

Yunus Environment Hub's

Position on Just Transition in the Global Plastic Treaty

At Yunus Environment Hub we work towards fulfilling our mission set out by our Co-founder and Chairman, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, to create a “World of Three Zeros”: zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions. Ensuring a Just Transition in the Global Plastic Treaty is clearly aligned with our core principles, and therefore we actively contribute our voice, best practice, and expertise to the international discourse on the topic.

The proposed international legally binding instrument (ILBI) on plastic pollution offers a critical opportunity to address a pressing environmental challenge through global cooperation. However, plastic pollution's impacts go beyond the environment, affecting livelihoods, health, and well-being of communities worldwide, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups. The ILBI negotiations must adopt a human-centered approach, ensuring no one is left behind in the transition to a sustainable and circular plastics economy. This requires meaningful participation from all stakeholders - governments, workers, civil society, industry, waste sector, vulnerable groups and the private sector. An inclusive process that amplifies diverse perspectives is essential for equitable solutions that balance environmental protection, social equity, economic viability, and human rights throughout the plastics value chain.

According to ILO's definition, a Just Transition means *“greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind.”* While the need for a just transition is essential in the global plastics treaty, there is also a huge opportunity to incorporate circular economy models and strategies to work towards a just transition for a global circular economy for waste management, with a focus on the plastic value chain. The ILO also states *“An inclusive circular economy acknowledges workers' rights and involves them in shaping policies. This includes social protection measures alongside policies to close material loops and promote protection measures ensuring decent work.”*

While the ILO definitions are broadly adopted and accepted, there are challenges that need to be addressed to ensure proper implementation and outcomes for a just transition to a global circular economy.

- Lack of comprehensive data and information systems to support decision-making and monitor progress, limited data on waste generation, composition, and management practices, making it difficult to develop targeted interventions and policies.
- Transitioning to sustainable waste management and circular economy models often requires significant upfront investments in infrastructure, technology, and training, which can be a barrier for resource-constrained actors.
- The prevalence of the informal sector in waste management across developing countries poses another challenge for a Just Transition. Informal waste workers often lack legal recognition, social protection, and access to decent working conditions. Integrating these

workers into formal systems while ensuring their livelihoods and well-being is a complex task that requires careful planning and stakeholder engagement.

- Discussions on Just Transition often gravitate directly towards informal workers, however, it's crucial to broaden the perspective beyond this to include the private sector and formal employees. Work to reskill and upskill the current workforce, and the future workforce is essential to ensure new circular models are inclusive and effective.

Transitioning to an inclusive, circular economy requires a systemic shift that cannot be achieved through isolated initiatives. It requires cooperation and coordination across all stakeholders.

The Role of Just Transition in the Global Plastic Treaty

The Just Transition principles provide a framework for ensuring that the transition away from plastic does not exacerbate existing inequalities or environmental degradation. Incorporating Just Transition into the global plastic treaty discussions promotes a holistic approach that addresses the interconnected nature of environmental, social, and economic challenges.

- **Social Equity Social Equity** - Ensures affected workers and communities are considered in transitioning from plastic-dependent industries.
- **Economic Resilience** – Promotes development of alternative, sustainable industries, minimizing economic disruptions for plastic-reliant workers and communities.
- **Environmental Responsibility** – Prioritizes environmental conservation and sustainability alongside socio-economic concerns in the treaty framework.
- **Global Cooperation** – Fosters collaboration among nations to address the plastic crisis while balancing environmental, social, and economic considerations.

Elevating the Just Transition in the Global Plastic Treaty

At YEH we believe the global plastic treaty should elevate Just Transition from a secondary consideration to a core guiding framework for the plastics transition by integrating holistic, ethical solutions benefiting people and planet.

YEH conducted a research report on “Just Transition for Waste Management and the Circular Economy in the ASEAN Region towards a Sustainable Future” with a focus on the plastic value chain on behalf of GIZ. Through literature review and interviews across diverse stakeholders we found a broad consensus on the importance of including Just Transition principles and considerations in the Global Plastics Treaty. Stakeholders from various sectors, including waste picker associations, labor organizations, government representatives, and youth advocates, agree that Just Transition should be an integral part of the treaty to ensure a fair and equitable shift towards a circular economy.

The following recommendations are clear ways to elevate Just Transition in the Global Treaty:

- 1. Universal inclusion** – All articles must mainstream equity dimensions covering human rights, informal sector, marginalized communities rather than siloed provisions.
- 2. Binding social impact framework** – not just voluntary guidelines – require national JT plans meeting clear targets on livelihood protection, worker development etc.
- 3. Broadened scope beyond waste** – Incorporate JT across full plastic lifecycle including production, consumption and circular innovation stages.
- 4. Clear Implementation and review standards** – Define country obligations and formats for reporting on JT progress, coupled with transparency commitments.
- 5. Direct financing mechanisms** – Explore dedicated funding channels, levies and incentive structures specifically supporting national and community-centric JT programs.
- 6. Formal representation structures**- Entrench roles for workers, farmers and community organizations throughout JT treaty execution processes - not just token consultation.
- 7. Regenerative design principles** - Align JT commitments with wider concepts like doughnut economics, social business, community wealth building highlighting larger system transitions.

Next Steps towards a Circular and Just Transition

We recommend that the Treaty advocates for the adoption of circular economy strategies that reduce waste and enable decent, green job creation across the value chain. The following areas should be considered to support the move from linear to inclusive, circular models

Upskilling and Reskilling for a New Economy

Circular economy requires expertise in remanufacturing and refurbishing among other skills to keep resources in the loop longer. To ensure labour demands are met we need to upskill both the current and future workforce in hands-on repair skills and trades like mending, disassembly, upcycling. Strategies to increase the expert pool should be included to ensure demand is met for decent, green jobs, such as:

- Government vocational training, apprenticeships in repair trades
- Incentives like tax breaks for repair enterprises creating green jobs or repair bonus for citizens
- Integrate circular design, zero-waste in school curriculums
- Reskill workers from declining industries into sustainability roles
- Support community repair cafes, makerspaces for peer learning

Just Transition and Circular Economy across the Value Chain

There is a pressing need to build circular strategies that embrace Just Transition principles along the value chain both upstream and downstream from production, design to retail stages. To support a transition towards just and circular strategies, the treaty could help broaden impact across value chains:

- Responsible, worker-friendly manufacturing that adheres to labour rights, including restricting child labour across supply chains
- Encourage ethical procurement by retailers, and empower ethical consumption with transparency, circular services
- Uphold labor rights, formalize integration of informal recyclers
- Support the integration of environmental, social, and economic sustainability into the circular economy. By doing so, we can help bridge the gap seen in many circular economy strategies that currently focus on the environmental and economic impact, while leaving out critical social dimensions.
- Education and training for stakeholders across the value chain both to understand their rights, and to capacity build on inclusive, circular strategies

Recommendations for the ILBI Negotiations

The following recommendations aim to ensure a just transition to a circular plastics economy in the ILBI negotiations. Recommendations should consider specific country context and needs, and opportunities for regional collaboration and alignment should be prioritized when possible to support harmonized approaches.

1. Advocate for the inclusion of Just Transition principles in the ILBI to ensure the transition to a circular plastics economy is equitable and leaves no one behind.
2. Push for concrete funding mechanisms and capacity building support in the ILBI to enable developing countries to effectively implement plastic pollution reduction measures.
3. Seek alignment between the ILBI and existing national policies and initiatives on plastic waste management and circular economy. Look for synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.
4. Be willing to compromise on aspects like implementation timelines in exchange for robust financial and technical assistance provisions in the ILBI.
5. Conduct comprehensive impact assessments to identify sectors and communities most vulnerable to the plastics transition. Use this evidence to inform negotiating positions.
6. Consult extensively with labor unions, informal waste worker associations, and industry to understand their concerns. Reflect these in negotiating positions as appropriate.

In addition, we recommend that Member States seek out opportunities to collaborate across regions and geographies. This could include, but not limited to:

- Jointly advocate for an ILBI that reflects the region's unique challenges and circumstances, for example in the case of the ASEAN region its high dependence on plastics, vulnerability to plastic pollution, and development needs.

- Use the negotiations to enhance regional cooperation and harmonized approaches on plastics, like region-wide EPR guidelines, plastics standards, and circular trade frameworks.
- Jointly push for ILBI provisions that enable engagement of the region's active youth, civil society, informal and vulnerable groups in plastics solutions. Build coalition with these groups to enhance negotiating power.

Reach out to us at info@yunuseh.com for more details, and to receive a copy of our research report “*Just Transition for Waste Management and the Circular Economy in the ASEAN Region towards a Sustainable Future*” with a focus on the plastic value chain conducted on behalf of GIZ.