



Just Transition in the Global Plastics Treaty

For Prelims: [Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee](#), [India Plastics Pact](#), [Project REPLAN](#), [GoLitter Partnerships Project](#)

For Mains: [Just Transition](#), Environmental Governance and Multilateral Agreements, Inclusive Development and Vulnerable Sections

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Why in News?

The negotiations for the [Global Plastics Treaty](#) initiated under the **United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolution 5/14** (March 2022), have brought attention to the need for a [Just Transition](#) ensuring that efforts to end plastic pollution are both environmentally sustainable and socially fair.

- Part one of the 5th session of the [Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee \(INC-5.1\) on plastic pollution](#) held in Busan (2024) emphasized the need for stronger legal recognition and protections for informal waste workers and other vulnerable communities.

Note: The INC, set up by [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) under the **UNEA resolution 5/14**, is tasked with creating a **legally binding treaty to tackle plastic pollution across its full life cycle**.

- INC-1 was held in Uruguay (2022), INC-2 in Paris (2023), INC-3 in Nairobi (2023), INC-4 in Ottawa (2024), and INC-5.1 in Busan (2024). INC-5.2 is scheduled for Geneva (August 2025).

Why is the Inclusion of 'Just Transition' Critical in the Global Plastics Treaty?

- **Ensuring Fairness, and Inclusivity:** A just transition **ensures fairness and inclusivity** in the shift to low-carbon, sustainable economies by **protecting workers and vulnerable communities**. It seeks to avoid creating new injustices while trying to fix existing ones.
 - It promotes **green jobs, retraining, and social protection**, especially for informal waste workers.
- **Protecting Workers in Transition to a Plastic-Free Economy:** Workers across the value chain (from production to disposal) are at **risk of exclusion or economic displacement as countries move towards banning plastics** and promoting sustainable alternatives.
 - Informal waste pickers contribute significantly to plastic recycling (**often over 50% of urban waste recovery in developing nations**), yet lack recognition and legal

protection.

- **Gaps in the Draft Treaty on Just Transition:** The draft Global Plastics Treaty recognizes waste pickers' contributions **but lacks binding protections**.
 - It fails to define their roles in informal sectors, and Articles 8 and 9 of the Treaty **merely encourage inclusion without mandating obligations**, excluding informal workers from engagement. Article 11 lacks financial support for just transition programs.
 - A 'Just Transition' ensures waste pickers are not marginalized in the shift to sustainability. Without binding protections, they risk economic displacement. A clear framework is essential for their inclusion, social protection, and retraining for greener jobs.

Where do Countries Stand on Just Transition in the Global Plastics Treaty?

- **India:** It agrees with **Just Transition provisions** but stresses that implementation should align with **national regulations and local contexts**.
 - At INC-5.1 in Busan, India called for a clear scope for the **Global Plastics Treaty**. It urged avoiding overlaps with existing agreements like the [Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions](#) or the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**.
 - India also stressed the treaty must follow **Rio Declaration (1992) principles**, especially [common but differentiated responsibilities](#), national priorities, and the **right to development for developing countries**.
- **European Union (EU):** Advocates for safe working conditions and legal recognition of informal workers, emphasizing fair conditions across the plastics lifecycle.
- **Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS):** Proposes inclusion of indigenous **people and local communities** in the Just Transition process, recognizing their vulnerability to environmental degradation.
- **US and African Group:** Both support existing provisions, with an emphasis on involving children, youth, and waste pickers. The African Group has reservations on the legal recognition of informal workers.
- **Iran:** Calls for financing, technology transfer, and capacity-building, but **disagrees** on terms like **'vulnerable groups' and 'workers' and resists legal recognition** of waste management cooperatives.

Global Plastic Pollution

- According to the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#), over 460 million tonnes of plastic is produced yearly, with 20 million tonnes leaking into the environment, threatening ecosystems, biodiversity, and the climate.
- In 2019, **macro-plastics** made up 88% of the 20 million tonnes of plastic leaking into the environment, mostly from single-use items like bags, bottles, and cups.

Plastic Pollution in India

- **Plastic Pollution:** According to the **UN Development Programme (UNDP)**, India generates **9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste annually**, with 40% uncollected polluting rivers, streets, and contributing **4% to national emissions**.
 - Rapid urbanisation and rising demand for plastic packaging are worsening the problem. Growth of **e-commerce** has led to more non-recyclable plastic waste.
 - Waste management infrastructure is weak, with more **uncontrolled dumpsites than sanitary landfills**. **Open burning** is widespread, causing toxic emissions and health hazards. The [EPR \(Extended Producer Responsibility\)](#) system is poorly enforced.
 - According to the **FICCI**, India may lose **USD 133 billion** in material value from plastic packaging waste by 2030.
- **India's Initiatives to Curb Plastics:**
 - [Plastic Waste Management \(Amendment\) Rules, 2024](#): Strengthen plastic waste governance by **mandating annual waste assessments** by local bodies, introducing a centralized registration portal, and requiring online reporting for better monitoring.
 - [India Plastics Pact](#): It unites stakeholders to cut plastic use through time-bound targets,

innovation, and accountability, aligned with global circular economy principles.

- **Project REPLAN (REducing PLastic from Nature):** Initiated by the [Khadi and Village Industries Commission](#), focuses on reducing plastic waste by incorporating it into handmade paper production.
- **Un-Plastic Collective:** Voluntary initiative launched by the UNEP-India, CII, and WWF-India, where companies commit to time-bound actions to eliminate, reuse, and replace plastics through a circular economy approach.

What Should be the Roadmap for Operationalizing Just Transition within the Global Plastics Treaty?

- **Binding Provisions:** Ensure key provisions related to Just Transition should be legally binding rather than voluntary to ensure accountability.
 - Ensure Just Transition references [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Conventions](#), national labour laws, and **UN human rights frameworks** to ensure strong enforcement and protection of workers' rights within the Global Plastics Treaty.
- **Definitional Clarity and Inclusivity:** Definitions must explicitly recognize informal waste workers, especially waste pickers, as critical stakeholders in plastic recovery and management.
 - Legal recognition of these workers will ensure they are integrated into both national and international policy frameworks and are provided with appropriate protections.
- **Institutional Mechanisms:** Establish a global **Just Transition Fund** to support vulnerable workers and facilitate green infrastructure.
 - A dedicated fund can better help retrain workers to integrate them into formal waste systems, boost [circular economy](#) efforts, and **prevent rising inequality or job loss during the plastic phase-out**.
- **Link Just Transition to Technology Transfer and Capacity Building:** Access to clean plastic management technologies should come with **safeguards for affected workers**. This ensures they're not pushed out or left behind during the shift to greener alternatives.
 - Support South-South collaboration on low-cost, decentralised recycling tech. Include mandatory capacity-building programs to help countries integrate informal workers into formal waste systems.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the significance of integrating 'Just Transition' into the Global Plastics Treaty. How can it address both environmental and social inequalities?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2016)

	Terms sometimes seen in the news	Their origin
1.	Annex-I Countries	Cartagena Protocol
2.	Certified Emissions Reductions	Nagoya Protocol
3.	Clean Development Mechanism	Kyoto Protocol

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only

- (c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

Q. In India, 'extend producer responsibility' was introduced as an important feature in which of the following? (2019)

- (a) The Bio-medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998
(b) The Recycled Plastic (Manufacturing and Usage) Rules, 1999
(c) The e-Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011
(d) The Food Safety and Standard Regulations, 2011

Ans: (c)

Mains:

Q: What are the impediments in disposing the huge quantities of discarded solid waste which are continuously being generated? How do we remove safely the toxic wastes that have been accumulating in our habitable environment? **(2018)**

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