	21.78	24
58	Mexico	46.09	7	118	Fiji	35.54	12				
59	Zimbabwe	46.08	4	119	Burkina Faso	35.24	18				
60	Argentina	46.06	8	120	Cameroon	34.90	19				

Regions (REG):

Asia-Pacific	Eastern Europe	Former Soviet States	Global West
Greater Middle East	Latin America & Caribbean	Southern Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa