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2022 ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE INDEX FINDS WORLD STRUGGLES TO MEET SUSTAINABILITY TARGETS

*India ranks last among 180 countries in the overall EPI scorecard,
with low scores on climate mitigation, air quality, and biodiversity.*

Online release event:

Results from the 2022 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) were released online and live from Yale and Columbia Universities on Wednesday, June 1 at 11:00 a.m. EDT. Danish Climate, Energy & Utilities Minister Dan Jørgensen joined the EPI research team to highlight key findings. [View the recording here.](#)

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – India ranks last out of 180 countries in the 2022 [Environmental Performance Index](#) (EPI) produced by researchers at Yale and Columbia Universities. The EPI rankings reflect country performance in a scorecard capturing a broad range of sustainability issues. In commenting on the rankings, Yale professor Daniel Esty, who directs the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy that co-produces the EPI, observed that “countries with broad sustainability agendas and particular emphasis on decarbonizing their economies come out at the top of the pack.” India faces sustainability challenges on multiple fronts, including poor ambient air quality, unsafe drinking water and sanitation, threats to biodiversity and habitat, and accelerating greenhouse gas emissions.

For 22 years, the EPI report has been the world’s leading analysis of country-level sustainability trends. The 2022 EPI ranks 180 countries on 40 performance indicators across 11 issue categories covering climate change, biodiversity, air quality, and other critical topics in environmental health and ecosystem vitality. Country rankings also reflect cutting-edge environmental research that enables new metrics on climate commitments, air quality, recycling rates, ocean plastic pollution, and sustainable pesticide use. Project director Martin Wolf noted: “As the most comprehensive global environmental analysis ever synthesized, the 2022 EPI harnesses data-driven insights to highlight best practices and enhance environmental governance around the world.”

2022 EPI Rankings

India comes in at the bottom of the global rankings, placing 180th out of 180 countries tracked by the EPI. Other poorly performing countries include Myanmar (179th), Viet Nam (178th), Bangladesh (177th), and Pakistan (176th). Leading the Southern Asia region for Ecosystem Vitality and Environmental Health are Bhutan and the Maldives, respectively.

Denmark ranks first in the world in the overall 2022 EPI rankings, reflecting strong performance across nearly all issues tracked by the EPI, with notable leadership in climate and sustainable agriculture. Other high-scoring nations include the United Kingdom and Finland, both of whom earn top rankings due to strong climate performance in recent years. Beyond providing global and country-level results, the 2022 EPI promises to advance sustainability by offering fresh insights into the economic, governmental, and social drivers of good environmental performance. Alex de Sherbinin of Columbia’s Earth Institute, one of the lead authors of the 2022 EPI, explained that “good governance and financial resources, more than any other factors, separate the nations that are moving toward a sustainable future from those which are not.” High scoring countries generally demonstrate long-standing commitments and broad policy programs to protect public health, conserve natural resources, and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

India’s poor performance in the 2022 EPI reflects several persistent sustainability challenges. The country ranks 179th in both the Air Quality and Biodiversity & Habitat issue categories. According to data from the Global Burden of Disease that undergirds the EPI’s analyses, millions of premature deaths in India result from poor ambient air quality every year. Poor air quality also continues to impact public health in China, although recent emissions control policies have helped it climb to 157th place in the 2022 EPI. India has struggled to make progress on biodiversity and habitat conservation in recent years, ranking 177th in the *national terrestrial protected areas* indicator and 111th in the *marine protected areas* indicator. These indicators are grounded in the latest available data from the World Database on Protected Areas.

Climate change is another area where India has struggled to make progress. As the world’s third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, India faces obstacles to mitigate climate change. The country’s recent efforts to expand renewable energy are praiseworthy, but current investments in decarbonization and clean energy are insufficient. Using the past 10-years’ emissions trajectory as a basis for projecting 2050 emissions, the EPI researchers forecast that India – along with most other nations – are not on track to reach net-zero emissions by mid-century, the goal ratified in the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact.

According to the EPI’s analyses, more than 50% of greenhouse gas emissions in 2050 are slated to come from just 4 countries: China, India, the United States, and Russia. “While U.S. emissions are declining rapidly, they are not falling fast enough to get to net zero by 2050 given the very high emissions starting point of the United States,” said Dr. Wolf. More troubling, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise in China, India, Russia, and several other major developing countries. Just 24 countries – the *dirty two-dozen* – will account for nearly 80% of 2050 residual greenhouse gas emissions unless leaders strengthen climate change policies and draw down emissions trajectories. “The 2022 EPI emissions projections should be a call to action for many nations,” declared Dr. Wolf.

The EPI demonstrates, however, that a country’s current trajectories are not locked-in. Policymakers in countries not on track can implement strategies that shift their emissions trajectories toward a more sustainable downward

rate. Likewise, some countries that have significantly reduced emissions in the past decade may find it difficult to find additional solutions to maintain their current trend. Future EPI reports will closely monitor the continued steps that India and other countries are taking to achieve steady emissions reductions.

EPI rankings have consistently underscored the environmental challenges that India faces. India's 180th ranking in the 2022 EPI reflects the latest environmental data and sustainability research. The EPI finds essentially no overall improvement in India's environmental performance over the past decade. Ten years ago, the same metrics used in the latest analyses would have given India a rank of 179th out of 180 countries.

Additional Global Insights

Worldwide trends suggest that many countries have made significant progress over the past decade on critical environmental health issues like sanitation, drinking water, and indoor air pollution. These gains demonstrate that investments in environmental infrastructure, like wastewater treatment facilities, and better household energy technologies, such as cleaner cookstoves, can translate into rapid improvements in public health. The EPI's new air quality metrics indicate, however, that residents in most countries still breathe unsafe air. More than 8 million people die prematurely each year from exposure to indoor and ambient air pollutants. Southern Asian countries, such as India, Nepal, and Pakistan, are particularly lagging in air quality.

Ecosystem trends capture both remarkable improvements and persistent challenges when it comes to preserving habitat and biodiversity around the world. Belgium, the U.A.E., Croatia, and Niger have substantially expanded protected habitat within their borders, earning top scores for biodiversity metrics in the 2022 EPI. The world has also met its marine protected areas target, successfully preserving 10% of coastlines – but with marine ecosystems still threatened in much of the world, there remains a much work to do to preserve ocean health. On other issues, global performance continues to move away from sustainability. Fisheries are especially in decline, with nearly all countries earning scores below 50 out of 100 on this vital issue.

The Drivers of Good Environmental Performance

At every level of development, some countries achieve scores that exceed their peer nations with similar economic circumstances. Cutting-edge analyses of the 2022 EPI rankings make clear that the factors explaining environmental success include good governance, country wealth, quality of life, independent media, and well-crafted regulations. The researchers found strong correlations between EPI scores and government effectiveness, rule of law, regulatory quality, happiness, and GDP per capita. Sustainable development requires financial resources, which enable investments in environmental protection. The wide divergence in scores among wealthy countries demonstrates, however, that policy choices also matter. Leaders that carefully manage pollution threats and natural resource use can drive their countries toward a more sustainable future.

A Call for Improved Environmental Monitoring and Data Reporting

Policy efforts to deliver a more sustainable future would benefit from better data collection, reporting, and verification across a range of environmental issues. The push towards more analytically rigorous environmental policymaking has gained momentum in recent years, particularly after the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015. Nonetheless, persistent information gaps hold the world back from a more sustainable future. Reliable global data are particularly lacking in agriculture, freshwater quality, chemical exposure, and ecosystem protection. The EPI team continues to call for world leaders and data organizations to close these gaps with stronger investments in environmental information frameworks.

About the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy

The Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy advances real-world outcomes in sustainable development through multiple initiatives. Inspiring fresh thinking with data-driven approaches to environmental decision-making, the Center engages stakeholders across disciplines, sectors, and boundaries to enhance policy and voluntary action on critical sustainability 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 collaborations, aiming to shape academic thinking and policymaking in the public, private, and NGO sectors.

About the Columbia University Center for International Earth Science Information Network

The Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), a center of the Columbia Climate School at Columbia University, works at the intersection of the social, natural, and information sciences. CIESIN 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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