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2020 ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE INDEX FINDS
DECARBONIZATION PROPELS COUNTRIES TO TOP SUSTAINABILITY RANKINGS
*India ranks near the bottom of all countries,*

*with particularly low scores on air quality and climate change mitigation*

Online release event:

Results from the 2020 Environmental Performance Index will be released online and live from Yale and Columbia universities on Thursday, June 4 at 11:00 a.m. EDT. Panelists from the research team will be joined by ministers from the Danish government. View recording here.

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — India ranks 168th out of 180 countries in the 2020 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) according to researchers at Yale and Columbia universities who produce this biennial scorecard of national results on a range of sustainability issues. Commenting on the rankings, Yale professor Dan Esty, who directs the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy that co-produces the EPI, observed that "our analysis suggests that countries with broad-based sustainability efforts and particular emphasis on decarbonizing their economies come out at the top of the pack." India's decarbonization agenda needs to accelerate, and the country faces a number of serious environmental health risks, including poor air quality.

Now in its 22nd year, the EPI report has become the premier metrics framework for global environmental policy analysis, ranking 180 countries on 32 performance indicators across 11 issue categories covering environmental health and ecosystem vitality. The 2020 EPI features new metrics that gauge waste management, carbon dioxide emissions from land cover change, and emissions of fluorinated gases – all important drivers of climate change. Project director Zach Wendling noted that "the expanded issue coverage promises to deepen the global capacity for data-driven environmental policymaking, clarifying sustainability leaders and laggards, and helping to identify best policy practices."

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In the 2020 EPI, Denmark ranks first in the world, reflecting strong performance across nearly all issues tracked by the EPI. Other nations in the top tier include Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and France. [Beyond providing issue-by-issue and country-by-country results](#), the 2020 EPI offers new insights into the factors associated with success on environmental sustainability goals. As Alex de Sherbinin of Columbia's Earth Institute, one of the lead authors of the report, explained, "good governance more than any other factor separates the nations that are moving toward a sustainable future from those which are not." High-scoring countries generally exhibit long-standing commitments and carefully constructed programs to protect public health, conserve natural resources, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

India comes in near the bottom of the global rankings at 168th place worldwide, and only Afghanistan (178th place) ranks below India in Southern Asia. Leading the region is Bhutan (107th), with relatively high scores in biodiversity & habitat protection. Sri Lanka (109th) and Maldives (127th) round out the top three countries in Southern Asia, followed by Pakistan (142nd), Nepal (145th), and Bangladesh (162nd).

India struggles to perform well on several of the 2020 EPI's environmental issue categories. For air quality, India and Pakistan both rank at the very bottom of the 2020 EPI, at 179th and 180th places, respectively. By comparison, low air quality also continues to plague China, although its recent pollution controls and other environmental investments have helped it climb to 120th place in the EPI, 48 places ahead of India's 168th overall ranking. On biodiversity & habitat, India places 148th in the world, failing to maximize the conservation potential of its protected areas, especially in marine ecosystems. Perhaps most critically, India places 106th in the world on climate change mitigation. As one of the world's most significant emitters of greenhouse gases, India should be applauded for recent gains in renewable energy investments. However, the data show India is not on track to decarbonize quickly enough to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Low EPI scores for India suggest a need for national sustainability efforts on a number of fronts, including air and water pollution, biodiversity protection, and the transition to a clean energy future.

EPI rankings have long highlighted the environmental challenges that India faces. India's 168th ranking in the 2020 EPI reflects our improved knowledge about the current state of the world. Ten years ago, these same metrics would have given India a rank of 163rd in the world. The EPI finds essentially no overall improvement in India's environmental performance over the past decade, though there are gains and losses on individual issues.

## 2020 EPI Global Trends

The 2020 EPI reveals that global progress on climate change has been halting. The Index's metrics on $CO_2$ emissions from land cover change and black carbon emission growth rates show that critical aspects of the battle to address climate change are trending in the wrong direction. Despite its high regional ranking in the 2020 EPI, Sri Lanka's climate change score dropped by 12.5 out of 100 over the past decade, due to heavy reliance on fossil fuels, and India's score dropped by 2.9. China, by contrast, improved its climate change score in the last ten years by 24.5. Meeting the goals set out in the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement requires sustained cuts in emissions of all greenhouse gases, and the 2020 EPI finds that no country is decarbonizing quickly enough to meet these climate change goals. Some of India's neighbors do excel on individual greenhouse gas reductions, most notably Sri Lanka on methane and Pakistan on fluorinated gases. To spread best practices around the world, policymakers must pay greater attention to how climate leaders achieve success. Such lessons can be drawn from countries that have recently made notable improvements in climate change mitigation around the world, such as Seychelles, Bahrain, and Luxembourg.

Taking into account historic data on environmental performance, the 2020 Index also recognizes countries that have made significant progress over the past decade. Many countries have improved health outcomes related to sanitation, drinking water, and indoor air pollution, demonstrating that investments in public health can translate into rapid advancements in human well-being. Environmental health gains can be traced to successful campaigns to reduce household use of solid fuels in a number of countries, particularly in the Middle East. Such efforts need to be expanded to all countries, especially as the world tackles persistent problems like poor air quality. As the 2020 EPI builds on data mostly from 2017 and 2018 and collected

earlier, the results do not capture impacts from very recent events, including the burning of the Brazilian Amazon, wildfires in Australia, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional performance on protecting and enhancing the vitality of ecosystems reveals both gains and stubborn challenges. In the 2020 EPI, Morocco, UAE, Croatia, and Kuwait substantially improved their scores on protection of biodiversity and habitat. On other issues, the world community is doing well, while a few countries are trending in the wrong direction. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cambodia, for example, have experienced significant deforestation over the past five years. Fisheries are also in global decline, with significant trouble noted in a range of countries including Bahrain, Argentina, and Australia, and regionally in Pakistan.

## Explaining EPI Results

At every level of development, some countries achieve scores that exceed their peer nations with similar economic circumstances. Analysis of the factors underlying the 2020 EPI rankings makes it clear that sustainable development requires not only economic prosperity to generate the funds required for investments in public health and environmental infrastructure but also careful management of the pollution threats and natural resource management challenges that emerge from industrialization and urbanization. This analysis demonstrates that positive environmental performance requires good governance, including a strong rule of law, vibrant public engagement, an independent media, and well-crafted regulations.

## EPI and Global Sustainability Data

The EPI builds on the best available global data from international research entities, such as the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the World Resources Institute, the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, CSIRO, the Mullion Group, and the Sea Around Us Project at the University of British Columbia, as well as from international organizations like the World Bank and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Complete methods, data, and results are available online at epi.yale.edu. The EPI team is dedicated to transparency and constant improvement and invites critique and commentary from the global community.

The push for better data analytics as a foundation for policy choices has gained momentum in recent years, particularly after the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. And while more environmental data have become available, the EPI research team decries the lack of methodologically rigorous and globally comprehensive indicators on a number of fundamental issues including wetlands protection, toxic waste management, and groundwater quality and availability.

## About the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy

[The Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy](#) advances fresh thinking and analytically rigorous approaches to environmental decision-making across disciplines, sectors, and boundaries. In addition to its research activities, the Center aims to serve as a locus for connection and collaboration for all members of the Yale University community who are interested in environmental law and policy issues. The Center supports a wide-ranging program of teaching, research, and outreach on local, regional, national, and global pollution control and natural resource management issues. These efforts involve faculty, staff, and student collaboration and are aimed at shaping academic thinking and policymaking in the public, private, and NGO sectors.

## About the Columbia Center for International Earth Science Information Network

[The Center for International Earth Science Information Network](#) (CIESIN) is part of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. CIESIN works at the intersection of the social, natural, and information sciences, and specializes in online data and information management, spatial data integration and training, and interdisciplinary research related to human interactions in the environment. Since 1989, scientists, decision-makers, and the public have relied on the information resources at CIESIN to better understand the changing relationship between human beings and the environment. From its offices at Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory campus in Palisades, New York, CIESIN continues to focus on applying state-of-the-art information technology to pressing interdisciplinary data, information, and research problems related to human interactions in the environment.

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