



HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL TRADE POLICY HELP TACKLE PLASTIC POLLUTION?

POLICY OPTIONS AND PATHWAYS

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How can international trade policy help tackle plastic pollution?

Trade and trade policies need to be better aligned with global efforts to reduce plastic pollution. This report brings together empirical evidence of the intersections between trade, plastics and plastic pollution with analysis of how trade policies could support international efforts to tackle plastic pollution. It provides a strategic assessment of how trade policies could support international efforts to reduce plastic pollution, suggests policy options and recommends pathways for aligning trade and trade policy with plastic pollution goals with the greatest prospect for meaningful outcomes across United Nations processes, multilateral environmental agreements, trade diplomacy, and others international processes and economic organisations, as well as at the regional and domestic level.

The challenge

- There has been a **20-fold increase** in plastic production over the past 50 years.
- Projections foresee a further **quadrupling** of annual plastic production by 2050
- Recycling has reached only **9 per cent** of plastic waste produced since the 1950s.
- International trade is central to the expanding global plastics economy; trade across the life cycle of plastics is worth over **USD 1 trillion** or more than 5% of global trade.
- International trade in avoidable, unnecessary, problematic and hazardous plastics includes an array of single-use plastics and plastic packaging, **71 per cent of which cannot be recycled**.
- Currently, policy frameworks on plastic pollution and on trade are **incoherent and often contradictory**.
- Existing trade policy measures targeting plastic pollution offer a foundation to build on but are **disjointed, ad hoc, uncoordinated, and lack transparency**.

Recommendations

Trade policies should be better aligned with global efforts to reduce plastic pollution. Enhanced international cooperation on trade dimensions could support and complement wider international environmental efforts to tackle plastic pollution.

This report recommends governments and stakeholders take cooperative action to:

- Reduce trade in **avoidable, unnecessary, problematic and environmentally harmful plastics**.
- End trade in **hazardous, mixed and contaminated plastic waste** while monitoring and facilitating responsible trade in high-value, recyclable plastic waste destined for certified environmentally sound recycling facilities.
- Promote trade in environmentally sustainable **non-plastic substitutes**; goods and services that promote reuse and refill systems; certified 'plastic free' and recycled plastic products; and goods and services for environmentally sound and locally appropriate waste management and recycling.

To enable progress, trade policy recommendations for governments and stakeholders in this report include:

- Address data gaps on **trade flows** relevant to plastic pollution and improve **transparency, reporting and notifications** on plastics-related trade measures.
- Boost **trade-related technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries** on trade policy design and implementation relating to plastic pollution.
- Support the development and implementation of **international standards** and sustainability criteria for production and trade of plastics, reuse and refill systems, environmental labelling, recycling, and substitute materials.
- Increase transparency of government **subsidies to fossil-fuel feedstocks and virgin plastic production** and adopt commitments to end future subsidies.

In pursuit of these recommendations, the report suggests governments should act through five pathways:

- International environmental processes, including the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, and the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), including through discussions of a new global agreement on plastic pollution, called for by over 100 countries.
- At the **World Trade Organization**, including through its Informal Dialogue on Plastic pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade, seeking synergies with the WTO's 'Joint Statement Initiative' on Trade and Environmental Sustainability, and the work of WTO's regular committees.
- In other **international fora**, such as the World Customs Organization (WCO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Interpol, and the OECD.
- **Through regional cooperation** to advance common

approaches to trade policies aligned with plastic pollution reduction goals

- **Nationally** to harness trade measures to reduce plastic pollution and safeguard plastic pollution reduction policies in bilateral trade negotiations.

This executive summary draws together key findings and recommendations from the report. It reviews the need for a system change approach to addressing plastic pollution and transforming the plastics sector (section 1), why trade matters to plastic pollution (section 2), why trade *policies* matter to plastic pollution and how stronger international cooperation on trade could help (section 3). It concludes with recommendations on policy priorities and pathways (section 4).

1. Setting the scene

1.1. Plastics, the pollution crisis and the need for a system change approach

At the heart of the plastic pollution problem is the massive 20-fold growth in plastic production over the past 50 years. Recent projections foresee a quadrupling of annual plastic production by 2050.ⁱ The growing production and consumption of plastics is also due to their versatility – they can serve a vast array of useful purposes – and their low cost.

The diversity of plastic polymers and products, and the many combinations of plastics and other materials, means that the types and scale of pollution associated with their production, use and disposal varies as does the range of possible options for reuse, recyclability, and waste management. Since the 1950s, only 9 per cent of plastic waste produced globally has been recycled; today, most plastic waste is either landfilled, incinerated or discarded in the natural environment.ⁱⁱ

As the world's production of plastics has soared, so too has the scale and urgency of the plastic pollution crisis. In recent years, impact of marine litter and microplastic pollution on the world's marine ecosystems has captured the attention of citizens, governments and the media around the world, spurring numerous calls for stronger international action. For millions of people around the world who depend on oceans for their livelihoods, plastic pollution has a direct economic and social impact. At the same time, there are rising concerns about the environmental, economic, health and human rights impacts of plastic pollution on land and in the air across the life cycle of plastics. Around the world, stakeholders concerned about environmental justice and human rights highlight challenges of exposure to toxic chemicals in communities that live alongside production plants, incineration facilities, and plastic landfills. Amidst efforts to reduce the climate crisis, scrutiny of the carbon footprint of the expanding plastics sector is also growing,

especially in light of forecasts that the plastics sector could account for almost 20 per cent of the world's carbon budget by 2040.ⁱⁱⁱ

To address this problem, governments and stakeholder partnerships around the world are pursuing a range of policies and initiatives to prevent and clean up the leakage of plastic into the environment; phase out unnecessary, avoidable and problematic use of plastics; incentivize the use of alternative plastics where these can reduce environmental harm; and promote substitutes (from 'reduce and refill retail models' to non-plastic packaging). A growing number of businesses and consumer partnerships are also taking voluntary action to reduce their plastic footprint. Among a broad diversity of these stakeholders, the vision of a more circular plastics economy, which moves from a take-make-waste model to a reduce-reuse-recycle approach resonates widely as a framework for action.

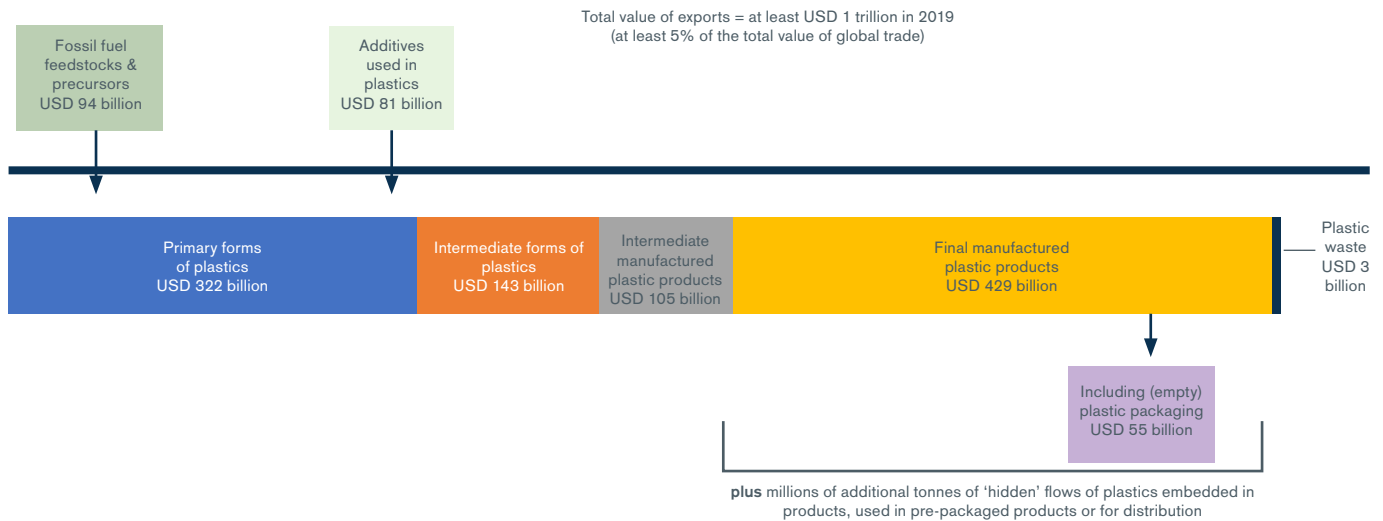
Importantly, there is also rising attention to supply-side factors driving the expansion of the plastics sector and plastic pollution; a key problem being the low price of subsidized fossil fuel-based feedstocks – mainly ethylene and propylene – which the petrochemicals industry uses to produce virgin primary plastics. So long as conventional virgin plastic polymers are cheap, market incentives to reduce production of single-use plastics, move to refill systems, recycle plastic, switch to using recycled material, and shift to substitutes, will be limited.

Whether focus is on ocean plastic pollution or the contribution of the plastics sector to climate crisis, there is a need to tackle the plastic pollution problem both downstream and upstream. Indeed, the latest scientific research emphasises that reducing plastic pollution will require a 'system change' approach, where four strategies are pursued in parallel: 1) reduce, 2) substitute, 3) recycle, and 4) dispose.

1.2. Tackling plastic pollution demands attention to the sector's political economy

Any effort to reduce plastic pollution must acknowledge the reality that enormous economic and commercial interests are driving the USD 569 billion plastics economy.^{iv} Primary production of plastics is dominated by 20 major petrochemical companies, underpinned by private and state-owned oil and gas companies, which are some of the world's most politically influential. The plastics industry is financed by an array of international investors and the largest users of plastics are some of the world's largest brands and retail companies, with extensive global supply chains, employing millions of people around the world.^v The plastics sector as a whole is estimated to employ over 180 million workers globally, with the majority in the developing world, and an uncounted number of informal sector workers involved in waste picking and sorting.^{vi} Entire communities, cities or regions may depend economically on activities from plastics production and manufacturing to waste picking.

Figure i. Trade across the life cycle of plastics (USD billions, 2019)



Source: Authors' compilation using 2019 UN Comtrade data, building on analysis by Barrowclough et. al. (2020) *op cit*, p. 17.

In this context, efforts to reduce plastic pollution that do not grapple with the political economy of the plastics sector (i.e., combining voluntary actions with regulations and policies to provide market incentives for innovation), including support for the transition of impacted workers, are doomed to fail. Transforming the global plastics economy will require not only international environmental cooperation but also integration with economic policy approaches in regard to taxation, government subsidies, finance, trade, and investment policies. It will also require action from companies at the international and regional level that are supply chain leaders.

2. Why trade matters to plastic pollution

Trade plays a central role in the global plastics economy. **In 2019, the value of global trade in plastics was more than 1 trillion dollars (or 5 per cent of global trade).** International trade occurs across the life cycle of plastics – from trade in feedstocks and plastic polymers to single-use plastic products and plastic waste (see Figure i).

Notably, these figures omit the vast volumes of 'hidden' trade in plastics that are not captured by international trade statistics. This hidden trade includes cross-border flows of plastic packaging associated with specific products (pre-packaged food and beverages); packaging used in the distribution and transportation of products, including business to business (B2B) packaging; or plastic embedded in countless products that are widely traded and consumed across the world – from cars to household appliances, and construction materials.

Although the volume of such 'hidden plastics' traded

internationally is massive, these are not captured in official

trade statistics. In a first effort to quantify such hidden flows, this report estimates that trade in hidden plastics added at least a further 70 million metric tonnes (MT) to plastic trade flows in 2018.^{vi} Hidden trade flows of plastic packaging, for instance, exceeded the trade flows of empty plastic packaging that are traceable using official trade statistics.

At key points along the plastics value chain, trade represents a significant share of overall global production. In 2019, for instance, exports of primary plastics represented an estimated 56 per cent of the world's primary plastics production.

By volume, over 250 million MT of plastic at different points in the plastic life cycle – from primary plastics and final consumer products to plastic waste – crossed international borders in 2019.

Plastic trade flows are relevant to plastic pollution for two core reasons:

- 1. Trade flows of plastic waste to countries with inadequate waste management capacity exacerbate leakage of plastics into the environment;**
- 2. Trade in plastic products, as well as products containing plastics and pre-packaged in plastics, adds to the waste management burden of importing countries.**

3. Why trade policies matter to plastic pollution and why stronger international cooperation is needed

For good and ill, trade policies play an important role in shaping international trade in plastics. Many countries use trade-related measures and policies, both at and behind the border, to support the expansion of plastic production and exports. This includes, for example, the provision of government subsidies to plastic producers, including through export credit agencies, as well as the negotiation of trade agreements that reduce barriers to trade for plastics. Powerful exporters of plastic products and waste use bilateral trade negotiations, for instance, to ensure access to markets for plastic wastes and products. This report identifies examples of how such actions can frustrate or present barriers to progress on national efforts to reduce plastic pollution.

At the same time, many countries are using trade and trade-related policies to help reduce plastic pollution. From 2009-2020, for instance, governments notified the WTO of over 140 environment-related trade measures taken to bolster national efforts to tackle plastic pollution, most of which have been taken by developing countries.^{viii} These included import tariffs and restrictions on certain types of plastic waste and plastic products, as well as import bans.^{ix}

In addition, numerous domestic measures taken to reduce plastic pollution and promote a more circular plastics economy have international trade dimensions. These include: environmental standards and labelling requirements for plastic products and production processes; government procurement policies; regulations to improve supply chain transparency; environmental taxes and charges on plastic production, consumption and waste; and extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes (including deposit-refunds and product take-back schemes).

Current efforts to use trade policy and measures to support efforts to address plastic pollution are disjointed, ad hoc, uncoordinated, and lacking transparency – all of which undermine their effectiveness. Key shortfalls and gaps in international coordination, transparency and coherence on trade-related aspects of plastic pollution are summarised in Box i. The patchwork of existing national actions does, however, provide an important foundation for international cooperation in favour of greater coherence and enhanced impact.

Existing efforts at international cooperation on plastic pollution and trade

Reducing plastic pollution demands government action at the national level through ambitious environmental goals, well-designed and enforced environmental laws and regulations, as well as effective and adequately resourced institutions. In the absence of sufficient capacity-building and technical support, many governments struggle to implement and

enforce national policies to reduce plastic pollution or related international commitments.

At the same time, plastic pollution is a complex, cross-sectoral and transboundary challenge that no single country can address alone. The transboundary nature of the plastic pollution crisis means that international coordination and cooperation are vital. Although calls for stronger international cooperation have yielded important

Box i. Shortfalls in international cooperation on trade and plastics pollution

- **Data gaps** – no common platform exists for publicly accessible data, monitoring and analysis of trends in global plastic production, trade flows and supply chains, or on their implications for trade policy design.
- **Policy incoherence** – trade policy frameworks are not well aligned with domestic plastic pollution reduction measures.
- **Poor coordination** – national approaches to trade and plastic pollution are developed in an uncoordinated, piecemeal and disjointed manner. Companies and exporters – including those working to reduce their plastics footprint – face increasingly complex and diverging regulatory frameworks across global supply chains.
- **Weak transparency of relevant trade policies** – there is poor transparency of the growing array of domestic plastics-related trade policies, environmental measures and private sustainability standards.
- **Neglected development dimensions** – inadequate attention is paid to the trade-related challenges and opportunities for developing countries in regard to reducing single-use plastics, establishing reuse and refill systems, improved plastics design and manufacturing, managing trade in plastic waste, and building waste management capacity.
- **Insufficient cooperation among international organizations** – insufficient cooperation among international organizations and processes working on the trade-related aspects of plastic pollution and the potential for trade policy to support efforts to tackle plastic pollution.
- **Inadequate research and policy analysis** – beyond trade in plastic waste, there are few studies of the intersection of trade in plastics and plastic pollution, and considerable gaps in evidence and analysis of policy solutions. More broadly, there has been almost no scholarly attention to how trade policy can support international efforts to reduce pollution across the life cycle of plastics.

government and stakeholder initiatives, the proliferation of fragmented, voluntary approaches is not delivering the rapid, comprehensive solutions required to tackle growing plastic pollution.

International cooperation on plastic pollution currently suffers from important blindspots. Most international efforts focus on the end-of-life of plastics, with far less attention to the drivers of expanding plastic production and pollution; pollution across the life cycle of plastics; and the upstream policy measures needed to reduce production of avoidable, unnecessary and problematic plastics.

Over the past few years, the UN Environment Assembly has unanimously adopted several resolutions urging action to bolster international cooperation on marine plastic pollution. In 2021, more than 100 UN members have joined a call for the start of negotiations on a new global agreement on plastic pollution.^x

While the ambition and purpose of the proposed treaty (i.e., focused on marine litter only or on wider challenges of plastics pollution) remain matters for negotiation, the call for action does signal a recognition that tackling the plastic pollution crisis with the urgency required will demand more effective global environmental governance. This must be guided by environmental expertise, to define and implement clear goals, targets and timeframes for cooperative, mutually-reinforcing actions, and to connect the vast array of currently disjointed domestic and international efforts. Further, there is a growing emphasis among stakeholders on the need for a life cycle approach to the challenges of plastic pollution and the development of clear shared global goals.^{xi} Notably, recent proposals for a global plastic pollution treaty recognise the relevance of international trade as well as the interface between trade policy and efforts to reduce plastic pollution.^{xii} Looking ahead, a global plastic pollution treaty offers the potential for a multi-layered framework that would include targets and provisions for more environmentally sustainable trade across the plastics life cycle and priorities for trade-related cooperation.

Status quo on trade-related cooperation

In recent years, growing scrutiny of trade in plastic waste has put the issue of 'trade and plastic pollution' on the map. At the heart of concern has been the realisation that plastic waste exports often comprise low-value, mixed, contaminated and hazardous plastic waste, with the result that the vast majority of exported plastic waste is not managed in an environmentally sound manner in the destination country, far less recycled.^{xiii}

At present, the key international instrument that addresses the trade-related aspects of plastic pollution is the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes, which was amended in 2019 to more specifically respond to challenges related to trade in plastic waste. Among other measures, the 'plastic waste amendments' introduce export restrictions on contaminated

and unrecyclable plastic waste.^{xiv} Existing efforts are having mixed results. Restrictions on the import of plastic waste by China and a number of developing countries, has put important pressure on exporting countries to reduce and better manage plastic waste at home, but have also led to a dispersal of waste exports to a broader range of countries, many of which lack environmentally sound waste management capacity. Efforts to implement the new international commitments under the Basel Convention are at an early stage and will take considerable investment to implement. Although some countries are not implementing export bans, illegal trade in plastic waste is also growing.^{xv}

Another international effort relevant to trade is the Stockholm Convention, which bans or restricts the production, use and trade of certain Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), including a number of additives, such as flame retardants and plasticizers, used in plastics.^{xvi}

While important, these existing trade-related efforts do not address all aspects of plastic trade that are important to reducing plastic pollution, nor do they address trade-related challenges and opportunities across the life cycle of plastics for reducing plastic pollution.

In the meantime, interest in how trade policy could support and complement international efforts to reduce plastic pollution and support a more circular plastics economy is growing.

In 2020, a group of WTO Members launched the Informal Dialogue on Plastic Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade at the WTO. Now cosponsored by 19 WTO Members from developed and developing countries, including China – a key player in global plastics production and trade – as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK and the Russian Federation, along with a diverse set of developing countries, including Barbados, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Fiji, the Gambia, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Morocco and Thailand.^{xvii} Their dialogue process has already attracted participation from key countries with the power to make a tangible contribution to reducing plastic pollution by cooperating on some carefully chosen trade policy aspects.

More broadly, a group of 55+ WTO Members has cosponsored the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD), again engaging both developing and developed countries as cosponsors.^{xviii} The interest of a number of WTO members in reviving efforts to promote trade in environmental goods and services, and promoting a more circular economy, also provides opportunities for advancing trade cooperation on plastic pollution.

Notably, there is also growing recognition of the need for stronger collaboration and coordination across the range of international organisations and processes that address plastic pollution, and also among ministries at the national level, including environment and trade ministries.

Figure ii. Possible outcomes from trade policy cooperation across the plastic life cycle, by lever



priorities are clustered in two broad categories according to whether they would have direct or indirect impacts on reducing plastic pollution (see Figure iii):

Incubate and catalyse action (direct impacts)

The four key priorities to incubate and catalyse action proposed in this report are as follows:

1. Reduce trade in avoidable, unnecessary, problematic and other environmentally harmful plastics, including through coordinated restrictions, phase-outs or bans of trade in single-use plastics and packaging most associated with plastic pollution; hazardous plastics; and products associated with microplastic pollution. These efforts can start with those that are already restricted or banned domestically.
2. End trade in hazardous, mixed and contaminated plastic waste (i.e., including by promoting implementation of the Basel Convention's 'plastic waste' amendments), while monitoring and facilitating responsible trade in high-value recyclable plastic waste destined for certified, environmentally sound recycling facilities.
3. Promote trade in goods and services that can reduce plastic pollution, including environmentally sustainable substitutes, including non-plastic substitutes (e.g., both raw materials and manufactured products from natural fibres), reuse and refill systems, certified 'plastic free' products and recycled plastics, as well as technologies for environmentally sound waste collection, recycling and waste management that are appropriate to local circumstances and support local employment.
4. Increase transparency of government subsidies to fossil-fuel feedstocks and virgin plastics production, adopt commitments to end future subsidies, and explore transboundary cooperation on taxation of virgin primary plastics.
5. Coordinate policies relevant to more sustainable plastics trade, such as through transnational approaches to extended producer responsibility (EPR); improved transparency and cooperation of sustainability criteria and environmental standards for plastics, and of policies and regulations for environmentally sustainable packaging.

Inform, enable and support action (indirect impacts)

These important priorities to facilitate effective policy action on trade-related issues could be advanced in a relatively short period (1-3 years) and then sustained, and comprise five enabling actions:

1. Address gaps in data on trade flows across the plastics life cycle and information-sharing relevant to plastic pollution, mapped against data and metrics of plastic production, consumption, and environmentally sound waste management capacity, and improve transparency, reporting and notifications on plastics pollution-related

4. Recommendations on policy priorities and pathways

This report reviews a broad array of options for harnessing trade policy to support and complement international efforts to tackle plastic pollution, focusing on four levers critical to progress: reduce, substitute, recycle and dispose (see Fig. ii).

4.1. Recommendations on policy priorities

Our recommendations on policy priorities emerged from consultations with experts from government, international organizations, stakeholder groups and the research community. These priorities include specific interventions along the life cycle of plastics and can be achieved over varying time frames: short-term (1-3 years); medium-term (3-5 years) and long-term (5 years +) (See Figure iii). The

Figure iii. Impacts and timeframe for selected trade policy recommendations



trade measures.

- Invest in detailed analysis and information-sharing on trade policy options that can support reductions in plastic pollution, including through identification of opportunities for global and regional cooperation, as well as on how and where trade rules and policies can impede plastic pollution reduction efforts.
- Conduct sustainability impact assessments of proposed and existing bilateral and regional trade agreements to review the environmental impacts of plastics trade on both exporting and importing countries. In addition, compile national and regional case studies on the environmental impacts of trade in plastics.
- Boost trade-related technical assistance and capacity-building for developing countries on the design and implementation of trade policies related to plastic pollution and a more environmentally sustainable, circular plastics

economy (e.g., Green Aid for Trade).

- Support development and implementation of international standards and sustainability criteria for the production and trade of plastics, reuse and refill systems, environmental labelling, recycling, and substitutes. This should include international standards for disclosure of information on the material content of plastic products that cross borders, as well as for the design of packaging to reduce the volume and variety of plastic packaging used in international trade.

4.2. Recommendations on pathways

Strategic trade-related cooperation on these priorities could be advanced through a range of international processes and organizations in both the environmental and economic arena. There is no single inter-governmental venue or process for advancing these priorities.

This report identifies five pathways through which trade-

Figure iv. Priorities at the WTO

Incubate and catalyse action (direct impact)

Promote policy coherence through pledges to restrict or ban trade in hazardous, avoidable, unnecessary, problematic, and environmentally harmful products that are already restricted or banned domestically (including but not limited to single-use plastics).

Adopt voluntary pledges, targets and coordinated approaches to reduce trade in hazardous, avoidable, unnecessary, problematic and environmentally harmful plastic products and to reduce production and trade in virgin plastics (including pellet loss along international supply chains).

Pledge to reduce unnecessary, avoidable and problematic plastic packaging associated with international trade and to better coordinate on policies for more environmentally sustainable packaging, including consideration of challenges arising for developing country exporters.

Promote trade in environmental goods and services that can help reduce plastics pollution, focusing on non-plastic substitutes and environmentally sound, locally appropriate waste management systems, recycling technologies, and certain recycled plastics.

Support efforts to implement the Basel Convention's provisions to regulate trade in hazardous, contaminated and mixed wastes in a transparent and effective manner, and facilitate trade in recyclable plastic wastes destined for certified, environmentally-sound recycling facilities.

Inform, enable and support action (indirect impact)

Adopt and implement an Aid for Trade mandate to support developing countries to use trade policies and measures to reduce plastic pollution; promote trade in non-plastic substitutes and the use of reuse and refill systems; upgrade to meet sustainability standards relevant to reducing plastic pollution; support capacity building for customs authorities to monitor plastics trade and implement relevant regulations at the border; and engage in negotiations to expand their access to waste management and recycling technologies.

Enhance transparency, information-sharing and coordination on trade measures, taxes, and technical regulations related to plastic waste and products in order to highlight best practices and enhance effectiveness in achieving plastic pollution goals. Working with other international organizations and stakeholders, establish a monitoring mechanism on trade flows and environment-related trade measures relevant to plastics pollution.

Identify key areas where improved international trade statistics and classifications are needed to enable monitoring and regulate international trade across the life cycle of plastics, especially trade flows most relevant to plastic pollution, calling for action where relevant to amend the World Customs Organizations (WCO) Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding Systems (HS).

Identify key areas where internationally-agreed standards are needed to underpin more environmentally sustainable plastics trade, as well as challenges for developing countries, calling for work on these topics in relevant international fora, such as the UN Environment Assembly and the ISO.

Encourage dialogue and information exchange on: i) environmentally harmful subsidies to the plastics sector; ii) trade-related strategies for a shift toward a more circular economy (e.g., coordination of EPR systems and efforts to promote reuse and refill systems); iii) technology-related barriers to developing country efforts to reduce plastics pollution; iv) strategies to support transparency of environmental considerations across global plastics supply chains, including disclosure of plastic footprints and leakage.

related cooperation on these options could be advanced:

- Trade-related action through **international environmental processes**, such as the implementation of plastic waste amendments to the Basel Convention and further upgrading of its rules on plastic waste; adding relevant plastics-related hazardous chemicals to the list of those for which trade is banned or restricted under the Stockholm Convention; setting shared goals and targets for plastic pollution reduction through UNEP and its UN Environment Assembly, including potentially through a proposed global plastic pollution treaty, that can provide a policy framework for action on trade. This would include outlining priorities and targets that can guide efforts to harness trade policy to support reduced plastic pollution.
- Support action on plastic pollution at the **World Trade Organization** through the Informal Dialogue on Plastic Pollution, seeking synergies with the WTO Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions, including through the conclusion of Ministerial Statements and workplans for ways forward at the WTO's Ministerial Conference at the end of 2021. Complement this work with discussion in relevant WTO regular committees. Drawing from the policy options reviewed in this paper, recommendations on politically feasible, impactful and relevant options are presented in Figure iv.

– Support complementary action in related **international fora** such as:

- World Customs Organization (WCO): Amend the Harmonized System of international trade classifications to enable more granular tracking of trade flows in plastics, focusing on the round of negotiations starting in 2021, and support enhanced work on plastics as part of WCO's Green Customs initiative.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): Develop and maintain an online database on trade in plastics; strengthen work to support the technical capacity of developing countries to implement trade policies that reduce plastic pollution, support ocean economies and promote circular economies; support analysis of options for more sustainable manufacturing and design of plastics in developing countries; and promote opportunities for developing countries in establishing reuse models and non-plastics substitutes, including through enhanced South-South cooperation on liberalisation and by supporting developing country engagement in related efforts at the WTO.
- Interpol: Support efforts to monitor and end illegal trade in plastic waste.

- OECD: Encourage research on national experiences and possible options for using trade policy and measures to support plastic pollution goals; contribute OECD data and analysis to efforts to understand plastic value chains; and monitor and analyse subsidies to the plastics sector.
- Support **regional coordination and cooperation**, including by:
- Supporting regional approaches and exchange of best practices on trade policy frameworks for plastic pollution, such as through the Pacific Islands Forum, the Caribbean Community, and the East African Community. Regional approaches could also be pursued within the context of regional trade arrangements, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, and to guard against bilateral and regional trade negotiations with powerful plastic exporters being used to weaken commitments and efforts to reduce plastic pollution.
 - Harnessing voluntary settings, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), to test and incubate options for regional cooperation on trade-related aspects of plastic pollution.
- **National action** to harness trade measures to reduce plastic pollution, including through implementation of the Basel Convention plastic waste amendments, and safeguard plastic pollution policies in bilateral and regional trade arrangements.

Finally, we emphasise the importance of cooperation across international processes and forums. On plastic production use and waste, sustainability standards and monitoring, for instance, enhanced cooperation among key international processes working on different aspects of the issue will greatly enhance impact.

Notes

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