

# Finding synergies and gaps in the global governance of plastics and chemicals

A study towards informing a new global agreement to end plastic pollution

## Project background

The environmental, social and economic damage resulting from plastic pollution has increasingly gained attention globally, prompting policy responses at the national and regional levels. In recognition of the legal and policy gaps and inefficiencies in the current international framework, countries recently came together to unanimously agree, at the United Nations Environment Assembly resumed fifth session (UNEA 5.2) in March 2022, on the need to strengthen global governance across the full life cycle of plastics and to end the pollution caused by the generation, use and final treatment of plastic products and their associated chemicals.

The resolution adopted at UNEA 5.2 titled “End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument” calls for the establishment of an International Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution, with the ambition of completing its work by the end of 2024. The UNEA resolution to end plastic pollution calls for enhancing cooperation, coordination and complementarity amongst regional and international conventions and instruments.

The governance of plastics and chemicals are closely linked, as they both derive from hydrocarbons that are

predominantly sourced from oil and gas and refined to feedstocks for production of polymers and chemicals that together constitute the building blocks of plastics. The scope, objectives and measures of a new instrument must therefore consider the interlinkages with the global chemicals regime, as well as the global governance of hazardous and other wastes. The role of the new agreement within the context of existing regimes must also drive the life cycle of plastic products towards safe circularity, while harnessing nature-based solutions that protect the environment and human health and creating benefits for workers under informal and cooperative settings.

## Finding synergies across Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)

To capture the full life cycle of plastics, the study will consider plastics pollution in all its forms, including chemicals of concern, polymers of concern, problematic plastics and microplastics. The study will assess the extent to which existing instruments address these forms of plastic pollution across selected governance elements considered important for catalyzing a systemic change towards ending “plastic pollution”, as referred to in the UNEA resolution.



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## Expected outcomes

1. **Map the global governance of chemicals** across their life cycle, including under the Stockholm Convention, Rotterdam Convention, Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and relevant regional frameworks;
2. **Map the global governance of plastics** across their life cycle, including under the Basel Convention and relevant regional frameworks;
3. **Identify areas of convergence** across relevant conventions and instruments, suggesting areas of complementarity for which cooperation and coordination under a new agreement may be required;
4. **Identify gaps** in the global governance of plastics and chemicals across the life cycle consisting of: 1) the extraction phase, 2) the chemicals phase, 3) the material phase, and 4) the dematerialization phase;
5. **Clarify the role of a new international legally binding instrument** to address plastic pollution, based on the findings about the synergies and gaps in the existing legal and policy frameworks;
6. **Highlight the role of international sustainability criteria** in closing the gaps in the governance of chemicals, plastics and wastes.



## Role of international sustainability criteria

International sustainability criteria (a set of common principles and criteria to guide measures across the life cycle of plastics) could help fulfil the aspirations of the UNEA resolution on plastic pollution to “promote sustainable production and consumption of plastics, including, among others, product design, and environmentally sound waste management, including through resource efficiency and circular economy approaches”. Sustainability criteria developed under the new agreement can also influence design within the chemicals regime, and support efforts under the waste regime. They can also provide a ‘level playing field’ for industry, while guiding national legislation to ban and restrict the use of plastics and chemicals when needed, label them accordingly and supply necessary information on chemicals in products to ensure safe management across the value chain.

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### Timeline of the study

The study is supported by an interdisciplinary Advisory Group. A first online workshop was held **8 March 2022** on the study methodology and the Advisory Group will provide further support in reviewing the drafts of the report.



Key dates for the study:

**15 May 2022** – first draft mapping the global governance of plastics and chemicals

**6-17 June 2022** – side event at the resumed meeting of the Conferences of the Parties to the BRS Conventions.

**30 June 2022** – 2<sup>nd</sup> online workshop

**31<sup>st</sup> August 2022** – final draft

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*The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the Government of Norway*



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