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CONVENTIONS



BASEL CONVENTION



PLASTIC WASTE PARTNERSHIP  
A PARTNERSHIP OF THE BASEL CONVENTION



## How the COVID-19 pandemic affects plastic waste and the Basel Convention—and how we can tackle these challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily affected our ability to manage plastic waste. The pandemic has increased levels of plastic use in various areas, in particular in the medical sector. Meanwhile, lockdowns and other restrictions have changed people's lifestyles leading to the use of more packaging and use of personal protection equipment such as masks which also contains plastic. Furthermore, the growing reliance on food and consumer products delivery services has resulted in rapidly increasing amounts of packaging waste, most of which consists of plastic.

Whilst there are many initiatives to combat plastic wastes, with the adoption of the Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments in 2019, the Basel Convention remains the only global legally binding global instrument that specifically addresses plastic waste. The Basel Convention is based on 3 pillars:



- **Control of transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes, including plastic waste**



- **Environmentally sound management of such wastes**



- **Prevention and minimization of the generation of such wastes**

These pillars have been negatively affected by the pandemic in many countries. The Basel Convention is critical tool to address certain challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### COVID-19 and transboundary movements of plastic waste

The pandemic has in many instances disrupted transboundary movements of plastic waste:

It has become more difficult for countries that lack capacities for environmentally sound management to export plastic waste for treatment and disposal in other countries. Waste management facilities in many countries closed or operated at limited capacity.



**Tightened border restrictions**

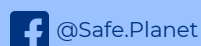
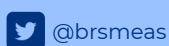


**Increase in transport costs**



**The need to change shipping routes**

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# COVID-19 and environmentally sound management of plastic waste

The pandemic has had serious repercussions on many countries' ability to manage plastic waste in an environmentally sound manner:



**Collection, recycling and disposal facilities operating at reduced capacity or not at all**



**Municipal waste collection systems severely disrupted due to lockdown measures**



**An increase in illegal dumping of plastic waste**

Various countries, including developed countries, experienced a significant increase in illegal waste disposal during the lockdown. In some countries, the majority of the recycling industry was operating intermittently or not at all due to the various resurgence of the virus and its variants. Informal workers have been impacted particularly, due to restrictions on movement which in many cases have been preventing them from making a living.

## COVID-19 and the prevention and minimization of plastic waste

The rapid increase in the use of masks and packaging, has set back global efforts to reduce the use of plastic products and switch to alternatives.

Given shifting priorities, outreach efforts aiming to reduce the reliance on single use plastics have become more difficult to communicate. Meanwhile, changing shopping habits increased plastic waste generation.



## Turning challenges into opportunities

The Basel Convention offers a range of tools to overcome these challenges. It provides a global legally binding framework for the management of plastic waste, as well as guidance, tools and initiatives, such as:

### Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership



**Technical guidelines on plastic waste**

### Small Grants Programme on Plastic Waste



**Framework for the environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes and other wastes**

Technical assistance is provided via a number of projects, thanks to generous financial support provided so far by the European Union, the Governments of France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, and the Norwegian Retailers' Environment Fund. Currently, over 60 countries are targeted across countries in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The full list of countries is available on the [BRS Secretariat's website](#).

### More reading:

Basel Convention [Factsheet on Healthcare or Medical Waste](#)  
Information on the [Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments](#)  
[Technical assistance](#) provided under the Basel Convention on plastic waste