

Draft Concept Note - UNEP OECD ILO Webinar

Addressing plastic waste through responsible business conduct: Experiences from Southeast Asia

Date: 16 March 2022 (10-12am CET / 4-6pm Indochina Time/Bangkok) - TBC
Virtual event

Background

Microplastics are now ubiquitous in the natural environment. Plastic waste and pollution are threatening ecosystems and livelihoods across Southeast Asia. Increasing volumes of plastic waste have led to acute environmental, social and health impacts, particularly for vulnerable communities. Asia is both a hotspot for plastic pollution as well as a range of innovative measures designed to curb plastic pollution. Business are increasingly finding innovative ways to reduce plastic waste and transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy.

Market assessments of plastics circularity, waste and pollution are needed to eliminate unnecessary single use plastics, increase collection and recyclability, and to promote innovation. A [human rights based approach](#) to preventing waste and plastic pollution contributes to safeguarding the environment. The protection of the environment and ecosystems also contributes to the fulfilment of human rights and human well-being, including health, an adequate standard of living and decent work.

Progress against these goals is essential to achieving sustainable supply chains and a low carbon economy, as well as to promoting decent work. However, this transition will have complex impacts on employment in the value chains. Whilst some jobs may be lost in manufacturing, new opportunities can be created in repair, resale, sorting, pre-processing, and recycling. This provides the potential for higher quality jobs, particularly for those in the informal economy; as well as a need for re-skilling, formalisation of enterprises in the waste-management sector and access to social protection to the thousands of workers working in sectors related or linked to the management of plastic waste.

An equitable transition that provides opportunities for decent work will not happen automatically, and targeted interventions and collective responses are required by the private sector. Business strategies should be informed by holistic assessments of social and environmental impacts across value chains, factoring in the gender dimension of both challenges and opportunities. A systemic approach to achieving more sustainable value chains can contribute to building more prosperous and resilient economies and inclusive societies.

According to the [ILO](#), a sustained 5% annual increase in recycling rates for plastics, glass, wood pulp, metals and minerals could generate around 6 million additional jobs worldwide.¹ For example, 500,000 people are employed in the recycling and waste management sectors in Bangladesh, most of them women. While this sector has an enormous potential to create new jobs, many of the employment in this sector remains largely part of the informal economy in many countries. Workers face serious decent work deficits, such as work-related hazards, discrimination, stigmatization, violence and harassment, low earnings and long working hours. They often are not legally registered and are not protected by labour laws, with no access to social protection benefits.

¹ ILO, Greening with jobs [WESO](#), 2018

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world in different ways, leading to a number of ongoing health, economic and environmental problems. Millions of people are quarantined or working from home generating extra residential and medical waste, some of which is mixed with plastic or other waste that could be contaminated with the virus, a situation which would further accentuate the precariousness of the working conditions of workers in this sector.²

During the pandemic, waste collection remains an essential service that must continue as normal as possible to prevent waste from building up in the community. As the pandemic persists, waste collection workers may be more exposed to the contagion as they frequently touch surfaces that may be contaminated and face increased workloads.

International instruments such as the ILO [MNE Declaration](#) and [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) provide frameworks to support and drive efforts of all stakeholders to adopt a holistic approach to addressing plastic waste and their impact on the world of work. This includes helping businesses avoid and address adverse impacts to workers, consumers and the environment that may be associated with operations, supply chains or business relationships; re-skilling of the workforce to meet the demands of new sectors such as the recycling and waste management. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)³ through a responsible business conduct lens means adopting a holistic approach to informal waste management for instance. Similarly, plastic credit systems adopted in line with RBC standards can support standardizing sustainable production and consumption, recovery and offsetting processes.

Through this webinar, UNEP, the ILO and OECD will explore how businesses are addressing plastic waste through responsible business conduct in Southeast Asia. Participants will discuss how OECD's [Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct](#) and the ILO's [Guidelines for a Just Transition](#) can be integrated into business policies and processes in order to address plastic waste and to deliver [Decent Work](#).

This session will showcase innovative business practices for plastic circularity and highlight what actions are needed to help businesses, governments and communities to shift away from business as usual to an inclusive circular and more sustainable and resource-efficient plastics economy.

Objectives:

- Highlight the impacts of plastic waste and pollution in SEA, and underline the connection to Decent Work, RBC and gender impacts.
- Discuss business responsibilities and opportunities for action.
- Exchange experiences on conducting due diligence in plastic value chains, on occupational health and the formalization of employment in the waste management sector.
- Provide an overview of recent policy developments related to RBC and promote resources that will help companies address plastic pollution and waste issues holistically.

Outcomes:

- Improved business understanding of the connection between plastic waste, decent work and the circular economy.
- Greater awareness of policy developments and drivers for supply chain due diligence.

² https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/resources-library/publications/WCMS_762877/lang--en/index.htm

³ OECD defines Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) as an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of a product's life cycle. See: <https://www.oecd.org/environment/extended-producer-responsibility.htm>

- Uptake in use of RBC Due Diligence framework and other tools that support business in developing holistic strategies to addressing plastic waste and promoting Decent Work in their RBC strategies.

Structure of the Webinar:

- Duration of this virtual workshop is 2 hours.
- It will be conducted via Zoom.
- This is an open event with registration required.

Primary Audience:

- Businesses and industry groups in S.E.Asia
- Researchers and practitioners
- Civil society

Draft Agenda:

AGENDA	
4:00 – 4:15 PM (GMT+7 / ICT) (10am CET/ Paris)	Opening remarks and welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Housekeeping and introduction of key opening speaker</i> • Mr Laurent Louradis, Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to Thailand. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>Introduction and overview of the EU policy on Plastics and Environmental Due Diligence.</i>
4:15 – 4:35 PM	Connecting the dots: RBC, Plastics and the Circular Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophia Gnych, OECD Centre for Responsible Business Conduct <i>– What is RBC?</i> <i>– environmental due diligence in practice</i> • Maarten Dubois, Project Lead on Circular Economy and Plastics at the OECD, <i>– Key findings from the OECD Global Plastics Outlook: Economic Drivers, Environmental Impacts and Policy Options</i> • Vincent Aloysius, SEA circular project, UNEP <i>– framing the challenge of plastic waste and pollution in S.E. Asia</i>
4:35 – 4.40 PM	Video contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Marcos A. Orellana, Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes (TBC).
4:40 – 5:30 PM	Panel discussion. Leadership in Plastics Circularity: Opportunities & Barriers* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator - Georgina Lloyd – UNEP Asia-Pacific Regional Coordinator, Environmental Law and Governance • Ms Indah Budiani, Executive Director, Indonesia Business representative (Indonesian Business Council for Sustainable Development) • Josephine Tan, General Manager, Penang Green Council • Alvaro Zurita - Team Leader, Rethinking Plastics - Circular Economy Solutions to Marine Litter · GIZ

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Sara Seck - Associate Professor of Law; Yogis and Keddy Chair in Human Rights Law, Associate Dean, Marine & Environmental Law Institute, Schulich School of Law. <p><i>*Suggest conversational format with no formal presentations</i></p>
5:30 – 5:50 PM	<i>Q&A with audience</i>
5:50 – 6 PM	<i>Closing remarks</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dr Cristina Martinez - A Just Transition to Decent Work & Circular Economy in Plastics sector, Senior Specialist on Environment and Decent Work – ILO</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Reflections / key take aways / next steps</i>

Background

Under the joint Responsible Supply Chains in Asia programme (RSCA), implemented together with the European Union, the ILO and OECD have been engaging with governments and companies across global supply chains to promote an enhanced respect for human rights, labour and environmental standards by businesses engaged in supply chains. Through the RSCA, the ILO and OECD are contributing expertise on trade and investment, labour and risk-based RBC due diligence to support an enabling environment for RBC, to boost industry capacity, and to raise awareness of the importance of RBC and Decent Work in Asia. The RSCA programme is being carried out in partnership with six key countries for global supply chains across Asia including Japan, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar.

ILO MNE Declaration

The [MNE Declaration](#) is the only ILO instrument that provides direct guidance to enterprises (multinational and national) on social policy and inclusive, responsible and sustainable workplace practices. This policy instrument was elaborated and adopted by governments, employers and workers from around the world. It was adopted 40 years ago and amended several times, most recently in March 2017. Its principles are addressed to multinational and national enterprises, governments of home and host countries, as well as to employers' and workers' organizations; providing guidance in such areas as employment, training, conditions of work and life, industrial relations as well as general policies in order to maximize the continued prominent role of multinational enterprises in the process of social and economic upgrading in a globalized and interconnected world. The ILO MNE Declaration is founded substantially on principles contained in international labour standards.

OECD Instruments on Responsible Business Conduct

The [OECD Guidelines](#) are an international soft law instrument backed by 50 governments representing 61% of global trade and 80% of international investments. They enshrine recommendations from governments to business on how companies should be contributing positively to sustainable development while also addressing their adverse impacts on people and the planet. Specifically, the Guidelines include recommendations for responsible business behavior across all areas of business impact, including but not limited to the environment, human rights, industrial relations, consumer interests, disclosure and science and technology.

The OECD Guidelines also include an expectation that business conduct comprehensive supply chain due diligence to identify and address their adverse impacts on people and the planet. To support businesses in carrying out due diligence, the OECD has developed due diligence guidance

for specific sectors and at a cross sector level, to explain how to practically implement recommendations on RBC – including across supply chains and taking into account both social and environmental risks and adverse impacts of business activities. Strengthening the integration of environmental - in addition to human rights - supply chain due diligence into various voluntary and mandatory regulations and policy initiatives is on the rise. These efforts also point to a growing global recognition of the OECD Guidelines and OECD guidance on due diligence in addressing environmental threats, dependencies and adverse impacts.

SEA circular

[SEA circular](#) is an initiative of the UN Environment Programme and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) to inspire market-based solutions and encourage enabling policies to prevent marine plastic pollution and less plastic wasted in South-East Asia. The project is working in six countries in South-East Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, from 2019-2023 with the support of the Government of Sweden. SEA circular works with national and provincial governments, private sector corporations, civil society groups and NGOs, to promote circular economy principles and seek solutions to marine plastic pollution. The project works to support market-based solutions, enhance science, raise awareness and promote behavioural change towards less plastic wasted in South-East Asia.

Rethinking Plastics

The project “[Rethinking Plastics](#) - Circular Economy Solutions to Marine Litter” supports the transition towards a circular economy for plastics to reduce plastic waste leakage into the sea and thus marine litter.

It is based on the cooperation between the European Union (EU) and seven countries in East and South-East Asia and is well-aligned with regional and national efforts and initiatives to reduce marine plastic waste. Jointly with its partners, the project works on improving the management of plastic waste, encouraging sustainable consumption and production of plastic as well as reducing litter from sea-based sources and strengthening green public procurement.

The project is co-funded by the European Union and the Federal Republic of Germany through the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It is jointly implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Expertise France.

Promoting responsible supply chains in Asia

This event is supported by the Responsible Supply Chains in Asia (RSCA) programme⁴ which is implemented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and International Labour Organization (ILO) and with funding from the European Union. The RSCA programme aims to promote respect for human rights, including labour rights, and responsible business standards in global supply chains.

This programme is carried out in partnership with Japan (an OECD and ILO member) and five partner economies, namely China, Thailand, Viet Nam, Philippines, and Myanmar (also ILO members).



⁴ The Responsible Supply Chains in Asia programme. OECD.
<http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/globalpartnerships/responsible-supply-chains-asia>