



# **IAWP's Vision for a Just Transition for Waste Pickers under the UN Plastics Treaty**

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The International Alliance of Waste Pickers is a union of waste picker groups representing more than **460,000 workers** across **34 countries**

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## INTRODUCTION

The intersecting crises of inequality, climate change, and plastic pollution are wreaking constant disruption of our environment and economy. Underserved communities are disproportionately affected, exacerbating the divide between the rich and the poor across countries worldwide. A growing number of policies are being developed around the world to address the plastics pollution crisis. Some of these offer potential opportunities and challenges for existing actors in materials management<sup>1</sup> systems, including the ongoing process to negotiate an international, legally-binding instrument on plastic pollution on land and in the marine environment (United Nations Plastics Treaty).

Globally, up to 85 per cent of recycling chain workers are informal.<sup>2</sup> Many if not most of these workers depend on the recovery and processing of plastics.<sup>3</sup> Investment and policy responses to plastics pollution, however, often fail to safeguard the livelihoods of workers who depend on the industries and materials impacted by these policy responses.<sup>4</sup> Thus they fail to achieve a *just transition* to a more circular and environmentally-sound economy.

Both waste pickers and the concept of just transition have gained growing attention within the process to develop the United Nations (UN) Plastics Treaty, with the UNEA 5/14 resolution<sup>5</sup> recognizing the “significant contributions” of, and considering lessons learned from, “workers in informal and cooperative settings to the collecting, sorting and recycling of plastics in many countries.” However, in order for the UN Plastics Treaty to adequately safeguard the livelihoods of impacted and potentially impacted workers, the concept of just transition, and the identification and prioritization of impacted stakeholders, must be well understood by all parties and adequately described in the treaty.

In this document, we, the waste pickers affiliated with the International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP), have outlined: our definition and vision for a just transition, a detailed definition of our occupation, and the importance of prioritizing waste pickers within just transition strategies.

This document sheds light on some of the employment opportunities that our affiliates seek. These include: regularized roles in doorstep collection of segregated waste and recyclables; the implementation of repair and reuse systems and services; and the

- 1 Throughout this document we use the term “materials management” in lieu of “waste management” to encompass the broader management of waste, recyclables, reusables and repairable materials.
- 2 ILO. 2013. “Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs.” International Labour Conference, 102nd Session. Geneva. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_207370.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_207370.pdf)
- 3 Singh, Richa. 2021. Integration of Informal Sector in Solid Waste Management: Strategies and Approaches. Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. <https://www.cseindia.org/integration-of-the-informal-sector-10894>.
- 4 Cass Talbott, Taylor, Pinky Chandran, Cecilia Allen, Lakshmi Narayan and Owusu Boampong. 2022. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Waste Pickers. WIEGO Technical Brief No. 15. Manchester, UK: WIEGO. <https://www.wiego.org/publications/extended-producer-responsibility-epr-and-waste-pickers>
- 5 UNEA Resolution 5/14 entitled “End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument”. [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/39812/OEWG\\_PP\\_1\\_INF\\_1\\_UNEA%20resolution.pdf](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/39812/OEWG_PP_1_INF_1_UNEA%20resolution.pdf)

management and operation of materials management facilities. We have also elaborated on the conditions necessary for us to remain and advance in the materials management sector, drawing on examples from countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, India, South Africa, France, and the United States.

Despite the challenges that we face in waste picking occupations, we persist in this work, securing our livelihoods while mitigating carbon emissions, curtailing plastic pollution and adapting to the economic challenges of the time.

Workers in the informal economy are most at risk of displacement from circular economy policies and treaties, and therefore deserve prioritization within just transition efforts. However, we also recognize that waste pickers are not the only workers in the informal materials management system, which also includes artisans who utilize natural materials and vendors of reusable and second-hand goods and who do repair services. We also recognize workers in plastics production chains. Furthermore, we recognize that there are many other workers beyond waste pickers who are formally and informally employed to perform private and municipal services in waste management systems. We advocate for these workers to also be considered as stakeholders within plastics policy processes. While this document deals specifically with waste pickers, it is important for all affected workers in materials management and production systems to be afforded a just transition.

This is a living document, responding to the ongoing United Nations (UN) process to negotiate a Plastics Treaty, as well as the growing and often problematic impact of circular economy policies and investments on our livelihoods. This document is based on waste pickers' demands expressed in Plastics Treaty-related trainings and meetings of the International Alliance of Waste Pickers, in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) negotiations for the Plastics Treaty. It draws on IAWP's representative global advocacy processes, through which we also developed our official position<sup>6</sup> on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).<sup>7</sup>

Waste pickers bring history, diversity, pride and expertise to the materials management industry, and we should be recognized and supported as important and essential stakeholders.

6 International Alliance of Waste Pickers. 2021. Position on Extended Producer Responsibility. [https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR\\_GlobalRec\\_ENG.pdf](https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR_GlobalRec_ENG.pdf)

7 UNEP/PP/INC.1/6 definition: Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the waste stage of that product's life cycle.

# WASTE PICKERS: DEFINITION AND CONTEXT



## DEFINITION OF WASTE PICKERS

Waste pickers constitute most workers in informal and cooperative settings in the waste sector. In the International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP),<sup>8</sup> we describe waste pickers 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. Our description includes itinerant waste pickers, current and former waste pickers who have new roles and engagement in waste pickers’ organizations, and those who have been integrated into municipal solid waste management systems and continue to retrieve, sort, and sell recyclables.”

UN-HABITAT has defined the term “waste pickers” in its 2022 report titled “Leaving no one behind” as “Individuals/workers who collect items and materials from public spaces, open dumpsites or landfills, as well as from waste bags and bins on streets, and subsequently sell recyclables to intermediate or apex traders.” However, we contend that our definition is more comprehensive and precise. This is because it encompasses not only waste pickers but also the ecosystems in which we operate, recognizing those who engage in solidarity economy, cooperatives, and the informal economy. These interconnected roles put waste pick-

ers in the best position to cope with plastic pollution from a life cycle approach.

We firmly assert that any discourse concerning a UN Plastics Treaty must incorporate the perspectives of waste pickers. Our work is central to the prevention of plastic pollution by converting discarded plastic into raw materials essential for manufacturing. Through our retrieval, collection, sorting, aggregation, and sale of materials to recycling units, we play an indispensable role in this transformative process, and consider ourselves to be professionals in our work.

First, it is imperative that United Nations member states participating in the UN Plastics Treaty negotiations incorporate the definition of waste pickers within the framework of the future legal instrument to regulate plastic pollution. The foundation of our engagement rests upon the establishment of a comprehensive and unambiguous description of waste pickers.

This first step is crucial to understanding our past, present, and potential contributions. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, India, and Kenya, waste pickers have organized into large but decentralized national movements; and for the past 25 years, waste pickers have participated in different UN debates, where some of our demands have been taken up.<sup>9</sup> Waste pickers can be independent or organized, what differs are the modes of operation and management, as well as the forms and degrees of organization. Integration, recognition, and acknowledgment of our work and contributions to materials management form pivotal initial steps inherent to any policy that aims for equitable stakeholder participation and a just transition.

Examples of how critical definition is to this process can be found in initiatives undertaken by the governments of India, Brazil and Argentina when integrating waste pickers into solid and plastic mate-

8 Waste pickers have defined their occupation in the constitution of the International Alliance of Waste Pickers: <https://globalrec.org/constitution>

9 Details of some of the United Nations Climate Change Conferences where waste pickers have participated can be found here: <https://globalrec.org/gb-type/climate-change/>; <https://globalrec.org/2023/08/18/ilc2023-just-transition/>

rials management systems. Their approaches began with formulating a definition of our occupation,<sup>10,11</sup> as they established opportunities for waste pickers to both continue accessing materials informally and to advance in the materials value chain, including into formal work. These proactive strategies demonstrate the critical importance of such definitional clarity. We posit that a similar approach is needed for the efficacy of the forthcoming UN Plastics Treaty.

From a legal perspective, the definition of waste pickers in an international treaty is key because many governments around the world will adopt that definition, or will build on it, for domestic legislation. Also, in many countries, when the treaty is ratified, it will become part of that country's law.

## CONTEXT OF WASTE PICKERS' WORK

Waste pickers play a critical role in addressing the challenges of plastics pollution, climate change and poverty by working to feed our families and communities, and working to ensure basic sanitation and the human right to a clean environment for our communities. Through our efforts, we actively combat pollution and climate change, managing approximately 60 per cent<sup>12</sup> of the world's plastic waste collected for recycling, and thus actively contributing to a more circular economy. This significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions<sup>13</sup> and prevents plastics from causing environmental and public health issues like drain blockages, flooding, and poor sanitation. Additionally, our contributions protect marine life by preventing plastics from being ingested by fish and livestock, as well as preventing harmful open burning practices in dumpsites and underserved communities. Furthermore, waste pickers' work saves costs for mu-

nicipalities by filling gaps in waste management and extending the lifespan of dumpsites and other waste processing infrastructure.

Despite our significant social, economic, and environmental contributions, waste pickers constitute the most vulnerable and exploited stakeholders within plastics value chains. We are frequently excluded from formal labour markets and marginalized due to the stigmatization of waste and poverty. Most of us operate as self-employed workers but without recognition as workers and, as a result, without labour rights. We tend to earn meager incomes under hazardous and precarious working conditions, and are often economically exploited – including within plastics value chains, where there is virtually no implementation of principles on business and human rights. This is especially true for women and children in the sector.

The ongoing transition away from carbon-intensive industries poses a potential threat to our livelihoods by eliminating low-barrier and flexible job opportunities, further increasing vulnerability within our communities. Furthermore, as plastic production continues to rise, a shrinking portion of packaging is deemed valuable or recyclable. In India and Southeast Asia, for example, non-recyclable sachets now account for 95 per cent (by volume) of food and non-food industry sales.<sup>14</sup> Yet as plastic waste generation and pollution grows, governments worldwide are promoting formal waste collection and management systems without properly acknowledging the important role and contribution of waste pickers. This situation leaves us at a disadvantage, lacking the necessary resources, equipment, and registration status to effectively compete with new enterprises entering the waste management and recycling sector. The privatization of waste, fueled by policies like Extended Producer Responsibility and other circular

10 For example, the Government of India in its Solid Waste Management Rules 2016 ([https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/MSW/SWM\\_2016.pdf](https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/MSW/SWM_2016.pdf)) defines our occupation as follows:

- **Waste picker** means a person or groups of persons informally engaged in collection and recovery of reusable and recyclable solid waste from the source of waste generation in the streets, bins, material recovery facilities, processing and waste disposal facilities for sale to recyclers directly or through intermediaries to earn their livelihood.
- **Informal waste collector** includes individuals, associations or waste traders who are involved in sorting, sale and purchase of recyclable materials.

11 See the [Buenos Aires 992 Law](#).

12 Pew and SYSTEMIQ. 2022. *Breaking the Plastic Wave: A Comprehensive Assessment of Pathways Towards Stopping Ocean Plastic Pollution*. [https://www.systemiq.earth/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BreakingThePlasticWave\\_MainReport.pdf](https://www.systemiq.earth/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BreakingThePlasticWave_MainReport.pdf)

13 See WIEGO's Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Inclusive Recycling: Methodology & Calculator Tool at <https://www.wiego.org/ghg>.

14 Tearfund. 2019. "No Time to Waste." <https://www.tearfund.org.au/resources/no-time-to-waste>





## HOW WASTE PICKERS PREVENT MARINE WASTE POLLUTION

economy<sup>15</sup> investments, diverts valuable materials away from us, leading to uncertain futures.

Additionally, we face constant disruptions caused by extreme weather events, regressive government policies criminalizing the informal economy and the use of public space, communal violence, wars, and disruptive changes in environmental and economic policy. All of these challenges, singularly and combined, hinder our ability to plan for the future. We face risk to our lives and are subjected to pollution, unsanitary conditions, poor health, social stigma, shrinking economic opportunity, and evictions. Meanwhile, our communities suffer from inadequate waste management, violating the human right to a clean environment.<sup>16</sup>

The persistent injustices waste pickers face can be attributed to our insufficient inclusion in policies and investments aimed at addressing climate change and plastic pollution. To address these issues, new materials management processes must be built upon two fundamental principles: **genuine integration with legal recognition of our work** and **a just transition that allows for our incorporation**.

Among the estimated 20 million waste pickers in streets and dumpsites around the world, some waste pickers and organizations have made strides towards a just transition, but the majority of us still struggle in conditions of extreme vulnerability. Only 20 per cent of the 24 million recycling sector jobs around the

15 UNEP/PP/INC.1/6 states: "A more circular economy, one of the current sustainable economic models, in which products and materials are designed in such a way that they can be reused, remanufactured[,] recycled or recovered and thus maintained in the economy for as long as possible, along with the resources of which they are made, and the generation of waste, especially hazardous waste, is avoided or minimized, and greenhouse gas emissions are prevented or reduced, can contribute significantly to sustainable consumption and production."

16 UN. General Assembly (76th session) 2021-2022. [UNGA Resolution 76/300. The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.](#)



*Through our efforts, we actively combat pollution and climate change, managing approximately 60 per cent of the world's plastic waste collected for recycling, and thus actively contributing to a more circular economy.*

world are formal,<sup>17</sup> with women overrepresented in the more informal and precarious roles in the sector. Supporting organizations that foster a just transition empowers waste pickers and creates lasting positive changes in our communities.

### DEFINING INCLUSION, INTEGRATION AND FORMALIZATION

The concept of waste picker **inclusion** is sometimes called into question, under the argument that waste pickers are already integral to (and thereby included in) materials management systems; and that, rather than “including” waste pickers into new systems, we should advocate for systems to be built from existing waste picker work with improvements in accordance with the International Labour Organization’s (ILO’s) Decent Work agenda.<sup>18</sup> However, waste picker inclusion in materials management is not a given – for example, under systems that prohibit or inhibit waste pickers from accessing materials or marketing options.

The concept of waste picker **integration** generally describes the process of improving and formalizing the work of waste pickers in ways that ensure decent safety and labour standards.

However, most conceptions of integration describe the incorporation of waste pickers into new or formal systems in ways that erase existing waste picker systems and knowledge, usually at the hands of profit-oriented newcomers who dispossess the existing

working poor of capital. Interpreting waste picker integration as charity is particularly problematic in its targeting of waste pickers as passive recipients of help, rather than as knowledgeable workers who contribute to economic, social and environmental development. This deprives waste pickers of their power and status as workers. It also misses an opportunity to structurally ensure more equitable distribution of resources and profits within the materials management sector.

More transformative and successful forms of waste picker integration, on the other hand, aim to build materials management systems using established waste picker systems and knowledge, while ensuring fair remuneration for services rendered, support for transforming waste pickers’ place in recycling value chains, and priority for waste pickers over other workers to access resources and contracts. An example is the Waste Picker Integration Guideline for South Africa, which calls for:

*the creation of a formally planned recycling system that values and improves the present role of waste pickers, builds on the strengths of their existing system for collecting and revaluing materials, and includes waste pickers as key partners in its design, implementation, evaluation and revision. Waste picker integration requires changes in a number of spheres and includes the integration of waste pickers’ work, as well as the political, economic, social, legal and environmental integration of waste pickers.<sup>19</sup>*

17 Report-V Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs, International Labour Organization, 2013 [https://www.ilo.org/wcms-sp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_207370.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcms-sp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_207370.pdf)

18 See ILO’s “Decent Work and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---eu-rome/---ro-geneva/---ilo-lisbon/documents/event/wcms\\_667247.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---eu-rome/---ro-geneva/---ilo-lisbon/documents/event/wcms_667247.pdf)

19 Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries and Department of Science and Innovation. 2020. Waste picker integration guideline for South Africa: Building the Recycling Economy and Improving Livelihoods through Integration of the Informal Sector. DEFF and DST: Pretoria. <https://wasteroadmap.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Waste-Picker-Integration-Guidelines.pdf>



WASTE DUMPING IN AN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITY IN ACCRA, WHERE WASTE PICKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO SECURE A JUST TRANSITION IN DOORSTEP WASTE COLLECTION. PHOTO:TAYLOR CASS TALBOTT.

IAWP broadly interprets formalization according to ILO R204 – *Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy*– by also emphasizing that, for waste pickers, beneficial formalization should include elements such as: legal recognition within policies and laws; registration with benefits and the issuance of ID cards; organizing and the establishment of collective bargaining mechanisms; contracts for service provision; and similar provisions.

It is important to note that some formalization efforts, such as the imposition of onerous or costly registration requirements or fees or taxation without

benefit, can be detrimental to workers in the informal economy<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, formalization is not feasible for all workers or their organizations/enterprises. Governments and the private sector often endorse enterprise formalization while also supporting labour deregulation<sup>21</sup>. Instead, formalization efforts should strive for broad-reaching benefits focused on decent conditions for workers, rather than requirements that create barriers to participation.

A just transition should ensure both the inclusion and the transformative integration of waste pickers.

20 Ghosh, Jayati. 2021. *Informal Women Workers in the Global South: Policies and Practices for the Formalisation of Women's Employment in Developing Economies*. Routledge IAFPE Advances in Feminist Economics. London and New York: Routledge.

21 Madhav, Roopa, and Marlese von Broembsen. 2021. "Informal Workers, Social Audits and Human Rights Due Diligence in Supply Chains." WIEGO blog series. February 4, 2021. <https://www.wiego.org/blog/informal-workers-social-audits-and-human-rights-due-diligence-supply-chains>



# JUST TRANSITION FOR WASTE PICKERS AND OTHER WORKERS UNDER THE UN PLASTICS TREATY



The IAWP advocates that **just transition<sup>22</sup> be both a core obligation and a cross cutting issue within the means and measures of implementation in the future UN Plastics Treaty**, which should provide clear recommendations for how to implement a just transition in national, state and municipal action plans. More specifically, in the zero draft of the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution,<sup>23</sup> the IAWP emphasizes that the principles of just transitions should be integrated into the forthcoming plastic treaty. This inclusion should particularly apply to:

- Part I (Objectives, Definitions, Principles, and Scope);
- Part II (Extended Producer Responsibility, Waste management, Just Transition, Transparency, Tracking, Monitoring, and Labeling);
- Part III (Financing and Capacity-building, technical assistance, and technology transfer);
- Part IV (National plans); and Part V (Governing body, Subsidiary bodies, and Secretariat).

It is of utmost importance that waste picker representatives become members of both the governing body and subsidiary bodies of the future plastics instrument, among others.

In line with the ILO's definition of a just transition<sup>24</sup> (see next section), the IAWP demands a plastics treaty that will ensure environmental sustainability, decent work (including living wages and social security), and

poverty eradication for waste pickers and other workers in plastics value chains.

The Plastics Treaty can take inspiration from various other efforts that recognize the role and contribution of workers in informal employment. For example, it could draw on learnings from how the Minamata Convention on Mercury<sup>25</sup> addresses the informal Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM) sector. Parties had set out core objectives, focused on strategies that would protect mining communities and vulnerable populations while working towards formalizing the ASGM sector. This advocacy resulted in a dedicated Article (Article 7) and an annex (Annex C) in the Minamata Convention,<sup>26</sup> which provide guidance for the integration of the sector, listing targets and strategies to facilitate formalization, baselines, stakeholder involvement and financial assistance

Similarly, IAWP would like to see a **dedicated Article for a just transition in the Plastics Treaty text, and an annex with co-developed mandatory targets for the sustained integration of waste pickers in waste management practices.**

In addition, the Basel Convention has included recommendations on how to address the environmentally sound management of waste in the informal sector.<sup>27</sup> Considering that the primary purpose of the Basel Convention's "Guidance on how to address the environmentally sound management of waste in the informal sector" is to ensure the environmentally sound management of waste, rather than addressing

22 The ILO defines just transition as greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities, and leaving no one behind. See (ILO): [Frequently asked question on just transition](#).

23 UNEP/PP/INC.

24 ILO. 2023. Outcome of the General Discussion Committee on a Just Transition ILC.111/Record No. 7A. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_885375.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_885375.pdf)

25 UNEP. 2021. Minamata Convention on Mercury. UNEP/MC/COP.4/6. [https://minamataconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/working\\_document/4\\_6\\_ASGM\\_Guidance.English.pdf](https://minamataconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/working_document/4_6_ASGM_Guidance.English.pdf)

26 UNEP. 2021. Minamata Convention on Mercury. UNEP/MC/COP.4/6. [https://minamataconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/working\\_document/4\\_6\\_ASGM\\_Guidance.English.pdf](https://minamataconvention.org/sites/default/files/documents/working_document/4_6_ASGM_Guidance.English.pdf)

27 Tsakona, M., Ruceska, I., Dias, S. Khaled, D. 2022. *A Seat at a Table: The Role of the Informal Recycling Sector in Plastic Pollution Reduction, and Recommended Policy Changes*. GRID-Arendal. Available at <https://www.grida.no/publications/863>

and protecting human and workers' rights,<sup>28</sup> IAWP advocates for **guidelines and toolkits to be developed and included in the UN Plastics Treaty to support Parties with implementing their obligations related to a just transition and human rights**. Materials management policies, and the UN Plastics Treaty, should include enforceable mandates for the integration of waste pickers and their organizations in materials management systems and on all decision-making bodies and processes, including clear definitions, guidelines for integration, and periodic targets, reporting, and monitoring- without which norms fall short of a just transition for most waste pickers. These guidelines should be developed in collaboration with waste pickers and can be provided as an annex in the Plastics Treaty.

IAWP has proactively created a definition of just transition in the context of the UN Plastics Treaty, along with its essential components. These preparatory resources, outlined below, to assist member states.

## DEFINITION OF JUST TRANSITION

Just transition, as a concept, emerged at the confluence of multiple labour and environmental justice movement struggles around the world. Many of its guiding principles, platforms and policies have been adopted by governments, labour unions, and community-based organizations over the past four decades.<sup>29</sup>

The ILO uses several characterizations to define just transition in its “Conclusions concerning just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all”. These include:

11. *A just transition promotes environmentally sustainable economies in a way that is inclusive, by creating decent work opportunities, reducing inequality and by leaving no one behind.*

12. *Just transition involves maximising the social and economic opportunities of climate and environmental action, including an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, while minimizing and carefully managing challenges. It should be based on effective social dialogue, respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, and be in accordance with international labour standards. Stakeholder engagement is also important.*
13. *A just transition is central to delivering sustainable development in its economic, social, and environmental dimensions and to addressing the linkages between them. It is instrumental in taking ambitious action on environmental and climate change and pursuing the realization of the goals and commitments of the Paris Agreement and other international environmental agreements.*
14. *Ensuring a just transition is important for all countries at all levels of development, and for all economic sectors, the formal as well as the informal economy, and should be in line with national development priorities.<sup>30</sup>*

This definition was adopted at the 111th session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva in June 2023. Delegates representing workers, employers, and governments from the ILO's 187 Member States<sup>31</sup> adopted conclusions concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.

The conclusions highlight the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic dimensions in attaining a just transition, with delegates emphasizing the imperative for achieving social justice, eliminating public health impacts, eradicating poverty, supporting decent work, and promoting gender equality – all while also addressing environmental and climate change challenges. The conclusions endorse the ILO Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all<sup>32</sup> as a

28 UN Habitat and NIVA. 2023. Leave no one behind, published by [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/04/en\\_2503\\_leaving\\_no\\_one\\_behind.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/04/en_2503_leaving_no_one_behind.pdf)

29 For example, see: Just Transition Alliance principles: <https://jtalliance.org/what-is-just-transition/>; Indigenous Principles for a Just Transition: <https://www.ienearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/IEJJustTransitionPrinciples.pdf>; Climate Justice Alliance principles of Just Transition: <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/>

30 ILO. 2023. Outcome of the General Discussion Committee on a Just Transition ILC.111/Record No. 7A. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_885375.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_885375.pdf)

31 See more on the Member States ([ilo.org](http://ilo.org))

32 [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_432859.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf)



*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.*

foundation for action and a central reference for policy-making. The significance of implementing coherent and integrated policies and measures to address climate change and environmental degradation is highlighted, with conclusions emphasizing the need for balanced approaches that consider the interconnections between climate change, decent work, and sustainable development. They recognize the importance of promoting gender equality, social inclusion, equity and environmental justice throughout the just transition process, while considering the voices and needs of indigenous and tribal peoples, vulnerable groups, workers, and marginalized communities. The involvement of governments, employers, environmental and economic justice groups and workers' organizations, and other relevant stakeholders is deemed crucial for achieving a just transition. Furthermore, the conclusions highlight the significance of adequate financing and provisions for a just transition, including sustainable investment, fiscal instruments, and access to finance for environmentally sustainable activities. Specific roles and responsibilities for governments, employers' organizations, community and workers' organizations were outlined. Governments are urged to formulate and implement inclusive and integrated frameworks, while employers and workers' organizations are encouraged to engage in social dialogue, contribute to policy-making, and develop their own initiatives for a just transition.

Contextualizing that definition in the framework of the Plastics Treaty, we at IAWP align our definition of just transition with the principles developed by allied trade unions, environmental justice movements, and the ILO Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.<sup>33</sup> Our definition is simple to articulate: “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 principles and rights at work, 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 **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 implementation 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.

IAWP strongly advocates for the integration of a comprehensive “just transition” definition in the forthcoming legal framework designed to combat plastic pollution – a definition that centers the self-determination of all of those communities and workers who are first and most impacted by such pollution and its policy responses.

As those most impacted by materials management policy, the collective voice of waste pickers needs to be included in all levels of policy making involved in the reduction of plastics pollution. This inclusion is paramount in dispelling any ambiguity shrouding

33 Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_432859.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf)

the just transition concept. The current divergence in interpretations among different stakeholders and member states underscores the necessity for a clear definition, particularly concerning the well-being of the most vulnerable communities and individuals in the plastic value chain.

Moreover, within this document, we delineate the essential facets of a just transition, which resonate closely with the definitions articulated above.

### WASTE PICKERS SEEK DECENT WORK

All working people aspire to decent work.<sup>34</sup> It involves opportunities for productive work that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, and universal social protection. Other aspects of decent work include protection from fatal and non-fatal diseases and injuries related to employment, prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for workers to express their concerns, to organize, and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all people. This is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, which seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The concept of “rights at work” emphasizes recognizing and respecting the rights of all workers, with special consideration for the most vulnerable. The future plastic instrument should be designed to promote all these facets of decent work. Additionally, it should promote the principle of prevention found in the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), Article 4, [2].<sup>35</sup> Waste pickers and their organizations are already active in many areas of the waste value chain, contributing to many of the control measures outlined in the Plastics Treaty’s Zero Draft text. In today’s linear economy, most, but not all, of the opportunities that waste pickers find are downstream measures, and we need support to grow and strengthen our roles in upstream opportunities to prevent waste

related pollution, including in material reuse and repair. Here, significant opportunities can build upon waste pickers’ existing activities to achieve decent work. As part of a just transition, governments should identify and support potentially impacted workers like waste pickers to transition into decent work.

The following sections detail some types of livelihood systems, with specific examples, in which waste pickers can find decent work.

### REGULAR DOORSTEP WASTE AND RECYCLABLES/ REUSABLES COLLECTION SERVICES

Doorstep collection of waste and recyclables/reusables supports stronger materials management systems because regular, face-to-face contact between waste pickers and residents gives opportunity for education, as well as the de-stigmatization of waste workers. This type of arrangement should involve both autonomous/non-organized and organized waste pickers and be offered in both affluent neighbourhoods and in informal/popular settlements, where a lack of adequate waste collection and management violates the universal human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as recognized by the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>36</sup> In many countries, waste pickers have self-organized to provide doorstep services, independent of government. In others, governments have supported waste pickers’ delivery of these services (though generally, governments must channel much more funding and infrastructure support into this type of work).

Waste pickers are contracted in doorstep waste and recyclables collection in many parts of the world, including:

- A. In **Belo Horizonte, Brazil**, waste pickers have been providing services for the municipal recycling program since 1993 – the longest service provision partnership between a local government and informal workers. Their role was recognized in the Organic Constitution of Belo Horizonte in the early

34 The concept of decent work includes a living wage, employment, social security, safety and health at work, workers’ rights and social dialogue. See [Decent work \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/decent-work/).

35 See [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C155](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C155)

36 See the ILO’s news release of 29 September 2022: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_857164/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_857164/lang-en/index.htm)



1990s, and the partnership has involved support in capacity building, equipment, rental and/or construction of recycling warehouses. Workers' co-operatives are paid for collection services through municipal contracts. Workers representatives from all existing cooperatives are part of a multi-stakeholder platform – the Municipal Waste & Citizenship Forum – where government officials, cooperatives and non-governmental organizations are engaged in the planning and implementation of the inclusive recycling scheme.<sup>37</sup>

- B. In **Bogota, Colombia**, waste pickers advocated for and successfully shaped the constitutional law that granted them status as service providers in the recycling system. Workers were formally registered following a census and, by March 2013, the municipality launched a payment scheme financed through a service fees (tariff) that enables workers to be paid for their service.<sup>38</sup> Colombian waste picker organizations have historically defended the minimum basic income of waste pickers as a way to maintain their role in the system – but without necessarily defending formalization, which excludes the majority of waste pickers.
- C. In **Bengaluru, in the state of Karnataka, India**, the municipal authorities have taken an affirmative step by authorizing and signing memorandums of understanding with waste pickers. Under this arrangement, waste pickers conduct biweekly door-to-door collection of dry waste, including recyclable and inorganic inert materials, directly from households. Notably, waste pickers possess the legitimate right to recover and subsequently sell the collected waste for recycling purposes.<sup>39</sup> To facilitate this essential service, the municipal authorities cover the operational expenses. This is achieved through the provision of salaries for the employed driver and helper, who previously worked as waste pickers. This initiative has been successfully

implemented in over a third of the city's municipal wards, including informal settlements.

- D. In **Buenos Aires, Argentina**, contracts have been made since 2012 between the municipality and the city's 12 waste picker cooperatives, incorporating more than 6,500 waste pickers to carry out environmental promotion services, segregated collection of recyclable materials, and the recovery and sale of 400 tons of recyclables per day. These contracts include: logistics, infrastructure and equipment (recycling plants with machinery for the sorting and processing of recyclables), supplementary salary, daycare for children, health and accident insurance, clothing and personal protection elements, among others. Argentina's National Federation of Waste Pickers (FACCyR) also helps negotiate contracts between waste picker cooperatives and municipalities across the rest of the country<sup>40</sup>.

Some examples of waste pickers providing waste collection in *underserved* communities (low income and informal settlements) include:

- A. **India's SWaCH waste picker cooperative** has municipal contracts to provide daily doorstep waste collection across Pune city, including for 160,387 residents in slum communities. The service generates 811 full time jobs for waste pickers in just slum waste collection. Residents pay a low monthly fee (50 INR/month on average) and the Pune Municipal Corporation provides a per-household subsidy to waste pickers of about 20 INR/household/month. One worker can serve about 200 households per day. Outside of slums, the user fee charged is higher (80 INR/month), requiring no subsidy. However, the waste pickers' income is also supplemented by the sale of recyclables, as well as voluntary EPR for multilayer packaging. SWaCH workers have also played a central role in informing the residents they serve

37 Dias, S.M, and Fernandez, L. 2020. Formalization from the Ground: The Case of Waste Pickers Cooperatives. In: Charmes, J. (ed). Research Handbook on Development and the Informal Economy. <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/research-handbook-on-development-and-the-informal-economy-9781788972796.html>

38 Parra, Federico. 2015. Reciclaje: ¡Sí, pero con recicladores! WIEGO Technical Brief number 9. <https://www.wiego.org/publications/reciclaje-si-pero-con-recicladores-gestion-publica-aprovechamiento-con-inclusion>

39 See the Solid Waste Management Bylaw. Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Pallike 2020. [https://upload.indiacode.nic.in/showfile?actid=AC\\_KA\\_71\\_402\\_00007\\_14\\_1552388734165&type=rule&filename=bbmp\\_swm.pdf](https://upload.indiacode.nic.in/showfile?actid=AC_KA_71_402_00007_14_1552388734165&type=rule&filename=bbmp_swm.pdf)

40 Example provided by FACCyR



SWACH WORKERS COLLECTING SEGREGATED WASTE IN PUNE'S RAMNAGAR SLUM COMMUNITY. PHOTO: BRODIE CASS TALBOTT

about incoming plastic ban policies, and have created and promoted their own campaigns to ensure, for instance, that sanitary waste is properly wrapped and marked to protect waste workers<sup>41</sup>.

- B. **Ground Score Association in Portland, Oregon, USA** has municipal, county and regional government contracts to provide doorstep waste collection to homeless camps across the city. This generates formal employment at better-than-minimum-wage levels with benefits for 45 waste pickers, and serves about 500 people. Most workers are homeless when they start working for Ground Score, and by the time they are brought onto payroll (formalized), 60 percent of them have secured housing<sup>42</sup>.



A GROUND SCORE ASSOCIATION HAS GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS TO PROVIDE DOORSTEP WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES FOR HOMELESS CAMPS IN OREGON ON THE WEST COAST OF THE UNITED STATES. PHOTO: BRODIE CASS TALBOTT

41 Example provided by the SWaCH waste picker cooperative.

42 Ground Score Association- USA. 2023. Web page: <https://www.groundscoreassociation.org/glitter>

C. The **Worli Koliwada fishermen's community**, a low income community in **Mumbai, India**, receives daily doorstep waste collection services provided by 40 waste pickers of the Ramai Cooperative, most of whom are women who were previously working in streets and on the Deonar dumpsite. They serve about 7,000 of the community's 9,690 households. Through the project, which falls under the Parisar Vikas program of the women's liberation organization Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS), waste pickers receive social protection, education support, and other benefits. This is a three-year project funded by IDFC First Bank under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds<sup>43</sup>. After that, the municipality has agreed to take over the work with their own municipal employees and be trained by the cooperative. SMS will then find a new slum site where the cooperative can operate and hopefully again pave the way towards the municipality taking on this work.



WASTE PICKER MEMBERS OF MUMBAI'S RAMAI COOPERATIVE PROVIDE DOORSTEP WASTE AND RECYCLABLES COLLECTION IN THE WORLI KOLIWADA FISHERMEN'S COMMUNITY. PHOTO: UMESH JADHAV

D. In **Nairobi, Kenya**, the Slums Going Clean and Green program of the Kenyan National Waste Pickers Welfare Association (KeNaWPWA) is providing doorstep waste collection to 10,800 slum households, collecting 85 tonnes of waste/week and generating 288 full time jobs for waste pickers. Unfortunately, they receive no government

support for this work, and depend on user fees and donations – though most households are not able to pay. Recyclables provide another income stream. Waste pickers bring collected materials to a recycling centre run by KeNaWPWA, where they are sorted and sold (high value plastics) or processed into structural components used to construct goods for sale.<sup>44</sup>



WASTE PICKERS PERFORMING DOORSTEP WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES IN NAIROBI'S KIBERA COMMUNITY. PHOTO: BRIAN GISORE

43 SMS- India. 2023. Web page: <https://swk.nowastes.in/>

44 SGGC-Kenya. 2023. Web page: <https://slumsgoinggreenandclean.org/the-solution/>



ARGENTINA: WASTE PICKER COOPERATIVES UNDER ARGENTINA'S NATIONAL WASTE PICKER FEDERATION (FACCYR) HAVE MUNICIPAL CONTRACTS TO COLLECT BEACH LITTER AND EDUCATE BEACH-GOERS. PHOTO: FACCYR

### FULL LITTER COLLECTION SERVICES, INCLUDING IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AND GREEN SPACES

Like waste collection in low-income communities, litter collection is also underfunded, and its management around the world relies heavily on the mobilization of volunteers. If funded, doorstep waste collection in low-income communities and litter collection can generate low-barrier opportunities to organize and formalize our work. In this way, it can also be a pathway into other types of service provision. Because we come from these communities, we are well equipped to provide services in them.

- A. Two IAWP affiliates, **Argentina's FACCyR and USA's Ground Score Association**, have government contracts to provide litter collection services.
- B. Many other organizations such as **Ghana's Green Waste Pickers Cooperative, Senegal's Bokk Diom, and South Africa's ARO** voluntarily conduct clean-ups to draw attention to and support for their work; however, we believe organizations should be contracted and fairly compensated by local municipalities for such work.

### SORTING AND AGGREGATION OF RECYCLABLES IN FACILITIES OPERATED BY WASTE PICKERS ORGANIZATIONS

When we operate our own facilities, we can provide services that are better adapted to waste pickers' and our community needs. This also enables our organizations to buy and commercialize materials from autonomous (independent of any organization) waste pickers at predictable and fair rates. Managing facilities where there is interface with the public can also help to de-stigmatize our work by establishing relationships between waste pickers and the broader community.

- A. Waste picker organizations like SWaCH, Hasiru Dala,<sup>45</sup> Stree Mukti Sanghatana (India), FACCyR co-ops (Argentina), MNCR co-ops (Brazil) all have government support to operate their own facilities. These facilities range from scrap dealerships, green centers, transfer centers and sorting facilities. In all of these facilities, waste pickers both bring materials that they have collected at the household level and buy materials from autonomous waste pickers, who also benefit when

45 Pinky Chandran and Sandya Narayanan. 2016. A Working Observation on the Dry Waste Collection Centers in Bangalore. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1878029616301128>



MEMBERS OF ACARI, AN ASSOCIATION IN ITAJUBÁ CITY, BRAZIL, DISCUSS FORMS OF COOPERATION WITH AUTONOMOUS WORKERS. PHOTO: RAQUEL D. MANZANARES

waste picker organizations manage facilities. In cities such as Belo Horizonte and Itajubá, both in the Minas Gerais state of Brazil, for instance, the cooperatives COOPESOL Leste and ACARI<sup>46</sup> are integrating autonomous workers in their work spaces and enabling them to have access to better working conditions.

- B. Some Deposit Return Systems (DRS – a form of EPR) on beverage containers include handling fees that fund the independent operation of can and bottle redemption centers. In New York City, this system funds the operation of independent redemption centers, including the nonprofit waste picker service and advocacy organization Sure We Can. However, the handling fee can only be increased through the legislative process, and most independent redemption centers in New York struggle to make ends meet. Sure We Can depends on its



WASTE PICKERS SORT AND PROCESS RECYCLABLE MATERIALS AT THE PARQUE PATRICIOS GREEN CENTER (CENTRO VERDE) IN BUENOS AIRES. PHOTO: MOVIMIENTO NACIONAL DOS CATADORES DE MATERIAIS RECICLÁVEIS (MNCR)

46 For details on the ACARI case, see Gonçalves, J. T.; Manzanares, R. D.; Lima, F. P. A.; Azevedo, D. A. G. 2021. Integração rua-galpão e inclusão de catadores de rua pela associação Acari em Itajubá (MG). In: Anais do X Encontro Nacional da Anppas (Unicamp). Campinas-São Paulo, Brasil. [http://www.even3.com.br/anais/x\\_enanppas2021/395492-INTEGRACAO-RUA-GALPAO-E-INCLUSAO-DE-CATADORES-DE-RUA-PELA-ASSOCIACAO-ACARI-EM-ITAJUBA-\(MG\)](http://www.even3.com.br/anais/x_enanppas2021/395492-INTEGRACAO-RUA-GALPAO-E-INCLUSAO-DE-CATADORES-DE-RUA-PELA-ASSOCIACAO-ACARI-EM-ITAJUBA-(MG))

non-profit status to access grants and donations – relying on earned income from the redemption program alone is not financially sustainable<sup>47</sup>.

C. In Oregon, USA, waste pickers with the organization Ground Score Association operate their own depot collecting cans and bottles returned through the state’s DRS system. Because the system lacks provision of a handling fee, there is no financial incentive for the operation of an independent depot. But beverage distributors have been funding the depot after the City of Portland funded its upstart during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the state stopped enforcing its DRS system.<sup>48</sup> With funding from the implementing Producer (Distributor) Responsibility Organization, Ground Score’s People’s Depot is given a set amount of money each year, rather than being paid per amount of materials. This limits its ability to operate only 2.5 hours/day, 5 days a week. Depot workers are necessarily given limited hours, but through Ground Score can earn a higher-than-minimum wage and access formal benefits (including holiday and sick pay, medical care, workers compensation, unemployment benefits, and other supportive benefits like transportation credits).

D. In the Canadian province of Quebec, on the other hand, the Deposit Return System does include a handling fee, but the only two independent depots that exist there – both non-profits with a mission to facilitate the work of waste pickers – are not eligible for this payment. The waste picker organization Cooperative Les Valoristes has operated a community-based redemption center for the past 10 years in Montreal, where it has redistributed deposit reimbursements to the local community. However, the cooperative must fundraise aggressively to meet its oper-

ating costs. Recently, the province doubled the deposit amount, which will result in an influx of beverage container redemption – an economic boon for waste pickers overall, but not for Coop Les Valoristes, which may now be forced to close its operation<sup>49</sup>.

When EPR systems do not enable waste pickers to advance in the value chain into the operation of formal material management centers, they are often relegated to the system’s informal, precarious roles.

### REUSE AND REPAIR OF GOODS AND SERVICE PROVISION

As waste pickers, we acknowledge that while recycling is important to addressing plastics pollution, it alone cannot offer a comprehensive solution. Furthermore, waste pickers are, and have long been, active in reuse and repair systems around the world – and have suffered in this occupation under the global shift to a more linear economy. Even under circular economy policies, we are not benefiting directly.<sup>50</sup> We therefore emphasize the importance of securing and enhancing waste pickers’ involvement in material reuse and repair systems as an integral facet of a fair transition. Examples of waste pickers engaging in reuse and repair services include:

A. **India’s Solid Waste Management Rules of 2016** mandate the segregated collection of waste. Combined with more recent bans on single use plastics, the rules have helped establish stable demand for zero waste events services, including the provision of reusable dishware, recycling and composting services. Since the implementation of such policies, Hasiru Dala Innovations – a for-profit social enterprise focused on waste pickers and women’s empowerment in waste

47 Sure We Can- USA. 2023. Web site: [www.surewecan.org](http://www.surewecan.org)

48 Cass Talbott, Taylor. 2021. Oregon’s Bottle Bill: Opportunities and Challenges for Inclusive Waste Management. The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers and WIEGO. [https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/10/Oregon\\_bottle-bill-opportunities-and-challenges-for-inclusive-waste-management\\_2021\\_case-study.pdf](https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/10/Oregon_bottle-bill-opportunities-and-challenges-for-inclusive-waste-management_2021_case-study.pdf)

49 Example provided by Cooperative Les Valoristes and web site: <https://cooplesvaloristes.ca/>

50 For example, the French waste picker organization Amélior does not benefit financially from France’s EPR for textiles law, despite recovering considerable amounts of textiles for reuse. Furthermore, second hand goods vendors in Ghana, which receives much of France’s second hand textiles, do not benefit financially from France’s EPR for textiles law. See: <https://stopwastecolonialism.org/> for more.



WASTE PICKERS WITH HASIRU DALA INNOVATIONS CONDUCT ZERO WASTE EVENT SERVICES. PHOTO: HDI



WASTE PICKERS VENDING SECOND-HAND GOODS IN THE STREETS OF PARIS. PHOTO: TAYLOR CASS TALBOTT

management – has seen a 30 per cent increase in demand for their zero waste events services. This has generated additional income for waste pickers equivalent to a local living wage<sup>51</sup>.

- B. Thousands of **waste pickers across Europe, as well as in Canada**, manage their own markets, selling second-hand merchandise. Waste picker organizations like France's Amelior and Italy's Rete ONU help manage and negotiate space for flea markets. Meanwhile, waste pickers in India participate in a practice of selling salvaged reusable items to intermediaries, who subsequently sell these goods in second-hand markets.
- C. Part of the **Argentina Recicla program**, which is championed by the Argentina's Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Social Development, includes an electronics repair program<sup>52</sup> that is implemented by waste pickers from Argentina's National Waste Picker Federation (FACCyR).

#### OTHER MATERIAL RECOVERY AND MANAGEMENT ROLES ACROSS THE VALUE CHAIN

To diversify income streams, most waste pickers work across material value chains, collecting plastics, paper, e-waste, textiles, metals, glass, etc., which contributes to more holistic and effective materials management. Due to the fast changing nature of materials management, we as waste pickers understand that job security also means operating across the materials *management* value chain, including in collection, sorting, processing, transportation, recycling, reuse and repair. We aspire to have organizations that work in all of these facets, so that workers can better contribute to a world without waste, while still ensuring that basic sanitation needs are met.

51 World Bank Group. 2023. Building a Future for Women in South Asia's Plastic Waste Management. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/30e2b4c5-8d46-4898-810a-576307b88ec5>

52 Argentina Recicla. 2023. Video: ¿Qué son los RAEE? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1atZcqZvOfQ&t=5s>





## ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF A JUST TRANSITION



IN THIS SECTION, WE OUTLINE THE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF A FRAMEWORK FOR JUST TRANSITION, BEYOND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO IDENTIFY VIABLE AND DECENT LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKERS AT RISK OF DISPLACEMENT. THIS FRAMEWORK IS TAILORED FOR BOTH WASTE PICKERS AND OTHER WORKERS WITHIN THE PLASTICS VALUE CHAIN. THESE COMPONENTS PROVIDE A ROADMAP FOR CRAFTING THE RECOMMENDED JUST TRANSITION ARTICLE WITHIN THE TREATY, FOR SUPPLEMENTING OTHER ARTICLES, AS WELL AS FOR FORMULATING SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDELINES FOR JUST TRANSITION WITHIN THE ANNEXURE.

These components, which are described in detail, with examples, in subsequent sections, encompass:

- 1. RECOGNITION OF WASTE PICKERS IN NORMS, POLICIES AND LAWS;**
- 2. UNIVERSAL REGISTRATION OF WASTE PICKERS AND OTHER WORKERS IN PLASTICS VALUE CHAINS;**
- 3. TRANSPARENCY, OVERSIGHT AND ADAPTATION;**
- 4. DIRECT INVOLVEMENT AND ADVANCEMENT IN POLICY MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES;**
- 5. SOCIAL PROTECTIONS AND SAFEGUARDS;**
- 6. FAIR REMUNERATION, LIVING WAGES AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS;**
- 7. FORMALIZATION AND STRENGTHENED ORGANIZING;**
- 8. CAPACITY BUILDING AND APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER;**
- 9. IMPROVED MATERIALS MANAGEMENT.**

Many of these components are already integrated into existing programs and policies in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, India, and South Africa. A detailed exposition of these components is provided below, along with the relevant examples.

# 1.

## RECOGNITION OF WASTE PICKERS IN NORMS, POLICIES AND LAWS

IAWP advocates for the inclusion, definition, and acknowledgment of waste pickers, as well as other workers engaged in the plastics value chain, within informal and cooperative settings in national, provincial, and municipal legislations and norms. This should extend to plastic and other materials management (including solid waste management), Extended Producer Responsibility, social protections and labour laws, and national action plans addressing plastic pollution. Such recognition must confer legal entitlements for livelihood and social protection to ensure the continuity and advancement of recycling, reuse, and waste collection by waste pickers. The policy and legislation landscape is progressing beyond waste management to include circular economy strategies, action plans, plastics industry master plans, and sustainable production and consumption initiatives. As these are activities waste pickers are already involved in, the policies and legislation should also include recognition of waste pickers. Funding must be dedicated to ensure all policies are equitable and inclusive.

IAWP also advocates for legal frameworks that aim for wealth and opportunity distribution to impacted workers, workers in the informal economy, and specifically marginalized populations.

Several countries have incorporated waste picker recognition into their national waste management laws and norms. Some examples are detailed below. While these regulations may fall short of achieving a comprehensive just transition for waste pickers, they have established some of the world's most inclusive materials management systems. These cases can serve to inspire future improved practices:

- A. **Brazil's National Solid Waste Policy** (n° 12.305/2010), established in 2010, states that “the participation of waste picker cooperatives must be prioritized” in the operation of reverse logistics, especially with post-consumer packaging and in the implementation of selective (segregated) collection by local authorities. Despite this, less than 10 per cent of Brazilian municipalities contract with waste picker cooperatives.<sup>53</sup> In the state of **Minas Gerais, Brazil**, workers and their allies advocated for a law (19823) that institutes a payment for environmental services called “Bolsa Reciclagem” – a recycling bonus, wherein the state pays workers’ cooperatives a bonus for the work their recycling and environmental protection work.<sup>54</sup>
- B. **India's Solid Waste Management Rules of 2016**<sup>55</sup> provide the definition of waste pickers (shared above) and mandate their involvement in waste management. See ANNEX 1 for more details.
- C. **Rulings of the Constitutional Court of Colombia:** Starting in 1995, several rulings by Colombia's Constitutional Court have established a mandate for affirmative action for waste pickers in the country. These involve municipal government and include education, housing, health and other cross-cutting basic needs. The Constitutional Court also established the rights of waste pickers to advance in value chains (i.e. grow in their profession). Waste pickers were effectively designated as subjects of special protection by the state, deserving of integration, recognition and remuneration. The intention of the court was to guarantee that the benefits of integration and remuneration would be available to all waste pickers, not just the authorized and organized few. These rulings were used over the years to ensure waste pickers rights to work and to a *minimo vital*,<sup>56</sup> for many waste pickers whose livelihoods were

53 For more information about how Brazilian waste pickers are included in waste management, please see: Rutkowski & Rutkowski. 2015. “Expanding worldwide urban solid waste recycling: The Brazilian social technology in waste pickers inclusion.” *Waste Management & Research*, Vol. 33(12) pp 1084–1093. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0734242X15607424>

54 Dias, Sonia and Silva, Vera Cardoso. 2017. *Negotiating the Recycling Bonus Law: Waste Pickers & Collective Bargaining in Minas Gerais, Brazil*. In Eaton, Adrienne E., Schurman, Susan J., Chen, Martha A. *Informal workers and collective action: a global perspective*. New York: Cornell University Press Available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/219377004.pdf>

55 Solid Waste Management Rules 2016, notified by Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. [https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/MSW/SWM\\_2016.pdf](https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/MSW/SWM_2016.pdf)

56 As documented by Parra and Abizaid (2022) (see next footnote): “The [Colombian] Constitutional Court developed jurisprudence



ANARCH MEMBERS AT A GREEN POINT IN SANTIAGO, CHILE. PHOTO: ANARCH

disrupted by the closure of landfills, the privatization of (and free market competition within) waste management, and the prohibition of traction animals in collection.<sup>57</sup>

D. **Argentina's Guide for the Implementation of Integral and Inclusive Waste Management**,<sup>58</sup> developed by the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Social Development, provides detailed guidance to government officials for the implementation of inclusive integral management of urban solid waste.

E. **Chile's 2016 Recycling and EPR law (20920)** defines waste pickers,<sup>59</sup> formally recognizes them through the national system of certification of labour competencies (Art. 32), and includes the establishment of a registry of waste pickers through the Pollutant Release and Transfer Registry (Art. 37). Municipalities may enter into agreements with registered waste pickers to support waste management goals and, in 2020, a decree was approved that amended the law to establish that 50 per cent of the waste reception and storage facilities must be operated by waste pickers (Art. 40).

around the definition of the vital minimum. This concept is enshrined in the Constitution in articles 1, Social State; 2, State as guarantor of the rights and duties enshrined in the Constitution; 11, inviolability of the right to life; and 85, protection of rights, in tandem with article 26, freedom to choose one's own profession or trade. The vital minimum is understood as activities that are indispensable to cover basic needs, like food, clothing, education, and social security (T-497 of 2002, cited in Constitutional Court of Colombia 2003b). The State is responsible for ensuring the vital minimum through, among other, affirmative actions in favour of the most vulnerable populations, so that they can lead a dignified existence."

57 Parra, Federico and Olga Abizaid. 2022. Formalization as Public Service Providers: Achievements and Obstacles for Colombia's Waste Pickers. WIEGO. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/technical-brief-12-2021-ENG\\_0.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/technical-brief-12-2021-ENG_0.pdf).

58 "Guía para la Implementación de la Gestión Integral e Inclusiva de Residuos," in Spanish. [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2021/12/guia\\_para\\_la\\_implementacion\\_giirsu\\_24\\_feb\\_2022.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2021/12/guia_para_la_implementacion_giirsu_24_feb_2022.pdf)

59 The definition of waste picker: "Natural person who (...) is directly and habitually dedicated to the selective collection of household or similar waste and the management of reception and storage facilities for such waste, including its classification and pre-treatment" (Art. 3, No. 22).

According to estimates by the Ministry of the Environment,<sup>60</sup> this means that waste pickers will operate at least 175 of the country's 350 reception and storage facilities. Furthermore, a work-based payment will be introduced that is calculated based on the value of the work required to recover the material – something closer to what waste pickers often call a “payment for service” (Art.40). For more details, see ANNEX 1.

F. **South Africa's EPR regulation of May 2021**, Section 5A, places legal obligation on EPR schemes to:

*integrate informal waste collectors, reclaimers and pickers into the post-consumer collection value chain, ...compensate waste collectors, reclaimers or pickers, who register with the National Registration Database, ...implement transformation within those entities with whom they contract with a special focus on women, youth and persons living with disabilities; and prioritize the promotion of small businesses and entrepreneurs with a special focus on women, youth and persons living with disabilities.*

Section 5A (1), states that the producer responsibility organization must:

integrate informal waste collectors, reclaimers and pickers into the post-consumer collection value chain; and ...compensate waste collectors, reclaimers or pickers who register with the National Registration Database, for collection services and environmental benefits, through the collection service fee by November 2022. The collection service fee and National Registration Database shall be reviewed annually by the national Department responsible for Environmental Affairs.

The initial stride towards achieving a just transition begins with legally recognizing and acknowledging waste pickers. As a prerequisite, it is imperative to incorporate the recognition and integration of waste pickers and other workers within the plastic value chain into national, state and municipal level legislation. This recognition should be embedded within overarching frameworks such as national waste man-

agement, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and circular economy policies. Moreover, this acknowledgment should be mirrored at provincial and municipal levels, as often, waste management responsibilities are decentralized, necessitating alignment at local tiers of governance.

## 2.

### UNIVERSAL REGISTRATION OF WASTE PICKERS AND OTHER WORKERS IN PLASTICS VALUE CHAINS

Universal surveys and a systematic registration process for waste pickers are essential to comprehensive inclusion and must form part of national action plans. Thus these should be mandated by national laws and policies, and be reflected in the norms of state/provincial and municipal authorities. This initiative should include the establishment of localized and national databases, with stringent data protection protocols, while also offering livelihood and social protection benefits to those registered. In addition to recognizing waste pickers, registration systems can improve the availability and accuracy of waste collection and recycling data, which is needed for monitoring and reporting plastics waste management.

Within the framework of the Plastics Treaty, we recommend that standardized guidelines be established for nations and local administrations to streamline the registration of various entities within the recycling hierarchy, including waste picker organizations, aggregators, and reprocessors, who contribute at the foundation of the recycling ecosystem.

To facilitate registration and enumeration, there are several key factors that we recommend:

- First, informal waste work should be included as an occupational category within country level statistics and labour force surveys, with distinctions between own-account workers, dependent contractors, and independent contractors, and including unpaid work performed for subsistence purposes.

60 In Decree N°12, published on March 16, 2021 by the Ministry of Environment, which establishes collection and valorization goals.



WASTE PICKER REGISTRATION IN MANGAUNG FREE STATE, SOUTH AFRICA. PHOTO: LEFA MONONGA

- Second, databases should include workforce demographics (gender and other forms of ethnicity/race/caste identity, including economic background) and role.
  - Third, given that many waste pickers have endured harassment, abuse, violence, and mental health challenges, some individuals may be hesitant to undergo registration by public authorities. It is advisable to involve trained counselors and or waste pickers themselves to facilitate the registration procedure. It is also of paramount importance that unregistered individuals are not unfairly labeled as illegal participants in waste management efforts.
  - Fourth, databases must never be used for criminalization and should not carry burdensome registration requisites or financial or tax implications
  - Fifth, policies should include a process for thorough, detailed plans for research and mapping to identify all actors in materials management systems. This should consider their contribution and market share (opportunity distribution) and their disaggregated material impact (amounts of material processed for disposal, recycling and re-use). This ensures that all existing actors in the waste handling and recycling systems are included in policy planning and implementation.
  - Finally, periodic studies should be conducted to assess equity and opportunity distribution and inform changes to the system.<sup>61</sup>
- The following examples from around the globe capture some of the ways that waste pickers have been registered:
- A. **Registration of waste pickers/reclaimers in South Africa:** In the initial phase of implementing South Africa's Waste Picker Integration Guidelines,<sup>62</sup> the South Africa Waste Picker Registration System

61 Global Alliance of Waste Pickers. 2021. Position on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). [https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR\\_GlobalRec\\_ENG.pdf](https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR_GlobalRec_ENG.pdf)

62 DEFF and DSI (Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries and Department of Science and Innovation). 2020. Waste picker integration guideline for South Africa: Building the Recycling Economy and Improving Livelihoods through Integration of the Informal Sector. DEFF and DST: Pretoria. <https://wastepickerintegration.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/DFFE-and-DSI-Waste-Picker-Integration-Guideline-for-South-Africa.pdf>

(SAWPRS) was established. To overcome challenges and effectively gain the trust of waste pickers, the registration process has relied on the leadership of national waste picker organizations the African Reclaimers Organization (ARO) and the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA). This initiative received financial support through the World Bank ProBlue program. The process involves registering buy back centers on a blockchain system, registering waste pickers on the SAWPRS, registering each waste picker on at least one blockchain material weight tracking system and each waste picker on the payment system of their choice. Waste pickers must show identification, and must be verified as a waste picker by another waste picker who supports the registration process. Their registration is uploaded by the registrar onto a mobile phone or tablet. Registrars hail from any stakeholder group, but the verifier is always a waste picker. While this is still a work in progress, registration renders waste pickers eligible for various government and industry programs, including eligibility for service payments under the country's EPR Regulation<sup>63</sup>.

#### B. Unified Registry of waste pickers in Colombia:

In Bogotá, Colombia, the Government of Bogotá Humana implemented the Transitional Payment Scheme for Recycling Services in response to a Constitutional Court order. This initiative involved a comprehensive waste picker census and registration process. Organized and autonomous waste pickers were registered under this census, entitling them to receive a service payment based on the weight of materials brought to designated centers. Additionally, this registration facilitated access to banking resources, with payments being directly transferred every two months.<sup>64</sup>

To ensure the accuracy of registrations and prevent the inclusion of non-waste pickers, the registration process was strategically conducted at recycling centers instead of census points. In 2014, the Unified Registry of Waste Pickers was estab-

lished, allowing for annual updates to the census. Notably, by 2022, the registry had successfully recorded 25,322 waste pickers, marking a significant increase from the 13,984 registered in 2012.<sup>65</sup>

The registry supports the provision of social benefits by gathering valuable data related to social protection, housing status, dependents, transportation methods for materials, locations for aggregation and sale of waste, and income levels. Recognizing the importance of this approach, the national government has mandated all municipal authorities to conduct waste picker censuses. Comprehensive guidelines have been provided for the implementation of these crucial surveys.<sup>66</sup>

#### C. Issuance of occupational identity cards for waste pickers in India:

India's Solid Waste Management Rules of 2016 mandate local bodies to establish schemes for the registration of waste pickers (mentioned above in the section on recognition). As part of this, many Indian cities issue occupational identity cards to waste pickers. The cards have helped waste pickers enroll their children in government scholarship programmes, avail of low interest rate credit to expand their livelihoods, qualify for housing support, and access healthcare services. The cards need to be printed and issued on durable materials.



WASTE PICKER ID CARD ISSUED IN BANGALORE, INDIA. PHOTO: HASIRU DALA

63 Example provided by the African Reclaimers Organisation.

64 Parra, Federico and Olga Abizaid. 2022. Formalization as Public Service Providers: Achievements and Obstacles for Colombia's Waste Pickers. WIEGO. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/technical-brief-12-2021-ENG\\_0.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/technical-brief-12-2021-ENG_0.pdf)

65 Parra, Federico and Joann Vanek. 2023. "The Collection of Data on Waste Pickers in Colombia, 2012-2022." WIEGO Statistical Brief #35. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO\\_Statistical\\_Brief\\_N35\\_Colombia\\_English.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO_Statistical_Brief_N35_Colombia_English.pdf)

66 Ibid.

D. In **Brazil**, the national classification of occupations (CBO in Portuguese) has included waste pickers (*catador de material reciclável*) since 2002 in its national classification system.<sup>67</sup> This has enabled Brazil's national statistics system to collect statistics on waste pickers in its National Household Survey (PNAD in Portuguese), which has facilitated effective integration of waste pickers in waste management and in government policy.

### 3.

#### TRANSPARENCY, OVERSIGHT AND ADAPTATION <sup>68</sup>

Financial, material and organizational transparency can significantly improve data collection efforts, and also help enable inclusive and more circular materials management systems. Member states and producers should be mandated to report on their plastics waste management-related targets and engagement with waste pickers, the extension of social welfare provisions, and improvement in waste picker income and working conditions. Circular economy data remains weak in capturing labour realities,<sup>69</sup> especially for those who work in the informal economy, so the Plastics Treaty presents an opportunity to close gaps in research and understanding.

In making recommendations for policy, including EPR, IAWP recommends that mandatory and periodic (at least every few years) public independent audits be conducted and include a full financial and socio-economic review of any management body within a given system; the audit should include itemized income versus expenditure, and a demographically disaggregated accounting of the employment realities (income, benefits, contract status) of all workers in the materials' domestic supply chains. All data should be made publicly available.

Materials management oversight bodies, including EPR management organizations, should also report on disaggregated material generation, collection, and sale and recycling rates. Management bodies should be required to report the names and demographics of who sits on leadership teams and oversight bodies. To fully understand the realities surrounding any materials management system, periodic studies should also be conducted about the recovery, recyclability and sustainability of materials on the market.

Clear and accessible grievance and dispute resolution mechanisms are vital. Also, there should be regular public or social audits of the integration of waste pickers and other actors in the informal waste supply chain into EPR and other materials management policies and plans, including the plastics treaty.<sup>70</sup>

Governments should also conduct periodic, demographically-disaggregated market studies to identify the roles that are vulnerable to disruption and new jobs created. Because circular economy policies tend to have a formalizing and consolidating effect, which can change the nature of work, we also recommend documenting changes in the type of work (skill level; scheduled work versus autonomous; and whether a job requires public-facing social skills).

### 4.

#### DIRECT INVOLVEMENT AND ADVANCEMENT IN POLICY-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES

IAWP insists that waste pickers and other workers who may be impacted by transitions have direct and ongoing involvement in the formulation of new materials management policy. IAWP recommends the establishment of public governance committees or fora composed of interested parties. These should effectively include workers in the informal economy

67 Dias, Sonia Maria. 2011. Statistics on Waste Pickers in Brazil. WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 2. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Dias\\_WIEGO\\_SB2.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Dias_WIEGO_SB2.pdf)

68 Global Alliance of Waste Pickers. 2021. Position on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). [https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR\\_GlobalRec\\_ENG.pdf](https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR_GlobalRec_ENG.pdf)

69 ILO. 2023. Decent Work in the Circular Economy: An Overview of the Existing Evidence Base. [https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS\\_881337/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_881337/lang--en/index.htm)

70 Adapted from IAWP's EPR position.

and other marginalized waste actors. Forums for social dialogue in which waste pickers, producers, and government bodies (including municipal authorities) come together to negotiate and plan plastic materials management should be implemented and fully documented. Social dialogues can follow the tripartite system outlined in the frameworks of the ILO.

The following examples provide insight into the establishment of such fora:

- A. According to the **Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules of 2016 in India**, both state urban and rural development departments are required to establish an Advisory Committee tasked with overseeing and evaluating waste management efforts. As stipulated by the rules, this Advisory Committee must comprise representatives from waste pickers or civil society organizations actively engaged with waste pickers. Solid Waste Management Round Tables around India have also helped bring waste pickers and other stakeholders together in planning.
- B. Since the 1990s, **Brazil's Waste and Citizenship Forum**<sup>71</sup> has provided a collaborative and inclusive planning platform that has been key to the establishment and improvement of some of the world's most successful examples of waste picker integration.
- C. The **South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)** convened a working group that included representatives of the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO), South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA), the South African Local Self Government Association (SALSGA) and different municipalities to develop the Waste Picker Integration Guideline for South Africa<sup>72</sup>.
- D. The inclusion of waste picker representatives from **Red Nacional de Recicladores del Ecuador (RENA-**

REC) in the development of Ecuador's Inclusive Circular Economy Law (*Ley Orgánica de la Economía Circular Inclusiva*) helped influence provisions that will improve waste pickers' work<sup>73</sup>. This includes a waste picker census, certification and registration system linked to eligibility for social security, as well as the provision of infrastructure and training support.

In places like Argentina, Colombia, India, South Africa, and the US, waste pickers have advanced from informal street and dumpsite picking into the management of buyback centers, waste collection, and material processing systems set up by the municipal authorities. In line with the ILO's guidelines for just transition, IAWP demands that there be ongoing involvement of waste pickers in implementation and planning processes, with opportunities for personal development and advancement in materials management value chains.

## 5.

### SOCIAL PROTECTIONS AND SAFEGUARDS

All workers in a materials management system should have access to social and labour protections which are rights-based and universal in scope, governed and delivered by the state, and financed through production-oriented contributions such as EPR, product taxes and other means.

ILO 2015 guidelines for a just transition<sup>74</sup> highlight the need for sustainable social protection to serve as a safety net against job losses and displacement. This should be extended to all workers including workers in informal employment who are poorly covered under existing social protection legislation and schemes.<sup>75</sup> ILO Recommendation on Social Protection Floors (no. 202) considers the inclusion of workers in informal employment through their representative organizations; "in regard to the establishment and

71 Dias, Sonia. 2011a. "The Municipal Waste and Citizenship Forum: A Platform for Social Inclusion and Participation." WIEGO Policy Brief (Urban Policies) No. 5. May 2011. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Dias\\_WIEGO\\_PB5.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Dias_WIEGO_PB5.pdf)

72 <https://www.gtac.gov.za/resource/waste-picker-integration-guideline-for-south-africa/>

73 Grid Arendal, IKHAAP and Niva. 2023. Fair and Inclusive EPR schemes in the Global South: Challenges and the way forward. Webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z-q32uiLXU>

74 [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_432859.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf)

75 ILO. 2021. World Social Protection Report 2020-22. Geneva: ILO.



review of the levels of these guarantees, tripartite participation with representative organizations of employers and workers, as well as consultation with other relevant and representative organizations of persons concerned, should be ensured.” Art 8 (d). ILO Recommendation 204<sup>76</sup> states that all human rights should be extended to workers in the informal economy, including social protection.

At a minimum, we insist that the following social protections be provided to all workers in waste management, including waste pickers:

**Support for childcare and education:** As waste pickers, we advocate for comprehensive initiatives that guarantee full employment and prioritize the preservation and enhancement of our livelihoods. Our profession often bears the burden of stigma, especially due to the unfortunate increase in the number of children engaged in waste-picking activities. As parents ourselves, we share the universal aspiration of providing our children with brighter prospects than waste picking. The attainment of a respectable income and stable employment holds the promise of being able to enroll our children in schools, thereby securing their education.

In the context of social protection and overall well-being, the prioritization of our children’s education becomes a paramount concern. It is imperative that adequate measures are put in place to ensure that their educational journey is safeguarded and nurtured.

Moreover, the challenging circumstances we often confront leave us with limited options for childcare, compelling many of us to bring our children along while we work. Recognizing these circumstances, the Government of India has introduced a dedicated scholarship program targeting children whose parents are involved in “unclean” occupations.<sup>77</sup> To access this scholarship, waste pickers utilize their occupational identity cards as part of the application process. (India’s Pune Municipal Corporation also has programs that provide educational scholarships for the children of waste pickers.)

In addition, a considerable number of children engaged in waste picking have sadly endured instances of abuse, violence, and exposure to harmful substances, which can have long term impacts on physical and

mental health. This reality often renders traditional education systems inadequate in meeting their unique needs. Consequently, waste picker organizations worldwide, including those in India, South Africa, Argentina, and other regions, have taken the initiative to establish specialized learning and recreational spaces for these children. Often operated by volunteers and with limited government assistance, these spaces serve as invaluable sanctuaries for growth and development.

**Universal Basic Income:** Many waste pickers organizations, like Argentina’s FACCyR, under the Union for Popular Economy Workers (UTEP), argue for universal basic income, which can ease transition periods, help stabilize market fluctuations, and protect workers who may not be able to be trained into different roles.

**Universal and free access to quality healthcare and pension:** Many waste pickers, and especially elderly individuals, in regions like East Asia, Europe, and the US rely heavily on waste picking as their sole means of survival amidst a triple crisis characterized by minimal or no income, reluctance from employers to hire older workers, and advancing age. Sadly, many waste pickers are excluded from integrating into formal waste management systems solely due to their age, facing significant challenges in finding employment opportunities beyond retirement age. In such a context, a robust pension system and universal healthcare coverage is of paramount importance. These provisions would address the health and security concerns associated with aging waste pickers, offering them the necessary support and resources during their later years.

Organizations like the Alliance of Indian Waste-pickers and Working People’s Charter actively advocate for the establishment of a robust social protection system. There is a pressing need to implement a strong pension system within the social protection framework. Additionally, social protection must encompass universal and free access to high-quality healthcare for all workers engaged in informal employment, including waste pickers. This system should also prioritize the improvement of public hospitals to ensure that workers can readily access essential healthcare services.

76 [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:R204](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R204)

77 A victory for waste pickers’ children! Finally, waste pickers included in scholarship program (<https://globalrec.org/2013/07/02/a-victory-for-waste-pickers-children/>)

**Safeguards against livelihood eradication and provision of alternative work options:** Across Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America, waste pickers are being displaced from dumpsites and landfills without any safeguarding of their livelihoods. Often this displacement involves the closure of the site to human access, but it can also involve the diversion of valuable materials at the household level, or at other points in the value chain before it reaches the dumpsite. The organization WIEGO<sup>78</sup> declares that:

Any change to the way solid waste is managed—whether upgrading from dumps to controlled landfills, introducing recycling schemes or “modernizing” a system—must begin with a comprehensive plan that considers the needs of the informal workers who are already engaged in gathering, sorting and recycling waste. Any suppressed activity should be replaced with another of at least equal value to waste pickers. And waste pickers must be involved as equal partners in all phases of planning and implementation.<sup>79</sup>

In Dakar, Senegal, for example, waste pickers in the Mbeubeuss dumpsite<sup>80</sup> are facing displacement by the World Bank-financed PROMOGED<sup>81</sup> project. Though the World Bank funding comes with conditions for the state to safeguard the livelihoods of waste pickers, this has still not been implemented, while valuable materials are already being diverted from the dumpsite. Furthermore, waste pickers have not been adequately involved in the planning of safeguarding and have no commitment from the government that they will be ensured a just transition into the formal materials management system or another livelihood. Even for those who are retrained into other occupations, safeguarding policies generally lack funding for

ongoing research to understand if the safeguarding was effective in the long term.

Despite the weaknesses of many safeguarding policies in guaranteeing a just transition for workers, these policies are nevertheless essential to ethical environmental policy and should be strengthened. A decision from the 2010 Cancun Agreements established a mandate for the creation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Appendix III of the report<sup>82</sup> states that operational documents for the GCF will have “mechanisms to...ensure the application of environmental and social safeguards” (para. 1(h)) and “mechanisms to ensure stakeholder input and participation.” (para. 1(j)). Further, GCF’s Governing Instrument,<sup>83</sup> adopted in 2011, includes the requirement for safeguards.

## 6.

### FAIR REMUNERATION, LIVING WAGES AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

More work is needed to assess fair payment and how that should be calculated. We also believe that fair payment should be afforded both to waste picker organizations, as well as to waste pickers who have not been integrated into formal employment arrangements. South Africa’s EPR Regulation, and Bogota, Colombia’s waste picker registration system both include direct transfer digital payment schemes for waste pickers per kilo of material taken to designated points – providing protection against material market fluctuations, and recognizing waste pickers for the service they provide, regardless of whether or not they are working formally or within an organization. In addition to giving waste pickers exclusive right to recyclables in Argentina, Section

78 Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). See [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org).

79 Dias, Sonia M. 2018. WIEGO’s position on Dump Closures. Position paper. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/WIEGO%20POLICY%20STANCE%201\\_DUMP%20CLOSURES.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/WIEGO%20POLICY%20STANCE%201_DUMP%20CLOSURES.pdf)

80 WIEGO Blog. 2023. Bokk Diom Mobilizes Against Partial Closure of Mbeubeuss Dumpsite in Dakar. <https://www.wiego.org/blog/bokk-diom-mobilizes-against-partial-closure-mbeubeuss-dumpsite-dakar>

81 The project, called in English “Promotion of the integrated management systems and economy of solid wastes,” purports to improve solid waste management in communities through the installation of equipment and the construction of facilities. See: <https://promoged.sn/en/en>

82 Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, held in Cancun from 29 November to 10 December 2010. <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>

83 Green Climate Fund. 2011. Web page: Governing Instrument. <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/governing-instrument>

1.4.2.1 of Argentina's Guide for the Implementation of Integrated and Inclusive Waste Management<sup>84</sup> gives registered waste pickers the right to a Complementary Social Wage System (translation by IAWP):

*In order to advance in the formalization of the sector and guarantee the functioning of the SRL, it is advisable for the RU to have a Complementary Social Wage or Complementary Wage Supplement that, in combination with the income from the sale of recyclable from the sale of recyclable materials, would generate more than a subsistence income. This wage supplement can be provided at the local, provincial or national level. The main program that guarantees this right is currently the Programa Potenciar Trabajo, which depends on the National Ministry of Social Development.*

Tools like WIEGO's Greenhouse Gas calculator<sup>85</sup> may be useful for calculating service fees, which should correlate with the amounts of materials diverted for recycling and reuse, but also incorporate the expenses needed to maintain healthy organizations and healthy workers. But more systems are needed for the estimation and delivery of fair payment.

Fair remuneration for services must account for the full costs of systems operations including collection, transportation, sorting, processing, infrastructure, innovation, and end of life management for all materials, as well as administration like legal fees, data collection and management, human resources, and rent or land ownership costs, insurance, organizing and training, and infrastructure.

It is worth noting that the concept of fair remuneration, or living wage/income, diverges from the notion of adhering to minimum wages for waste pickers. Many countries establish minimum wage standards primarily to stimulate mass employment; however, such measures often compromise living standards and the broader quality of life, thereby hindering overall

well-being. India's SWaCH waste picker cooperative has municipal contracts to provide doorstep waste and recyclables collection for thousands of households. Workers can operate on a flexible schedule, and earn their income from residential user fees and the sale of recyclables and are therefore not bound to scheduled wage employment while also earning higher per hour rates than the local minimum wage.

**Finance mechanisms:** While the IAWP does not yet have a developed position on the desired finance mechanisms for the implementation of the plastics treaty, it advocates for tripartite negotiations related to financing where the private sector is involved, but with governments also involved both for oversight, financial, technical and assets-related support. Governments around the world provide land and infrastructure for waste picker organizations, as well as contracts, equipment and advocacy support. We also advocate that government bodies have designated staff to liaise with waste picker organizations and help advocate for their needs within government institutions and policy processes. Finally, IAWP advocates for flexible funding, especially at the start of waste picker integration initiatives, when experimentation is key.

Despite lacking an official position on finance mechanisms, IAWP has developed detailed recommendations for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).<sup>86</sup> While we recognize EPR's potential for infusing needed funding into materials management systems, EPR can also undermine the livelihoods of waste pickers.<sup>87</sup> For example, EPR schemes can attract formal-sector companies that compete with waste pickers for contracts and materials, and mount high barriers to entry without support for their inclusion. We advocate for EPR only if it can ensure the measures outlined in IAWP's official position on EPR, in which waste pickers are recognized as partners and service providers.

84 Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible y Ministerio de Desarrollo Social. 2022. Reconstrucción argentina, 2 *Guía para la Implementación de la Gestión Integral e Inclusiva de Residuos*. [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2021/12/guia\\_para\\_la\\_implementation\\_giirsu\\_24\\_feb\\_2022.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/2021/12/guia_para_la_implementation_giirsu_24_feb_2022.pdf)

85 See WIEGO's Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Inclusive Recycling: Methodology & Calculator Tool at <http://www.wiego.org/ghg>.

86 The IAWP's Position on EPR can be found at: <https://epr.globalrec.org/position-on-epr/>

87 Cass Talbott, Taylor Pinky Chandran, Cecilia Allen, Lakshmi Narayan and Owusu Boampong. 2022. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Waste Pickers. WIEGO Technical Brief No. 15. Manchester, UK: WIEGO. <https://www.wiego.org/publications/extended-producer-responsibility-epr-and-waste-pickers>

# 7.

## FORMALIZATION AND STRENGTHENING OF ORGANIZING

**Formalization:** IAWP advocates for support and incentives for waste pickers to formalize their work without punitive or exclusionary measures for those who cannot. When provided with government support, waste picker organizations around the world are among the most skilled at integrating workers in informal employment into formal opportunities, as well as in providing services that can benefit and support waste pickers who have not been integrated into formal employment. They already provide useful examples of just transition for the informal economy.

We advocate for support for the self-organization of waste pickers and other workers in plastics value chains, prioritizing democratic organizations able to strengthen those skills deemed by the ILO<sup>88</sup> to be important for a just transition, including: cooperation, collaboration, systems thinking, skill-building and problem solving among workers, as well as strategizing alternative livelihoods within the circular economy. IAWP supports organizations dedicated to the distribution of economic opportunity, wealth and power.

The 2022 International Labour Conference Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy (SSE)<sup>89</sup> calls on members states, with the support of the ILO, to “integrate the SSE into national development, recovery, and employment strategies to support pro-employment macroeconomic, tax, industrial, social, environmental and other policies for promoting just digital and environmental transitions and reducing inequalities” Para 9(d). The SSE also con-

tributes to more inclusive societies, the transition from the informal to the formal economy, poverty reduction and building resilience as highlighted in: the Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193); the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No.204); and the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205); among others.

While IAWP demands support for formalization, it also recognizes that not all workers are able to conform to formal market demands, arguing that materials management systems should maintain or establish safe and legal entry points for all waste pickers to collect and commercialize materials, while also supporting low-barrier pathways into cooperative, formal, and decent work. Formalization can also create cleavages between workers in the formal and informal economies,<sup>90</sup> worsening the conditions for workers in informality. Furthermore, women are often left behind as a waste system formalizes,<sup>91</sup> and are more likely than men to seek out informal work.<sup>92</sup> Thus formalization must take a delicate and intersectional, gender-based approach.

A. Waste picker organizations like Argentina’s FACCyR, India’s SWaCH cooperative, and the cooperatives of Brazil’s MNCR have registered and semi-formal facilities that buy materials from autonomous waste pickers, often offering above-market rates, as well as holistic advocacy and other support to defend the rights of waste pickers to access and commercialize materials.

**Strengthening organizing:** Within the framework of the IAWP, we strongly advocate for the allocation of resources to enhance the empowerment of waste pickers through the establishment of trade unions,

88 ILC.111/Report VI Achieving a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. International Labour Conference 111th Session, 2023. para.103. In: Achieving a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (ilo.org)

89 Resolution concerning decent work and the social and solidarity economy. 2022. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_848633.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_848633.pdf)

90 O’Hare, Patrick. 2019. ‘The landfill has always borne fruit’: Precarity, formalisation and dispossession among Uruguay’s waste pickers. *Dialect Anthropol* 43, 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-018-9533-6>

91 Samson, Melanie. 2003. Dumping on Women: Gender and Privatisation of Waste Management. Athlone: Municipal Services Project and the South African Municipal Workers’ Union. WIEGO. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Samson\\_Dumping\\_on\\_Women.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Samson_Dumping_on_Women.pdf)

92 Samson, Melanie. 2020. Lessons from Waste Picker Integration Initiatives: Development of Evidence Based Guidelines to Integrate Waste Pickers into South African Municipal Waste Management Systems Technical report: Integrating reclaimers into our understanding of the recycling economy. Pretoria, South Africa.

associations, and other member-based organizations. These platforms play a pivotal role in facilitating collective bargaining with stakeholders such as recyclers, producers, and municipal authorities. By bolstering waste pickers' organizational capacities, we not only introduce institutional mechanisms that foster transparency within material supply chains but also fortify workers' positions, enabling them to engage in negotiations to secure more favorable contracts. The reinforcement of waste pickers' organizational structures serves as a catalyst for positive change, driving increased accountability and fairness throughout the materials management ecosystem.

## 8.

### CAPACITY BUILDING AND APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

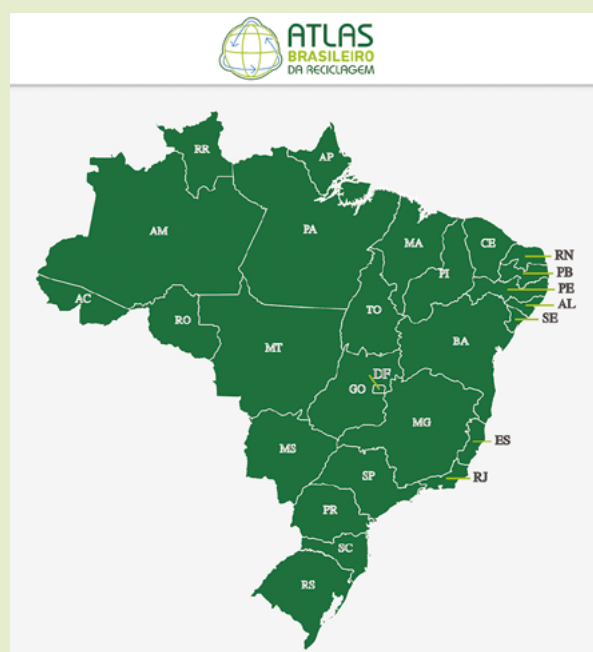
Capacity building, along with reskilling or upskilling, is essential to both just transition and the establishment of more decent work in plastics management. Governments should track and report on labour market trends to ensure that any reskilling will be successful over the long term, and should report on the success or failures of retraining efforts.

Common training needs for waste pickers include: leadership and organization-building, collective bargaining, solid waste management, occupational health and safety, and policy and legal compliance. NGOs, government, researchers and the private sector also need training to help the informal waste sector self-organize, and experienced waste picker organizations can often provide this type of training.

Waste pickers need training and investment to adapt to new technologies, especially digital technology that can strengthen traceability and impact reporting. But materials management systems should also be technologically appropriate such that they do not push out actors who may not be able to adapt to digital technologies, drive vehicles or operate heavy machinery.

Examples of innovative and effective training and appropriate technology include:

- A. In Brazil, the Brazil's National Waste Picker Movement (MNCR) and its technical wing, the National Association of Waste Pickers (ANCAT), worked with private partners to enable waste pickers to work at the Rock in Rio Festival as event service providers collecting recyclable materials, using blockchain technology<sup>93</sup> to trace materials all the way from the event to the recycling industry.
- B. The Brazilian Recycling Atlas<sup>94</sup> is a virtual tool that compiles and presents a wide range of recycling value chain data collected from waste pickers associations and other actors. The atlas sheds light on the working landscape of waste pickers in Brazil, while also generating information and infographics that strengthen the capacity of waste pickers to better understand the recycling value chain and advocate for investments to improve their work.



THE BRAZILIAN RECYCLING ATLAS IS A VIRTUAL DATABASE DETAILING BRAZIL'S RECYCLING LANDSCAPE, INCLUDING THE NUMBER OF WASTE PICKER ASSOCIATIONS THAT CAN BE FOUND ACROSS THE COUNTRY. SCREENSHOT FROM: [HTTPS://ATLASBRASILEIRODARECICLAGEM.ANCAT.ORG.BR/](https://atlasbrasileirodareciclagem.ancat.org.br/)

93 Gama, Mara. 2022. Rock in Rio: Catadores dão nova vida ao lixo gerado durante o festival. <https://www.uol.com.br/ecoa/colunas/mara-gama/2022/09/22/rock-in-rio-catadores-dao-nova-vida-ao-lixo-gerado-durante-o-festival.htm?cmpid=copiaecola> <https://www.uol.com.br/ecoa/colunas/mara-gama/2022/09/22/rock-in-rio-catadores-dao-nova-vida-ao-lixo-gerado-durante-o-festival.htm>

94 <https://atlasbrasileirodareciclagem.ancat.org.br/sobre>

- C. In India, the Alliance of Indian Waste-pickers, in partnership with the National Institute of Urban Affairs (an autonomous think tank under the Government of India), conducted a training program for municipal officials aimed at enhancing their understanding of waste pickers and their contributions. The primary objective was to sensitize these officials and facilitate the seamless integration of waste pickers into the existing system. This initiative attracted active participation, with over 1,100 municipal officers from various regions of the country receiving training directly from waste pickers as well as representatives from waste picker organizations. Since then, municipal authorities have been actively engaging with waste pickers in many cities.
- D. The National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) in collaboration with the Alliance of Indian Waste-pickers, has designed comprehensive training modules which have been adopted nationwide by waste picker organizations. These modules cover various important topics, including social protection, business opportunities within waste management, and organic waste handling. Noteworthy organizations like Hasiru Dala, Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Chintan, among others, have also formulated their own training modules. These modules concentrate on mentoring waste pickers for diversified livelihoods, financial management, gender inclusivity, and other relevant skills and subjects. Furthermore, the Central Institute of Plastic Engineering and Technology (CIPET) has introduced specialized training programs, supported by NSKFDC.
- E. Under the Argentina Recicla program, The Ministry of Social Development office of Popular Economy, and the Commercialization Secretariat of Argentina's National Waste Picker Federation (FACCyR), developed a manual<sup>95</sup> for sorting recyclable materials to promote and improve inclusive recycling around the country. Argentina's National Recycling Map also documents recycling facilities around the country.<sup>96</sup>
- F. When waste pickers are organized, their organizations are often able to facilitate accessible training, and ensure that training reaches workers. Argentina's National Waste Picker Federation (FACCyR) has developed manuals<sup>97</sup> and training programs to build the capacity of thousands of workers across the country, even using fun and interactive tools like video games.<sup>98</sup>
- G. Waste pickers also need appropriate technology that may not be new or particularly advanced. For example, waste picker organizations in places like India, Argentina, South Africa and the US have established systems that enable waste pickers to collect materials manually using pushcarts and other appropriate collection equipment. Material is then brought to centralized areas where it is collected by trucks. These systems enable the integration of workers who may not be able to drive, which in many places also means that women are more likely to be able to participate.

95 Argentina recicla. Manual para la Clasificación de Materiales Reciclables. 2022. [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual\\_para\\_la\\_clasificacion\\_de\\_materiales\\_reciclables\\_7\\_sep\\_2022.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual_para_la_clasificacion_de_materiales_reciclables_7_sep_2022.pdf)

96 Mapa Federal de Reciclado. No date. <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/desarrollosocial/argentinarecicla/mapa-federal-de-reciclado>

97 See examples:

[https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual\\_pedagogia\\_mds\\_2\\_1.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual_pedagogia_mds_2_1.pdf)

[https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual\\_maquinaria\\_anexo\\_mds\\_1.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual_maquinaria_anexo_mds_1.pdf)

[https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual\\_de\\_operacion\\_y\\_mantenimiento\\_-\\_enfadradora\\_vertical\\_deisa\\_ev-11x2\\_23\\_jun\\_23.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual_de_operacion_y_mantenimiento_-_enfadradora_vertical_deisa_ev-11x2_23_jun_23.pdf)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWXqKu4rWZo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5BfrXsfhGs&t=13s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zCrWns3KUK>

[https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual\\_seguridad\\_e\\_higiene\\_mds\\_24\\_abr\\_2023.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual_seguridad_e_higiene_mds_24_abr_2023.pdf)

[https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/guia\\_giirsu\\_con\\_perspectiva\\_de\\_genero\\_mds\\_24\\_abr\\_2023.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/guia_giirsu_con_perspectiva_de_genero_mds_24_abr_2023.pdf)

98 <https://crearjuegos.ar/videojuegos/play/Argentina%20Recicla>



MANY WASTE PICKER MEMBERS IN ARGENTINA PERFORM DOORSTEP RECYCLABLES COLLECTION USING LARGE BAGS ATTACHED TO COLLAPSIBLE SCOOTERS. PHOTO: BRODIE CASS TALBOTT

## 9.

### IMPROVED MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

IAWP further advocates for<sup>99</sup> the following socio-environmental materials management measures:

- A. Complete and segregated waste collection that services all residents, including those in informal settlements.
- B. Minimization of packaging (and phasing out of non-recyclable, multi-polymer and multilayered plastics that contaminate feedstock).
- C. The designing and funding of services for reuse and repair that engage impacted waste pickers and have economically distributional effects.
- D. Mechanical recycling targets and uniform and minimum recycled content mandates. Many governments and producers are creating targets for using recycled content. The targets should be mandatory and should require sourcing of recyclable plastics from waste pickers upon fair payment.
- E. The phase-out of materials containing or emitting hazardous substances that may harm the health of waste pickers or recyclers; and mandated testing of new technologies and materials to ensure their safety.
- F. Domestic processing of materials. This prevents imports that flood local waste markets with plastic scrap, subsequently lowering scrap prices and over-burdening local recycling systems while undermining incentives for the local collection and sorting of recyclables<sup>100</sup> – all of which undermines the income of waste pickers not involved in the plastics import trades.

99 Adapted from IAWP's official position on EPR. [https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR\\_GlobalRec\\_ENG.pdf](https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR_GlobalRec_ENG.pdf)

100 Interpol. 2020. Interpol Strategic Analysis Report: Emerging criminal trends in the global plastic waste market since January 2018. [https://www.interpol.int/en/content/download/15587/file/INTERPOL%20Report%20\\_criminal%20trends-plastic%20waste.pdf](https://www.interpol.int/en/content/download/15587/file/INTERPOL%20Report%20_criminal%20trends-plastic%20waste.pdf).

- G. Prioritization of the regulated management of non-recyclable or hard-to-recycle materials over recyclable materials with pre-existing robust, economically viable markets.
- H. The prevention, prohibition and elimination of climate-intensive, destructive technologies like incineration and pyrolysis/chemical recycling.
- I. Clear, truthful labeling of materials to ensure safe handling and processing by waste pickers and recyclers.
- J. New opportunities for waste pickers and other marginalized waste sector stakeholders through shifts in materials management.



## CONCLUSION



The IAWP firmly believes that the forthcoming Plastics Treaty has the potential to not only address global plastic pollution but also bring about a transformative change in the conditions and rights of workers in materials management systems. To achieve this, it is imperative that member states include a dedicated Article on Just Transition within the treaty, supported by actionable guidelines in an annexure. This would represent a crucial first step in acknowledging the historic contributions of waste pickers to plastic pollution reduction

Despite the invaluable contributions we have made to environmental protection and the well-being of all life on our planet, waste pickers continue to endure a cycle of poverty and marginalization. While negotiations for the Plastics Treaty are underway, our 20 million colleagues in the waste picking profession face life-threatening hardships as they manage materials in streets and dumpsites. Discrimination root-

ed in our occupation, identities, and economic constraints persists. As we advocate for a just transition, we call for a transformation that not only recognizes but also rectifies these disparities, ensuring equitable and dignified conditions for waste pickers and other essential workers in entire plastics value chains.

In our unwavering commitment to assist Member States in crafting this Article and Supplementary Annexure, we have compiled this comprehensive document and will continue to actively engage in international negotiations and intersessional work towards the plastics treaty. While there is little doubt about our historical and present-day role in preventing plastics pollution, we strongly urge for legal recognition of this contribution in local and national policies, including within the Plastics Treaty itself.

It is only through these measures that we can move towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all. We are the voices of all workers.



## ANNEX 1

**EXPANDED TEXT REFLECTING WASTE PICKER INTEGRATION  
IN MATERIALS MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

- A. India's Solid Waste Management Rules of 2016<sup>101</sup> states:

*Under section 4 of SWM Rules which outlines the duty for waste generators:*

*4(6) "All resident welfare and market associations shall, within one year from the date of notification of these rules and in partnership with the local body ensure segregation of waste at source by the generators as prescribed in these rules facilitate collection of segregated waste in separate streams, handover recyclable material to either the authorised waste pickers or the authorised recyclers," sub-sections: 4(7) and 4(8) mandate the same for gated communities, institutions, hotels and restaurants.*

*Under section 11 outlining the "Duties of the Secretary-in-charge, Urban Development in the States and Union territories. – (1) The Secretary, Urban Development Department in the State or Union territory through the Commissioner or Director of Municipal Administration or Director of local bodies shall":*

*"(a) prepare a state policy and solid waste management strategy for the state or the union territory in consultation with stakeholders including representative of waste pickers, self-help group and similar groups working in the field of waste management consistent with these rules, national policy on solid waste management and national urban sanitation policy of the ministry of urban development, in a period not later than one year from the date of notification of these rules.*

*(c) state policies and strategies should acknowledge the primary role played by the informal sector of waste pickers, waste collectors and recycling industry in reducing waste and provide broad guidelines regarding integration of waste picker or informal waste collectors in the waste management system.*

*(d) ensure implementation of provisions of these rules by all local authorities.*

*(m) start a scheme on registration of waste pickers and waste dealers."*

*Under section 15 concerning "Duties and responsibilities of local authorities and village Panchayats (rural local bodies), census towns and urban agglomerations. – The local authorities and Panchayats shall:*

*(c) establish a system to recognise organisations of waste pickers or informal waste collectors and promote and establish a system for integration of these authorised waste-pickers and waste collectors to facilitate their participation in solid waste management including door to door collection of waste.*

*(h) setup material recovery facilities or secondary storage facilities with sufficient space for sorting of recyclable materials to enable informal or authorised waste pickers and waste collectors to separate recyclables from the waste and provide easy access to waste pickers and recyclers for collection of segregated recyclable waste such as paper, plastic, metal, glass, textile from the source of generation or from material recovery facilities;"*

101 Solid Waste Management Rules 2016, notified by Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change ([https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/MSW/SWM\\_2016.pdf](https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/MSW/SWM_2016.pdf))

*Under section 23 regarding the establishment of a State Level Advisory Body, the law mandates the inclusion of: "One representative from reputed Non-Governmental Organisation or Civil Society working for the waste pickers or informal recycler or solid waste management."*

B. Additional provisions and developments under Chile's Recycling and Extended Producer Responsibility Law (20920):

Integrated Management Systems (SIG; Producer Responsibility Organizations) are now required to develop "plans for the formalization of grassroots recyclers" that "must indicate the mechanisms and instruments for training, financing and formalization, aimed at enabling the full integration of waste pickers, indicating the scope and magnitude of the efforts to be made" (Art.13 and Art.40). In September, Chile's National Waste Picker Association (ANARCH) signed an agreement with the SIG Re-Simple to cover the salaries of three people in each reception and storage facility and the operating and main-

tenance expenses. In addition, a fixed and stable rate is agreed for the value of packaging materials. The formalizing effect of these contracts enables waste pickers to be supported by labour legislation, which will enable better working conditions for waste pickers.

This work is heavily dependent on the existing organization of waste pickers, which is helping to establish cooperatives to be eligible for contracts under the new law. It is still unclear how many of the country's 60,000 waste pickers will ultimately benefit (rather than being displaced) under the new law. Waste picker cooperatives will play a strategic role articulating between formalized and non-formalized recyclers. In October 2023 the EPR law was formally initiated and ANARCH, through the national cooperative of certified recyclers CONAREC, has taken administrative control of two clean points and a collection center in the commune of Independencia in Santiago, and a clean point in the commune of Vitacura, the first steps in real integration and just transition.

## ANNEX 2:

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Additional resources and accounts of how waste pickers and IAWP's organizational members are securing or attempting a just transition for their workers.

**ARGENTINA**

- FACCyR (Español): [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1NE-sDCwBQStvkZiFLTpaj\\_PmQd4EXgHPM4DOKhsp6dU/edit#slide=id.g13b1d6eb48e\\_0\\_26](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1NE-sDCwBQStvkZiFLTpaj_PmQd4EXgHPM4DOKhsp6dU/edit#slide=id.g13b1d6eb48e_0_26)
- FACCyR E- Waste, electronics repair (Español): <https://www.facebook.com/fcartoneros/videos/315670275690481>
- Argentina Recicla: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/desarrollosocial/argentinarecicla>  
<https://youtu.be/2z2y7nNsu4E>
- Mapa Federal de Reciclado: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/desarrollosocial/argentinarecicla/mapa-federal-de-reciclado>
- Manual para educación ambiental con inclusión social: [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual\\_pedagogia\\_mds\\_2\\_1.pdf](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/manual_pedagogia_mds_2_1.pdf)

**COLOMBIA**

- <https://app.frame.io/presentations/395b4e8a-0a2b-456c-b0b1-247e77ef60d6>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=sAF7G-gMjFw>

**INDIA**

- SWaCH: <https://youtu.be/ptkDrtnhZAc>
- SWaCH explainer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WyXhISDleU>

**HASIRU DALA**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kObH7XW0j3Y>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_vVPupUDdD0&t=658s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vVPupUDdD0&t=658s)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPyV4hrcmqg>

**ECUADOR**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k76xAFgQQrk>

**MEXICO**

- Lxs Rifadxs de la Basura: <https://www.losrifadosdelabasura.com/>

**SOUTH AFRICA**

- South Africa's waste picker integration work: <https://wastepickerintegration.org/>
- <https://www.lrs.org.za/2022/09/29/how-reclaimers-bargain-struggles-and-successes-of-a-worker-organisation/>

**UNITED STATES**

- Sure We Can: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psKpRLNuaDw&t=1s>
- Ground Score: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqCJWblCIWA>

**GLOBAL**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI2v9RpOeRU>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4DO1\\_ClyNk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4DO1_ClyNk)



# INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE PICKERS

NOVEMBER 2023

## **IAWP's Vision for a Just Transition for Waste Pickers under the UN Plastics Treaty**



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