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## The Basel Convention A Critical Tool to Tackle Plastic Waste

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## **The Basel Convention A Critical Tool to Tackle Plastic Waste\***

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### **Executive summary**

The global COVID-19 pandemic has revealed our continued dependence on plastic. Since the 1950s, the production of plastics has been growing rapidly. Yet, limited progress has been made in ensuring the environmentally sound management (ESM) of plastic waste. Consequently, plastic waste can now be found in all environmental media and even in the remotest areas. Once in the environment, plastic waste and hazardous plastic additives cause significant adverse effects to wildlife, ecosystems—and potentially to human health.

The global community is determined to take action to tackle the global plastic crisis. In 2016, the United Nations Environment Assembly recognized that the presence of plastic in the marine environment is a rapidly increasing serious issue of global concern that needs an urgent global response. It continues to explore the development of a global instrument on plastics. Many other initiatives are underway, including by the private sector and civil society.

Perhaps most importantly, multilateral environmental agreements are already in place to address plastic waste and hazardous additives. The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) has long controlled various POPs used as plastic additives with a view to their elimination or reduction. In 2019, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal adopted the “Plastic Waste Amendments”, introducing new categories for plastic waste in several annexes, which means it will be

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subject to a control procedure when moved across borders with the intention of ensuring that it is managed in an environmentally sound manner. This makes the Basel Convention the only global legally-binding instrument that currently and specifically addresses plastic waste. Effective 1 January 2021, it is expected that the Plastic Waste Amendments will (a) create the conditions for the global trade in plastic waste to become more transparent and better regulated; (b) provide an incentive for stakeholders to strengthen their national capacities and infrastructures for the more environmentally sound collection, separation, recycling and other disposal operations of plastic waste; and (c) encourage the expansion of infrastructure for the environmentally sound management (ESM) of plastic waste and thus help create jobs and economic opportunities.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have significant repercussions with regard to our ability to address the global plastic crisis. The Basel Convention and its three pillars—control of transboundary movements (TBM), ESM, and prevention and minimization of the generation of wastes—provides a useful lens to illustrate these effects: (1) Given tightened border restrictions, increases in transport costs and the need to change shipping routes, it has become more difficult for Parties that lack the capacity for adequate waste management to export plastic waste for environmentally sound treatment and disposal in countries with such capacity. (2) Formal collection, storage and recycling and disposal centres have been operating at reduced capacity or temporarily ceased the operation. Municipal waste collection systems were severely disrupted during the lockdowns while illegal waste disposal appears to have increased significantly. (3) The rapid increase in the use of personal protective equipment, packaging for takeaway etc. has meant a setback for global efforts to tackle plastic waste at its source. Meanwhile, recycling rates have fallen significantly as a consequence both of the pandemic and historically low oil process.

However, the Basel Convention also offers a variety of platforms, guidance, tools and technical assistance developed and provided under the Basel Convention to strengthen the capacities of Parties during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. These include the Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership, the Small Grants Programme on Plastic Waste as well as other projects providing technical assistance. The Basel Convention's 'Technical guidelines for the identification and environmentally sound management (ESM) of plastic wastes and for their disposal' are being updated while a range of other tools and guidance directly or indirectly addressing plastic waste are already at Parties' disposal.

## **I. Introduction**

This article explores how the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal already serves as a critical tool to tackle the growing plastic waste crisis and holds further potential to be realised in protecting human health and the environment from the adverse effects of plastic waste by fully implementing the Plastic Waste Amendments, scaling up the use of existing and new guidance, tools and technical assistance and taking full advantage of the Plastic Waste Partnership. Section two starts with a brief account of the extent to which plastic waste provides a challenge, concluding that urgent action is needed. In line with these findings, the international community, through the Basel Convention's Plastic Waste Amendments and the United Nations Environment Assembly, among others, has decided to make plastic and plastic waste a priority topic on the agenda, as explored in section three. The Basel Convention covers both post-consumer as

well as industrial plastic waste, including mixtures of such waste, ranging from waste polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles to polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF), for example. In section four, the article then proceeds by discussing the various impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has been having on the three pillars of the Basel Convention—namely, control of transboundary movements (TBM), environmentally sound management (ESM) and prevention/minimization of the generation of plastic waste. As it becomes clear that strengthening the capacities of Parties to the Basel Convention in addressing plastic waste is becoming ever more imperative, the article presents in section five the various initiatives, tools and guidance available under the Basel Convention as well as relevant project providing technical assistance. The last section provides some brief concluding remarks.

## II. Are we facing a global plastic waste crisis?

### *Plastic production and the generation of plastic waste have been increasing rapidly*

Since the 1950s, the production of plastics has been growing rapidly, from approximately 2 million tonnes to more than 426 million tonnes in 2018<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1<sup>2</sup>). Polyethylene (PE), used in widespread packaging materials (bags, containers, milk bottles, shampoo bottles, water bottles etc.), many of which are used only once before being discarded, accounts for approximately 31 % of all plastics<sup>3</sup>. Equally relevant, plastic is widely used in a variety of economic sectors, such as construction, textiles, electronics, transportation, fishing and agriculture. An estimated 9.2 billion tonnes of plastics have been produced to date and 7 billion tonnes of plastic waste have been generated<sup>4</sup>.

Yet, very limited progress has been made in ensuring the ESM of plastic waste, defined under the Basel Convention as “taking all practicable steps to ensure that hazardous wastes or other wastes are managed in a manner which will protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects which may result from such wastes”<sup>5</sup>. Approximately 76 % (or 5.3 billion tonnes) of the plastic waste generated to date was either released to the environment or disposed in landfills<sup>6</sup>. An earlier 2017 estimate found that only approximately 9 % of all plastic waste ever generated was recycled and approximately 12 % was incinerated<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 2<sup>8</sup>). Illegal traffic of plastic waste also continues to pose challenges, as further discussed in the following sections.

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<sup>1</sup> Geyer, R., 2020. Production, Use and Fate of Synthetic Polymers in Plastic Waste and Recycling. Letcher, T.M. (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

<sup>2</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2020. Baseline report on plastic waste. UNEP/CHW/PWPWG.1/INF/4

<sup>3</sup> Geyer, R., 2020. Production, Use and Fate of Synthetic Polymers in Plastic Waste and Recycling. Letcher, T.M. (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

<sup>4</sup> Geyer, R., 2020. Production, Use and Fate of Synthetic Polymers in Plastic Waste and Recycling. Letcher, T.M. (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

<sup>5</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2020. Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. Geneva: Switzerland.

<sup>6</sup> Geyer, R., 2020. Production, Use and Fate of Synthetic Polymers in Plastic Waste and Recycling. Letcher, T.M. (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

<sup>7</sup> Geyer, R., Jambeck, J. R., Law, K. L., 2017. Production, use and fate of all plastics ever made. Science Advances, 3(7). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.1700782.

<sup>8</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2020. Baseline report on plastic waste. UNEP/CHW/PWPWG.1/INF/4.

Consequently, plastic waste in its various forms—macro-, micro- and nano-plastics—can now be found in all environmental media, even in the remotest areas<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, microplastics find their way into the food we eat, the water we drink and even the air we breathe. Looking forward, the situation is unlikely to improve, unless significant action is taken. It has been estimated that the amount of mismanaged plastic waste generated globally could triple by 2060<sup>10</sup>. Global disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have the potential of exacerbating these challenges as well as our capacities to address them.

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<sup>9</sup> Bryant, J.A., Clemente, T.M., Viviani, D.A., Fong, A.A., Thomas, K.A., Kemp, P. *et al.*, 2016. Diversity and activity of communities inhabiting plastics debris in the North Pacific Gyre. *Systems* 1, 00024-16. <http://doi.org/10.1128/mSystems.00024-16>; Lebreton, L., Slat, B., Ferrari, F., Sainte-Rose, B., Aitken, J., Marthouse, R. *et al.*, 2018. Evidence that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is rapidly accumulating plastic. *Scientific Reports* 8:4666 DOI:10.1038/s41598-018-22939-w.; Ostle, C., Thompson, R.C., Broughton, D., Gregory, L., Wootton, M. and Johns, D.G., 2019. The rise in ocean plastics evidence from a 60-year time series. *Nature Communications* 10, 1622. Doi:10.1038/s41467-019-09506-1; van Sebille, E., Delandmeter, P., Schofield, J., Hardesty, B.D., Jones, J. and Donnelly, A., 2019. Basin-scale sources and pathways of microplastic that ends up in the Galápagos Archipelago. *Ocean Science* 15, 1341-1349. <https://doi.org/10.5194/os-15-1341-2019>; Tekman, M.B., Wekerle, C., Lorenz, C., Primpke, S., Hasemann, C., Gerdt, G. *et al.*, 2020. Tying up loose ends of microplastic pollution in the Arctic: Distribution from the sea surface through the water column to deep-sea sediments at the HAUSGARTEN Observatory. *Environmental Science and Technology* 54(7), 4079-4090. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.9b06981>; GESAMP (2020). Proceedings of the GESAMP International Workshop on Assessing the Risks Associated with Plastics and Microplastics in the Marine Environment. Kershaw, P.J., Carney Almroth, B., Villarrubia-Gómez, P., Koelmans, A.A. and Gouin, T. (eds.). IMO/FAO/UNESCO-IOC/UNIDO/WMO/IAEA/UN/UNEP/UNDP/ISA Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection. SECOND DRAFT ASSESSMENT ON SOURCES, PATHWAYS AND HAZARDS OF LITTER INCLUDING PLASTIC LITTER AND MICROPLASTICS POLLUTION - NOT FOR CIRCULATION OR QUOTATION. <http://www.gesamp.org/publications/gesamp-international-workshop-on-assessing-the-risks-associated-with-plastics-and-microplastics-in-the-marine-environment>.

<sup>10</sup> Lebreton, L., and Andrady, A., 2019, Future Scenarios of Global Plastic Waste Generation and Disposal. Retrieved from: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-018-0212-7>.

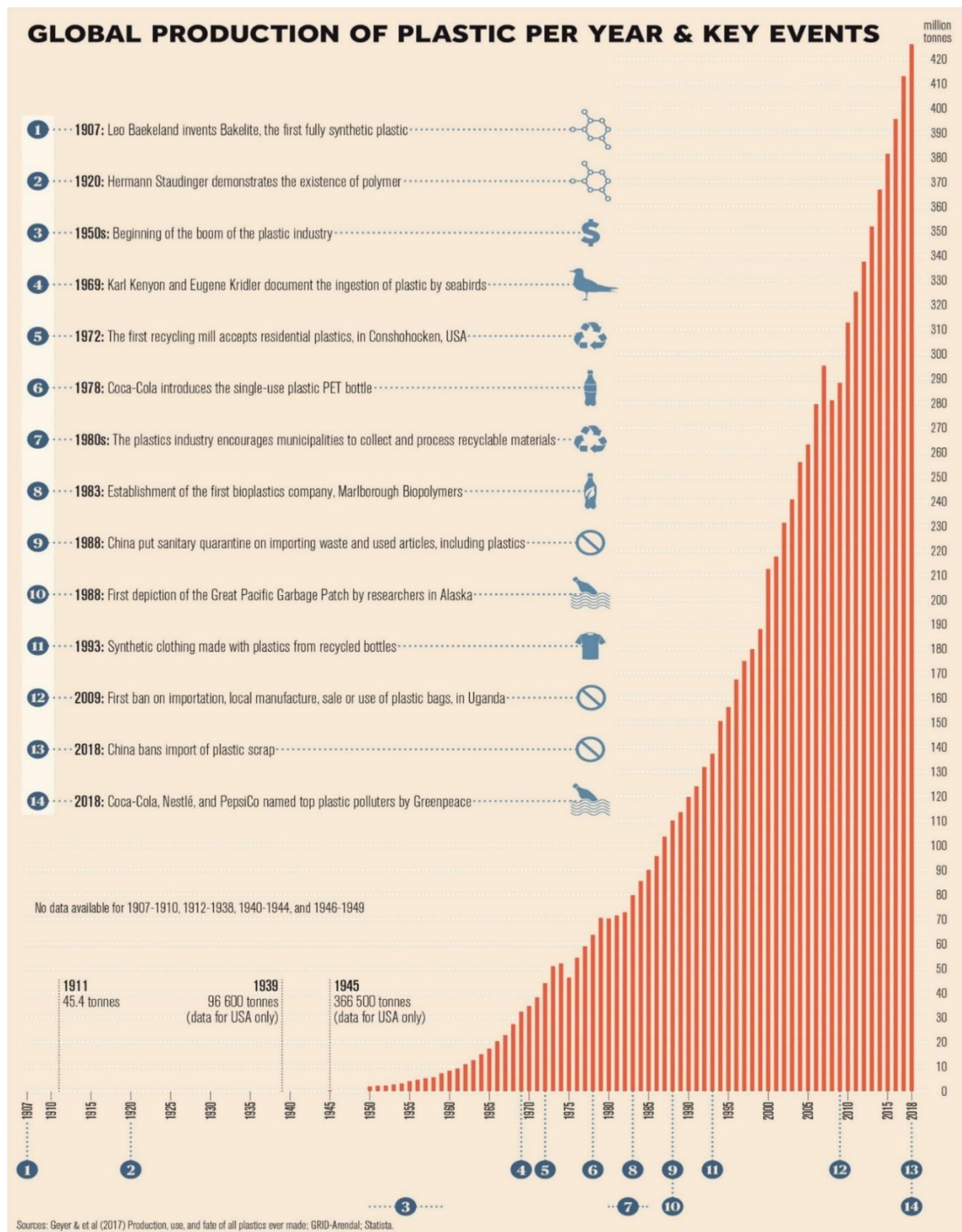


Figure 1: Global production of plastic per year and key events



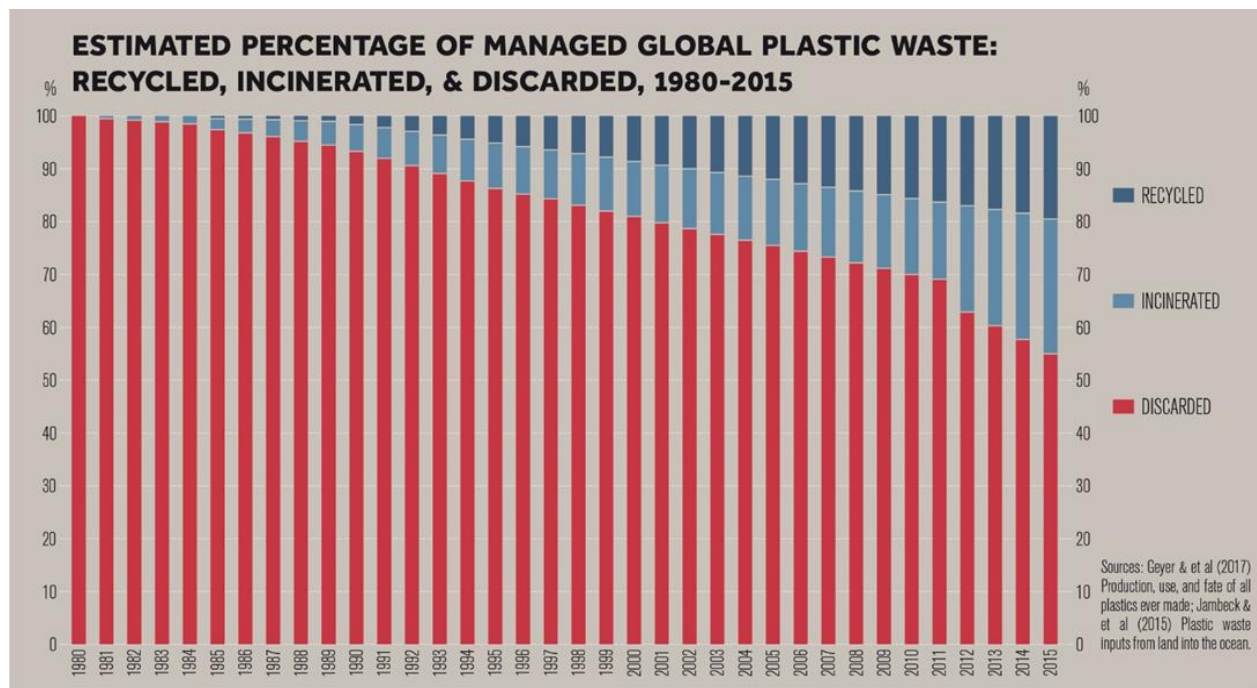


Figure 2: Estimated percentage of global plastic waste that was recycled, incinerated and discarded

### *Plastic waste and its additives threaten the environment, human health and human rights*

Once in the environment, plastic waste causes significant adverse effects to wildlife, ecosystems—and potentially to human health<sup>11</sup>. Approximately 700 marine species have been estimated to interact with marine debris, mostly plastic waste, many of which have been injured or killed, for example due to entanglement or ingestion—which may also expose them to hazardous plastic additives, some of which are listed under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants<sup>12</sup>. Microplastics, which may contain various hazardous additives or have adsorbed environmental pollutants, are also of concern. Due to their small size, they fall within the ideal prey range for many marine species, including many consumed by humans<sup>13</sup>. Microplastics have the potential of affecting animals both physically and chemically<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, larger litter items can adversely affect critical ecosystems, such as coral reefs<sup>15</sup>. Even adverse effects on the broader ecology of marine systems cannot be excluded, a topic that is basis for further research.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2019. Global Chemicals Outlook II. Nairobi: Kenya.

<sup>12</sup> Hardesty, B. D., Good, T. P., Wilcox, C., 2015. Novel methods, new results and science-based solutions to tackle marine debris impacts on wildlife. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 115, 4-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2015.04.004>.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, S. L., Thompson, R. C., & Galloway, T. S., 2013. The physical impacts of microplastics on marine organisms: A review. *Environmental Pollution*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2013.02.031>.

<sup>14</sup> Galloway, T. S., Cole, M., & Lewis, C., 2017. Interactions of microplastic debris throughout the marine ecosystem. In *Nature Ecology and Evolution*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-017-0116>.

<sup>15</sup> Uneputty, P., & Evans, S. M., 1997. The impact of plastic debris on the biota of tidal flats in Ambon Bay (eastern Indonesia). *Marine Environmental Research*, 44(3), 233–242. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0141-1136\(97\)00002-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0141-1136(97)00002-0); Gregory, M. R. (2009). Environmental implications of plastic debris in marine settings-entanglement, ingestion, smothering, hangers-on, hitch-hiking and alien invasions. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*, 364(1526), 2013–2025. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0265> ; Galgani, F., Hanke, G., & Maes, T., 2015. Global distribution, composition and abundance of marine litter. In M. Bergmann, L. Gutow, & M. Klages (Eds.), *Marine Anthropogenic Litter* (p. 29–56). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16510-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16510-3_2).

The study of potential adverse impacts on human health continues to be the subject of intensive research. Yet, uncertainty remains with regard to the level of exposure to nano- and micro-plastics and related potential health effects. While plastic particles are capable of entering the human body through various pathways, ingestion via seafood seems to be the most important exposure pathway<sup>16</sup>. Some studies found adults to be consuming in excess of 50,000 pieces of plastic a year<sup>17</sup>. Indoor air and house dusts may contain microfibers with flame retardants such as polybrominated diphenyl ethers<sup>18</sup>. Human exposure to microplastics as well as associated hazardous chemicals has been studied<sup>19</sup>. Further research is warranted to study the fate and potential adverse effects of these particles once they enter the human body. In this context, hazardous plastic additives are of primary concern, as some of these may have effects on the endocrine system, the cardiovascular system, neurodevelopment etc.<sup>20</sup> The poor and marginalized are among those worst impacted. For example, the poorest often live in closer proximity to areas where open burning of plastic waste is practiced. Informal working conditions of waste pickers and recyclers have health implications. Plastic pollution also frequently contributes to urban flooding in developing countries, in particular the poorest areas, as drainage systems become clogged. As another example, plastic pollution may threaten the livelihoods of those depending on marine resources for work, meaning those engaged in artisanal and small-scale fisheries are particularly at risk. Moreover, poor and marginalized communities often face higher exposure to

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<sup>16</sup> Farrell, P. and Nelson, K., 2013. Trophic level transfer of microplastic: *Mytilus edulis* (L.) to *Carcinus maenas* (L.). *Environmental pollution*, 177, p. 1-3; Watts, A.J., Lewis, C., Goodhead, R.M., Beckett, S.J., Moger, J., Tyler, C.R. and Galloway, T.S., 2014. Uptake and retention of microplastics by the shore crab *Carcinus maenas*. *Environmental science & technology*, 48(15), p. 8823-8830; Besseling, E., Foekema, E.M., Van Franeker, J.A., Leopold, M.F., Kühn, S., Rebolledo, E.B., Heße, E., Mielke, L.J.I.J., IJzer, J., Kamminga, P. and Koelmans, A.A., 2015. Microplastic in a macro filter feeder: humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*. *Marine pollution bulletin*, 95(1), p. 248-252.

<sup>17</sup> Cox, K.D., Covernton, G.A., Davies, H.L., Dower, J.F., Juanes, F. and Dudas, S.E., 2019. Human consumption of microplastics. *Environmental science & technology*, 53(12), p. 7068-7074.

<sup>18</sup> Toms *et al.*, 2009. Assessment of polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in samples collected from indoor environments in South East Queensland, Australia. *Chemosphere* Jun;76(2):173-8.

<sup>19</sup> Zhang *et al.*, 2020. Microplastic Fallout in Different Indoor Environments. *Environ. Sci. Technol.* 2020, 54, 11, 6530–6539. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Gore, A.C., Chappell, V.A., Fenton, S.E., Flaws, J.A., Nadal, A., Prins, G.S., Toppari, J. and Zoeller, R.T., 2015. EDC-2: The Endocrine Society's second scientific statement on endocrine-disrupting chemicals. *Endocrine reviews*, 36(6), p. E1-E150; Dorman, D.C., Chiu, W., Hales, B.F., Hauser, R., Johnson, K.J., Mantus, E., Martel, S., Robinson, K.A., Rooney, A.A., Rudel, R. and Sathyanarayana, S., 2018. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of human and animal evidence of prenatal diethylhexyl phthalate exposure and changes in male anogenital distance. *Journal of Toxicology and Environmental Health, Part B*, 21(4), p. 207-226. *Toxicology and Environmental Health, Part B*, 21(4), p. 207-226; Hu, Y., Wen, S., Yuan, D., Peng, L., Zeng, R., Yang, Z., Liu, Q., Xu, L. and Kang, D., 2018. The association between the environmental endocrine disruptor bisphenol A and polycystic ovary syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Gynecological Endocrinology*, 34(5), p. 370-377; Hu, C., Schöttker, B., Venisse, N., Limousi, F., Saulnier, P.J., Albouy-Llaty, M., Dupuis, A., Brenner, H., Migeot, V. and Hadjadj, S., 2019. Bisphenol A, chlorinated derivatives of bisphenol A and occurrence of myocardial infarction in patients with type 2 diabetes: nested case-control studies in two European cohorts. *Environmental science & technology*, 53(16), p. 9876-9883.; Golestanzadeh, M., Riahi, R. and Kelishadi, R., 2019. Association of exposure to phthalates with cardiometabolic risk factors in children and adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, p. 1-17; Rochester, J.R., Bolden, A.L. and Kwiatkowski, C.F., 2018. Prenatal exposure to bisphenol A and hyperactivity in children: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Environment international*, 114, p. 343-356; Lee, D.W., Kim, M.S., Lim, Y.H., Lee, N. and Hong, Y.C., 2018. Prenatal and postnatal exposure to di-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate and neurodevelopmental outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Environmental research*, 167, p. 558-566.



hazardous additives, for instance because workers lack access to personal protective equipment, particularly in the informal sector, where conditions lead to more exposure to the adverse effects of hazardous chemicals and wastes. Plastic pollution also directly and indirectly threatens the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, culture and development<sup>21</sup>.

### **III. How has the international community reacted to the plastic waste crisis?**

*The international community requested an urgent global response to address the plastic crisis*

The global community is determined to take action to tackle the global plastic crisis. In 2016, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) recognized that the presence of plastic in the marine environment is a rapidly increasing serious issue of global concern that needs an urgent global response<sup>22</sup>. Meanwhile, including through the ad-hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, UNEA continues to explore the development of a global instrument among the options to address the global plastic crisis. Many other initiatives are already underway, such as the Clean Seas Programme and the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). Other international multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) also work to address plastic waste, for example the UN Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Regional Seas Conventions and the Stockholm Convention. Meanwhile, international organisations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), only to mention a few, provide critical contributions.

Also relevant are the numerous initiatives and projects undertaken by civil society and the private sector, including in the context of public-private partnerships. Notable examples include the work undertaken by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and the World Economic Forum, among others. We can thus conclude that the call for action has not remained unanswered. Yet, despite the significant action already taken, it appears that this is not yet sufficient to comprehensively tackle the global plastic crisis. The following two sections present two global Conventions that can play a critical role in accelerating progress.

*Stockholm Convention on POPs addresses hazardous plastic additives*

As previously mentioned, hazardous additives in plastic may pose a threat to human health and the environment. The Stockholm Convention requires Parties to prohibit, eliminate or restrict the production, use, import and export of listed intentionally produced POPs. It also requires Parties to reduce or eliminate releases from unintentionally produced POPs and has provisions on the ESM of stockpiles and wastes consisting of, containing or contaminated with POPs. It is binding for 184 Parties, as of March 2021.

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). (2020). Neglected: environmental justice impacts of plastic pollution. p. 6. Nairobi: Kenya.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2016. Resolution 2/11: Marine plastic litter and microplastics. UNEP/EA.2/Res.11. Nairobi: Kenya.

The Stockholm Convention controls various POPs used as additives, flame retardants, water and oil repellents, plasticizers in plastics or manufacture of fluoropolymers. In early 2021, the POPs Review Committee (POPRC), which is a subsidiary body responsible for reviewing POPs for listing in the Stockholm Convention, found that UV-328, an additive in plastic products, satisfies the screening criteria set out in Annex D, namely persistence, bioaccumulation, potential for long-range environmental transport and adverse effects to human health and/or the environment<sup>23</sup>. A decision by a future meeting of the COP could trigger its listing in the Annex to the Convention requiring Parties take action towards its reduction or elimination.

At its seventeenth meeting to take place in 2021, the POPs Review Committee will review, among others, a new set of chemicals, long-chain perfluorocarboxylic acids (PFCAs) and their salts proposed by Canada, the substances that are essential for the production of fluoropolymers, such as polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF). PVDF is one of the polymers recognized in Annex IX to the Basel Convention as exempted from the PIC procedure. Furthermore, the POPs Review Committee is currently analysing the information on the long-range environmental transport of chemicals of concern through plastic debris.

*Basel Convention: the only global legally-binding instrument specifically addressing plastic waste*

The Basel Convention was adopted in 1989 and entered into force in 1992. With currently 188 Parties, it has almost universal coverage. In June 2018, Norway submitted a proposal to amend certain Annexes to the Basel Convention to more clearly specify how it covers plastic waste and hence stem the flow of plastic waste to countries with little or no facilities for its ESM.

In the landmark decision BC-14/12<sup>24</sup>, in May 2019, the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention unanimously adopted the Plastic Waste Amendments, introducing new categories for plastic waste in Annex II, Annex VIII and Annex IX. This makes the Basel Convention the only global legally binding instrument that currently and specifically addresses plastic waste. From 2021, 186 States around the world and one regional economic integration organisation are bound by the amendments. The Plastic Waste Amendments introduced new entries to each of the respective Annexes:

- Annex II lists categories of wastes requiring special consideration. The new entry Y48 covers all plastic waste, including mixtures of plastic waste, except for the plastic waste covered by entries A3210 (in Annex VIII) and B3011 (in Annex IX).
- Annex VIII lists wastes that are characterized as hazardous<sup>25</sup>. The new entry A3210 covers hazardous plastic waste.
- Annex IX lists wastes that are not considered hazardous<sup>26</sup>. The new entry B3011 covers plastic waste consisting exclusively of one non-halogenated polymer or resin, selected fluorinated

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<sup>23</sup> Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, 2021. Report of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee on the work of its sixteenth meeting. UNEP/POPS/POPRC.16/9. Geneva: Switzerland.

<sup>24</sup> Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention, 2019. BC-14/12: Amendments to Annexes II, VIII and IX to the Basel Convention. Geneva: Switzerland.

<sup>25</sup> Although the hazardous characteristics in Annex III can be used to demonstrate that the waste is not hazardous.

<sup>26</sup> Unless they contain the hazardous material in Annex I to an extent causing them to exhibit Annex III hazardous characteristics.

polymers or mixtures of polyethylene, polypropylene and/or polyethylene terephthalate, provided the waste is destined for recycling in an environmentally sound manner and almost free from contamination and other types of wastes.

*What impacts will the Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments have?*

With the Plastic Waste Amendments, Parties to the Basel Convention are now required to control transboundary movements of the plastic waste covered under the procedures established by the Convention. This includes ensuring notification and consent prior to the movement commencing. There is also an obligation to provide annual national reports about the amounts of hazardous and other wastes exported and imported, among other things.<sup>27</sup> The first reports that will include information reflecting the Plastic Waste Amendments are expected to be transmitted by Parties before the end of 2022.<sup>28</sup> As the Plastic Waste Amendments entered into force on 1 January 2021, it is still too early to undertake an empirical analysis of the effects of the Plastic Waste Amendments, e.g. to estimate the reduction in the amounts of hazardous plastic waste exported to developing countries. It is nonetheless anticipated that there are at least three ways in which the Plastic Waste Amendments can be expected to advance the prevention and minimization of the generation of plastic waste, the ESM of plastic waste and the control of TBM of plastic waste. The identified benefits are likely to manifest gradually increasing in strength over time.

First, the Plastic Waste Amendments create the conditions for the global trade in plastic waste to become more transparent and better regulated. For waste that is hazardous or other waste that requires special consideration, including the types of plastic waste listed in Annex II and Annex VIII, the prior informed consent (PIC) procedure applies. This procedure, which is at the heart of the Basel Convention, requires the Parties to the Convention to ensure notification and consent in order to undertake a transboundary movement, which needs to ensure the ESM of the waste in question. Hazardous and other types of plastic wastes subject to the Convention also need to follow its provisions pertaining to waste minimization and ESM. Non-hazardous plastic wastes listed in Annex IX are not automatically subject to the Convention's control procedure, unless it (i) contains Annex I material to an extent to exhibit hazardous characteristics in annex III or (ii) it is considered or defined as hazardous waste under national legislation as set out in Article 3."

Second, the Plastic Waste Amendments are intended as an additional incentive within a legally-binding framework to encourage governments, the private sector and other stakeholders to strengthen national capacities and infrastructures for the collection, separation, recycling and other disposal of plastic waste. Basel Convention Parties have to take appropriate measures to ensure the availability of adequate disposal facilities, for the ESM of hazardous and other wastes located to the extent possible within it whatever their place of disposal. By introducing new categories for plastic waste in Annex II, Annex VIII and Annex IX, the Amendments further clarify the applicability of this requirement for the various types of plastic waste. To implement their obligations under the Convention, governments as well as the private sector will thus need to take measures to ensure that capacities for the ESM of plastic

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<sup>27</sup> Further information on national reporting is available at <http://www.basel.int/Procedures/NationalReporting/tabid/1332/Default.aspx>.

<sup>28</sup> Annual national reports can be accessed at <http://www.basel.int/Countries/NationalReporting/NationalReports/BC2018Reports/tabid/8202/Default.aspx>.

waste are available at the domestic level, to the extent possible and whatever the place of disposal. By providing a clear and stable framework in which infrastructure investments can be made, the Plastic Waste Amendments serve as a powerful argument to scale up projects aimed at for example improving collection systems or increasing recycling rates.

Third, by encouraging the expansion of infrastructure for the ESM of plastic waste, the Plastic Waste Amendments could also help create jobs and economic opportunities in a manner that safeguards human health and the environment. This is particularly relevant for the informal sector. In many developing countries, informal waste pickers continue to account for the largest share of waste collection, while lacking the benefits and protection that often come with formal employment. The Plastic Waste Amendments are also expected to incentivise innovation, such as in the design of alternatives to plastic and in the phasing out of hazardous additives. Innovation is likely to play an ever more important role, in particular against the background of disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Assessing the effectiveness and updating guidance*

Each Party has obligations under the Convention to take the necessary measures to implement and enforce the amendments.

The Secretariat maintains a database of national legislation and other measures adopted by Parties in this regard. As Parties develop their legal and institutional frameworks in relation to the Plastic Waste Amendments, it is expected that this database will be expanded with information and texts of measures on the ESM of plastic waste, as transmitted by Parties.<sup>29</sup>

An Implementation and Compliance Committee has also been established under the Basel Convention, with a dual mandate to deal with specific submissions relating to the compliance of individual Parties and a mandate to review general issues of compliance and implementation under the Convention.<sup>30</sup> This latter mandate often includes requests from the COP to the Committee to consider and update guidance documents, which may in the future include updates related to the plastic waste amendments. Specifically, with regard to combatting and preventing the illegal traffic of hazardous and other wastes in 2013, the COP to the Basel Convention established the Environmental Network for Optimizing Regulatory Compliance on Illegal Traffic (ENFORCE). Its revised roadmap of activities for 2020-2021 includes, among others, trainings on TBM, ESM and prevention/minimization of plastic wastes, targeting among others customs and law enforcement authorities.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the COP also decided in BC-14/13 to include in the work programme of the Open-ended Working Group (OWWG) for 2020-2021 consideration of whether, how and when the COP should assess the effectiveness of the measures taken under the Convention to address plastic waste as well as which further activities could possibly be conducted under the Convention in response to developments in scientific knowledge and environmental information related to plastic waste. In preparation for consideration of this issue at the twelfth meeting of the OWWG, the Secretariat has

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<sup>29</sup> The database can be accessed at <http://www.basel.int/Countries/NationalLegislation/tabid/1420/Default.aspx>.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.basel.int/TheConvention/ImplementationComplianceCommittee/Overview/tabid/2868/Default.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention. (2020). ENFORCE roadmap of activities for 2020-2021 (status 1 October 2020).

prepared a compilation of background information<sup>32</sup>. Comments are being incorporated before consideration by the COP at its fifteenth meeting of the question of a possible future assessment.

#### *International cooperation and potential future initiatives*

In 2018, UNEA, through Resolution 3/7 on marine litter and microplastics, para 10 (d) (ii), (iii) (iv) and (v), decided that the open-ended ad hoc expert group on marine plastic litter and microplastics will include in its programme of work, among others, to identify response options at all levels as well as the costs and benefits, feasibility and effectiveness of each of these options, thereby identifying potential options for continued work for consideration by UNEA. The Chair's summary of the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics for consideration by UNEA at its fifth session<sup>33</sup> found that there was a consensus that maintaining the status quo was not an option. AHEG thus identified the following potential options for continued work for consideration by UNEA, noting that these are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive:

- Global common vision: (setting new and or sharing an existing long-term vision and objective toward elimination of all discharge of plastic into the ocean)
- National action plans and their implementation (these could cover as far as possible all life cycle stages of plastics as the basic framework for countermeasures on marine plastic litter)
- Regional and international cooperation to facilitate national actions (enhancing cooperation to support national responses particularly for countries with limited resources and capacities, and having difficulties in developing and implementing such plans)
- Scientific basis (further expand, accumulate and share scientific knowledge on marine litter, in order to facilitate the necessary evidence-based and science-based policy approach to measure the success towards achieving common vision and objectives)
- Multi-stakeholder engagement (facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement in support of decision-making processes and implementation of actions to address marine litter)
- Strengthening existing instruments (strengthen existing instruments, frameworks, partnerships, and actions such as the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML), ongoing work under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, etc.)
- A new global instrument (develop a new global agreement, framework or other form of instrument to provide a legal framework of global response and to facilitate national responses especially for those countries with limited resources and capacities that could contain either legally binding and/or non-binding elements)

Enhanced coordination among instruments (enhance coordination framework amongst existing instruments and between existing and future instruments to pursue enhanced collaboration and to avoid duplication of efforts in order to work towards a common vision)As the global challenge of

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<sup>32</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention. (2020). Background information related to a possible future assessment of the effectiveness of the measures taken under the Basel Convention to address plastic waste and to possible further activities that could be conducted under the Basel Convention. UNEP/CHW/OEWG.12/INF/20.

<sup>33</sup> Substantive matters will be discussed at UNEA-5/2, to be held 3-4 March 2022.

addressing plastic waste cuts across all aspects of sustainable development and impacts virtually every sector of society, controlling TBM, promoting ESM, and advancing prevention/minimization of plastic waste requires close cooperation and coordination among international organizations and other stakeholders. Decision BC-14/13 also recognised the importance of enhanced cooperation in tackling plastic waste, the COP requested the Secretariat among others to continue to work closely with other international organizations on activities related marine plastic litter and microplastics. Such cooperation is ongoing, in particular with intergovernmental and other organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), International Maritime Organization (IMO), the World Customs Organization (WCO) etc.

For example, the COP requested the Secretariat to submit to the WCO a proposal for amending the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System to allow the identification of the various types of waste, including plastic waste.

Given the trade dimension of the Basel Convention and the Plastic Waste Amendment, cooperation with the WTO is critical. In March 2021, the WTO-members driven initiative ‘Informal Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade’ was kicked off. It focuses on transparency and international cooperation with the aim of establishing a solid factual basis to support WTO members’ efforts to reduce plastics pollution and to promote sustainable trade in plastics. The objective is to help members move towards a tangible outcome at the WTO 12th Ministerial Conference to be held in late 2021.

#### **IV. How has COVID-19 affected plastic waste and implementation of the Basel Convention?**

As is valid for many—or virtually all—sectors in our societies and economies, the COVID-19 pandemic is having significant repercussions with regard to our ability to address the global plastic crisis. To better understand the implications COVID-19 is having on the plastic waste and the implementation of the Basel Convention in particular, it is useful to recall that the Basel Convention rests on the following three pillars:

- (i) The control of TBM of hazardous and other wastes.
- (ii) The ESM of hazardous and other wastes.
- (iii) The prevention and minimization of the generation of such wastes.

##### *COVID-19 impacts on the control of TBM of plastic waste*

The COVID-19 pandemic is having negative impacts on each of these pillars in many countries. Let us first examine the impacts on the control of TBM of plastic waste. Overall, the pandemic has disrupted international trade, not only in goods and waste generally, but also in plastic waste, including COVID-19 related waste. This is due to the tightened border restrictions, an increase in transport costs and the need to change shipping routes, among others<sup>34</sup>. As a consequence, it has become more difficult for

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<sup>34</sup> Independent Commodity Intelligence Service, 2020. Post Corona Virus what will change. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: <https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2020/04/30/10502603/post-coronavirus-what-will-change>.



Parties, in particular developing countries that lack facilities for the adequate waste management, to import and export plastic waste for environmentally sound treatment and disposal in other countries. Meanwhile, the options for countries to export their waste to countries with adequate facilities have been limited<sup>35</sup>. For example, many European facilities have closed or operated at limited capacity. On the other hand, those at the receiving end also operate at lower capacities, as other regions remain in lockdown resulting in lower demand for such services. In fact, the Basel Convention encourages the treatment of waste as close as possible to the point of generation. We may thus also see a positive development, namely that the pandemic spurs the construction of facilities for the ESM of plastic waste in some countries, which brings us to the second pillar.

#### *COVID-19 impacts on the ESM of plastic waste*

During the pandemic, many countries are facing increased difficulties in ensuring the ESM of plastic waste. Meanwhile, formal collection, storage and treatment centres have been operating at reduced capacity. Recycling and waste disposal centres have often been closed or access has been restricted; municipal waste collection systems were severely disrupted during the lockdowns<sup>36</sup>. Doorstep collection of waste has been limited in many countries. In the Philippines, Vietnam and India, as much as 80 % of the recycling industry was not operating during the height of the pandemic<sup>37</sup>. The informal sector has been impacted particularly heavily. Meanwhile, illegal dumping of waste has been on the rise, even in developed countries. The United Kingdom saw a 300 % rise in illegal waste disposal during the lockdown period<sup>38</sup>. Absent reliable data, it seems safe to hypothesize that the situation has been even more dramatic in developing countries. Finally, we have also observed in the countries we work with that priorities have shifted away from the management of plastic waste. This is visible not least in the re-allocation of human and financial resources.

#### *COVID-19 impacts on the prevention and minimization of the generation of plastic waste*

The rapid increase in the use of masks, other personal protective equipment, packaging etc. has meant a setback for global efforts to reduce and otherwise tackle plastic waste at its source<sup>39,40</sup>. Recycling rates have fallen significantly in the last year. This has been a consequence of both the COVID-19 pandemic and historically low oil prices which reduced the cost of virgin resin compared to recycled resin.

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<sup>35</sup> Olley, K., 2020. Overview of the impact of COVID-19 on transboundary movements of hazard and other waste and illegal traffic. Presentation to the Basel Convention Open Ended Working Group, September 2020. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: [http://www.basel.int/TheConvention/OpenendedWorkingGroup\(OEWG\)/Meetings/OEWG12/Sideevents/tabid/8425/Default.aspx](http://www.basel.int/TheConvention/OpenendedWorkingGroup(OEWG)/Meetings/OEWG12/Sideevents/tabid/8425/Default.aspx). Accessed 20 January 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Independent Commodity Intelligence Service, 2020. Post Corona Virus what will change. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: <https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2020/04/30/10502603/post-coronavirus-what-will-change>.

<sup>37</sup> Brock, J., 2020. Special Report: Plastic pandemic – COVID-19 trashed the recycling dream. Reuters. Accessed 17 March at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-plastic-recycling-spe-idUSKBN26Q1LO>.

<sup>38</sup> World Economic Forum, 2020. The plastic pandemic is only getting worse during COVID-19. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/plastic-waste-management-covid19-ppe>.

<sup>39</sup> Asian Development Bank, 2020. Managing infectious medical waste during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accessed 17 March 2021 at <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/578771/managing-medical-waste-covid19.pdf>. Accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations, 2020. Five things you should know about disposable masks and plastic pollution. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1069151>.

According to one estimate, there was a 50 % drop in demand for recycled plastic on average across South and Southeast Asia<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, given the shifting priorities and changing perception regarding the advantages and disadvantages, outreach efforts aiming to reduce the reliance on single use plastics have become more difficult to communicate.

In sum, the pandemic is posing serious challenges to the implementation of the three pillars of the Basel Convention. At the same time, the Basel Convention also offers a range of tools to address these challenges. This is not only by providing a global legally binding framework for the prevention and minimization, ESM and TBM of plastic waste, but also through a variety of guidance, tools and technical assistance developed and provided under the Basel Convention to strengthen the capacities of Parties during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

## **V. How can other actions under the Basel Convention help strengthen Parties' capacities?**

### *The Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership*

In order to assist Parties in implementing these new obligations, in 2019, the COP established the Plastic Waste Partnership (PWP)<sup>42</sup>. The objective of the Partnership is to improve and promote the ESM of plastic waste at the global, regional and national levels and prevent and minimize their generation. The work of the Partnership is overseen by a working group which established four project groups.

- (i) Plastic waste prevention and minimization: This project group addresses issues such as reducing single-use packaging waste, improving the design of plastic products to increase durability, scaling up re-use solutions, and biodegradable plastic products.
- (ii) Plastic waste collection, recycling and other recovery including financing and related markets: This project group focuses on management systems, financing schemes, such as extended producer responsibility (EPR), innovative technologies, as well as regulatory and voluntary measures.
- (iii) TBM of plastic waste: The third project group explores means to support custom, enforcement and other authorities and gather information that will help countries to implement the concrete provisions that came with the Plastic Waste Amendments, among others.
- (iv) Outreach, education and awareness-raising: The fourth project group aims to raise awareness about the work of the PWP as well as develop and disseminate information materials on prevention, minimization, ESM and control of TBM of plastic waste.

By mobilising business, government, academic and civil society resources, interests and expertise, the PWP can be expected to catalyse action to advance the prevention and minimization, ESM and TBM of plastic waste. First, it constitutes a unique instrument in the field of plastic waste, because it serves a global legally-binding convention. Its work will thus feed directly into the work of the COP and can help shape the future decision-making on plastic waste under the Basel Convention. Second, the work of the PWP has been organized around the waste hierarchy, with the underlying idea that tackling

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<sup>41</sup> Brock, J., 2020. Special Report: Plastic pandemic – COVID-19 trashed the recycling dream. Reuters. Accessed 17 March at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-plastic-recycling-spe-idUSKBN26Q1LO>.

<sup>42</sup> Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention, 2019. BC-14/13: Further actions to address plastic waste under the Basel Convention. Geneva: Switzerland.

sources of plastic waste is the most preferable option, while we also cannot neglect more downstream solutions, such as environmentally sound recycling. It thus provides a holistic and science-based approach to tackling plastic waste. Third, with funding from the Governments of Germany, Norway and Switzerland, a series of pilot project will be financed through the PWP (23 projects have been selected for funding to date). Covering a diverse set of actions across all developing country regions, these pilot projects are expected to manifest tangible improvement on the ground, whether through infrastructure development, establishment of sorting schemes, inventory development or testing of alternatives to plastic.

### *The Small Grants Programme on Plastic Waste*

Another vehicle to advance the implementation of relevant provisions of the Basel Convention are the pilot projects<sup>43</sup> under the Small Grants Programme (SGP) on Plastic Waste<sup>44</sup>. Funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, the SGP on Plastic Waste projects are implemented by Basel and Stockholm Convention Regional Centres in close collaboration with the beneficiary countries. The projects fall under either one or several of the following results areas:

- (i) Controlling the TBM of plastic waste;
- (ii) Improving the ESM of plastic waste;
- (iii) Preventing and minimizing the generation of plastic waste;
- (iv) Reducing the risk from hazardous constituents such as POPs in plastic waste.

In total, 15 projects across all developing country regions have been selected for funding, from Cambodia to Albania and from Nigeria to Suriname, to mention a few of the target countries. Examples of the activities to be implemented include the upgrading of a community-run recycling centre, the manufacture of reusable bags through a women's cooperative, zero plastic high schools, development of regional standards for TBM of plastic wastes, and a certification scheme for plastic recycling companies. It is hoped that these projects can help to further strengthen Parties' capacities in addressing plastic waste.

### *Guidance and tools under the Basel Convention*

A wide range of tools and guidance has been developed and is being developed or updated under the Basel Convention to support Parties in meeting their obligations. As noted previously, these are now of particular importance given the rapid increases in plastic waste related to COVID-19.

First, there are tools with a broader scope that are also applicable to plastic waste. This includes the 'Framework for the ESM of hazardous and other wastes'<sup>45</sup>, which was adopted at the Basel Convention COP-11 in 2013. Essentially, the Framework identifies what can be done by relevant stakeholders to address the challenges of implementing the ESM of hazardous wastes and other wastes. In this context,

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<sup>43</sup> Note: these projects are in addition to the projects to be implemented under the PWP.

<sup>44</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2021. SGP on Plastic Waste. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: <http://www.basel.int/Implementation/Plasticwaste/Technicalassistance/Projects/BRSNorad2/SGPonplasticwaste/tabid/8402/Default.aspx>

<sup>45</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2013. Follow-up to the Indonesian-Swiss country-led initiative to improve the effectiveness of the Basel Convention. UNEP/CHW.11/3/Add.1/Rev.1.

an ESM toolkit<sup>46</sup> was also developed, which addresses topics such as the informal sector, private sector incentives etc. Furthermore, a practical manual to ensure that notifications of TBM meet ESM requirements and a guidance for developing strategies towards prevention and minimization are available.

Second, there are tools directly addressing plastic waste: Already in 2002, the COP-6 adopted the ‘Technical guidelines for the identification and ESM of plastic wastes and for their disposal’<sup>47</sup>. At the COP-14 in 2019, it was decided that these guidelines should be updated. This process is ongoing. The draft technical guidelines also address micro-plastics (e.g. regarding the identification of plastic wastes sources) and diverse sectors, such as packaging, agricultural plastic, fishing nets, synthetic fibres, vehicles and electronics. Moreover, and particularly relevant against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ‘Technical guidelines on the ESM of bio-medical and healthcare waste’ is available. Further tools are under development, for example practical guidance on the development of plastic waste inventories and considerations for developing national strategies for environmentally sound plastic waste reduction and management.

#### *Technical assistance provided under the Basel Convention*

In order to make optimal use of the available tools and guidance, the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions implements a number of additional technical assistance activities<sup>48</sup>. Projects addressing the three pillars of the Basel Convention—control of TBM, ESM and prevention/minimization of plastic waste—are currently being implemented in Ghana, Sri Lanka, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Kyrgyzstan. These projects support Parties in strengthening their legal and institutional frameworks for the control of TBM of plastic waste, provide trainings for custom authorities. As regards the second pillar, they facilitate the development of plastic waste inventories and national strategies for the ESM of plastic waste. Finally, a number of pilot tests are being or will be implemented, ranging from the collection and recycling of fishing nets to the use of compostable packaging made from seaweed.

## **VI. Concluding remarks**

As this article has sought to demonstrate, the global plastic waste crisis requires a swatch of determined action at various levels. With approximately 76 % of plastic waste either released to the environment or disposed in landfills, ensuring the ESM thereof is imperative. Here, the focus has been placed on the mechanisms available at the international level, most notably through the Basel Convention and the Stockholm Conventions. As the only global legally-binding instrument that currently and specifically addresses plastic waste, is expected that the Basel Convention’s Plastic Waste Amendments will (a)

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<sup>46</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2021. Environmentally sound management (ESM) toolkit. Accessed 17 March 2021 at:

<http://www.basel.int/Implementation/CountryLedInitiative/EnvironmentallySoundManagement/ESMToolkit/Overview/tabid/5839/Default.aspx>.

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2002. Technical guidelines for the identification and environmentally sound management of plastic wastes and for their disposal. UNEP/CHW.6/21.

<sup>48</sup> Secretariat of the Basel Convention, 2021. Technical assistance. Accessed 17 March 2021 at: <http://www.basel.int/Implementation/Plasticwaste/Technicalassistance/tabid/8340/Default.aspx>.

create the conditions for the global trade in plastic waste to become more transparent and better regulated; (b) provide a powerful incentive for the private sector, governments and other stakeholders to strengthen their national capacities and infrastructures for the collection, separation, recycling and other treatments of plastic waste; and (c) encourage the expansion of infrastructure for the ESM of plastic waste and thus help create jobs and economic opportunities. Many hazardous plastic additives are POPs listed under the Stockholm Convention, through which production, use, trade and waste disposal shall be eliminated and restricted.

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have significant repercussions with regard to our ability to address the global plastic crisis, as can be seen through the lens of the three pillars of the Basel Convention: TBM for the purpose of ESM of plastic waste have become more challenging; municipal waste collection systems have been severely disrupted; and the rapid increase in plastic products for hygienic and medical purposes has set back efforts to reduce plastic consumption. However, the Basel Convention also offers a variety of venues to strengthen the capacities of Parties during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. These include the Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership, the Small Grants Programme on Plastic Waste as well as other projects providing technical assistance. Equally relevant, the Basel Convention's Technical Guidelines are being updated while a range of other tools and guidance directly or indirectly addressing plastic waste are already at Parties' disposal.

In conclusion, the Basel Convention, working closely with other global, regional and national instruments and initiatives, thus serves as a critical tool to tackle the growing plastic waste crisis and holds further potential to be realised in protecting human health and the environment from the adverse effects of plastic waste by fully implementing the Plastic Waste Amendments, scaling up the use of existing and new guidance, tools and technical assistance and taking full advantage of the Plastic Waste Partnership.