

Scaling Impact



The Plastics Pact Network's Six-Year Journey
Towards Eliminating Plastic Pollution and Waste

A report from



ELLEN MACARTHUR
FOUNDATION

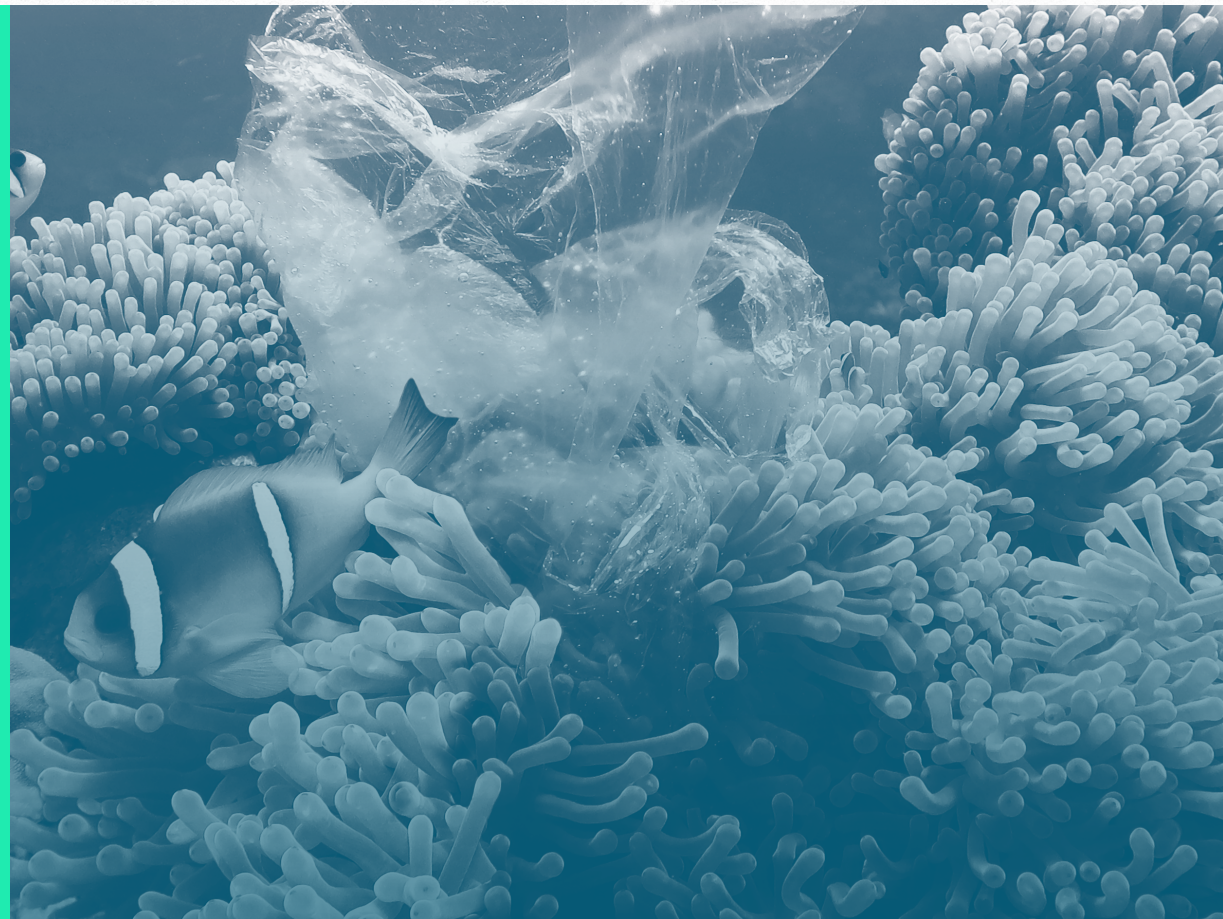




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Preface





The way that we currently produce and use plastics poses a major risk to people and the planet. The world produces 142.6 million tonnes of plastic packaging every year¹, the vast majority ending up in landfills, incinerators – or worse – the environment. Continuing the current trajectory, 30 million tonnes of plastic will end up in the environment annually by 2040, with serious consequences for the natural world as well as for human health².

Tackling the challenge of plastic pollution requires global, national and local action and change. So too will implementing a future Global Treaty on Plastics: a legally binding instrument that is currently being negotiated by 175 countries convened by the UN Environment Programme.

The Plastics Pact Network is a globally coordinated response to this world-wide problem. There is now a Pact on every continent, forming a global Network involving

over 900 local and global organisations. Each Pact brings together businesses, government bodies, NGOs, research organisations and citizens of a country or region with a programme of action and targets tailored to the local context, yet at the same time all Pacts are aligned under one common global vision: to create a circular economy for plastics, and so eliminate plastic waste and pollution.

Six years in, Plastics Pacts are a proven model for tackling plastic pollution. Thanks to Plastics Pact members, billions of problematic or unnecessary plastic items have been eliminated; design for reusability, recyclability and composability in practice and at scale has increased by 23%; and incorporation of recycled plastics back into packaging has increased by 44%.



¹ [OECD \(2022\) Global Plastics Outlook - Economic Drivers, Environmental Impacts and Policy Options](#)

² [OECD \(2023\) Towards Eliminating Plastic Pollution by 2024. A Policy Scenario Analysis, Interim Findings.](#)



About this report

In this report we are proud to share some of the excellent work of Plastics Pacts around the world. We look at how these Plastics Pacts have been tackling the shared challenges that we face in aiming to eliminate plastic pollution. We go into more detail on how the Plastics Pacts work and the progress that has been made in different countries against the Pact targets.

The past six years have helped us gather the key players behind a common vision, set baselines, develop roadmaps rooted in the local context and build unprecedented levels of transparency and quality data. This is only the start of our journey to a truly circular economy. The problem is still immense and we urgently need to see change go further and faster across the plastics value chain.

As part of the solution, the Plastics Pact Network continues to grow in geography, scale, membership and influence. Sharing best practice around the globe helps to drive reuse initiatives and allows us to ensure that materials placed on the market are designed for recyclability, in the way that they can be collected, processed and reincorporated.

This report is complemented by a compilation of case studies that feature the work being done by the Plastics Pacts at a national level, including:

- Eliminating problematic and unnecessary plastic packaging and items
- Ensuring that packaging is designed for collection and recycling
- Developing reuse and refill systems and models
- Working with the waste collection and recycling sector (including the informal waste sector) to improve the quality and quantity of waste recycling
- Unlocking the potential of innovation and new technology
- Creating robust end markets for recycled plastic, to stimulate economic demand for recycling
- Delivering citizen engagement and education campaigns
- Influencing policy and investment.

Finally, we look ahead, setting out our ambitious plans for the Plastics Pact Network, as we scale up our efforts to reduce plastic waste. We hope that you will join us.





About us

WRAP is a global environmental NGO transforming our broken product and food systems to power circular living. We catalyse action from policy makers, businesses NGOs and citizens to transform the systems that provide the things we consume to radically reduce waste and carbon emissions.

Our work is focused on preventing problem plastics, transforming the global food system, developing a sustainable system for fashion and textiles and creating sustainable behaviour change. WRAP has offices in the UK, the USA and Australia and works with partners in more than 40 countries.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation is an international charity whose mission is to accelerate the transition to a circular economy in order to tackle some of the biggest challenges of our time, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution. Founded in 2010, we work with our Network of private and public sector decision-makers, as well as academia, to build capacity, explore collaborative opportunities, and design and develop circular economy initiatives and solutions. Since its creation, the Foundation has emerged as a global thought leader, putting the circular economy on the agenda of decision-makers around the world. Through collaboration, our work in key areas such as plastics, food, and fashion, shows real change can happen. It now needs to happen faster and on a much greater scale.



02

Executive Summary





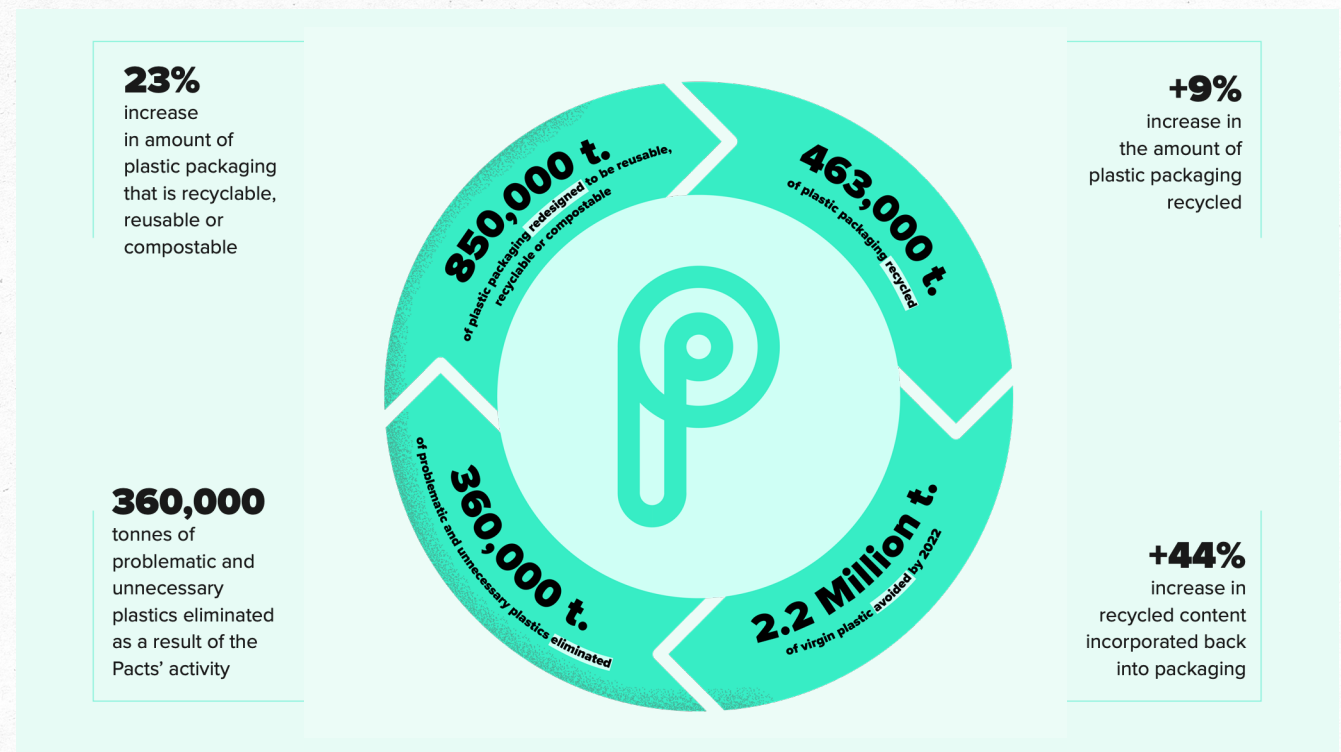
Plastics Pacts are a proven model for dealing with plastic pollution at pace. In 2018, WRAP and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation launched the UK Plastics Pact. Six years later, a dozen Plastics Pacts in countries representing over two billion people, and spread across all continents, form a global network with a proven track record of delivering real impact towards eliminating plastic waste and pollution. This report shares the impact and learnings from the past six years and looks ahead at how Plastics Pacts will continue to be a driving force of local, collaborative action around the world, informing and complementing national policy and a Global Plastics Treaty.

Plastics Pacts have mobilised over 900 organisations in 19 countries around the world to collaborate towards a common vision and targets. Each Pact brings together businesses from across the full value chain, government bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders at national level. In Pact countries, their members collectively account for an average of 33%³ of the plastic packaging that is placed on the market, all united behind a common vision of a circular economy which is aligned with the Global Commitment.

³ This figure does not consider Pacts with 2030 targets (India, Kenya and Colombia).

The Plastics Pacts are delivering impact on the ground and at scale towards eliminating plastic waste and pollution. Together, Plastic Pacts have:

- Achieved the elimination of over 360,000 tonnes of problematic and unnecessary plastics, meaning that tens of billions of items have been removed from circulation.
- Redesigned more than 850,000 tonnes of plastic packaging so that it is reusable, recyclable or compostable at scale and
- Increased recycled content in packaging by 44%, meaning that over 2.2 million tonnes of virgin plastic were avoided by 2022.
- Seen a 9% increase in the amount of plastic packaging recycled in their countries, equating to 463,000 tonnes.





Plastics Pacts are well-established platforms for collaboration, evidence-based knowledge creation and sharing, and creating transparency. Plastics Pacts facilitate impactful action by fostering local and global collaboration across the value chain, boasting over 70 working groups and 100+ publications, including guidance, tools, reports and research findings, as well as the implementation of pilots and collaborative projects. Pacts have made real changes happen on the ground by taking action such as creating strategies to increase recycled plastic in priority packaging applications, building insights on the requirements to scale up reuse and refill models, aligning design-for-recyclability rules, piloting new inclusive collection systems and developing behaviour change strategies to increase citizen engagement.

While the Network has been active for the past six years, many of the Plastics Pacts only launched within the past three years; this impressive impact has been achieved in a relatively short timeframe – indicating that much more is possible.

Pacts enable evidence-based decisions through public annual reporting, enhancing transparency and informing business and government decisions at a national and global level. With 27 annual reports providing quantitative data and qualitative case studies, the Plastics Pact Network shares insights on the challenges of transitioning to a circular economy in plastics; in learning from one another, Plastics Pacts accelerate and direct focus towards innovative solutions and best practice.

Plastics Pacts encourage a just transition by promoting inclusive recycling. With over 2.4 million informal waste pickers in Plastic Pact countries, informal waste sector associations are Pact members in South Africa, Kenya, Chile and India. This has allowed the Pacts to understand the major challenges faced by the informal waste collection and recycling sector, helping to raise their voice with businesses and governments, and supporting a just transition to new systems.

The Plastics Pact Network is demonstrating the swift and impressive impact that can be achieved through collaborative voluntary action, but this is not enough. A large part of the industry is not yet taking action (representation in Pacts is 33%) and although significant progress has been made, Pacts will not meet all 2025 targets, facing challenges in areas such as scaling reuse, expanding collection and recycling infrastructure and addressing flexible packaging. The learnings so far reinforce the need for additional, and more ambitious, binding policy measures, as well as accelerated voluntary business action. This cannot be an either/ or: both are crucial to tackling plastic waste and



pollution at the pace and scale required.

Voluntary action needs to be complemented by policy that creates the right incentives and regulatory frameworks to support further elimination of unnecessary packaging, simplification of packaging design, scaling-up of reuse/refill systems, collection and recycling of all recyclable plastics, and greater investment in critical infrastructure.



The international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity. To end plastic pollution globally, we need ambitious regulation to complement and accelerate voluntary efforts and create a level playing field for all businesses.

An ambitious Global Plastics Treaty, with legally binding global rules, would significantly accelerate policy and business action around the world. Establishing legally-binding global measures is essential to level the playing field for all countries and businesses, guaranteeing a minimum level of ambition and impact worldwide. This framework creates the necessary conditions to attract vital investments in infrastructure, innovation and skills on a global scale.

Even with an ambitious Global Plastics Treaty, there will be a continuing need for voluntary action and Plastics Pacts, in driving greater ambition specific to the opportunities in each country, and in advancing innovation and knowledge exchange.

The Plastics Pacts are uniquely placed to inform and support in implementing a future Global Plastics Treaty at national level. They provide a well-established and proven platform to bring together, align and facilitate collaboration between the entire value chain, government bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders at national level. They can inform and enable policymaking and treaty implementation through their large repositories of tools, insights, guidance, and standardised definitions from across the Plastics Pact Network, avoiding the need to start from

scratch, by allowing the adoption of established approaches with greater efficiency. Furthermore, the Pacts' annual and transparent reporting can help measure progress and inform decision-making.

Looking ahead, the Plastics Pact Network will accelerate and further scale its impact at national and global level, by building on the mechanisms in place, the stakeholders mobilised, and the impact and learnings to date. We are looking to 'supercharge' the Plastics Pact Network – accelerating and further scaling its impact at national and global level. To do so, the Network will: (1) increase its focus on key challenges – scaling infrastructure, reuse and flexible packaging; (2) ensure that a just transition is integrated in the circular economy strategy, and (3) increase emphasis on informing policy.

To bring the Plastics Pact Network to this next level, WRAP, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and individual Plastics Pacts are looking for additional funding. We strive for the Plastics Pact Network to be funded through a combination of philanthropic funding and membership fees. Corporate membership fees ensure industry relevance and buy-in, while philanthropic funding supports countries in the Global South with limited resources, and ensures the independence and neutrality required for the Pacts to be trusted partners for policymakers, NGOs and the public. With additional funding, the Plastics Pact Network will be able to realise its ambitious goal to further accelerate business action and policymaking, taking many millions of tonnes of plastic materials out of the environment.

There is a vital mission ahead of us to address the urgent global crisis of plastic waste and pollution; Plastics Pacts will play a significant role in this. With a bold Global Plastics Treaty, revitalised business backing and increased investment, the Plastics Pact Network is uniquely positioned to play a critical role in ending plastic pollution. Together, let's take decisive action and create a more sustainable future for people and our planet.

03

Plastics Pacts

a model for
collaborative action





For the past six years WRAP and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, through the Plastics Pact Network, have been working with partners around the world to address the plastic pollution issue.

Now with over 900 members around the world, the Network creates a valuable space for local and global exchange and collaboration across the plastics value chain. The Network represents the complete range of plastic packaging systems across the Global North and South, working together towards a common vision of eliminating plastic waste and pollution.

NATIONAL PLASTICS PACTS

- Canada
- Chile
- Colombia
- France
- India
- Kenya
- Poland
- Portugal
- South Africa
- United Kingdom
- United States of America
-  - Pact in development: Mexico*

REGIONAL PLASTICS PACT

- Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island Nations (ANZPAC)

+900

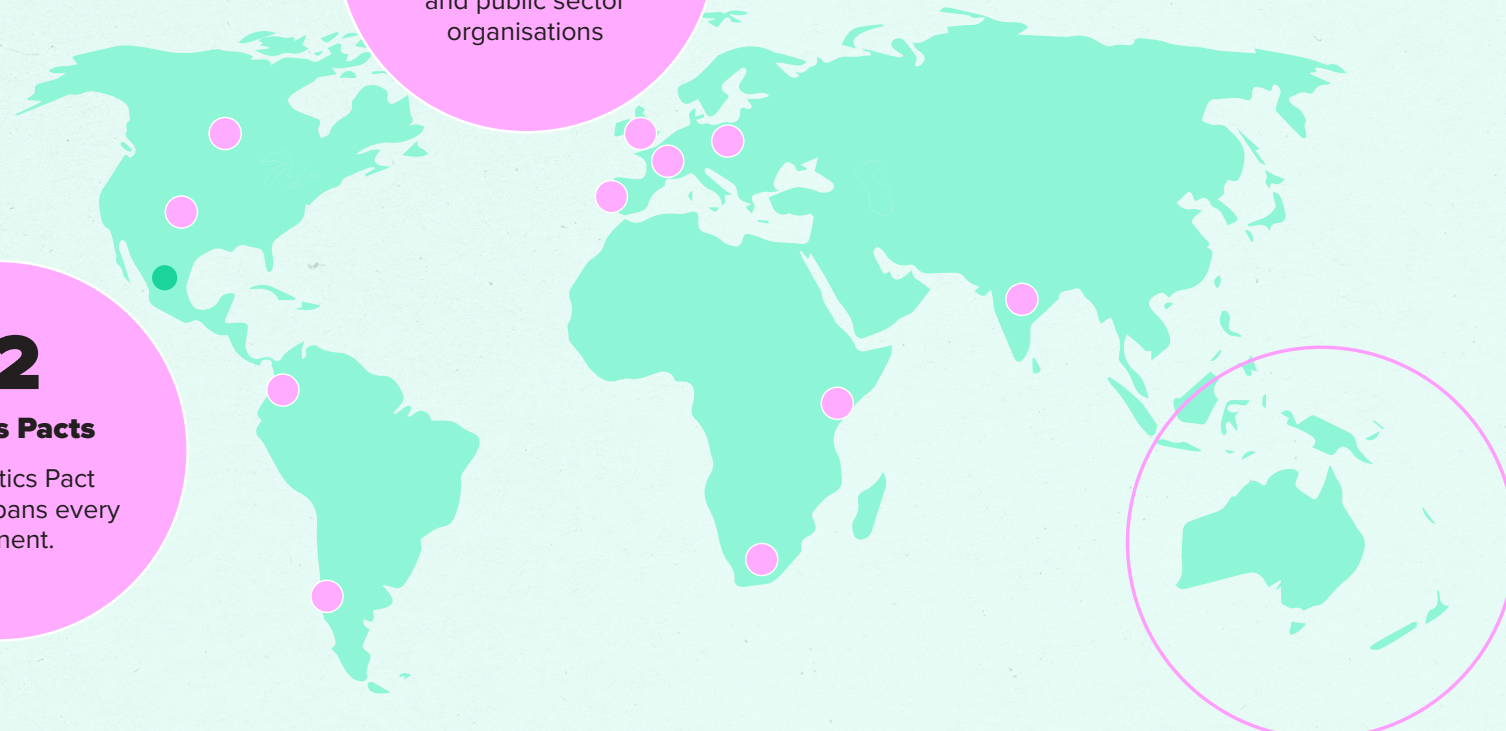
Members

from NGO, business
and public sector
organisations

12

Plastics Pacts

The Plastics Pact
Network spans every
continent.



*At the time of writing this report, the Plastics Pact in Mexico is in development, and has therefore not been included in the impact data or case studies.

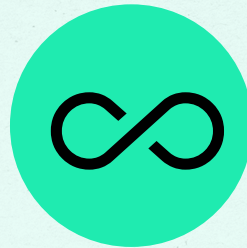


Plastics Pacts around the world are united behind one common vision and around four ambitious time-bound targets which link together to create circularity and impact:



Target 1

Eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastic packaging and items



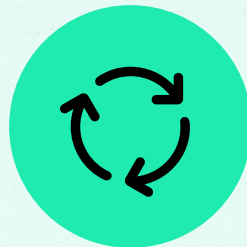
Target 2

Plastic packaging to be reusable or recyclable (or compostable)



Target 3

Increase amount of plastic packaging effectively recycled



Target 4

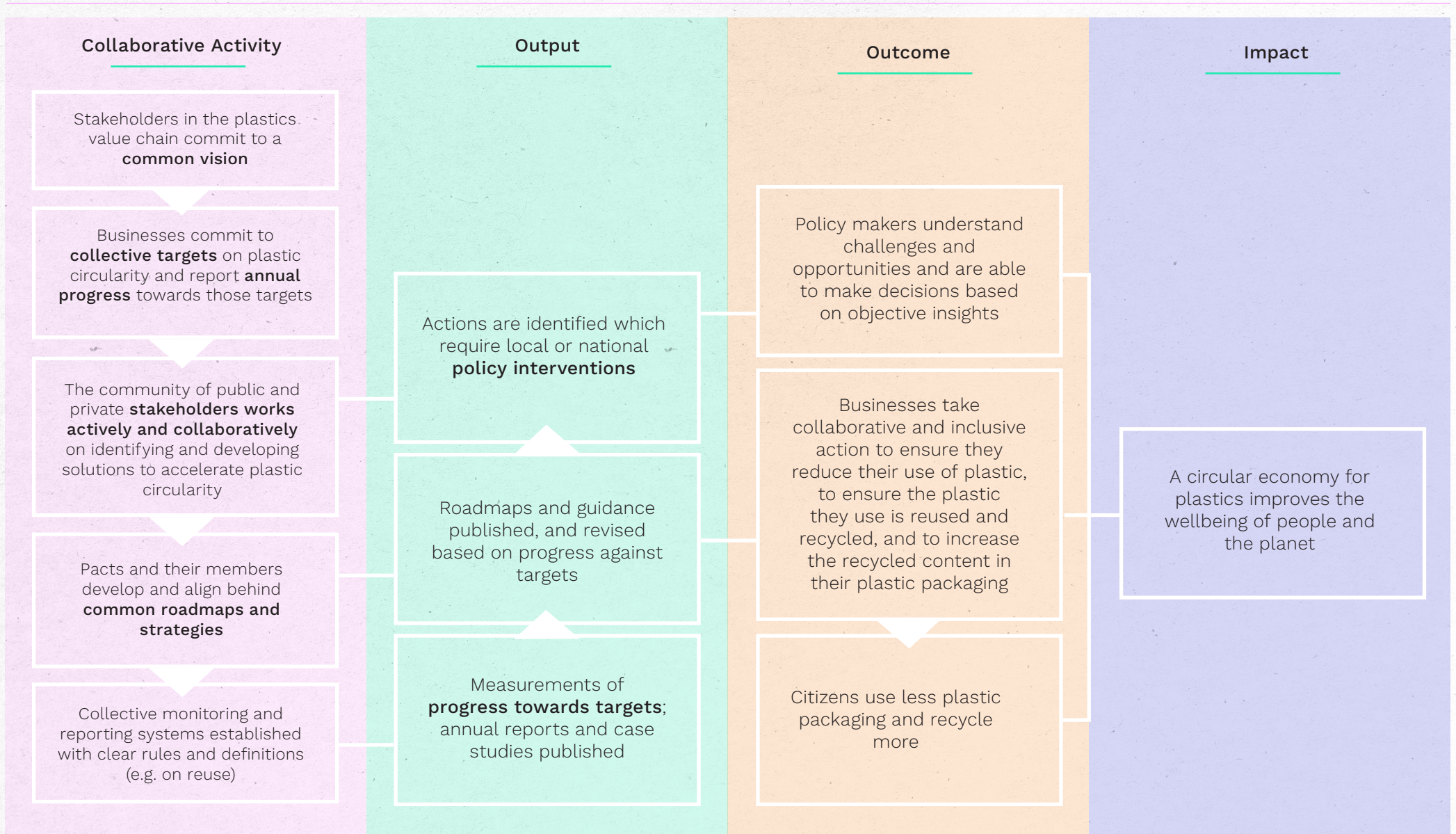
Increase average recycled content across all plastic packaging

Progress towards Pact targets is communicated transparently through public annual reports, improving the availability of data to inform decisions at a national and global level, and leading to clear outcomes and impact ([see the theory of change](#)).





Theory of Change





Plastics Pacts develop shared Roadmaps to reach these targets, addressing systemic issues that go beyond any one business, sector or organisation. Aligning this work globally, including with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and UN Environment Programme's Global Commitment, brings many additional benefits:

- Global businesses can be confident that their national actions align with their global goals and strategy. Similarly, local business members of national Pacts have access to global resources and insights.
- The power of being part of a network ensures that these Pacts do not work in isolation, but rather leverage collective knowledge. Insights and knowledge gained in one Pact can be shared with other Pacts, saving resources and increasing impact. Together we have generated a vast amount of knowledge and insights to be shared, as well as practical tools, to help accelerate the global transition to a circular economy for plastics.
- Global programmes of action can be delivered in multiple countries through the Pact network.

The national (and regional) focus of each Plastics Pact means that programmes of action can be developed that reflect the specific context, e.g. the relevant national policies, waste management structures (especially where the informal waste sector is active), languages, culture and available infrastructure.

Plastics Pacts have had a strategic impact in the countries where they operate, by building

social capital and capacity for knowledge exchange, developing greater accountability through increased transparency, and unlocking investment to accelerate action.

Global brands can set ambitious targets for their national businesses and teams. However, the execution and delivery of change needs to be done at a national level, reflecting the national policies, language and market dynamics. For these reasons engaging with – and signing up to – Plastics Pacts can support achievement of corporate global goals through national action and implementation.





The power of collaborative action

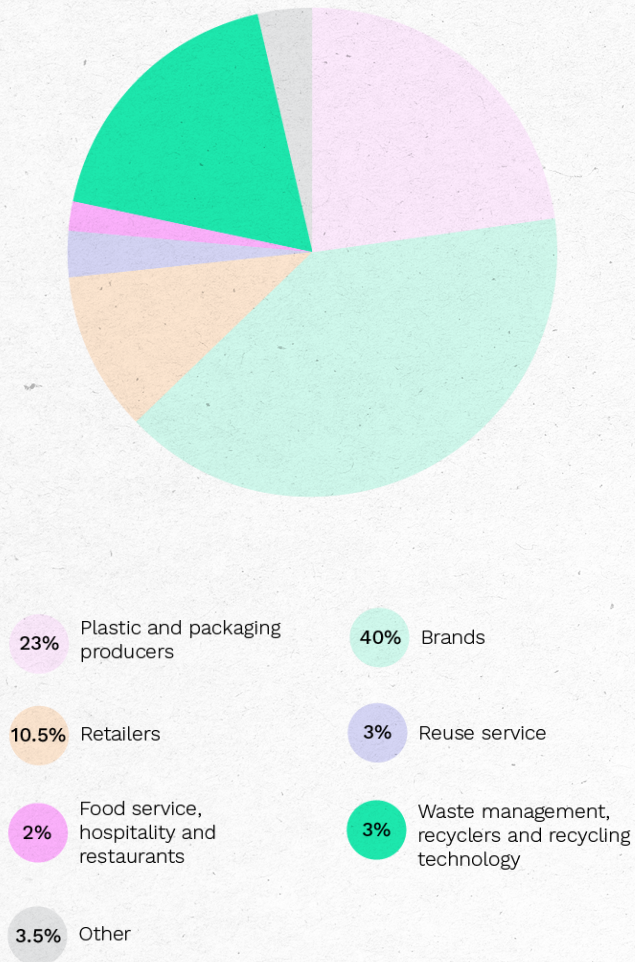
Collaborative action is at the core of the Plastics Pact model. Businesses operate within a complex global system, subject to external controls and shocks. Only by working together can individual businesses help us to move from a linear to a circular business model for plastics packaging.

Plastics Pacts are unique in having members that represent the entire plastics value chain at national or regional level. This helps to ensure that projects, working groups and guidance are based on informed decisions.





Plastic Pact members by type



Collaborative action has helped us to:



Unlock barriers and overcome inertia by aligning sectors around agreed actions and aligning efforts towards a common direction to enhance impact.



Enable **investment to be used effectively** in developing design solutions or providing reuse/ recycling infrastructure. Having sectoral targets and aligned solutions gives investors and innovators confidence



Communicate clearly to citizens and stakeholder groups on the role they can play in a circular economy e.g. by recycling



Send powerful and consistent messages to **policymakers** on how regulations can support action



Drive efficiency by helping businesses to avoid inappropriate or expensive changes or investments: e.g. adopting materials that are not recyclable.

By enabling businesses, governments, NGOs and others to take collective and co-ordinated action at a local, national, regional and global level, Plastics Pacts directly tackle the challenges of plastic pollution, to eliminate the plastics we don't need, innovate to ensure that the plastics we do need are either reusable, recyclable or compostable, and to circulate all plastics that are placed on the market.

The background of the slide is a blue-tinted photograph showing a pair of hands sorting through a large pile of discarded plastic bottle caps. The caps are of various colors and sizes, and the hands are positioned as if they are actively separating or inspecting them. The overall scene suggests a process of recycling or waste management.

04

Looking back

**A proven vehicle to
drive impact**



The impact of the Plastics Pact Network so far

The journey of the Plastics Pact Network started with the first Plastics Pact, launched in the UK in 2018. Now there is a Plastics Pact in every populated continent, covering 19 countries, representing approximately 27% of the world's population and over 40% of global GDP. Notable achievements thus far include:

Outputs

- Members of Plastics Pacts collectively account for 33%⁴ of the plastic packaging that is placed on the market in these countries, indicating that a substantial portion of the industry is engaging with them.
- The impact of the Network goes beyond its 900+ business members and supporters; the associated supply chains represent thousands of suppliers and producers, many of whom are making positive changes based on Plastics Pact recommendations: e.g. retailer Tesco developed its preferred materials list in support of the UK Plastics Pact targets.
- The 70+ collaborative action groups within the Network are concentrating their efforts on addressing key challenges related to plastics across the globe, and adapting to meet the evolving needs of members and the market.
- 100+ guidance documents, tools, reports and research findings have empowered Pact members and the wider sector to take meaningful action (see diagram 'research and guidance').

Impact

- Achieved the elimination of over 360,000 tonnes of problematic and unnecessary plastics, meaning that tens of billions of items have been removed from circulation.
- Redesigned more than 850,000 tonnes of plastic packaging so that it is reusable, recyclable or compostable at scale and
- Increased recycled content in packaging by 44%, meaning that over 2.2 million tonnes of virgin plastic were avoided by 2022.
- Seen a 9% increase in the amount of plastic packaging recycled in their countries, equating to 463,000 tonnes.

Since 2018, funding in excess of £6 million has helped to establish Plastics Pacts and develop research and innovation initiatives benefiting multiple Pacts

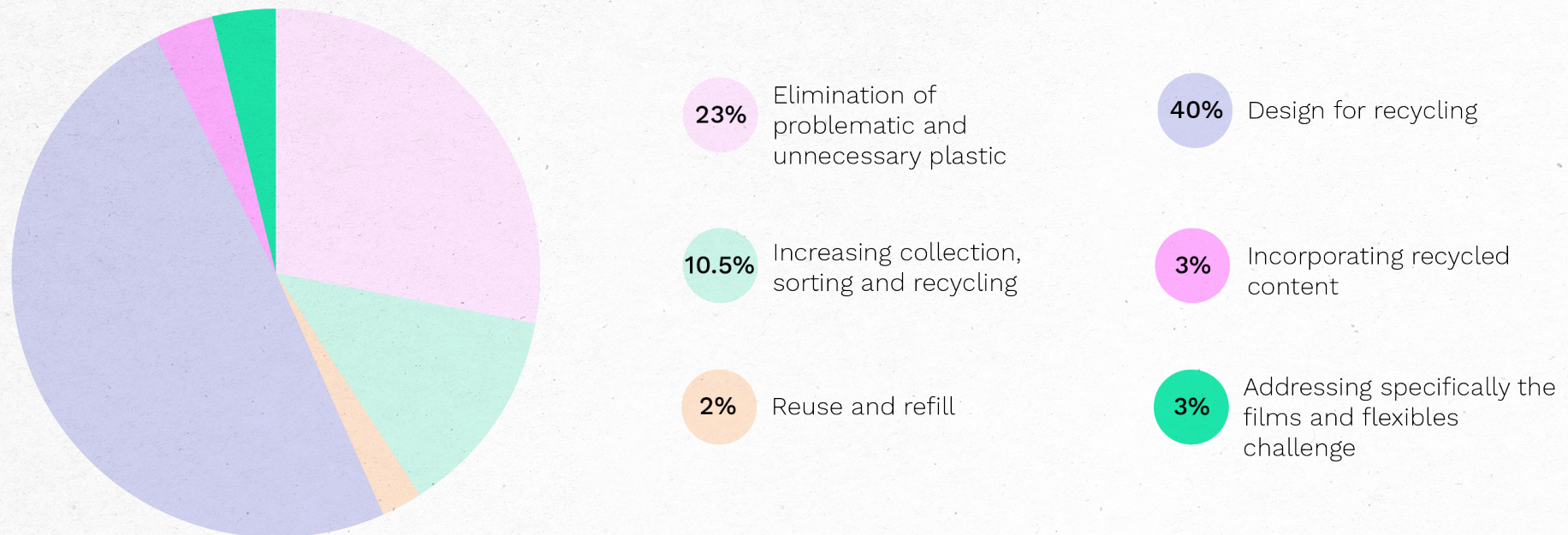
⁴ *This figure does not consider Pacts with 2030 targets (India, Kenya and Colombia).*



Research and Guidance

The Plastics Pact Network has developed a wide range of publications that provide insights and guidance to support Plastics Pact members in taking more impactful action individually and collectively. These publications supplement implementation of collective pilots and projects on the ground in Pact countries. The publications include 29 annual reports, 15 roadmaps, 8 whole value chain market data/insights and a further 76 guidance documents and reports that address the following impact areas:

Plastics Pact Network publications on each impact area





23%

increase in amount of plastic packaging that is recyclable, reusable or compostable

+9%

increase in the amount of plastic packaging recycled



360,000

tonnes of problematic and unnecessary plastics eliminated as a result of the Pacts' activity

+44%

increase in recycled content incorporated back into packaging

This is a strong network with value-chain stakeholders, action groups, workstreams and reporting platforms all in place, ready to scale and grow. In adopting the established approach of the Plastics Pact model, businesses and policymakers benefit from greater efficiency and avoid the need to start from scratch.



Progress highlights

UK

99.6% reduction in problematic items

280 billion items removed from sale.

73% of plastic now reusable or recyclable, representing an increase of 8 percentage point from the baseline

20k tonnes of non-detectable packaging removed: a **96%** reduction

61% increase in material recycled in the UK since 2018

Recycled content nearly tripled from **8.5%** in 2018 to **24.1%** in 2022.

Poland

6.6% reduction in primary plastic compared to 2018

9.8% recycled content, up from **5.41%** in 2020

45.5% of packaging suitable for recycling, 2.5 percentage points higher than 2022.

Canada

20%

of plastic packaging recycled, up from 12% in 2019

Recycled content increased from

11%

in 2021 to 12% in 2022.

Portugal

The amount of packaging classed as reuseable, recyclable or compostable increased from 52% in 2019 to

57%

in 2021.

The amount of recycled content increased from 10% in 2019 to

11%

in 2021.



Progress highlights

US

47.7%

of packaging was reusable, recyclable or compostable in 2022, up from 36% in 2021

Recycling levels increased to

9.4%

in 2022, up from 8% in 2021.

India

Recyclable packaging rose from 64% in 2021 to

67%

in 2022

Recycling rate was estimated in 2022 to be

25%

Chile

10.6%

of the plastic packaging placed on the market was reusable, up from 7.2% in 2019

42.3%

reduction in problematic and unnecessary plastics identified in 2019

South Africa

Output recycling rate has increased from

29.6%

in 2020 to 35% in 2022

Recycled content increased from

19%

in 2020 to 24% in 2022



Progress by target

Target 1

Eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastics

The focus of target 1 is to eliminate problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging, under the control of Plastics Pacts members and the wider market, through redesign, innovation, and alternative (reuse) delivery models. This focus enables the network to prioritise items that:

- Are not reusable, recyclable, or compostable in practice and at scale⁵.
- Contain, or require in manufacturing, hazardous chemicals that pose a significant risk to human health or the environment.
- Can be avoided (or replaced by a reuse model) while maintaining utility.
- Hinders or disrupts the recyclability or compostability of other items.
- Have a high likelihood of being littered or ending up in the natural environment.

All Pacts use common criteria to determine whether plastics are problematic and/or unnecessary in the context of their own markets, resulting in 11 Pacts producing an agreed list of items to eliminate, with more in development.

⁵ <https://emf.thirdlight.com/link/yohiss18qn6m-rs0oo3/@/preview/1?o> (Page 9)





Despite each Pact developing lists based on their own markets needs, there is a high degree of alignment between the initiatives:





Progress trends

The lists developed by the Pacts cover over 500,000 tonnes of material and hundreds of billions of individual items, and have resulted in 360,000 tonnes of problematic and unnecessary plastics being eliminated by Pact members. In the UK alone, problematic single-use items agreed to eliminate fell by 99.6% between 2018 and 2022, meaning that billions of items are no longer in circulation and that overall plastic material usage has fallen by 8%. Members of the Canadian Pact have committed to removing 8 of 15 problematic items by the next reporting cycle.

Pact members are supported in removing these problematic and unnecessary items by targeted Pact resources, e.g. the Polish Pact has issued guidance on removing items such as PVC, PS and carbon black; the UK Plastics Pact has produced guidance on selling fruit and vegetables unwrapped.

Refer to the [case study annex](#) for more details and examples from the Plastics Pact Network

Challenges to overcome



1

For most of the identified problematic plastics - including some of the most challenging ones like multimaterial films - existing solutions and innovations are being developed. However, most of these either need to be scaled up to meet demand or are not competitive in the market. There is a funding gap for readying these solutions for businesses to adopt them at scale.



2

Many problematic items have already been acknowledged by governments and businesses who are taking action to eliminate them. However, in some cases the proposed solutions can cause unintended consequences, shifting the problem from one material to another.



3

The removal of unnecessary packaging offers clear environmental advantages, however the term unnecessary impacts all sectors and covers a number of areas such as multi-packing, selling loose or excessive head space. The lack of clear definitions impacts progress, so developing definitions provides clarity on items added to the lists and gives business tools to use when reviewing their own portfolios.



Target 2

100% recyclable, reusable or compostable packaging

The Plastics Pacts' efforts for this target focus on two actions:

- Transitioning to reuse and refill systems where possible, and
- Ensuring that the plastic packaging we do need is designed for end-of-life, being suitable for recycling or composting.

Together with target 1, the aim is to reduce the amount of plastic packaging placed on the market and to create a more streamlined and 'cleaner' waste stream with greater value for collection, to increase effective recycling (target 3).

The Plastics Pacts have supported their members in redesigning their plastic packaging, to ensure that the packaging placed on the market is reusable, recyclable or compostable, in practice and at scale. The Plastics Pacts Network members have redesigned 850,000 tonnes of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable and compostable at scale. This means that there has been a 23% increase in the plastic packaging placed on the market by Plastics Pact members around the world that is reusable/ recyclable/ compostable, with some countries reaching up to 82% of design for circularity.

Progress trends



1

Pacts have coordinated and/or supported the development and implementation of industry design guidances, which has enabled significant shifts in the market such as the removal of colour from PET bottles and the simplification of material streams to the core polymers of PET, PE and PP. Most elements in this guidance are relevant at a national and global level, which means there is a valuable exchange of solutions from one Pact to another.



2

Pacts have encouraged the implementation of reuse pilots and although many have not reached the scale expected, the learnings and insights collected have helped develop a much better understanding on the most feasible applications and the requirements to take these models to the next level.



3

The Pacts' reporting requirements have forced businesses to have a more granular understanding of their plastic packaging portfolio and the recyclability of each format, enabling them to take more informed action and also producing valuable market insights for all stakeholders in the value chain.



Challenges to overcome



1

Scaling-up reuse and refill is a key priority for the Plastics Pact Network. To transition from numerous pilot projects to widespread market adoption, it is imperative either to implement more incentivising regulations or to secure commitments from businesses to engage in collaborative actions. This could involve standardising packaging designs or establishing shared infrastructure to facilitate the expansion of reuse and refill models⁶.



2

Films and flexibles are still considered non-recyclable in practice in most countries. We need to see a transition to recyclable mono-materials and increase collection rates to ensure that films and flexibles become recyclable and recycled in practice and at scale.



3

Barriers used in packaging offer extended shelf-life for products, but are often impeding their recyclability. Transitioning to recyclable packaging that preserves shelf-life is a key area of work for the Pacts.

Refer to the [case study annex](#) for more details and examples from the Plastics Pact Network

“

We are committed to designing for circularity and have a vision of zero packaging to landfill. By working closely with the South Africa Plastics Pact and having access to its global network, we have the opportunity to learn and collaborate with key stakeholders, industry, our suppliers and recyclers to tackle plastic pollution and unlock opportunities to create an expanded range of next generation products – expediting progress.

Woolworths, retail business member of the South Africa Plastics Pact

”

⁶ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/scaling-returnable-packaging/overview#:~:text=Scale%20and%20shared%20infrastructure%3A%20sharing,transportation%2C%20provides%20economies%20>



Target 3

Increase the recycling rate of plastic

The aim of this target is to ensure that the recyclable packaging that is placed on the market is effectively collected, sorted and recycled, and that this is measured at a national level. Progress towards this target is highly influenced by the implementation of policies to drive investment in collection, sorting and recycling infrastructure.

This target also has a focus on just transition for waste pickers, in Plastics Pact Network countries where there are informal recycling systems. The voice of waste pickers is starting to be heard and included in strategies and regulations (e.g. laws in Chile, South Africa and Colombia), ensuring that there are safer working conditions as well as fair pay for their services.

More than five million tonnes of plastic packaging were recycled in the last monitored year in Plastics Pact countries. The average effective recycling rate of plastic packaging for all Plastic Pact countries is 21%, reaching up to 55% at a national level.

Progress trends



1

Pacts have facilitated discussions on specific challenges with stakeholders from across the value chain, from packaging producers to recyclers, which have enabled significant developments in mechanical recycling, such as the development of the first post-consumer food-grade PP plant that has achieved FDA approval in the UK.



2

Pacts have taken action ahead of regulation to accelerate progress in complex challenges such as films and flexibles. Pacts in Chile, Canada and the UK are delivering pilots to collect films and flexibles, understand citizen behaviour and explore possible end markets to understand the best models for increasing recycling.



3

In many Pact countries, the informal sector is the main source of material collected for recycling but they do not benefit from safe and fair working conditions. Pacts have been working with informal sector associations to understand their collection models and needs and to bridge communications with public and private stakeholders to ensure the development of inclusive collection and recycling models.

For example in South Africa, there are up to 150,000 informal workers involved in the collection and sorting of plastic waste, contributing to 80% to 90% of material being collected for recycling. The African Reclaimers' Organisation (ARO) has a seat on the Steering Committee of the South Africa Plastics Pact and is involved in the strategic decisions that the Pact makes to advance plastic circularity. Read more in our case study annex.



Challenges to overcome

**1**

Ambitious legislation in the form of well-designed and implemented EPR schemes are required to support business action and increase recycling rates.

**2**

Investment into waste streams is not only financially demanding but timescales for installation of new facilities is a long-term process (typically of 1-2 years), leaving a time lag for benefits to be realised.

**3**

Rigid plastics generally have a sufficient weight/ volume/ value proportion to be collected at scale, including via the informal sector: films and flexibles, however, do not have that value proportion, leaving collection rates especially challenging.

**4**

In formal and informal contexts, citizens play a key role in increasing collection rates, and behaviour change is a complex process that can take a lot of time.

Refer to the [case study annex](#) for more details and examples from the Plastics Pact Network





Target 4

Increase the percentage of recycled plastic in packaging⁵

Target 4 encourages businesses to incorporate post-consumer recycled plastics into their packaging, to replace virgin polymer. By creating demand for recycled plastics, businesses signal to the market the need for increased investment in collection and recycling infrastructure to meet this demand. Materials with higher value, such as PET bottles, tend to have better collection rates.

We are seeing increasing demand for recycled materials in countries such as Poland, where use of recycled content has increased by 80% within three years of data reporting. In South Africa, there has been a 60% increase in recycled primary consumer packaging over the same period, and in the UK, the use of recycled materials has tripled. Plastic Pact members have replaced over 2.2 million tonnes of virgin plastic with recycled plastic. On average, the plastic packaging placed on the market by Plastic Pact members now has 11% recycled content.

Progress trends



1

Pacts have coordinated the development of strategies to increase recycled content in specific applications, identifying the needs for investment in recycling capacity to meet the committed demand. These strategies have helped de-risk investment decisions along the value chain.

For example, the US Plastics Pact has developed a collective strategy on priority resins and formats to increase the incorporation of Post-consumer Recycled Content (PCR) back into packaging and has been working with their Activators (members) to overcome challenges in this process.



2

Pacts have supported the development of trials to increase recycled content in different applications, identifying challenges that have influenced technology advances in mechanical recycling in each local context, from the instalment of washing plants for flexibles in Chile to the development of food-grade HDPE and PP in the UK.



3

Pacts have helped develop better understanding and alignment to bring government attention to the regulatory barriers and lack of standards limiting the use of PCR in packaging.

⁷ [The U.S. Plastics Pact target 4 also includes the incorporation of biopolymers.](#)



Challenges to overcome



1

Without regulatory support and incentives, mechanically recycled materials have limited end markets. A consistent global approach to regulation would streamline applications and ensure that investment was simpler to justify for regulated areas of consumer packaging, relating to food and skin contact.



2

PET currently accounts for a significant proportion of recycled materials. Increasing the proportion of recycled material from PP & PE is a significant hurdle. The restrictions on use of recycled plastic in contact with food limits the uptake in many markets.



3

Driving circularity in films and flexibles is probably the greatest challenge where the levels of contamination in both product and packaging are the highest. They have the highest proportion of food contact and the most demand in terms of performance requirements.





Impact beyond targets

The progress of the Plastics Pact Network is not towards one target in isolation but all targets working together, with the support of governments and citizens. By removing problematic and unnecessary items, designing for recyclability, moving to reuse where possible and maximising collection of materials, we can develop a high-quality stream of materials with value to drive further collection, minimising materials used and (importantly) those entering the environment.

Going beyond the numbers reported, the Plastics Pacts have had a significant structural impact that is crucial to change the plastics system for the benefit of people and the planet.

⁸ [Winnie W. Y. Lau et al.\(2020\) Evaluating scenarios toward zero plastic pollution. Science 369,1455-1461.](#)

1

Transparency & informed decision-making

To track, monitor and report on progress towards their targets, all Pacts collect annual quantified data. This data is sourced from a combination of member data and national waste data reporting.

Quantified progress towards the targets is supported by qualitative case studies and examples from a wider selection of individual Plastics Pact members. Many Pacts provide a level of benchmarking, allowing business members to see how their progress compares with the overall Pact progress. This combination of aggregated and individual progress tracking is powerful, leading to transparency and healthy competition amongst the Pact business membership.

Annual progress tracking against the targets allows the Pact secretariats to inform decision making, and ensure that the necessary programmes and resources are in place. This reporting is also increasing the availability of high quality granular data for businesses and governments to make informed decisions at a national and global level.

This suite of ambitious, collective targets that cover all members, and transparent annual reporting, is a unique and powerful component of the Plastics Pacts.

Refer to the [case study annex](#) for more details and examples from the Plastics Pact Network

2

Just transition

In the face of the escalating global plastic pollution crisis, there is an urgent need for a transformative approach to plastic production, use and disposal. This urgency is both environmental and socio-economic, calling for a holistic approach that addresses both the ecological impact of plastics and the inequalities that are exacerbated by the current linear plastics economy.

A just transition recognises the environmental, social and economic dimensions of the global plastics crisis. It is not enough simply to mitigate environmental damage; we must also ensure that the benefits and burdens of ecological policies are distributed fairly. This approach is rooted in the understanding that environmental justice and social equity are intrinsically linked. As the world strives to address the causes and impacts of plastic pollution, it is imperative that the transition does not exacerbate existing vulnerabilities or create new inequities.



The Plastics Pacts have promoted a Just Transition by recognising and working with informal waste pickers as a key stakeholder in the plastics value chain. There are over 20 million informal waste pickers around the world, who collect, sort and/ or sell materials for recycling – materials that together account for over half of the plastic waste collected for recycling globally⁹. Their contribution to plastic circularity is essential, yet their working conditions usually pose a risk to their health and safety, and lead to unjust livelihoods. This focus recognises the opportunity to significantly improve the quality and remuneration of jobs for informal workers, leveraging their existing capacity to manage resources.

Plastics Pacts have included the voice of the informal waste pickers in defining the local strategies to address plastic waste, in addition to providing support to improve their livelihoods by understanding and attending to their needs, to ensure safety and access to better opportunities.

Refer to the [case study annex](#) for more details and examples from the Plastics Pact Network

⁹ [Ellen MacArthur Foundation and UN Environment Programme, The Global Commitment Five years in: learnings to accelerate towards a future without plastic waste or pollution \(2023\)](#)

3 Unlocking innovation

Many challenges require innovation and pioneering research to overcome them. The Pacts act as a powerful forum for attracting innovation providers, enabling them to showcase and trial their technologies and potential solutions across the sector, rather than just with a single business.

The benefit of the Plastics Pacts' approach to innovation include:

- Pacts being able to secure additional innovation and research investment into a market, through the national and global community
- The respected Pact model, with its significant business membership, providing funders and innovators with an attractive audience to work with – therefore de-risking investment and maximising the chance of market roll-out and commercialisation
- Plastics Pacts across the network facing many common challenges to achieving circularity. Results from innovations that are explored and trialled in one Plastics Pact can be shared across the network, thereby reducing duplication, delay and the need for multiple parallel projects.

Refer to the [case study annex](#) for more details and examples from the Plastics Pact Network

Topical challenges

In working towards the targets over the past years, three major challenges were identified: scaling reuse, addressing flexible plastic packaging, and scaling collection and recycling infrastructure. These challenges are crucial to overcome to achieve a circular economy for packaging. They are systemic in nature and will require bold business innovation and policy interventions.

These challenges are not unique to the Pacts and were also identified as three 'pivotal hurdles' for Global Commitment signatories.⁷ We cover them briefly here, referring to the Global Commitment Five Years in report for more detail.

1 Scaling reuse

Over the past years, the momentum and action on reuse has risen substantially. Despite many pilots and trials, very few new, large-scale reuse business models were established and the overall share of packaging that is reusable remains low. The barriers to scaling-up vary by context and reuse type, and include consumer inertia, concerns over adulteration or hygiene, and challenges around supply chain logistics. The fact that the success of some reuse models hinges on a critical mass of companies embracing reuse and working together, poses a challenge for those aiming to be a first mover.



Concerted efforts from both policy and businesses will be required to overcome this and unlock the many economic and environmental benefits of reuse, a major part of the solution to packaging waste and pollution.

2

Addressing flexible plastic packaging

Flexible packaging such as wrappers, pouches, and sachets, are the fastest growing type of plastic packaging. Given their high functional properties, low weight, and cost-effectiveness, they are used ever more around the world. They are also the most challenging plastic packaging category from a waste and pollution perspective, particularly in regions that lack formal collection systems.

A variety of solution pathways have been explored, from innovation away from flexible packaging to designing flexible plastic packaging to be recyclable, to switching to other materials. A combination of all of these is likely required, depending on the region or product type, and all of these come with their challenges. Overcoming these challenges will require major innovation

¹⁰ [The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Extended Producer Responsibility – a necessary part of the solution to packaging waste and pollution \(2021\)](#)

3

Scaling infrastructure and inclusive recycling

efforts from businesses, as well as strong policy interventions to set the direction and level the playing field.

Infrastructure to collect, sort, and reuse or recycle packaging is fundamental to safely circulate materials in our economy and keep them out of the environment. Without improvements in such infrastructure, tens of millions of tonnes of plastics will continue to end up in the environment every year. There have been many initiatives to improve infrastructure over the last five years. However, at a global scale, the actual improvement in infrastructure has been limited.

A combination of several policy interventions will be needed to scale the required infrastructure. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) stands out as a particularly high priority policy measure to implement around the world, as the only proven mechanism to make the economics of packaging recycling work.¹⁰ The current negotiations for a Global Plastics Treaty offer a unique opportunity to establish and enforce effective and well-designed EPR schemes around the world.

Businesses can support and accelerate this by actively advocating for well-designed, mandatory EPR schemes and designing all their packaging to be reusable or recyclable.

Crucial in the design and implementation of any infrastructure and EPR or other policy is to consider how to best leverage the incredibly valuable work of the informal sector and actively include them in a way that ensures a just transition, enhancing the livelihoods and wellbeing of all people involved.



05

Looking ahead
ready to further scale
impact





The need for voluntary efforts/ Plastics Pacts

Plastics Pacts are a vehicle for action and positive change: they have demonstrated what can be achieved through collaborative action, and they have made impressive progress in many areas.

However, moving away from a long-established, linear plastics system is challenging. It requires difficult decisions to be made by businesses – both within the Plastics Pact membership and outside.

1

We need to further accelerate and scale voluntary business efforts in the areas where progress has been demonstrated, such as increasing the use of recycled plastics, eliminating problematic and unnecessary plastics and designing for recycling. On top of that, it will be crucial to double down on tackling the major challenges of plastic flexible packaging, scaling reuse, and establishing more collection and processing infrastructure.

2

Collaborative voluntary action is leading to progress. It is necessary, but it is not enough. We need a dual approach: more ambitious, legally binding policy measures, as well as accelerated voluntary business action. This cannot be an either/or; both are crucial to unlock the progress we need to see.

3

An ambitious Global Plastics Treaty, with legally binding global rules, would significantly accelerate policy and business action around the world. Establishing legally-binding global measures is essential to level the playing field for all countries and businesses, guaranteeing a minimum level of ambition and impact worldwide.

In all of these areas, the Plastics Pact Network is driving positive change, scaling-up business-led action and financial investment, as well as informing ambitious legislation, based on evidence and experience gathered from around the world.



The Plastics Pact Network – uniquely placed to inform and support a Global Plastics Treaty

For the Global Treaty on Plastics that is currently under negotiation to be most effective, it will need to include legally binding global rules. At the same time, there will always be a need for national adaptation and implementation to fit the local context. Once it is finalised, policymakers will need to work on national action plans to deliver against the commitments established in the final agreement. The Plastics Pacts Network can support the development and implementation of an ambitious Global Treaty in several ways.

- The involvement of the entire plastics value chain, through the Plastics Pact, ensures that there is an impartial and balanced representation of businesses, alongside traditionally under-represented sectors (such as the informal waste sector) and NGOs. This will help to create an inclusive Treaty, focused on the greater purpose of eliminating plastic pollution.
- Plastics Pacts use tried-and-tested solutions and approaches, based on what has been shown to work effectively and what does not. This provides invaluable insights for shaping the Treaty's framework and, later on, its implementation.

- The Network has developed a large repository of tools, insights, guidance and standardised definitions, meaning that countries do not need to start from scratch, but can adopt established approaches with greater efficiency¹¹.
- Plastics Pacts have compiled a diverse array of case studies and resources from various global plastics systems, spanning low-, medium- and high-income countries. These resources showcase successful strategies and serve as potent examples for governments to draw on when defining national action plans.
- Finally, the Plastics Pact Network exemplifies the power of positive global collaboration and knowledge-sharing, highlighting the importance of collective action in addressing plastic pollution challenges effectively.

Pacts 2.0 - the future of the Plastics Pact Network

The Plastics Pact Network is a platform with global harmonisation and exchange at its core, supporting local action with a focus on national priorities. Looking forward, our ambition is to 'supercharge' the Plastics Pact Network to deliver greater impact at national and global level.

With 2025 being a milestone year (Plastics Pacts working towards 2025 targets), many Pacts are evaluating their future targets and areas of focus. The Network is looking to support ambitious Pacts beyond 2025 – 'Plastics Pacts 2.0' – with the following elements in common:

- Added focus on tackling key challenges—reuse, flexible packaging and scaling infrastructure
- Ensuring that a just transition is integrated in the circular economy strategy
- Stronger industry membership and market coverage
- Additional funding to deliver ambitious, innovative projects, campaigns and initiatives
- A focus on delivering against ambitious Global Plastics Treaty commitments
- Strong collaboration and knowledge-sharing across the Network, and between member organisations, on common topics and challenges.

¹¹ Some of these publications are restricted to members, but many are public and can be accessed through each Pact's website

06

**Making it
happen**





Plastics Pacts are well-established and powerful vehicles for action to address plastic pollution at source, ready to further scale impact by building on the mechanisms in place, the stakeholders mobilised, and the impact and learnings to date. These took time and major investments to establish and demonstrate their ability to drive successful action and lasting change. This is just the start of the Plastics Pacts journey. We are ready to build on these well-established, proven vehicles for action, to further scale impact in the years ahead.

WRAP and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation believe that the work of the Plastics Pacts can help to act as a springboard for action, and help to implement the forthcoming Global Treaty on Plastic Pollution. With additional funding and support from businesses, their potential for impact could be even greater.

Financing

The majority of Pacts rely on annual membership fees to fund all or part of their programmes. On top of that, WRAP and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation have leveraged in excess of £6 million from a range of governmental, philanthropic and institutional funders to support the setting-up and development of the Plastics Pacts in Africa, LATAM and India over the past six years.

We strive for the Plastics Pact Network to be funded through a combination of philanthropic funding and membership fees. Corporate membership fees ensure industry relevance and buy-in, while philanthropic funding supports global south countries with limited funding and ensures the independence and neutrality required for the Pacts to be trusted partners for policymakers, NGOs, and the public.

To achieve the ambition and full potential of the Plastics Pacts and the Plastics Pact Network, and to accelerate action towards their targets, we are seeking additional funding. This is for action focused on:

- Accelerating global knowledge exchange between Plastics Pacts and their member businesses
- Driving action and projects, with a special focus on tackling the major challenges of plastic flexible packaging, scaling reuse, and to establishing more collection and processing infrastructure.
- Supporting countries and organisations outside of the Plastics Pact Network who are seeking to meet their Treaty obligations, based on learnings from Pact countries and members.

You are not investing in the building of new platforms, reporting tools, etc. The Plastics Pact Network model is proven and well-established. Your money can go straight into delivering change, using these well-established vehicles.

Business participation

The Plastics Pacts are supporting businesses in making more substantial and accelerated progress towards their targets. Most challenges around plastic waste and pollution cannot be solved by a business on their own, and Plastics Pacts help businesses deliver impact through providing a platform of collaboration and connection to other local stakeholders, to address these challenges together.

However, a large part of the industry is not yet taking action, and a major push is still needed in areas such as reuse, infrastructure and flexible packaging. The learnings so far reinforce the need for additional and more ambitious, binding policy measures, as well as accelerated voluntary business action. This cannot be an either-or: both are crucial to tackling plastic waste and pollution at the pace and scale required.

We call on businesses active in Plastics Pact countries to join and actively engage in these Pacts to drive change together, beyond what that they could deliver separately.



National policies: ambitious, informed and aligned

National policies and targets are needed that align with the global movement toward a circular economy for plastics, to unlock further investment and innovation to resolve these challenges. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is the form of legislation that is most widely used by national governments, while the use of bans, taxes and other fiscal levers should also be considered.

While many national governments have limited resources to deliver in all these areas directly, they can direct existing and new policies and investments towards supporting such actions. It is envisaged that a Global Plastics Treaty will galvanise national government action and funding to address these issues, and accelerate business-led action and change.

We call on national and local governments in Plastics Pacts countries to reach out to and actively engage in Plastics Pacts. Pacts stand ready to share learnings to inform and support policymaking and the national implementation of a Global Plastics Treaty.

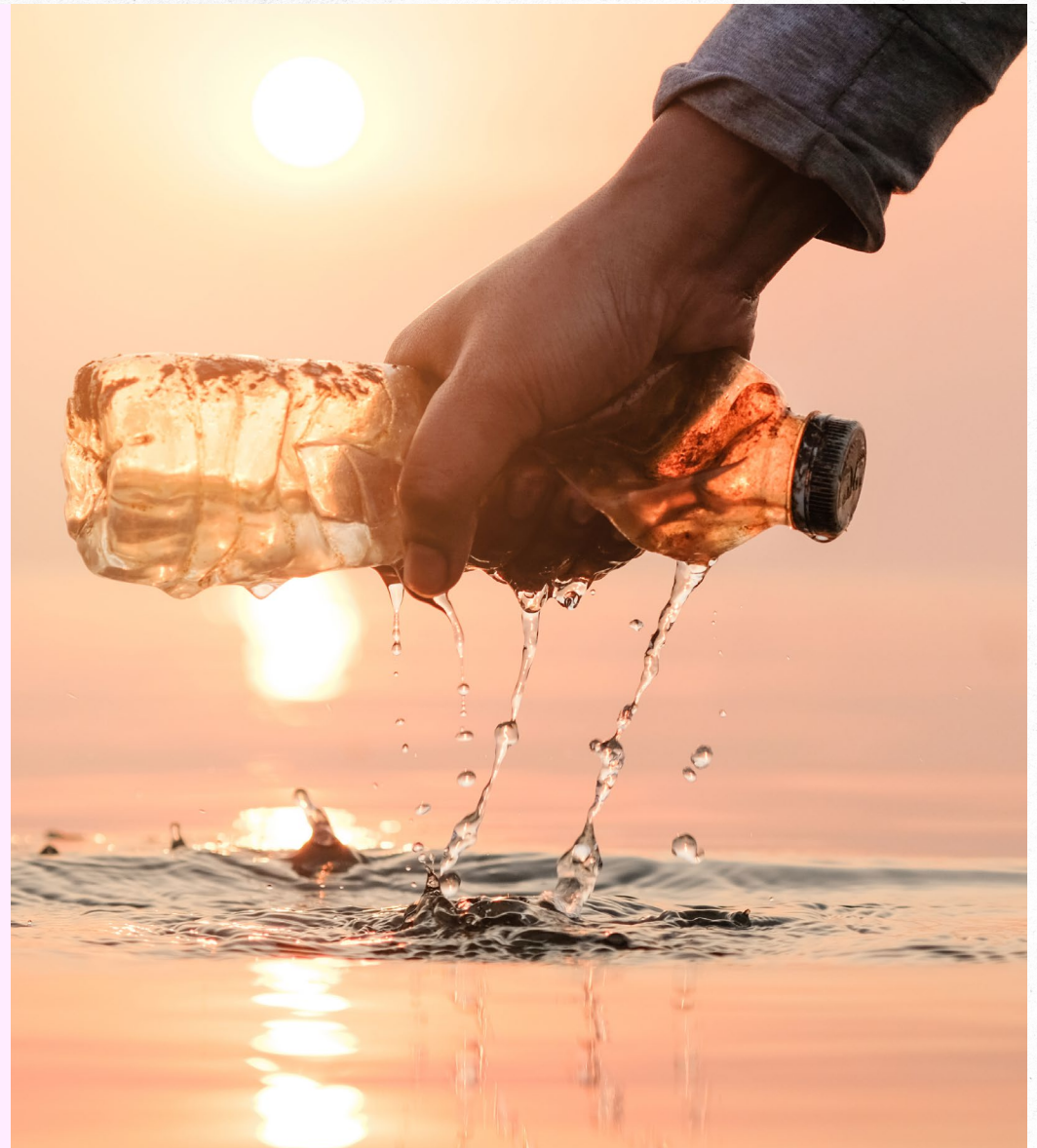
The Plastics Pact Network - uniquely placed to inform and support a Global Plastics Treaty. Refer to our Policy Brief for more information.





The causes of plastic pollution are complex and varied. Therefore, ‘fixing’ the system will require collaboration, sharing of innovations, insights, research and learnings from all the NGOs, businesses and innovators working on transforming the plastics sector. This needs to be underpinned by an ambitious **Global Treaty and a major increase in funding**. No one organisation, framework, technology or piece of legislation will provide the solution to stop plastics from polluting our environment and our oceans.

WRAP, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and the entire Plastics Pact Network are all focused on ending plastic pollution. We invite you to join the Plastics Pacts and, together with us, make an end to plastic waste and pollution.





Glossary

EFSA – European Food Safety Authority

EPR – extended producer responsibility

FDA – US Food and Drug Administration

FMCG – fast-moving consumer goods

HDPE – High-density polyethylene

NGO – non-governmental organisation

NIR – Near InfraRed spectroscopy

PE – Polyethylene

PET – Polyethylene terephthalate

PP – Polypropylene

PS – Polystyrene








PVC – Polyvinyl chloride

SMEs – small and medium-sized enterprises







UKRI – UK Research and Innovation



Plastics Pacts secretariats

Pact	Pact Logo	Link	Secretariat Description
ANZPAC		https://anzpacplasticspact.org.au/	The Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) is a not-for-profit organisation leading the development of a circular economy for packaging in Australia.
Canada		https://plasticspact.ca/	Generate Canada (previously The Natural Step Canada) is a not-for-profit organisation that generates solutions for a strong and inclusive economy that thrives within nature's limits.
Chile		https://circulaelplastico.cl/	Fundacion Chile is a public-private not-for-profit organisation that seeks to connect inclusive growth, environmental protection, and social development to create a
Colombia		https://cempre.org.co/pacto-plasticos/	CEMPRE is a not-for-profit organisation that designs and implements collective initiatives that promote investment, impact and results in the circular economy to contribute to the economic and social development of Colombia.
France		https://pacte-national-emballages-plastiques.fr/	Causanova is a business consultancy in sustainable development strategy that promotes and coordinates multi-stakeholder platforms in France and Europe.
India		https://www.indiaplasticspact.org/	The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is a trade association that works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative
Kenya		https://kpp.or.ke/	Sustainable Inclusive Business Kenya is a knowledge centre driving and catalysing change through inspiration, initiative, facilitation and connection. They bring companies and their stakeholders together to share knowledge and good practices and set goals to create a sustainable and inclusive economy and futureproof businesses with positive impact on People and Planet.

**Plastics Pacts secretariats**

Pact	Pact Logo	Link	Secretariat Description
Mexico (Pact in development)		https://pactodelosplasticosmexico.org/	WWF Mexico is an NGO with the mission to protect Mexico's biodiversity by generating local solutions with global impact and mobilising national and international resources to promote a prosperous future for the country.
Poland		https://paktplastikowy.pl/	The 17 Goals Campaign is the first and the biggest national cross-sectoral initiative for the Sustainable Development Goals in Poland. It encourages business to contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda.
Portugal		https://pactoplasticos.pt	The Smart Waste Portugal Association is a non-profit association, founded in 2015, whose mission is to enhance the Circular Economy in the various value chains, through education, innovation, collaboration and the creation of new businesses
South Africa		https://www.saplásticospact.org.za/	GreenCape is a non-profit organisation that drives the widespread adoption of economically viable green economy solutions from South Africa.
U.K.		https://wrap.org.uk/taking-action/plastic-packaging/initiatives/the-uk-plastics-pact	WRAP is a global environmental NGO transforming our broken product and food systems to create circular living. We catalyse action from policy makers, businesses, NGOs and citizens to transform the systems that provide the things we consume to radically reduce waste and carbon emissions.
U.S.		https://usplasticspact.org/	The Recycling Partnership is a mission-driven NGO that is committed to advancing a circular economy by building a better recycling system.



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