

THE GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY

QUICK GUIDE



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1. WHAT IS THE GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY?

The Global Plastics Treaty (GPT) is an international, multilateral agreement currently being negotiated at the United Nations (UN).

In March 2022, the treaty process was launched by a resolution of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

Over 170 countries passed [Resolution 5/14](#) calling for the development of “an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, . . . which could include both binding and voluntary approaches, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic.”

Common references to the agreement include formally, the international legally binding instrument (ILBI) on plastic pollution or more generally, the global plastics treaty (GPT).



2. WHAT IS THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE?



Resolution 5/14 called for the establishment of a body called the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution (INC).

The development of a draft treaty takes place through a process of comment and revision, punctuated by multiple rounds of in-person negotiation.

Three rounds of negotiation, held in Uruguay, France, and Kenya, took place in 2022 and 2023. A fourth (INC-4) will occur in Ottawa, Canada from April 23 to 29, 2024. A fifth, and likely final, round of negotiations (INC-5) is scheduled for November 5 to December 1 in Busan, South Korea.

3. WHAT IS THE TIMELINE?

Roadmap to INC-4

a journey towards a legally-binding instrument on plastic pollution



AHEG = Ad-hoc Expert Open-Ended Group
UNEA = United Nations Environment Assembly
OEWG = Open Ended Working Group
INC = Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee

4. WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THE TREATY?

Resolution 5/14 mandates that the treaty address the full lifecycle of plastics: from the extraction of raw materials, production processes, use of plastics, and waste, including pollution and waste management.

The treaty text combines a blend of binding and voluntary targets, means of implementation, and supplementary annexes yet to be defined.

Currently, there are no provisions to reduce plastic production at a global level or numerical targets that mandate a specific timeline for implementation.

The IUCN has proposed a new provision be added to protect against biodiversity impacts.

Importantly, the current draft lacks a binding obligation for treaty signatories to protect human rights. Principles of justice, equity, and inclusivity are additionally lacking in the text.



5. WHAT IS THE REVISED ZERO DRAFT?

Following INC-2, the initial draft text of the treaty, called the Zero Draft was released. This document was then expanded after INC-3 to compile numerous options and input from countries into what is now, the Revised Zero Draft.

It includes six primary parts that will guide future negotiations.

Overview:

Part I: Includes the Preamble, Objective, Definitions, Principles, and Scope of the agreement. These introductory elements set the stage for the legally binding treaty's purpose, motivations, and considerations that guide the interpretation and implementation of the agreement.

Part II. Includes the control measures across the full lifecycle of plastics, defined within 13 provisions and sub-paragraphs. These include:

1. Primary plastic polymers
2. Chemicals and polymers of concern
3. Problematic and avoidable plastic products, including short-lived and single-use plastic products and intentionally added microplastics and 3bis. Micro- and nanoplastics
4. Exemptions available to a Party upon request and 4bis. Dedicated programmes of work
5. Product design, composition and performance
6. Non-plastic substitutes
7. Extended producer responsibility
8. Emissions and releases of plastic throughout its life cycle
9. Waste management
10. Trade [in listed chemicals[, polymers] and products, and in plastic waste][related measures]
11. Existing plastic pollution, including in the marine environment
12. Just transition
13. Transparency, tracking, monitoring and labelling and 13bis. Overarching provision related to Part II

Part III. Includes means of implementation covering the financing mechanism, capacity building, and technology.

QUESTION #5 CONTINUED

Part IV. Includes implementation measures covering 8 provisions and sub-paragraphs. These include:

1. National [Action][Implementation]Plans
2. Implementation and compliance
3. Reporting on progress [of implementation]
4. Periodic assessment and monitoring of the progress of implementation of the instrument* [and effectiveness evaluation]
5. International cooperation
6. Information exchange
7. Awareness-raising, education and research [and development]
8. [Partner and] Stakeholder engagement and 8bis. Health aspects

Part V. Includes the institutional arrangements that establish the decision-making authority, including the Governing body, Subsidiary bodies, and Secretariat of the future treaty. This provision currently sets the multilateral environmental agreement as a convention, (synonymous with the word treaty), and establishes a Conference of Parties that will convene to review the implementation of and proposed amendments to the instrument, among other matters.

Part IV. Includes a placeholder for final provisions to be further developed by the INC.

Annexes: Includes possible annexes to the treaty, yet to be defined, that are supplementary to the control measures, such as timeframes and targets for bans, phase-outs, or reductions, as well as setting criteria for the provisions.



6. WHAT'S AT STAKE WITH THE PLASTIC CRISIS?

- Plastics significantly contribute to the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and represent a human rights and justice issue.
- According to UNEP, plastics are a barrier to achieving every Sustainable Development Goal. More than 16,000 chemicals can be found in plastics and over 26% are hazardous to human health.
- 99% of plastics derive from fossil fuels. The plastic industry contributes 3-8% of global annual emissions and production is projected to triple by 2050.
- Each year, only 9% of global plastic waste is recycled and roughly 19% is incinerated.
- Half of the global sea turtle population is estimated to have ingested plastics. By 2050, it is projected that 99% of seabirds will too.
- Millions of metric tons of plastic are exported from high GDP countries to low GDP countries, predominantly of the Global South; a trend called, 'waste colonialism.'
- Each year, 11 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean, forming vast garbage gyres as well as breaking down into persistent microplastics, harming over 700 documented species. An estimated 170 trillion microplastics are in the ocean.



7. WHAT ARE SOME KEY ISSUES OF THE TREATY?

Despite the ambition to finalize the treaty by the end of 2024, several key issues persist in the text, including missing elements and provisions where decisions regarding their binding nature or strength are yet to be made. Advocacy for such changes includes to:

- Retain and strengthen binding provisions across the full lifecycle.
- Set a cap on production of virgin (new) plastics.
- Include bans and phase-outs of concerning chemicals and unnecessary plastics, like single-use plastics and intentionally added microplastics, and increase producer transparency.
- Recognize the plastic-climate nexus and increase synergies between the GPT and the Paris Agreement and the 1.5C Target.
- Integrate protections for human rights, including Indigenous Rights, and labor rights in facilitating a just transition, and foster plastic literacy regarding human and environmental health risks.
- Increase protections for the ocean by addressing existing plastic pollution and preventing and ending further pollution of chemicals, plastic polymers, and microplastics.
- Promote justice, mitigating the disproportionate harms of the plastic lifecycle to marginalized communities and increasing participation including of Indigenous Peoples, the Global South, waste pickers, Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, women, and youth.
- Provide financial and capacity-building resources to countries of the Global South, Small Islands, and those with the fewest resources to implement the treaty.

8. WHAT ARE SOME STICKING POINTS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS?

Diverging views: At INC-3, disagreements on the scope and ambition of the agreement caused the now Revised Zero Draft to grow almost 3x in size, aiming to accommodate all of the inputs of countries, meaning that provisions currently include a range of options for countries to discuss and narrow at INC-4.

The full lifecycle of plastics: Some countries have advocated for limiting the scope to cover only pollution or waste management---a position that contrasts Resolution 5/14, and that of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution. This group led by Rwanda and Norway, and comprised of more than 60 countries, issued a joint statement at INC-3 calling for a full life cycle approach.

Legally binding provisions: Additionally, some disagreements have arisen on limiting the ambition of provisions from legally binding to voluntary (“shall” vs. “should”). The same High Ambition statement reiterated the call for binding provisions.

Levels of influence: At INC-3, the Center for International Environmental Law quantified that 143 fossil fuel and chemical industry lobbyists registered. The industry’s representation outnumbered the 70 smallest Member States delegations. The INC can address unbalanced levels of influence with conflict of interest policies and should ensure meaningful participation for those most harmed by this industry, including Indigenous Peoples, the Global South, and youth.

9. HOW WILL THE TREATY INTERACT WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS?

The aim of developing a new treaty is not to duplicate efforts but to foster synergies and complement existing ones that address plastic-related issues like pollution, climate change, biodiversity, and human rights. Here are a few ways the GPT may interact with other agreements, with potential synergies and challenges.

1. Synergies with MEAs: The GPT could align with existing multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) such as the Basel, Stockholm, and Rotterdam Conventions, addressing waste, pollution, and chemicals, relevant to the GPT goal of ending plastic pollution. Additionally, alignment with the Convention on Biological Diversity could address connections between plastic pollution and biodiversity loss, as proposed by the IUCN.

2. Conflicts with Trade Agreements: Certain aspects of the GPT, like trade restrictions on plastic products or packaging, may conflict with provisions of trade agreements, such as those overseen by the World Trade Organization (WTO). These agreements generally advocate for the free flow of goods between countries, posing challenges to measures that restrict trade under WTO rules.



QUESTION #9 CONTINUED

3. Alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The GPT could contribute to achieving several of the SDGs, such as SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), by promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns, reducing marine pollution, and protecting marine ecosystems.

4. Co-benefits with Climate Goals: Plastic pollution and climate change intersect at the heart of the triple planetary crisis. The ambition of the GPT, particularly in reducing plastic production and ending plastic pollution, aligns with climate goals like the 1.5°C warming target of the Paris Agreement by reducing emissions associated with plastic production, disposal, and incineration. Leveraging platforms like the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement, the GPT can strengthen efforts to reduce and monitor greenhouse gas emissions across the plastics lifecycle. However, there could be areas of potential interference if efforts to address plastic pollution involve measures that increase energy consumption or emissions, like alternative materials or recycling processes.

Although there may be areas of potential interference, the adoption of the GPT would complete the legal landscape and enable issues directly and indirectly related to plastics to be addressed more comprehensively.



10. WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

World leaders will convene at INC-4 and INC-5 in 2024 with an aim to finalize the agreement. If the timeline proceeds without delays, it will be adopted in 2025.

Generally, following the adoption of a multilateral agreement, it will then be opened for signature, likely with a specified time limit for countries to become signatories.

For the treaty then to become legally binding, each State will need to ratify the agreement.

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