

## Recommendations for potential core obligations options for the plastics treaty

### Proposed changes to Option 11. Possible core obligation: facilitating a just transition, including an inclusive transition of the informal waste sector

The resolution 5/14<sup>1</sup> by the United Nations Environment Assembly recognized the significant contribution made by workers in informal and cooperative settings to the collecting, sorting and recycling of plastics in many countries. A just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy can contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty. These are our suggested changes to the document "Potential options for elements towards an international legally binding instrument, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastics"<sup>2</sup>.

Original text	Proposed IAWP text	Comments
The committee may wish to consider including some or all of the following potential options for control measures and voluntary approaches:	The committee may wish to consider including some or all of the following potential options for control measures and <del>voluntary</del> <b>mandatory</b> approaches:	Voluntary approaches have proven to be inadequate in addressing the scope of need for waste pickers and other workers in the informal economy.
(a) Establish a mechanism to ensure a fair, equitable and inclusive transition for the industry and affected workers, informal waste workers and affected communities, particularly in developing countries.	(a) Establish a mechanism to ensure a fair, equitable and inclusive transition for <b>waste pickers</b> , industry, and <b>other affected workers and communities particularly in developing in all countries</b> .	As the most vulnerable stakeholders in the waste system, waste pickers merit explicit mention. If they are generalized under all informal workers, then experience tells that just transition initiatives inevitably prioritize informal workers like scrap dealers who are more advanced in the value chain, simply because those workers are easier to access and support.  Waste pickers and other affected workers and communities are vulnerable in all countries, not just developing ones.
(b) Establish a requirement for private waste management companies to collect plastic	(b) Establish a requirement for <del>private waste management companies</del> <b>producers and</b>	The system should support and strengthen cooperatives and associations, and provide pathways

<sup>1</sup> Resolution 5/14. End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument - Resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly on 2 March 2022 [UNEP/EA.5/Res.14] <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/40597>

<sup>2</sup> Access working document <https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/42190/UNEP-PP-INC.2-4%20English.pdf>

Original text	Proposed IAWP text	Comments
<p>waste from informal waste picker cooperatives or associations, where relevant, and establish gradual schemes for their formalization. As these cooperatives or associations formalise, the requirement for companies to collect from waste picker cooperatives or associations should be geared toward the formal ones.</p>	<p><b>recyclers to collect buy recyclable plastics waste and collect reject plastic waste after paying a fair price<sup>3</sup> from informal waste pickers cooperatives or associations and autonomous self-employed waste pickers, where relevant, and establish gradual scheme partnerships for their formalization for plastic waste management with waste pickers associations, cooperatives and autonomous waste pickers. As these cooperatives and associations formalise, the requirement for companies to collect from waste picker cooperatives or associations should be geared towards formal ones.</b></p>	<p>for their formalization and advancement in value chains, but should not close off informal entry points into the system. Experience shows that informal entry points into the system is where much of the waste management's diversity and poverty-alleviating benefits can be found. If those entry points disappear, then waste systems tend to evolve towards a state of wealth consolidation and the inclusive and poverty alleviating impacts of the system are diminished.</p>
<p>(c) Improve working conditions for workers, including waste pickers, including by providing legal recognition and support for informal waste pickers, such as access to health care, education and social security benefits.</p>	<p>(c) Improve working conditions for <del>workers</del> waste pickers <b>and other workers in plastic value chains</b> including by providing legal recognition and support for informal waste pickers, such as access to health care, education and social security benefits.</p>	<p>Waste pickers should be centered in the text, as the most vulnerable stakeholders in the system.</p>
<p>(d) Integrate the informal waste sector into the plastics value chain and promote a circular economy through a "just transition programme".</p>	<p>(d) <del>Integrate the informal waste sector into the</del> <b>Recognise the role of waste pickers in</b> plastic value chains and promote circular economy <b>by establishing partnerships with waste pickers (associations, cooperatives and self-employed) for recovery of recyclable plastics</b> through a Just Transition Program.</p>	<p>The most vulnerable stakeholders in the plastics value chain (waste pickers) should be recognized for their role and involved as partners in the design and implementation of systems in order for the transition to be truly just.</p>
<p>(e) Establish a requirement to use fees derived from EPR schemes to fund an upgrade of infrastructure</p>	<p>(e) Establish a requirement to use fees derived from EPR schemes to fund an upgrade of infrastructure and technical</p>	<p>Cooperatives, associations and other forms of worker owned enterprises are more effective than companies at centering the needs of workers and</p>

<sup>3</sup> Fair price covering costs such as waste-pickers labour in picking, collecting, sorting, aggregating and transportation. The fair price needs to be agreed in advance by waste-pickers cooperatives, self-employed waste-pickers, and buyers such as recyclers and producers.

Original text	Proposed IAWP text	Comments
and technical and management skills for informal waste pickers to function as waste collection and sorting companies.	and management skills for informal waste pickers to function as waste collection and sorting <del>companies</del> <b>cooperatives, associations and other forms of worker owned enterprises.</b>	establishing more durable inclusive waste management ecosystems.
	<b>(f) Ensure that autonomy and aspirations of waste pickers, and their associations and cooperatives are accounted for while planning a Just Transition through a universal survey of waste pickers and social dialogue.</b>	Waste picker surveys are essential for identifying who to bring to the table in the planning and implementation of new systems, and social dialogue is key to just transition.
	<b>(g) Mandatory reporting by member states and producers on engagement and partnerships with waste pickers with regards to plastic waste management, the extension of social welfare provisions, and increases in waste picker income.</b>	Mandatory reporting will ensure that a just transition is in place, and will help member states learn from one another about how to best support vulnerable workers in their waste systems.

We also recommend that the following definitions of Just Transition and waste pickers be added to the relevant definitions section :

**Just transition** is defined as *ending plastic pollution in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. It is based on making visible those already working at all stages of the plastic value chain, waste pickers and other workers under informal and cooperative settings and recognizing their fundamental human dignity, and their historic contribution. It involves maximizing the social and economic opportunities of ending plastic pollution while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges – including through effective social dialogue among all groups impacted, and respect for fundamental human rights. A plan for a just transition must build and improve upon systems that waste pickers have already established while guaranteeing, better and decent work, social protection, more training opportunities, appropriate technology transfer, support for infrastructure and organizing of workers, and greater job security for workers at all stages of the plastic value chain, waste-pickers and other workers in informal and cooperative settings, and all workers affected by plastic pollution. Its specific outworking will depend on local context and local consultation. The just transition framework should emphasize supporting waste pickers and other workers who are most vulnerable to occupational disruption from waste management investments and climate change<sup>4</sup>.*

<sup>4</sup> Our just transition definition was developed by representatives of waste pickers’ movements from around the world and draws on the ILO definition frequently referred to in the context of climate action, and the definition proposed by the International Trade Union Congress in their submissions to the Secretariat.

**Waste pickers** constitute most workers in informal and cooperative settings in the waste sector. Waste pickers can be described as people who participate (individually or collectively) in the collection, separation, sorting, transport, and sale of recyclable and reusable materials and products (paper, plastic, metal, glass, and other materials) in an informal or semi-formal capacity, as own-account workers, or in a cooperative or social and solidarity economy setting, and as workers who subsequently achieved formal work arrangements through their organizations. The description includes itinerant waste pickers, current and former waste-pickers who have new roles and engagement in their organizations, and those who have been integrated into municipal solid waste management systems and continue to retrieve, sort, and sell recyclables (this description is based on the definition included in the constitution of the International Alliance of Waste Pickers<sup>5</sup>).

---

<sup>5</sup> International Alliance of Waste Pickers' constitution <https://globalrec.org/constitution/>