

Policy briefing to inform the INC discussions on a Global Plastics Treaty

Waste management

Updated version of 15 April 2024

This policy briefing has been developed in consultation with experts and members of the Business Coalition to inform the INC discussions on the revised draft text for the Global Plastics Treaty ([UNEP/PP/INC.4/3](#)) and potential intersessional work ahead of INC-4. It refers to Part II, Section 9.a 'Waste management'. The document will be updated as needed to provide meaningful input at the different stages of the treaty negotiations and as new insights and resources become available.¹

Introduction

Under a business-as-usual scenario, global plastic waste will rise from 353 Mt in 2019 to 1,014 Mt in 2060. Short-lived applications, such as packaging and apparel, will drive this increase, as well as construction activities in emerging economies. In parallel to scaling [reuse solutions](#) and [recycling systems](#), it will be necessary to reinforce environmentally sound and safe practices to manage residual waste. Unless additional policy measures are adopted and enforced, a further increase in mismanaged plastic waste of up to 270 Mt/year by 2060 is expected.²

To end plastic pollution it is critical that the Global Plastics Treaty contains ambitious, effective and binding provisions on reduction, circulation, and prevention alongside remediation. Environmentally sound collection, sorting, preparation for reuse, and recycling of plastic items is best achieved as part of a holistic waste management system and not in isolation from other materials and waste streams.

Workers in informal and cooperative settings³ will keep on playing a critical role in facilitating the collection, sorting, reuse and recycling of plastic waste and other materials. With a more reliable policy framework in place, businesses can better support their collaboration within more formal value chains at the same time as addressing human rights impacts and improving the effectiveness of current collection and recycling systems.

¹ This document was developed in close coordination with a [Policy Working Group](#) co-chaired by business representatives, and through a consultation process with the [Members of the Coalition](#), ensuring a high-level of alignment amongst member organisations. However, it does not necessarily reflect in all aspects the position of every single Coalition Member.

² OECD (2022): [Global Plastics Outlook: Policy Scenarios to 2060](#)

³ In the context of the legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, it is key to acknowledge the crucial role that 'waste pickers', the 'informal waste and recycling sector' and 'workers in informal and cooperative settings' play today in support of a recycling economy in many countries around the world. It is crucial for the INC to define such terms to reduce ambiguity and make provisions effective and operational; in this policy briefing, by the notion 'workers in informal and cooperative settings' we refer to the three different categories mentioned above.

Plastics typically make up less than 20% of municipal waste streams⁴. Developing collection, sorting, and environmentally sound waste management systems only for plastics would be ineffective and would miss out on synergies and opportunities to capture other materials of value, reduce pollution overall, and ensure a healthy environment for local communities.

Intersessional work is key to better understand how the treaty could support countries in improving their waste management governance, taking national and regional differences into account.

What could treaty provisions on waste management look like?

The Business Coalition is of the view that the revised draft treaty text requires further strengthening of the core obligations and the development of a corresponding annex related to waste management. In line with the waste management hierarchy⁵, policy efforts should prioritise waste prevention and minimisation. Next to increasing collection rates for both recyclable and non-recyclable plastic waste, countries must also put better controls in place on what happens to this waste after it is collected. The provisions in the plastics treaty should be based on the work of existing multilateral agreements such as the Basel Convention.

Countries must commit under the treaty to strengthen their waste management governance and to improve their citizens' access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, which includes adequate and harmonised waste management infrastructure for the safe disposal of plastics.⁶ Under the treaty, all governments must be required to set national targets and standards for the collection, sorting, and recycling⁷ of plastic waste from high-impact sectors and applications, starting with packaging. Instead of only focusing on plastics in an isolated manner, the treaty should outline a clear trajectory for implementing mandatory collection of ALL packaging waste in conjunction with treaty provisions to introduce or continuously improve Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) systems in line with key principles and minimum requirements.⁸

The treaty should also establish minimum requirements for the safe and controlled operation of recycling and waste management facilities that minimise plastic emissions and releases of pollutants to water, land, and air. These should address the adaptation of the waste management capacities over time as well as the process and technical capabilities needed. In addition, the treaty should mandate national governments to prevent certain waste management practices as a matter of priority such as open dumping, burning of plastic waste and unmanaged landfills, and make sure that these are replaced with systems that eliminate or reduce plastic leakage into the environment.

⁴ World Bank (2018): [Trends in Solid Waste Management](#)

⁵ UNEP/ ISWA (2015): [Global Waste Management Outlook](#), page 31

⁶ IDB (2023): [Sostenibilidad financiera de la gestión de residuos sólidos en América Latina y el Caribe](#)

⁷ Recycling must generate recycled plastics as outputs that can be incorporated into new products, excluding waste-to-energy or plastics-to-fuel.

⁸ The Business Coalition has developed a separate policy briefing on EPR.

UN member states could consider establishing a competence centre and collaborative platform to support the implementation of effective municipal waste management systems tailored to national and local conditions, ensuring high collection and recycling rates, while minimising plastics being littered, landfilled, or incinerated. The treaty must provide mechanisms to support countries to transition away from landfill, incineration, and plastic waste-to-energy and towards implementing locally relevant circular solutions over time, including through the use of economic instruments and financial mechanisms.

What needs to be specified in the form of a technical annex?

In our view, the treaty provisions on waste management should be linked to an annex covering the following aspects:

- A common framework for setting national targets and standards for the collection, sorting, reuse and recycling, including reporting on progress against these targets and reflecting the infrastructure development needs for different plastic applications
- Minimum requirements for the safe and controlled operation of waste management facilities that minimise emissions and releases of pollutants to water, land, and air
- Measures to protect and respect the livelihoods, health, labour, and human rights of workers in informal and cooperative settings to be linked with the treaty provisions to ensure a just transition
- List of waste management practices that may lead to the emissions and releases of hazardous substances to be regulated from plastic waste management
- Support mechanisms for the implementation of effective municipal waste management systems tailored to national and local conditions, ensuring high collection and mechanical recycling rates, while minimising plastics being littered, landfilled, or incinerated
- Guidance to match design for recycling requirements to the type of recycling and waste management infrastructure, in line with provision under Part II.5.a on product design and performance

The treaty should provide governments with additional resources on how to support the implementation of the provisions on waste management, taking national and regional differences into account.

The Business Coalition stands ready to provide further input to these discussions based on the resources outlined in this policy briefing related to

- [Key principles to set up effective municipal waste management systems; and ensure safe and controlled operations](#)
- [Additional resources on measures to protect and respect the livelihoods, health, labour, and human rights of workers in informal and cooperative settings](#)

Appendix 1: Key principles to set up effective municipal waste management systems; and ensure safe and controlled operations

The Business Coalition supports the work conducted by the International Solid Waste Association ([ISWA](#)) that outlines the following key principles⁹:

1. Integrate plans for plastic waste collection and processing as part of **holistic waste management plans** (including non-plastic waste) and encourage synergies across sectors
2. Ensure efficient **waste governance systems** are in place, with multi-stakeholder participation and harmonised rights and obligations
3. Set ambitious **targets for collection and recycling** and establish convenient and effective collection systems within an ambitious timeline
4. Establish **sorting requirements based on defined standards** for municipal waste streams containing a minimum percentage of plastics to extract the recyclables before ensuring environmentally sound management of the remaining waste. The sorted recyclables must be further processed by a recycler compliant with appropriate standards.
5. **Improve monitoring and reporting of plastic waste** by implementing robust procedures for categorising and quantifying plastics in all municipal solid waste streams from households and public areas (including collected recyclables, organic waste, hazardous waste and mixed waste often referred to as residual waste).

ISWA also provides the following guidelines to ensure safe and controlled operations in the waste management system¹⁰:

1. Truly empower the workforce of the sector.
2. Implement extensive training programs in the sector and induce a huge cultural paradigm shift, changing the view on waste management workers from low-status jobs at the bottom of the societal pyramid to essential agents of change in the green transition.
3. Improve labour conditions by providing minimum requirements at the workplace and by benefitting from the continuous advancements in technological development.

The treaty provision alongside a potential annex or additional guidelines must be informed by the evidence regarding 'what works' when it comes to scaling up waste collection and management. In particular, it should promote progress along four relevant axes: collection, basic controlled disposal, fully controlled disposal, and recycling. Countries must have the necessary flexibility to improve waste collection services more generally where this is the most efficient and effective approach to addressing plastic waste.¹¹

⁹ ISWA (2021) [The Future of the Waste Management sector](#)

¹⁰ ISWA (2021) [The Future of the Waste Management sector](#)

¹¹ Tearfund, University of Leeds, Imperial College London and University of St Andrews (2024): [Solid waste management in the UN Plastics Treaty](#).

Appendix 2: Additional resources on measures to protect and respect the livelihoods, health, labour, and human rights of workers in informal and cooperative settings

Key principles that are supported by [Fair Circularity Initiative](#)¹² and [ISWA submission to INC-2](#)¹³:

1. Engage meaningfully with all relevant local partners, including actors across the value chain, government actors, and workers in informal and cooperative settings¹⁴, and ensure that the means of governance and financial tools of the waste management system reflect the local needs and are tailored to promote best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
2. Ensure that the contribution to recycling and the livelihoods of informal waste workers are maintained, including through adequate measures of the waste management system promoting social inclusiveness and fairness, and contributing to improving health, welfare, training and income of workers in informal and cooperative settings.
3. Use waste management as a catalyst for sustainable livelihood and economic development, as well as encourage new business models and business opportunities in a circular economy, realising the potential worldwide for new jobs in the circular economy.
4. Ensure a gender-sensitive approach as an integrated part of national legislation and policies, based on the knowledge of gender issues, barriers and gaps in waste management activities.

¹² [The Fair Circularity Initiative](#) was launched by a group of leading fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies – The Coca-Cola Company, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever – committed to respecting the rights of workers in the informal waste sector.

¹³ The key principles are also supported by the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, in the context of [setting up Extended Producer Responsibility policies](#)

¹⁴ In the context of the legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, it is key to acknowledge the crucial role that 'waste pickers', the 'informal waste and recycling sector' and 'workers in informal and cooperative settings' play today in support of a recycling economy in many countries around the world. It is crucial for the INC to define such terms to reduce ambiguity and make provisions effective and operational; in this policy briefing, by the notion 'workers in informal and cooperative settings' we refer to the three different categories mentioned above.