

## Prioritise Reuse and Refill Systems over Recycling — an easy, safe and effective solution to plastic pollution.

Non-toxic reuse and refill systems are effective, and readily available solutions to plastic pollution. Many such systems are already in place around the world, and with supportive policies, and multi-sector collaborations, they can be scaled to bring measurable reductions in plastic pollution—by as much as 40% by 2040—while driving economic development. The transition to reuse systems can begin immediately in settings that require least infrastructure change, least new investment and least consumer behaviour change—such as in closed systems.

Single-use plastic leakage into the environment could be reduced by 80% by 2040 using systems already available such as reusable packaging, whilst reuse systems can provide a 32% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, through reduced material production and disposal, even after accounting for the increased transport and washing required for reuse systems. For example, in the EU if 50% of packaging was reusable by 2030 for the food and drink on-the-go, e-commerce and household care sectors, this would save 3.7 tonnes MT of CO<sub>2</sub>, 10 billion cubic metres of water and 28 MT of waste per year [1]. Reuse and refill approaches also surpass recycling in effectiveness at reducing plastic waste.

These systems are diverse, tailored by local contexts to meet community needs. It is essential to include those most impacted in decision-making, ensuring solutions fit specific situations. The Treaty must include Just Transition principles that protect rights and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, waste pickers and other workers under informal and cooperative settings, vulnerable communities and workers at all stages of the plastic value chain. In the ongoing negotiations, a broader systems-thinking approach should emphasise reuse over product-specific or recycling-based strategies. This includes - for INC-5/treaty text focusing on enablers to scale reuse systems, including establishing global targets, setting control measures, setting clear mandate for establishing further requirements and guidelines, prioritising waste prevention, ensuring just transitions and prioritising financial support and capacity-building initiatives.

For INC-5, there is a minimum need for the global plastics treaty text outcomes to include:

- A core obligation for each Party to adopt control measures to support reuse and refill systems, including reference to priority product categories, with a view to achieve a globally set reuse target.
- An obligation for each Party to prioritise measures supporting reuse and refill over recycling, in line with the waste hierarchy (noting that reusable products should also be designed to be recyclable at the end of life). Parties should also be encouraged to support the development of reuse systems as alternatives to plastic products listed to be phased out/restricted (until Article 3), as relevant, rather than reverting to material substitution.
- A mandate and a process for Parties to develop work further on reuse and strengthen the implementation through the Conference of Parties. This should include minimum design and performance criteria for reuse systems, ensuring toxic-free and sustainable outcomes.
- Key definitions separating Reuse, Reuse systems, Return and Refill, Repair, Repurposing, and Refurbishment.
- Explicit references to reuse and refill systems in other parts of the instrument, notably with regards to the means of implementation. For example, Article 12 of the Chair's third non-paper refers to capacity building for collecting, sorting and recycling, but fails to refer to reuse, while capacity building on reuse and refill systems would also be beneficial to an effective implementation of the Treaty obligations.
- Mandate clear targets for: Plastic consumption reduction; Sector-specific reuse targets and Bans on single-use plastics

Action to scale up reuse, refill systems is not contingent on the treaty—there are opportunities that can start today to scale up reuse and refill systems. There are already many reuse and refill systems in place around the world that are ready to be scaled.

[1] [https://plasticpolicy.port.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Making-reuse-a-reality-report\\_GPPC.pdf](https://plasticpolicy.port.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Making-reuse-a-reality-report_GPPC.pdf), p. 16

## Background information

- Transitioning from single-use to reuse models presents one of the biggest opportunities to reduce plastic pollution (it is estimated that moving to reuse models can provide over 20% reduction in total annual plastic leakage to the ocean by 2040) and can create economic opportunity, including creating jobs in the value chain. A shift to reuse also has economic and financial benefits such as reduced costs for resource use (e.g. water, materials) and waste management, and increased savings for businesses over time.
- Individual countries and businesses alone cannot realise the shift to reuse at a global scale without targets, guiding principles, definitions and parameters for reuse systems that will be the basis for national legislation applied consistently across the globe.
- Scaling reuse requires a globally coordinated approach to create the system and conditions for supply chain cooperation, harmonisation of product design, and a level of infrastructure harmonisation (noting that infrastructures may need to be adapted depending on the context) and a level economic playing field.
- There is clarity on what is needed to design a system for reuse that will allow to maximise environmental, community and economic benefits: scaled and shared infrastructure, standardised packaging, high return rates as well as cooperation between different stakeholders (communities, workers—including waste workers, business, policy, finance, consumers). There is also clarity around product categories where reuse could be implemented immediately (Prefilled beverages, consumer delivery packaging, takeaway food and beverage; Business-to-business (B2B) packaging in closed-loop operations; on-site single-use plastic products). Policy measures at a global and national level have a critical role to play to create the right enabling conditions for these.
- There are multiple examples of where reuse and refill systems are already established around the world and are available models to enhance capacity of MS. Protecting the existing reuse systems: Many of those existing systems are downsizing or disappearing and there is a strong need to protect them and enlarge them. The use of throw away packaging is growing at the expense of reusable packaging reduction.
- Stress the importance of involvement of civil society, waste pickers and other workers, and reuse and refill practitioners and the need to ensure just transitions. There must be a recognition of existing reuse systems, stakeholders and practitioners, and the treaty must develop support mechanisms and interventions to allow existing systems and the involved stakeholders to contribute, participate in and be incorporated into the reuse economy shaped by the treaty.
- It is critical that the reuse and refill systems put in place are non-toxic, so that reusable products are safe to use and reuse.