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.

TRADE IN THE PLASTIC ECONOMY

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.