



## Factsheet 08 | Just Transition and recognition of the informal sector

*This factsheet has first been published in September 2020 and was updated in 2023 as part of the efforts of the PREVENT Waste Alliance Plastic Working Group on Social Inclusion.*

*This factsheet describes how informal workers and enterprises can be integrated into waste collection, sorting and recycling systems for packaging as part of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concept and related municipal waste management. The recommendations include strategies how to integrate workers under vulnerable working conditions in formal waste management markets.*

*It explores, among others, the following questions: Which forms of organisation (e.g., cooperatives) are suitable and which role can they play for the integration of informal workers? How can working conditions and income of informal waste pickers be improved and sustainable business models be set up? How can access to healthcare and social services be improved? This is analysed through a "Just Transition" perspective recently stressed by waste picker organisations, seeking to ensure that "nobody is left behind." Two case studies are briefly mentioned at the end of this factsheet, complemented by other key readings and sources.*

In low- and middle-income countries, separate collection, sorting and recycling of specific types of packaging waste is often carried out by the informal economy, sometimes in parallel to the official waste management system. The activities of the informal sector are driven by a combination of the market value of certain recyclable materials and the socio-economic conditions affecting some sections of the population. Nearly every city in the world has developed some form of informal waste management system over time. These range from improving waste segregation at households through educational activities, separate collection, sale and, to a more limited extent, the processing of recyclable materials. For the purposes of this factsheet, the term 'informal worker' refers to workers with no legal employment contracts, work/operating permits, access to health care or entitlements to social security, as well as those working in conditions that do not comply with health and safety and/or environmental standards.

*The need of a Just Transition*

The definition of “Just Transition”<sup>1</sup> used in the context of plastic pollution was developed by representatives of waste pickers’ movements from around the world and draws on the ILO definition frequently referred to in the context of climate action, and the definition proposed by the International Trade Union Congress in their submissions to the Secretariat.

Just Transition is defined as ending plastic pollution in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. It is based on making visible those already working at all stages of the plastic value chain, waste pickers and other workers under informal and cooperative settings and recognising their fundamental human dignity, and their historic contribution. It involves maximising the social and economic opportunities of ending plastic pollution while minimising and carefully managing any challenges – including through effective social dialogue among all groups impacted, and respect for fundamental human rights. A plan for a just transition must build and improve upon systems that waste pickers have already established while guaranteeing better and decent work, social protection, more training opportunities, appropriate technology transfer, support for infrastructure and organising of workers, and greater job security for workers at all stages of the plastic value chain, waste-pickers and other workers in informal and cooperative settings, and all workers affected by plastic pollution. Its specific outworking will depend on local context and local consultation. The just transition framework should emphasise supporting waste pickers and other workers who are most vulnerable to occupational disruption from waste management investments and climate change.

*A description of the informal sector*

The waste management sector is labour-intensive, and the initial investment required to set up a business is low. Barriers to entry are perceived to be low, which is one reason why the industry is particularly attractive to people working informally to boost their incomes. In some parts of the world, all waste management work is done on an informal basis, and such informal systems are **very often the backbone of collection, separation, recycling and trade in low- and middle-income countries.**

It is difficult to describe the informal sector in general terms, as circumstances vary markedly between countries and are strongly influenced by specific local factors, such as seasonal fluctuations in the industry. In some parts of the world, informal workers are better organised and more efficient than in others (e.g., through the creation of cooperatives). Better organisation and efficiency tend to result in better incomes for workers who, in general and regardless of their level of income volatility, remain in a state of high vulnerability. Contamination of waste due to a lack of separation at source drives down the market value of waste collected, and end-consumer markets for the goods are often underdeveloped, too. Moreover, many governments and societies barely recognise the informal sector and the important contribution it makes to public and environmental health, leading to low



Figure 1: Informal waste activities in the waste management chain

<sup>1</sup> International Alliance of Waste Pickers (2023). Recommendations for potential core obligations options for the plastics treaty: [https://globalrec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/230522\\_recommendations-for-core-obligations-plastic-treaty\\_IAWP\\_globalrec.org\\_.pdf](https://globalrec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/230522_recommendations-for-core-obligations-plastic-treaty_IAWP_globalrec.org_.pdf)

social status, risk of being displaced or harassed and a lack of support for efforts to improve living and working conditions.

**Informal stakeholders operate at every step in the waste management chain, though they are most heavily involved in collection.** Drawing clear boundaries as to where informal activity comes to an end and formal work begins is generally extremely difficult (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

Many informal stakeholders in waste management systems collect recyclables from households or workplaces as waste pickers on the streets, at transfer stations and at dumpsites. They usually collect recyclable materials and sell them to middlemen – small businesses which store recyclables before selling them on to recycling companies. However, informal businesses operate at every stage of the recycling process, in some cases through direct commercial links between waste pickers and formal recycling companies.

Depending on the roles people fulfil along informal packaging waste value chains, **their working lives are often characterised by a lack of regular income, rudimentary equipment, and harsh working conditions, little or no recognition of their work and a generally vulnerable position in the labour market.**

As the nature of the informal sector varies between countries, it is difficult to define general categories of workers within the informal waste management sector, but most systems incorporate at least some of the following groups:<sup>3</sup>

- **Recyclables collectors** are self-employed workers who use bags, small pushcarts, pull carts or small motorised vehicles to collect recyclable materials bought from households, generators of bulk waste or other establishments. They sell the material they collect to junk shops as a primary source of income and/or directly to formal recycling facilities. Recyclable collectors who are professional or semi-professional are usually well-equipped (e.g., with a motorcycle and trailer for collecting waste), highly knowledgeable about the industry and the waste cycle and often take genuine pride in their work. They can act as informal middlemen who buy and sell packaging waste, and/or process it using certain recycling processes (see also Figure 1). Collectors can also play an important role in terms of education and behaviour change, thanks to their presence in the field and a close engagement with residents.
- **Material pickers** pick up recyclable waste material on the streets or at open dumps, rather than collecting it directly from the source. Picking waste material is very labour-intensive and dangerous, particularly on open dumps. In many countries it is forbidden to go into landfills to collect recyclables.
- As part of the two categories mentioned above, we can also identify other groups of informal workers, for example:
  - **Casual or precarious informal workers** are often elderly people or people experiencing temporary hardship, for example as a result of unemployment. They usually have simple equipment such as old prams or wheelbarrows.
  - **Women waste pickers** are treated as a specific category of informal workers because their work is particularly precarious, and they are often equipped with nothing more than a pram, if they have any tools at all. They often fend for themselves, as they can't count on support from other family members and have little prospect of developing any sort of career.

<sup>2</sup> Kenya Plastic Action Plan (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Triangulated from

- GA Circular (2020). Full Circle. Accelerating the Circular Economy for Post-Consumer PET Bottles in Southeast Asia
- Ocean Conservancy (2019). Plastics Policy Playbook
- GIZ (2015). Valuing Informal Integration. Inclusive Recycling in North Africa and Middle East.

### Collection of packaging by the informal sector

Before the informal sector can be integrated into an EPR system, a thorough analysis is required to determine exactly which waste fractions are already being collected. Generally speaking, informal waste collectors tend to collect **any packaging and/or material with a positive market value, i.e. material that can generate income when sold**. Collection by the informal sector also varies depending on the proximity of recycling facilities or other potential customers to whom the waste can be sold (e.g., waste banks, aggregators, or brokers). If a specific price is paid for a given type of packaging (see Table 1), it is safe to assume that informal collectors will collect a considerable part of it. The following table shows an example of which types of packaging and materials are collected in the informal sector. This greatly varies from location to location.

Table 1: Examples of how various types of household waste are collected in the informal sector

Packaging type and material	Collected in the informal sector	Comments
PET bottles	Often	Usually have a positive market value, easy to collect, recycling/recovery systems often already established.
Packaging containing ferrous metals (like cans)	Often	Positive market value, with most waste being generated in industrial settings. Local recycling facilities are usually in place.
Non-ferrous metal packaging (like cans)	Often	Positive market value, with most waste being generated in industrial settings. Can usually be recycled or marketed locally.
Paper	Often	Paper waste is collected primarily from industrial/commercial sources. Can usually be recycled or marketed locally.
HDPE (rigid plastics, such as bottles)	Sometimes	Sometimes carries a positive net market value depending on local recycling facilities.
PP/PS (rigid plastics, such as cups)	Sometimes	Sometimes carries a positive net market value depending on local recycling facilities.
LDPE (film)	Sometimes	There is sometimes a positive market value for mono-materials, though this market value is generally for industrial waste only and depends on local recycling facilities.
Glass	Sometimes	Market value is strongly dependent on local recycling facilities and is usually more stable than other commodities. Collection is labour-intensive because glass is a dense material and heavy to carry.
Liquid packaging board (TetraPak and similar)	Rarely	No positive market value as it is generally difficult to market and recycle locally. Collection can be incentivised if the producer pays for it to be collected (thus creating an artificial market).
PS	Not collected	Accounts for only a small proportion of household packaging waste, making collection labour-intensive and non-profitable.
Other PET packaging (e.g. trays)	Not collected	No positive market value, no established recycling process.

Packaging type and material	Collected in the informal sector	Comments
PVC	Not collected	Accounts for only a small proportion of household packaging waste, making collection labour-intensive and non-profitable. There are facilities in place for the collection and recycling of some non-packaging items, such as PVC pipes.
Composites (flexible and rigid) and other plastics	Not collected	No market value. Collection is labour-intensive (especially for flexible packaging) because it is light, meaning that very large quantities have to be collected to make collection viable.

### *The need for sustainable waste management*

In high-income countries, the proportion of waste collected for recycling is rising in line with increasing GDP. However, studies indicate that this is not the case in many low- and middle-income countries. For PET bottles, for instance, data show that countries with lower GDPs generally have higher collected-for-recycling rates than countries with higher GDPs. One of the main reasons for this inverse correlation is reliance on the informal sector. As countries and cities develop, the average cost of living increases and collecting and selling PET bottles in the informal sector ceases to be economically viable which forces workers to move on to other trades and jobs. This in turn leads to a reduced number of workers in the informal waste management sector, which pushes down the collected-for-recycling rate. Unless this cycle is addressed, it can pose a real problem for the transition to sustainable waste management.<sup>4</sup>

**Improving waste management and recycling is a crucial step for the development of low- and middle-income countries, and the expertise of stakeholders in the informal waste management sector will be key to achieving this aim, so it is very important that they are socially and economically integrated into the waste management industry.** However, informal operators should only carry out waste management activities when the following conditions are met:

- Materials are easy to access and safe for sorting and storage.
- Transport and, if necessary, storage, are easy to arrange.
- There is a market for the materials they collect.
- There are buyers in their local areas.
- Collecting the materials can be expected to generate revenue.

Collecting waste in the informal, as opposed to the formal, economy, brings a high level of risk and uncertainty for those involved in collection, and severely limits the scope to establish a sustainable waste management system. In informal systems, items with no market value are not collected or discarded inappropriately and continue to litter the environment; systems that concentrate on collecting marketable materials are not effective for disposing other types of waste. Therefore, a key requirement for a comprehensive waste collection system is to **shift the focus from collecting materials with a positive market value to providing a service to the population**, regardless of how much the waste is worth in financial terms.

EPR is one of the key tools for this shift to a service-orientated mindset. It needs to be accompanied by efforts to recognise and integrate workers in the informal sector into a formal, supervised waste management system, possibly including moves to formalise their work. To make sure the system is properly funded for the long-term, it is also important to measure and be aware of the management costs for all waste materials, including items that have no positive market value.

<sup>4</sup> GA Circular (2020). Full Circle. Accelerating the Circular Economy for Post-Consumer PET Bottles in Southeast Asia

### *Integrating the informal sector into an EPR system*

When an EPR system works effectively, it encourages solid, long-term organisational structures and reliable funding. This in turn brings major benefits for workers and businesses working alongside it in the informal sector. Any good EPR system must be able to do the following:

- Ensure nationwide collection of all packaging.
- Develop infrastructure for sorting and recycling packaging.
- Ensure material recycling and high-quality recovery.
- Dispose of any non-recoverable packaging in an environmentally sound manner.
- Document and monitor waste management activity.
- Fulfil the obligations assigned to it by market participants.
- Provide training, advice, and information.
- Ensure materials can be easily identified.
- Ensure high standards of safety and welfare for workers in the EPR system.
- Make sure the management of financial flows is transparent and those responsible for doing so are held accountable.

Before the informal sector can be integrated into an EPR system, a thorough analysis is required to:

- Find the best term to refer to informal workers that makes them feel comfortable and proud,
- Identify organised communities with leaders who can represent them in decision-making processes (they can be mostly independent and hence not easy to identify),
- Know whether they are already supported by NGOs which can collaborate as intermediaries to facilitate any communication and preparation process regarding EPR integration,
- Identify existing studies or surveys carried out by environmental agencies, NGOs or other stakeholders trying to identify and characterise workers in the informal waste sector,
- Identify existing or ongoing work to establish policies for the inclusion of the informal waste workers,
- Identify existing initiatives to register informal waste workers,
- Identify existing initiatives led by packaging producers to integrate informal workers in packaging waste collection and sorting processes,
- Do what is necessary to get a formal agreement between all stakeholders in the packaging value chain that recognises informal workers as key players for the EPR implementation process. For example, when establishing a governance mechanism for the PRO (system operator), consider the option of including informal sector representatives in the decision-making process or in strategic meetings led by the PRO administration with other stakeholders.

Looking at formalisation as one way of integration, the formalisation of informal economies can take different approaches, such as registration, taxation, organisation and representation, legal frameworks, social protection, business incentives or support, and more<sup>5</sup>. For the waste picker community, the following benefits would be included as outlined in table 2.

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<sup>5</sup> Morais et al. (2022) Global review of human waste picking and its contribution to poverty alleviation and circular economy

Table 2: Waste pickers formalisation approaches<sup>6</sup>

Legal recognition	Improve salary conditions and benefits	Improve representation	Access to training and personal protective equipment
Legal recognition and positive public image and or public acceptance by waste pickers who contribute to the upkeep and cleanliness of the cities they work in.	Increased earnings of workers via stable monthly income.	Increase their voice and representation.	Improve their skills through training.
Identification cards to protect them, so that they can be identified as workers in order to benefit from the payment scheme.	Improve work conditions e.g., uniforms, specially designed carts and buckets for collection of municipal solid waste (MSW) and sorting spaces, etc.	Bargaining mechanisms to negotiate with buyers of the material they collect and with municipal officials.	Access to appropriate equipment and protective gear such as carts and gloves.
	Access to welfare e.g., day-care for children, education scholarships, pension schemes.	Organisational and bargaining power will help self and social recognition of their workers as a prerequisite toward building a collective voice and self-representation in order to engage in negotiations with employers, suppliers, buyers and/or middlemen.	

Due to the lack of an existing exemplary inclusive EPR model, WIEGO<sup>7</sup> highlighted the following enabling factors that are based on the experience of waste pickers and a few systems attempting integration.

Legislative Action for mainstreaming of the informal economy:

- Recognise all actors in the informal recycling economy in regulatory and legislative frameworks around waste management and resource recovery as applicable in individual countries.
- EPR systems need to account for waste pickers and other informal waste workers in EPR systems so that EPR functions well without exacerbating exclusion and poverty.
- EPR system design must be multi-stakeholder, and needs ongoing, direct communication with informal waste workers in the recycling value chain – waste pickers, waste pickers’ organisations, scrap dealers, aggregators, and recyclers.
- The regulatory framework must also allow for a just transition to the formal economy, without discrimination, irrespective of the worker or entrepreneur status – such as the provision of occupational identity cards, ease of registration including reduced fee involved in registration, allowing participation in tenders and bids, upholding existing service contracts, and ensuring that EPR systems do not exclude informal workers,
- Strong markets for materials or mechanisms to compensate fluctuations in market prices are key to both promoting a circular economy as well as ensuring an inclusive recycling, reuse and repair sector that generates and sustains local livelihoods.

<sup>6</sup> According to Morais et al. (2022), based on Dias 2016, International Labour Organisation and WIEGO 2017, WIEGO 2020.

<sup>7</sup> WIEGO (2022). Technical Brief on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Waste Pickers.

Facilitative Action to create an enabling environment:

- Access to capacity development and training.
- Access to social security.
- Access to infrastructure, land, and equipment.
- Access to finance.
- Access to legal support and administration.
- Access to technology.

Governance Action for ensuring adequate waste management, employment targets and standards, and social and labour protections:

- Protect access to waste for the informal waste workers.
- Prevent greenwashing by disclosing environmental and social performance indicators that allow a critical and holistic evaluation of the EPR system.
- Support entrepreneurship and social business.
- Support fair pricing of material that is negotiated between all stakeholders.
- Provide grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Prevent corrupt/exclusionary practices.
- Prevent monopoly power of companies providing or contracting formal waste management services, including producers, as the lack of conditions for a free competition puts at risk the integration of informal workers into an EPR system and a just transition.
- Enforce the Polluter Pays Principle.
- Promote equal partnerships.
- Manage data traceability of performance indicators (amounts collected, jobs created, etc.) from PROs, by ensuring data is in the public domain.

#### *Integrating informal workers through waste picker cooperatives or as employees*

'Typical' waste pickers work in the streets, on dumpsites and at landfill sites. Their focus is gathering valuable materials according to the principle of 'cash for trash': anything that cannot be sold for a profit is left to pollute the environment. However, an EPR system must ensure that all packaging is collected, including packaging with no market value or waste that is too light or difficult to collect to be economically viable, e.g., plastic bags, sachets, composite packaging.

Labour-intensive collection and sorting represent a great opportunity to integrate informal waste pickers into an EPR. The system operator (PRO) can help by offering attractive, formalised, terms and conditions, thus encouraging collectors who have been working informally to join a waste pickers' cooperative or apply for jobs. Agreements between cooperatives and PROs or employment contracts can be made directly between the waste picker and the PRO, or between waste pickers cooperative or the employee and a company tasked with providing sorting and collection services to the PRO.



Photo 1: Sorting PET bottles in Accra, Ghana (© cyclos 2019)

To formalise the current position of workers in the informal sector and integrate them into an EPR system, setting up cooperatives can help to formalise their activities<sup>8</sup>. **Cooperatives, in particular, have proven especially effective in integrating informal workers across a number of countries.** Under this model, formally registered collectives and cooperatives of independent informal workers enter into formal agreements to manage waste on behalf of the local authorities on a contracted basis. Allowing waste pickers in cooperatives to participate in such activities enables them to influence decision-making and to operate from a position of strength in numbers. Organising informal workers as part of a formal system requires a high level of trust between all those involved.



Photo 2: Production overview of an organized cooperative of informal waste pickers in Brazil (Co-operative Crescer - Sao Paulo) (© RITTEC 8.0 Umwelttechnik GmbH, 2023)

Formalisation is often linked to restricting workers to set working hours. This can cause problems for some informal workers, especially women. It is therefore important that moves to integrate informal workers leave room for flexible solutions. The key steps in the formalisation process are:

- Building trust and making sure workers are aware of how the system works and what will be expected of them.
- Providing professional training and legal advice.
- Providing access to waste management infrastructure and equipment.
- Signing formal agreements (cooperatives) or employment contracts.

The table below demonstrates the potential benefits and disadvantages that come with integrating informal workers into the formal economy:

Table 3: Informal work vs. formal economy

Informal sector	Formal agreements with cooperatives or employment
Irregular income	Earning regular income
Lack of appropriate waste management infrastructure and equipment	Access to suitable infrastructure and equipment
Insecure living standards	Better living standards
High risk of ill health	Lower risk of ill health
Vulnerable to unfair business practices	Fair, regulated business practices
Lack of access to social security systems	Access to social security systems
Very high degree of flexibility and independence	Less flexibility and independence

<sup>8</sup> Morais (2022). Global review of human waste-picking and its contribution to poverty alleviation and a circular economy.

*Integrating informal workers as business partners of independent/self-employed entrepreneurs*

Professional and semi-professional waste management companies in the informal sector are generally very well informed about the market, recycling, recovery options, the key stakeholders within the recycling chain and the various processes associated with waste management. The skills of these informal companies can be invaluable when it comes to setting up a successful EPR system, and the system operator (PRO) should consider contracts with some of these companies. Alternatively, if the aim is to integrate these informal actors into the system via a formal contract, the PRO and any co-contractors may agree to make companies in the informal sector formal members of the EPR scheme.

Where informal companies own their own facilities, it must be ascertained exactly what services they provide and what standards they comply with (or will be expected to comply with in the future). If these companies operate their own collection vehicles, it should be established whether they are roadworthy and how much waste they can transport. If, on the other hand, the companies have been operating purely as trading companies (perhaps with their own storage facilities), discussions should be held to clarify how they can contribute to the EPR system.

Independent/self-employed entrepreneurs may be able to play a role in areas including collection services, the provision of storage capacity, and sorting, marketing and/or recycling waste.



Photo 3: Waste delivery in Accra, Ghana (© cylos 2019)

To include companies operating informally in an EPR system, their status has to be formalised. The first step in this process is to incentivise the company to register with the system operator (PRO) and provide clear identifying information, including its address, a specific location, a nominated point of contact, an e-mail address, and a detailed description of the services it provides. Other key steps include:

- Building trust, as well as providing information on the system and the types of services required.
- Providing professional supervision and legal advice.
- Concluding service agreements with business partners.

The following table illustrates the effects of involving participants (both individuals and companies) from the informal sector in recycling systems as formal business partners:

Table 4: Informal business vs. formal business partners.

Informal business	Formal business partners
Uncertain commercial basis for operations	Fixed service agreements
Uncertain marketing conditions	Reliable acceptance of recyclables
Uncertain situation for employees/workers	Better conditions for employees/workers
High operational risks	Reduced risks

Informal business	Formal business partners
Vulnerable to unfair business practices	Supervised business practices
Not paying tax (though they may be paying informal landlords or stakeholders in order to operate)	Paying tax
No obligations to report to public authorities	Required to report to public authorities (which they may find very time-consuming and cumbersome)
No obligation to provide access to healthcare and welfare benefits for workers/employees	Expected to provide access to healthcare and welfare benefits to individual workers/employees

Enterprises in the informal sector can be integrated into EPR systems as formal partners by a number of different routes. For example, they can be set up as NGO-supported micro enterprises, as franchises of formal waste management companies, as cooperatives <sup>9</sup>, as community-based organisations, or as associations, among others, depending on the local jurisdiction.

*Other lessons learned from integrating informal enterprises and formalising working conditions*

Past experience with integrating informal enterprises into formal structures has highlighted a number of useful lessons.<sup>10</sup> However, it is also important to take into account context-specific challenges that may arise when implementing and scaling up projects.

- Public authorities (both at national and local level) are crucial in supporting the integration of informal workers by providing social security and implementing waste-related legislation (including legislation not connected to EPR).
- Children often work as waste pickers to contribute to the family income or to support themselves independently, sacrificing their education, health and physical development. When addressing the issue of child labour, it is important to acknowledge the economic issues to which it is intimately connected, and to address the contextual and structural factors that influence children to work or prevent them from accessing education.
- Inclusion and empowerment of women should be prioritised. Women are still frequently excluded from formal labour as it is often still perceived as a male domain<sup>11</sup>.
- An effort should be made to raise public awareness of the work done by informal waste management workers and why it is important.

*Integrating informal stakeholders into the legal framework of an EPR System*

Informal recycling activities should be integrated into the EPR system to ensure the people involved in them are working as part of the EPR system and to remove any risk to their incomes. Their work should be carried out on the basis of the legal framework applicable to the mandatory EPR system concerned. In particular, the legal basis should outline how the informal sector can be involved in the EPR system, and what responsibilities the PRO shall assume in this regard. Below follow two examples on how some countries already incorporated the inclusion of informal workers in their practices on EPR for packaging.

<sup>9</sup> Ocean Conservancy (2019). Plastics Policy Playbook

<sup>10</sup> After Manning, C. (2020). Private sector partnerships with waste pickers

<sup>11</sup> UNEP (2015). Global Waste Management Outlook.

### Chile case study

In Chile, a legal framework for a mandatory EPR system has already been drawn up. The decree covering packaging was enacted in June 2020 where it is stipulated that producers must begin compliance with a gradual scheme of recycling targets starting from October 2023 through PROs to which they must necessarily adhere. Article 41 of this decree states that:

*The waste pickers who are registered in the national register (RETC or PRTR) will be able to participate in waste management in order to achieve the objectives established in the Decree. For these purposes, they must be certified within the framework of the National System of Certification of Labour Competencies established in Law No. 20 267.*

*The Producer Responsibility Organisation must make the bidding rules under which they will conclude contracts for the collection and recovery services available to the waste pickers free of charge.*

*In addition, the PRO's Inclusion Plan (Article 41) must indicate the mechanisms and instruments of training, financing and formalisation, aimed at enabling the full integration of waste pickers, indicating the scope and magnitude of the efforts to be made in these three aspects [...].<sup>12</sup>*

### South Africa Case Study<sup>13</sup>

In South Africa, the absence of formal systems for separation at source of recyclables, an informal sector comprised of waste pickers has emerged that contributes significantly to the collection of recyclables. These informal sector livelihoods are marginal, with many waste pickers being homeless or living in informal settlements, and in many cases on or adjacent to landfills<sup>14</sup>. The National Waste Management Strategy 2020<sup>15</sup> promotes waste separation at source linked to EPR programmes including waste pickers. It calls for innovation and a variety of different models and tools to be developed for engaging the informal sector (waste pickers) that accomplish waste separation at source.

The promulgation of EPR regulations in November 2020<sup>16</sup> provided the legal framework for waste picker integration into the post-consumer collection value chain and for EPR schemes to pay a living wage (not below the minimum wage) to waste collectors, reclaimers, and pickers. Progress to date includes the development of the Guidelines for Waste Picker Integration<sup>17</sup>, the associated supporting website hosting a variety of useful resources and training materials ([www.wastepickerintegration.org](http://www.wastepickerintegration.org)) as well as the development of the South Africa Waste Picker Registration System (SAWPRS).

Registration on the SAWPRS will facilitate waste pickers' inclusion in government and industry programmes and provide pickers with access to the service fee which industry must pay to them in terms of the EPR regulations<sup>18</sup>. It is important to note that although payments of waste pickers were to be commenced in November 2022, significant work must still be conducted by Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs) to ensure that all registered waste pickers are paid the service fee, and that the current level of service fee is extremely low (approx. 0,15 RAN/kg or 0,007 USD/kg).

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<sup>12</sup> Chilean packaging EPR decree (Spanish) ([Link](#)).

<sup>13</sup> The South Africa Case Study was kindly provided by Suzan Oelofse of CSIR ([Link](#)).

<sup>14</sup> Department of Environmental Affairs (2018). South Africa State of Waste. A report on the state of the environment. Final draft report. Department of Environmental Affairs, Pretoria. 112 pp ([Link](#)).

<sup>15</sup> Department: Environment, Forestry and Fisheries. South Africa (2020). National Waste Management Strategy. ([Link](#))

<sup>16</sup> Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (2020). National Environmental Management: Waste Act (59/2008): Extended producer responsibility scheme for paper, packaging and some single use products. ([Link](#)).

<sup>17</sup> Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries and Department of Science and Innovation (2020). Waste picker integration guideline for South Africa: Building the Recycling Economy and Improving Livelihoods through Integration of the Informal Sector. ([Link](#)).

<sup>18</sup> Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (2020). National Environmental Management: Waste Act (59/2008): Extended producer responsibility scheme for paper, packaging and some single use products. ([Link](#)).

## Key readings and other sources



[PREVENT Waste Alliance \(2021\).](#)

[Video series:](#)

[EPR Explained! \(08\) Informal sector](#)

**Basel Convention (2019).** Draft guidance on how to address the environmentally sound management of wastes in the informal sector.

**GIZ (2018).** Creating Successful formal-informal Partnerships in the Indian E-waste Sector.

**GIZ (2018).** Inclusion of Informal Collectors into the Evolving Waste Management System in Serbia.

**GIZ (2017).** Building the Link: Leveraging Formal-Informal Partnerships in the Indian E-Waste Sector.

**GIZ, SWEEP-Net (2015).** Valuing Informal Integration: Inclusive Recycling in North Africa and the Middle East.

**Global Alliance of Waste Pickers (2021).** Position on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), [https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR\\_GlobalRec\\_ENG.pdf](https://epr.globalrec.org/files/2021/12/EPR_GlobalRec_ENG.pdf)

**Global Alliance of Waste Pickers (2022).** Website on EPR, including case studies, workers education materials, etc., <https://epr.globalrec.org/>

**Morais, J., Corder, G., Golev, A., Lawson, L., Ali, S. (2022).** Global review of human waste-picking and its contribution to poverty alleviation and a circular economy

**Scheinberg, A., M. Simpson, Y. Gupt et al. (2010).** Economic Aspects of the Informal Sector in Solid Waste Management.

**WIEGO (2022).** Technical Brief on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Waste Pickers, <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/technical-brief-no-15.pdf>



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