

Plastics and Trade

Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues

[Update on plastics and the environment](#) ↗

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TRADE IN THE PLASTIC ECONOMY

International **trade flows** are central to the production, consumption and disposal of plastic products. Researchers estimate that more than 300 million metric tonnes of plastics are traded annually, reaching a value of more than **1 trillion \$USD** [1]. Adding plastics embedded in products and used for packaging and transport, the real figures could be far higher.

Trade policy could be part of a comprehensive solution to plastic pollution [2]. Notably, both developed and developing countries express interest in ways cooperation on trade policy could support international efforts to tackle **plastic pollution**. This summary presents current developments on plastic pollution in trade governance, as well as gaps and recommendations for future steps.

CURRENT EFFORTS AND GAPS

Several countries have taken **measures within their borders**, such as restricting imports or exports of plastic waste, banning single use plastics, or using various licensing schemes, labels, taxes and charges [3,4]. However, the impacts of action at the national level is limited due to the globalized nature of the plastic economy.

At the multilateral level, the **Basel Convention** regulates trade of plastic waste as of 2021 [5]. Plastic pollution has been raised at the **World Trade Organization** (WTO), notably through the Committee on Trade and the Environment (CTE). In 2020, an informal dialogue to identify opportunities for enhanced trade cooperation on plastics was launched by a coalition of WTO members that recognize the rising

environmental, health and economic cost of plastic pollution, the role of trade across the life cycle of plastics and gaps in cooperation on trade-related dimensions of the plastic pollution crisis [6].

NEXT STEPS

Trade policy can contribute to global efforts to reduce plastic pollution and promote circularity in ways that complement the work underway in other international fora.

- ▶ Restrict the **export** of plastic products that are restricted domestically
- ▶ Promote trade in non-plastic **substitutes** and **waste management technologies**, by reducing or removing tariffs and non-tariff barriers
- ▶ Remove environmentally-harmful **subsidies** that drive the expansion of the plastics sector, especially fossil fuel subsidies
- ▶ Explore diverse global **policy options**, including hard law and soft law
- ▶ Support the implementation of the Basel Convention's **Amendments**
- ▶ Identify where international **standards** are needed to promote more environmentally sustainable plastics trade
- ▶ Share **information** and national experiences on the relevance of trade policy to national plastic pollution reduction efforts and ways to use it
- ▶ Increase **coherence** within governments on environment and trade issues
- ▶ Explore tools to address **capacity** constraints in implementation of trade policy
- ▶ Foster **collaboration** between scientists and businesses to develop environmentally sustainable products, including substitutes for plastics
- ▶ Support further **research** on trade flows in plastics and policy options