
**INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEXAS/ OSGOOD CENTER**
**LONE STAR / TEXAS MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2024**

# UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY (UNEA)

## Background Guide

**November 2024**

# What is the role of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)?

In a world of interconnected ecosystems and global demands, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the highest-level-decision making and universal forum – the only space where representatives from all countries of the world can discuss the environmental threats that the global community faces today. You are probably wondering when UNEA was born, and you will be surprised: UNEA is relatively a "young" body (committee) in the United Nations; **it was created in 2012 at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also referred to as RIO+20, when world leaders called for UN Environment to be strengthened and upgraded.** In fact, its creation embodies a new era in which the environment is at the center of the international community's focus and is given the same level of prominence as issues such as peace, poverty, health, and security. Its establishment was the culmination of decades of international efforts, initiated at the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, and aimed at creating a coherent system of international environmental governance. Today, UNEA plays a significant role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Goals.

The Assembly meets every two years in person in Nairobi, Kenya, to set priorities for global environmental policies and to develop international environmental law. Due to the COVID- 19, the Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly had to meet online for the first part of it. The last meeting (sixth session) of the Assembly took place in a hybrid format, from February 24 to March 1, 2024. You can also check when the other UNEA committees and bureaus that were scheduled to meet at: https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea-6

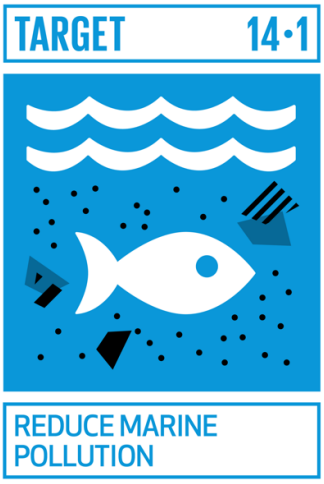
Curious about how things are like? Do you want to hear the real voices of the UNEA representatives? **CHECK** the **STATEMENTS** of diverse countries at the Fifth Session of the Assembly: https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea-5.2/statements

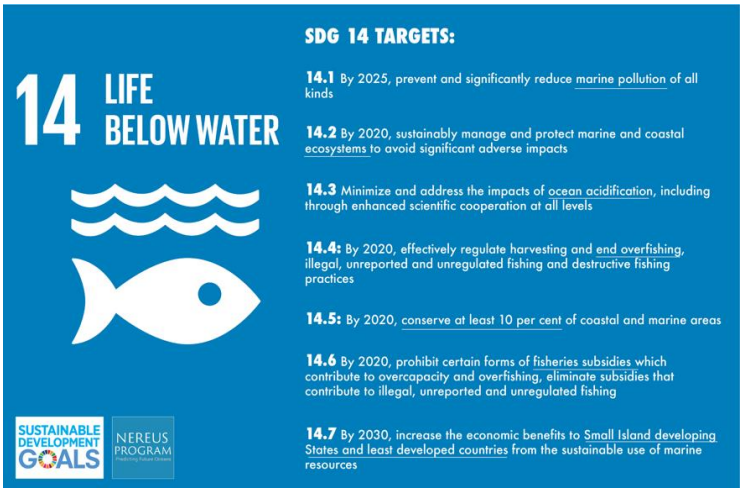
As you might have noticed while listening to the statements, addressing environmental challenges, such as climate change, marine pollution, sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems, overfishing, and ocean acidification is at the heart of this once called **"the world's parliament on the environment"**, included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly, **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, which aims to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development"**. Goal 14 includes specific targets to tackle and to measure the actions required to address these important issues that affect our largest ecosystems: the oceans. If you want to learn more about this universal goal and the standards used to measure the progress of achieving it, please **CHECK** these links: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/Goal-14/ and https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14 and **PAY ATTENTION** to SDG 14's specific targets and to its 10 indicators. You might want to get familiar with all the SDGs: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/overview/ and **EXPLORE** more at: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/

UNEA is a catalyst for change. Its representatives are convinced that it is urgent for all countries in the world to compromise to protect marine life. Just to understand the urgency, UNEA has conducted research, and it has estimated that **"the volume of plastic pollution entering the ocean each year is expected to double or triple by 2040, threatening all marine life."** According to the World Economic Forum, plastic pollution is one the five biggest threats to our oceans. **CHECK:**

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/5-ways- we-can-improve-ocean-health

**LEARN** about SDG 12. **CHECK:** https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Goal-12-infographic.pdf and **R E A D :** https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/12_Why-It- Matters-2020.pdf

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# CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEA AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## OUR OCEAN

THE PLANET'S LARGEST ECOSYSTEM

## IS ENDANGERED


**INCREASING ACIDIFICATION**

IS **THREATENING MARINE LIFE** AND LIMITING THE OCEAN'S CAPACITY **TO MODERATE CLIMATE CHANGE**

THE OCEAN **ABSORBS** AROUND **1/4** OF GLOBAL ANNUAL **$CO_2$ EMISSIONS**

**PLASTIC POLLUTION**
IS CHOKING THE OCEAN

**17+ MILLION METRIC TONS**
**OF PLASTIC ENTERED THE OCEAN IN 2021**

PROJECTED TO **DOUBLE OR TRIPLE** BY 2040

**90%** OF THE WORLD'S FISHERS ARE EMPLOYED IN **SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES**

**WHO NEED ACCELERATED** SUPPORT DUE TO THE **PANDEMIC**

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2022: UNSTATS.UN.ORG/SDGS/REPORT/2022/

## UNEA matters a lot. Why would that be?

There are a lot of reasons to affirm that this global forum has a relevant job in environmental protection. This entity starts negotiations for new international laws, known as treaties, conventions, and protocols, but its work does not finish in these negotiations (like the ones that you will engage in. UNEA experts and stakeholders also identify emerging problems and agree to the next steps to learn and to address them. Its global projects are also of extreme importance because UNEA serves as an international coordinator of their implementation. UNEA oversees the work of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). **LISTEN** to the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, speaking about the importance of UNEA: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uk8-Cu8HW50

## Governance, Structure and Mandate

You can learn more about UNEA in these links: https://www.iisd.org/articles/unea-governance

**READ** with these *key words* (acronyms) in mind: OECPR, IPCC, GEO, IPBES and pay attention to the description of its multiple roles as an international organization to protect the environment)

**CHECK:**https://www.unep.org/events/civil-society-events/united-nations-environment-assembly- unep-unea https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/the-un-environment-assembly-what-you-need-to- know/ https://www.ciel.org/project-update/expanding-engagement-in-international-institutions- the-united-nations-environment-assembly-unea/

## Mandate and Rules of Procedure

**CHECK:** https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/un-environment-assembly-rules-procedurehttps://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=243&menu=3170

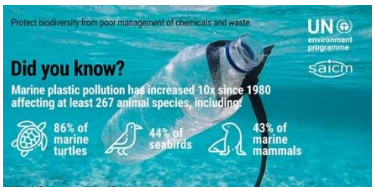

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 1NpXAQ9klBQ

"There is a misconception that consumers are to blame for not recycling enough, but in fact it is the design of plastic products that is a leading issue. **Today, many plastic items are designed in ways that make reuse or recycling difficult and uneconomical**. *It is estimated that only 21 per cent of plastics in short-lived products are economically recyclable and there is little incentive to collect the rest, often leaving them to pollute the environment.*
Solving plastic pollution will require that all necessary plastics are designed to stay in the economy and be reused and recycled.

Designing plastic for circularity in each local setting can increase its inherent value, while improving the profitability of the reuse and recycling industries, boosting uptake and quality of reuse systems and recycled content, and reducing the need for virgin plastic and its associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Global 'design for circularity' rules and standards are potentially game-changing to ensure international consistency and avoid loopholes created by a myriad of different standards and rules.

SOURCE: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/42233/guidelines_circularity_sheet.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

## What is the problem? What did cause this problem?




"In the early 2000s, the amount of plastic waste we generated rose more in a single decade than it had in the previous 40 years."
CHECK: https://www.unep.org/interactives/beat-plastic-pollution/


**WATCH:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kET-I4DbohQ
**WATCH:** https://youtu.be/qo0Rpek-_Fw



Plastic is ubiquitous in our planet. Plastic products have numerous economic and social benefits and environmental advantages. Plastic reduces food waste by increasing shelf life and protects vital medicines. Lightweight plastic packaging and plastics in vehicles reduce the fuel required to transport people and products. While these beneficial applications can't be denied, we must remember that the use and disposal of plastic has become an increasingly high-profile threat to our climate, ocean, wildlife, and human health.

**Plastic production has increased twenty times since 1964 and almost half of plastics produced are used just once before they are discarded. The mountains of plastic waste generated are, overall, poorly collected, and managed. Between 1950 and 2017, just 9% of plastics were recycled, 12% were incinerated, and the remaining 79% can still be found in landfills or polluting the environment.** As a result, plastic pollution

is becoming widespread both in the ocean and on land, where it is impacting our ecosystems and threatening lives and human health. Marine litter enters the ocean from both land-based and sea-based sources and a considerable proportion of all marine litter is plastic. **This problem is only getting worse, with the amount of plastic in our ocean predicted to double between 2010 and 2025 if present trends continue.**

To make matters worse, these plastics break down into small particles known as **microplastics.** Microplastics are becoming so widespread in our environment that they have been found everywhere from bottled water to Arctic snow. As a result, they are present in both the food we consume and the water we drink. Furthermore, plastic microbeads are present in a wide range of household products, from food products to cosmetics and toothpaste. Further research is needed to understand the impact of microplastics on nature and on human health, but many worrying effects have been found. For example, additives in plastics are known to disrupt animals' hormonal systems and possible in humans, lung inflammation, carcinogenicity, gene mutilation and repercussions for reproductive health have been identified as possible impacts. Furthermore, plastics make a direct contribution to climate change. **Plastics, which are made from fossil fuels, account for 20% of total oil consumption and their manufacture, recycling and incineration is energy intensive, resulting in high carbon emissions.**

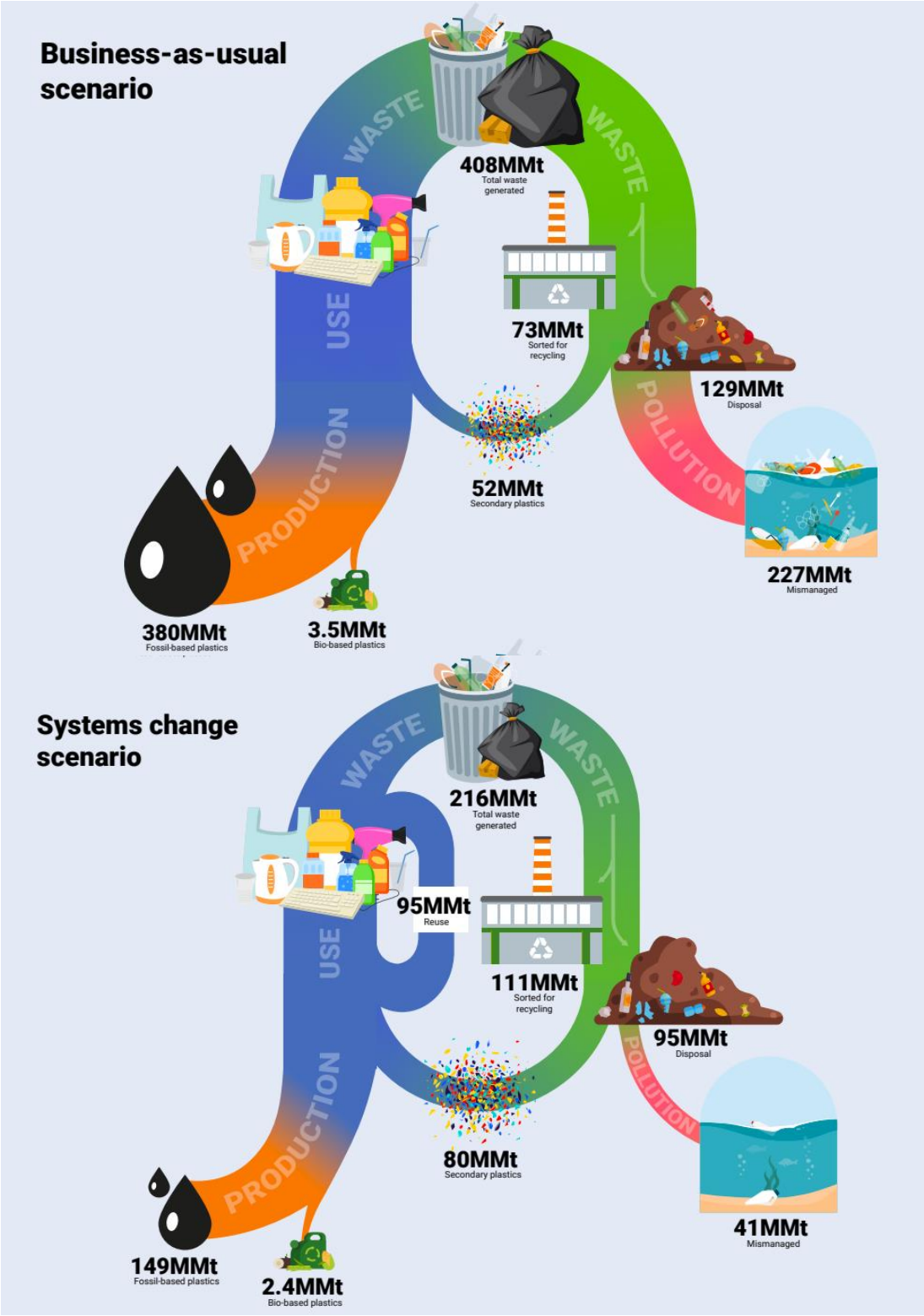



Figure ES 2: Possible plastic futures. **Top:** modelled plastic flows of short-lived plastics in 2040 under a business-as usual scenario; **Bottom**: modelled plastic flows of short-lived plastics in 2040 under a systems change scenario. Source: UNEP modelling building on The Pew Charitable Trusts and Systemiq (2020) and OECD (2022). https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/42277/Plastic_pollution.pdf?sequence=3


Source: https://www.allianzgi.com/en/insights/outlook-and-commentary/unwrapping-the-potential-of-sustainable-packaging


## Future Actions

### What should your committee discuss?

First, your committee should **REVISE** what UNEA has already done to advance the issue in its most recent meetings and get familiar with the history of the issue. REVISIT the timeline of the actions taken historically to tackle plastic pollution. **READ** this section and **CONDUCT** serious and independent research:

## A Common Understanding to End Plastic Pollution

**On 2 March 2022, the president of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) hit a gavel made of recycled plastics and set a historical precedent in environmental protection.** When the gavel, produced by Nzambi Matee, a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Young Champion of the Earth (as you could be) hit the committee chair's desk, **a new and monumental commitment to stop polluting the planet with plastic waste was born.**

UNEP Young Champion of the Earth, Nzambi Matee, produced *a plastic gavel using recycled plastic bottle tops from the Dandora landfill in Nairobi* Source: UNEP/Cyril Villemain

In a festive atmosphere in Nairobi, representatives from 175 out of 193 endorsed a resolution at the fifth United Environmental Assembly, known as UNEA-5, to negotiate an international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution by a concrete deadline: **the end of 2024.** This important agreement, a resolution titled **End Plastic Pollution: Towards an Internationally Legally Binding Instrument.** You can read it in: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/39812/OEWG_PP_1_INF_1_UNEA%20resolution.pdf
https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/40597/Plastic_pollution_UNEP_EA.5_Res.14_EPP_SP.pdf?sequence=11&isAllowed=y

In addition to the general analysis of the 1st Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-1), under the section Sequencing and Recommended Further Work, **CHECK** what countries' positions were: https://enb.iisd.org/plastic-pollution-marine-environment-negotiating-committee-inc1- summary


UNEA President Espen Barth Eide (right), UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen (center) and Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary of Environment of Kenya, applaud the passing of the resolution.
**Source: UNEP/Cyril Villemain**

This international agreement is another piece in the history of plastic pollution management. In the last 5-10 years, national, local, and regional governments and international organizations have adopted a growing number of action plans and instruments to address plastic pollution and its interlinkages with biodiversity, climate change, health, and social issues. **At the national level, many countries have moved to limit or to ban single-use plastics. There has also been a surge of interest in addressing the issue at the international (multilateral) level, including:**

- UN Environment's Global Partnership on Marine Litter (2012)
- UN Environment Assembly Resolutions on Marine Litter and Microplastics (2014)
- G7 Action Plan to Combat Marine Litter (2015)
- G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter (2017) Ocean Plastics Charter (2018)
- Amendments to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal ("Basel Convention") (2019)
- G20 Osaka Blue Ocean Vision and Implementation Framework (2019)
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN") Framework of Action on Marine Debris and the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris (2019)
- ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Member States (2021–25)
- Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ("APEC") Roadmap on Marine Debris (2019)
- Caribbean Community ("CARICOM") St. Johns Declaration to Address Plastic Pollution in Caribbean Sea (2019)
- Alliance of Small Island States ("AOSIS") Leaders Declaration (2021), and
- The Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution (2021)

Has your assigned country signed and ratified these documents? Did your country lead the efforts to create these regulations? Was your country a sponsor or a signatory? CHECK your country's position!

**From a legal point of view the problem is that although ubiquitous, plastics are currently NOT subject to any single international treaty regime.** For instance, the 2018 amendments to the Basel Convention meant that, for the first time, transboundary shipments of plastic scrap and waste would be regulated, leading to new export and import requirements for many companies. **However, this did not address most plastic products.** In addition, the

proliferation of local, national, and regional initiatives has given rise to often differing and incompatible rules, imposing greater costs on the regulated industry.

For these reasons, the resolution ***End Plastic Pollution: Towards an Internationally Legally Binding Instrument*** is important. It creates a path to a new international "Plastics Treaty"— focused on plastics as the central issue rather than as an incident to other subject areas— increasingly came to be seen as a key step in regulating global plastic production, use, and disposal, and has been advocated by many businesses looking for harmonized regulatory standards, predictable national targets, and common metrics to make their short- and long-term operational and investment decisions. **REMEMBER** that the approach needs to consider several issues. **CHECK:** https://www.no-burn.org/unea-plastics-treaty/ **TAKE NOTES** about the priorities that have been already identified. **CHECK** this: https://www.no-burn.org/mandate-for-global-plastics-treaty-a-historic-step-forward-in-the-fight-against-plastic-pollution/

With this resolution in mind and the tools that have already set the scene for a fundamental change, your committee is also encouraged to think about a new treaty or convention on plastic pollution that outlines concrete activities, steps, rules, and actions to address at least **T H R E E** fundamental **SHIFTS** of a big picture plan that can be collectively executed to create a new **CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR PLASTICS.**

## What is done in a circular economy?

"In a circular economy, **upstream innovation means that rather than working out how to deal with a product at its end-of-life, the focus is on the upstream phases of a product's life cycle to prevent waste and pollution from being created in the first place.** These strategies are in line with the waste management hierarchy, where reduction and value retention processes such as reuse strategies are prioritized over recycling. Some plastic products can

be replaced with others that perform the same function with a lower environmental impact, or the choice may be made not to use them altogether. Still, **we will want to make sure that all plastics that we do use are kept in circulation for as long as possible, ensuring products are reused, refurbished, and recycled and that we keep them in the economy and out of the environment." CHECK:**https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/unido-publications/2024-04/GACERE%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20Circular%20Design%20of%20Plastic%20Products_0.pdf

**CHECK:**


**WATCH this to learn about the 6 POINTS of a circular economy for plastic packaging:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmTQA-RNygQ


## Shift 1: Reuse

Accelerating the market for reusable products, to transform the throwaway economy to a reuse society, by creating the enabling environment to ensure the reuse market has a stronger business case than the single-use plastics market. **Studies show that reuse systems provide the highest opportunity to reduce plastic pollution (a reduction of 30 per cent by 2040) by replacing some of the most problematic and unnecessary products (The Pew Charitable Trusts and Systemiq 2020).**

## Shift 2: Recycle

Accelerating the market for plastics recycling by ensuring recycling becomes a more stable and profitable venture could reduce the amount of plastic pollution by an additional 20 per cent by 2040 (The Pew Charitable Trusts and Systemiq 2020). This will require an adequate availability of feedstock that can be recycled and that recycled materials can compete on a level playing field with virgin materials.

## Shift 3: Reorient and Diversify

Shaping the market for plastic alternatives to enable sustainable substitutions, thus avoiding replacing plastic products with alternatives that displace rather than reduce impacts. Sustainable alternatives could reduce pollution by 17 per cent by 2040 (The Pew Charitable Trusts and Systemiq 2020) but struggle to compete in markets with products made of virgin fossil fuel-based polymers owing to several challenges: cost of product, consumer demand and lack of appropriate regulations.

**Even with the market transformation approach, a significant volume of plastics cannot be made circular in the next 10 to 20 years and will require disposal solutions to prevent pollution. This refers to collecting and responsibly disposing of plastics that cannot be reused or recycled, including plastics that are already in the environment as existing pollution, or are stocked or will enter in the economy e.g., in short-lived or durable products designed without considering their circularity or long-term use in the economy. It also refers to new ways of financing collection and disposal of legacy plastics and preventing microplastics from entering the economy and the environment.**

Global plastic production and use has grown exponentially since the 1950s, with around nine million people employed globally in polymer production and plastic processing industries (United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Data Portal - ISIC codes 2013 and 2220). Light, strong, and seemingly inexpensive plastics have permeated our lives, our societies, and our economies – but at a pace that has escalated into significant costs to the environment, human health, and the economy. **Currently, the world produces 430 million metric tons of plastics each year (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2022), of which over two-thirds are short-lived products which soon become waste, and a growing amount (139 million metric tons in 2021 [Minderoo 2021]) after one single use. Plastic production is set to triple by 2060 if 'business-as-usual' continues (OECD 2022).**

A growing number of researchers are quantifying the social, economic, and environmental costs of plastic pollution. Scientific literature is linking chemicals in plastic and damage to human health at every stage of the plastic life cycle including workers and 'fence-line' communities that live next door to plastic production and waste disposal sites. As well as the potential for ecosystem impacts, microplastics have been found in the deepest recesses of the ocean, in pristine mountain glaciers, in breast milk and human bodies

**Research also shows that under a business-as-usual scenario, plastic could emit 19 per cent of global greenhouse gas GHG emissions allowed under a 1.5°C scenario by 2040, essentially making the goal out of reach** (The Pew Charitable Trusts and Systemiq 2020). Significantly, the costs and impacts are borne by all but fall disproportionally on people in some of the world's poorest nations.

Several reports indicate a heavy toll arising from the current linear plastics economy with preliminary estimates of the annual social and environmental costs linked to plastic pollution ranging between USD 300-600 billion per year, with some estimates above USD 1.5 trillion per year. Data shows potential litigation stemming from plastic pollution is estimated to exceed USD 20 billion in corporate liabilities in one country alone in the period 2022 to 2030. These lawsuits express the tension between different parts of society based on the profits received by the plastic industry and the costs borne by society at large but particularly by the most vulnerable, particularly within the framework of a universally recognized human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (UN General Assembly Resolution 76/300 of 28 July 2022). **An economically viable solution for all stakeholders does exist to achieve an end to plastic pollution**. **The transition to a new plastics economy is the most cost-effective way to ensure plastic pollution is substantially reduced by 2040, with solutions at hand that require vigilance, determination, and creativity.** While significant, the investment costs of the systems change are less than the current investment trajectory, around USD 65 billion per year through 2040 as opposed to USD 113 billion per year. **But time is of the essence: A 5-year delay could lead to an increase of 80 million metric tons of plastic pollution (The Pew Charitable Trusts and Systemiq 2020). A transformed plastics economy will introduce new economic benefits by bringing new business opportunities particularly for those who adapt faster.**

When the direct, environmental, and social cost savings are added up, more than USD 4.5 trillion are saved, or 20.3 per cent reduction in costs overall. **The systems change cannot be done in isolation due to the cross-border flows of plastics, liabilities, and risks: it requires harmonised international action. Aligned and coordinated measures and obligations between nations and across value chains will build synergies and create a major shift in the plastics policy landscape.** A harmonised knowledge base, driven by strong national reporting requirements, from which to take informed action, measure progress and refine regulatory interventions, depends on a globally coherent approach to monitoring and reporting. **However, it is recognised that countries will start from different places to implement market transformations and the specific policy mix appropriate to a particular country will need to consider the trade-offs built into policy choices and options.**

## What should your committee discuss?

**READ** the statement from Inger Andersen, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). **PAY ATTENTION TO the 10 POINTS highlighted in her statement:**

*"And it will take everyone to get the job done, starting with a strong outcome from INC-4 that moves us closer to an instrument that addresses the full life cycle of plastics.* ***An instrument that ensures that we eliminate the unnecessary single use and short-lived; that we roll out refill and reuse models; that we produce less problematic plastic. That we address harmful chemicals. That we design for circularity.*** *That we invest in solid waste management and recycling. So that we can use, reuse, and recycle resources more efficiently. And so that we can dispose safely of what remains."*

*Friends,*

*I have covered what I see as the most important elements of the instrument before, but they bear repeating, given what's at stake.*

***First, we must agree on clear, measurable time-bound targets.***

***Second, we must eliminate unnecessary single use, short-lived and problematic plastics.*** *Some uses of plastics are important and will remain so, including those that will be used to deliver net-zero. But there are many plastics, including short-lived and single use, that we all agree can go.*

***Third, we must redesign products.*** *There are many initiatives we can build on, such as the recently launched Circular Design of Plastic Products Policy Brief by the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency.*

***Fourth, we must agree on broad strokes Extended Producer Responsibility*** *schemes that build on guidelines and standards from the most successful schemes. Provide strong incentives for business. And promote design for circularity through eco-modulated fees to go beyond waste management.*

***Fifth, we must strengthen recycling*** *by investing in environmentally sound waste management and recycling technologies that meet specific standards.*

***Sixth, we must address chemicals of concern.*** *Workers and users are being exposed to hazardous chemicals in plastics. We need to find alternatives to protect human health.*

***Seven, we need reporting and transparency*** *that will ensure real progress is made and enable all other solutions and prevent greenwashing.*

***Eight, we must explore and agree on innovative funding for implementation.*** *Much financing will come from private sector investments. We, in UNEP, saw this ourselves when Kenya in 2017 banned single use plastic bags. The private sector immediately sprang into action producing and selling tote bags. No public funding was needed other than enforcement of the ban. The day we have targets for recycled content, the private sector will start investing in recycling facilities because of the value of*

*the recycled content. It is encouraging that just this last week 160 financial institutions representing 15.5 trillion USD in assets signed the UNEP Finance Initiative's Finance Statement on Plastic Pollution. A Statement that calls for an ambitious policy framework to supports the private finance sector in taking action.*

*Aside from the private sector funding, of course, a financial mechanism will be needed to support the institutional capacity building, experience exchange, enforcement and other shifts needed in the public sector.*

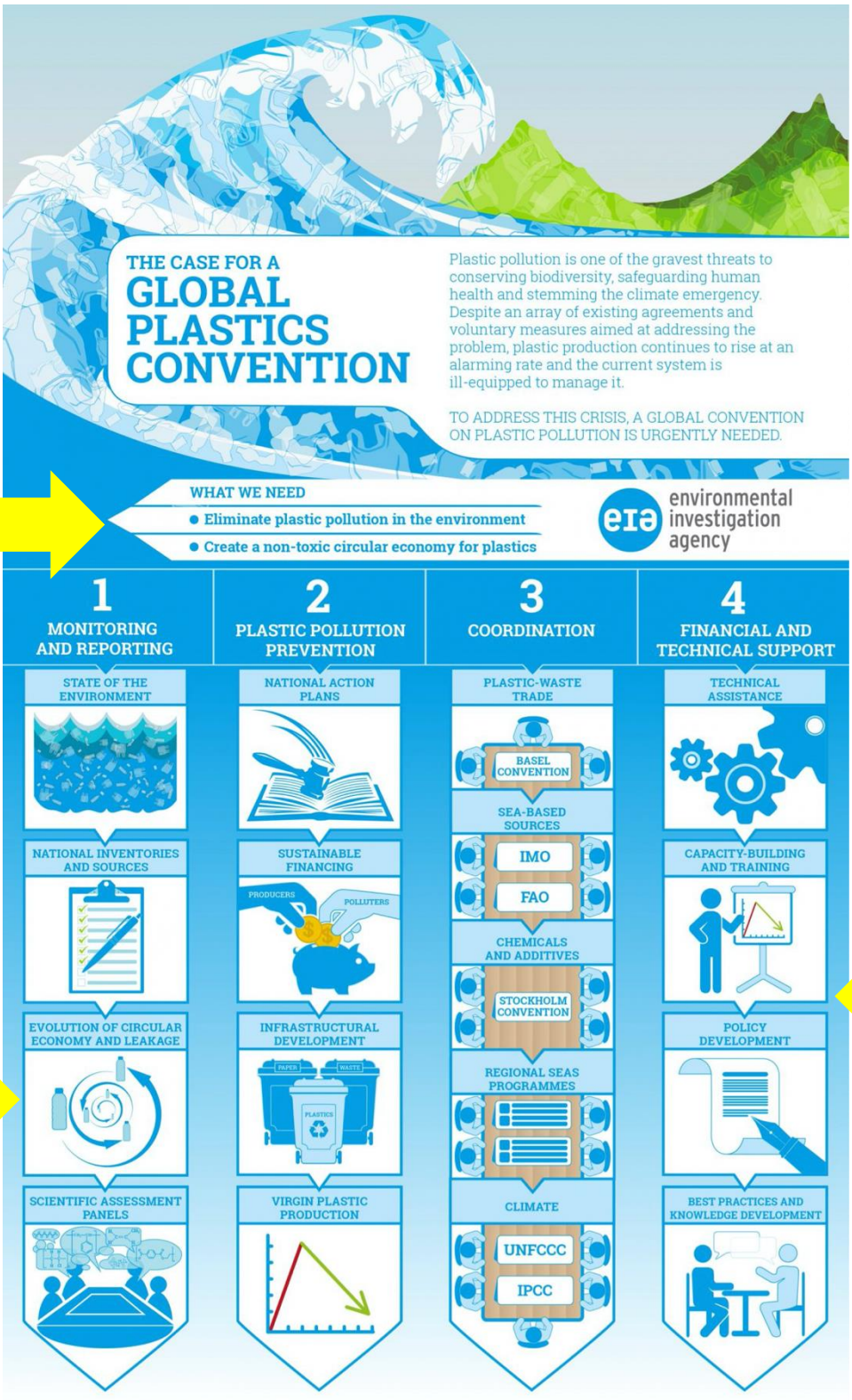
***Nine, we need to ensure a just transition*** *by including and account for the perspectives of all stakeholders and ensuring a just transition that bring decent new jobs for the 20 million waste pickers who form the global sanitation work force.*

***Ten, we need to address existing and future plastic pollution*** *by committing funds to clean ups and ways to capture pollution effectively.*

*These are elements that I hope we can see move forward in the coming days.*

## What can your committee do to address these 10 points?

**Source:** https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/speech/global-village-global-plastics-instrument




**Source:** https://reports.eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/08/eia-Infographic-Convention-on-Plastic-Pollution-scaled.jpg

## Conclusion

The resolution ***End Plastic Pollution: Towards an Internationally Legally Binding Instrument*** came amid a mounting plastic crisis that experts say threatens the environment, human health, and the economy. Research shows that humanity produces around 460 million metric tonnes of plastic a year, and without urgent action, this will triple by 2060. **CHECK:** https://www.oecd.org/environment/global-plastic-waste-set-to-almost-triple-by-2060.htm Furthermore, according to one UNEP study, over 14 million metric tonnes of plastic enters and damages aquatic ecosystems annually, and greenhouse gas emissions associated with plastics are expected to account for 15 per cent of the total emissions allowable by 2050 if humanity is to limit global warming to 1.5°C. **CHECK:**https://www.unep.org/resources/pollution-solution-global-assessment-marine-litter-and- plastic-pollution

In summary, as Jyoti Mathur-Filip, Executive Secretary of the INC Secretariat on Plastic Pollution" has put it **"the science is clear: we need rapid, ambitious and meaningful global action to curb plastic pollution."** Working collaboratively with your fellow delegates to pass resolutions to create a legally binding tool to tackle the plastic crisis, you can lay the groundwork needed to implement a life-cycle approach to plastic pollution, which would significantly contribute to ending the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. **CHECK:** https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/01/24/oceans-more-plastic-than-fish/79267192/

The collaborative work of good delegates can help the world to be, like UNEP has phrased it, in **a good place to move FROM POLLUTION TO SOLUTION. CHECK** this: https://www.unep.org/interactive/pollution-to-solution/

## TOPIC 2: ADDRESSING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE FASHION AND TEXTILE INDUSTRIES

**What is the problem? What are the environmental risks of fast fashion?**


**WATCH:** https://youtu.be/0v7f0KeNpv8
https://youtu.be/1-rpmq6XVrU
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_bjLgLn1AI

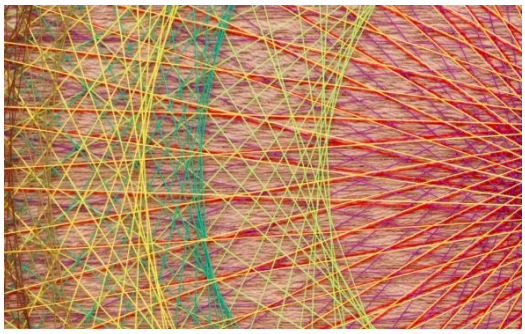
Washing clothes emits over 500,000 tons of microfibers into the ocean each year, an equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles. Many of those microfibers are polyester, a plastic found in an estimated 60% of garments. Producing polyester releases two to three times more carbon emissions than cotton, and polyester does not break down in the ocean and seas.

With more than 7,000 delegates from 182 UN Member States and more than 170 ministers participating in Nairobi in March of 2024, the UNEA-6 adopted a package of action plans, from promoting sustainable lifestyles to the sound management of chemicals and waste and sand and dust storms, issuing calls for immediate steps to rein in overconsumption and take smarter, greener steps towards sustainability. During the conference dozens of side events considered fresh initiatives and possible breakthroughs, including the use of artificial intelligence to fight climate change.

Cheap and disposable clothing has taken over the world and it is clear we have become addicted to fast fashion. Clothes being discarded in the Global North are ending up in the rivers, oceans, and some of the poorest communities in the Global South. These throwaway models are exacerbating the triple planetary crisis - the crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste - and why we need to tackle this challenge head

on and create a more circular, sustainable textile sector that serves everyone's needs," Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP

Likewise, in the so-called fast fashion field, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and **UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion** exhibited featured stylish clothing showcasing **a project aimed at stopping overproduction and overconsumption, eliminating hazardous chemical byproducts, and scaling circular business models which benefit the environment. Why was that the case?** It was part of the agenda because fashion revolves around the latest trends but is the industry behind the curve on the only consumer trend that ultimately matters. Consumer trends have a very negative environmental impact. Patterns of consumption need to change to ensure the survival of the planet.



**The fashion industry produces between 2 to 8 per cent of global carbon emissions.** Textile dyeing is also the second largest polluter of water globally and it takes around 2,000 gallons of water to make a typical pair of jeans. **Every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or burned.**

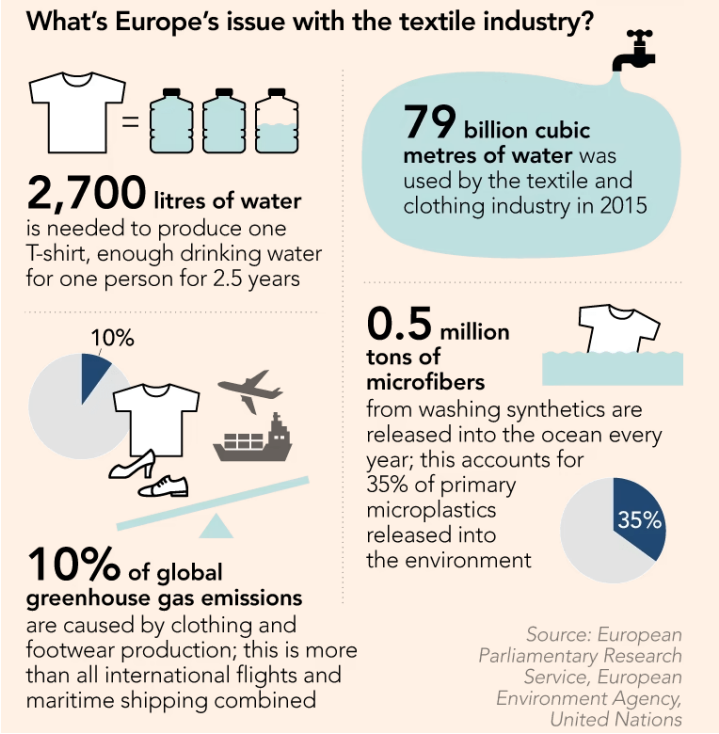
If nothing changes, by 2050 the fashion industry will use up a quarter of the world's carbon budget. Textiles are also estimated to account for approximately 9% of annual microplastic losses to the ocean.

In addition, there is the human cost: textile workers are often paid low wages and forced to work long hours in appalling conditions. But with consumers increasingly demanding change, the

fashion world is finally responding leading its way with its clothing proposals and designers looking to break the take-make-waste model.

> "However, there is still a fundamental problem with the fast fashion business model where revenues are based on selling more products, and therefore retailers must constantly offer new collections. It would be unrealistic to expect consumers to stop shopping on a large scale, so going forward, I would expect to see more development and wider adoption of more sustainable production methods such as waterless dyeing, using waste as a raw material, and development of innovative solutions to the textile waste problem,"

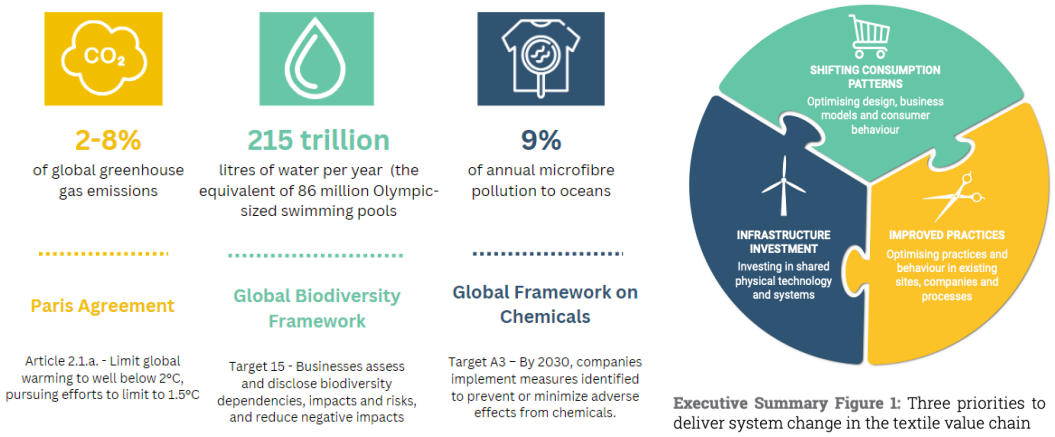
The textile value chain is complex and highly international – impacts of practices and policies enacted in one region reverberate across the global value chain. **There are currently no identified, open access, global structures to support coordination between policymakers and provide opportunities to share and scale textile policy work across countries and regions.** There is a need for a policy dialogue and coordination mechanism to give cohesion and support the upscaling of current policy efforts to minimize negative impacts on nature, people, and economies of the textile value chain.




https://www.texspacetoday.com/asias-textile-industry-transforming/

## What should you discuss?

Keep in mind that the textile sector isn't just about style; it's the frontline in the battle against the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. **Each year, the textile sector is estimated to be responsible for:**




**Executive Summary Figure 1:** Three priorities to deliver system change in the textile value chain

- Does your country have rules to promote the sustainable production of textiles (types of fabrics, methods of production, combination of materials)?

https://www.sustainablebrandplatform.com/articles/eu-country-specific-fashion-texile-regulations-2024
https://www.forbes.com/sites/beximco-group/2021/09/01/leading-the-way-to-sustainable-fashion/

- Does your country or region have recycling standards for specific materials (polyester)?

https://fashionforgood.com/our_news/can-we-recycle-polyester/
https://www.ikea.com/global/en/our-business/sustainability/recycled-polyester/
https://euric.org/resource-hub/press-releases-statements/press-release-clothing-reuse-has-a-70-times-lower-environmental-impact-reveals-new-study

- Does your country use guidelines like these?

https://www.basel.int/Portals/4/download.aspx?d=UNEP-CHW.16-CRP.31.English.pdf
https://plastichotspotting.lifecycleinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201125-UNEP-IUCN-report.pdf

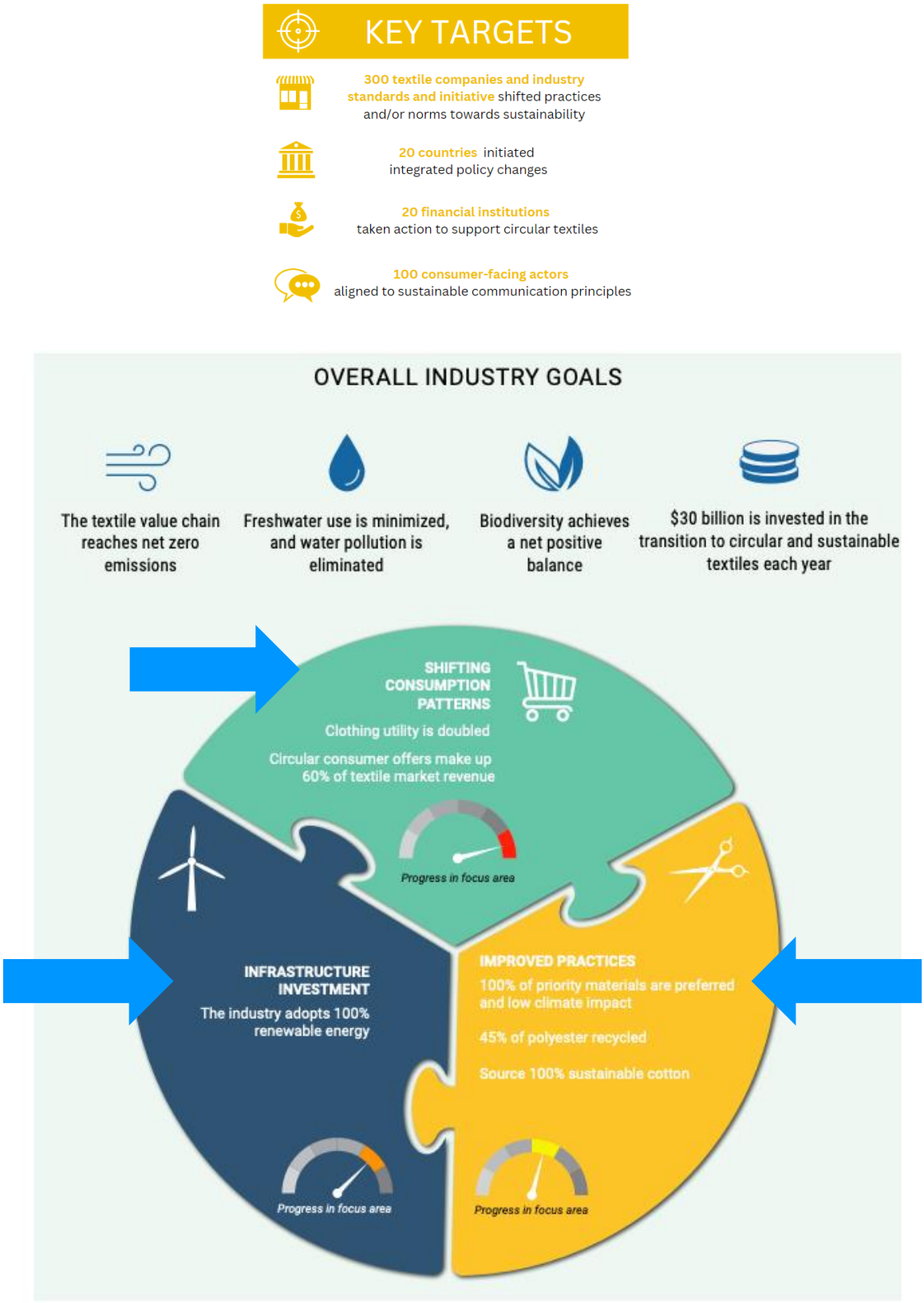
- Is your country part of these initiatives o similar efforts?

https://unfashionalliance.org/
https://buildingcircularity.org/textiles/
https://www.unep.org/circularity-and-used-textile-trade-project-1https://www.unep.org/technical-highlight/governments-call-global-textiles-policy-dialogue

- What are some case studies that could be taken as references? What type of changes are needed in commerce and trade practices?

CHECK:
https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/45486
https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/42047;jsessionid=3339C6D65DA9C1532FE8DBBE3FF9D4D7

- Has your country taken action to achieve these goals and targets?




**Executive Summary Figure 2:** Existing quantified industry goals for a sustainable and circular textile value chain

https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/2023-12/Full%20Report%20-%20UNEP%20Sustainability%20and%20Circularity%20in%20the%20Textile%20Value%20Chain%20A%20Global%20Roadmap_0.pdf

**Remember that the motto is to think beyond prevailing patterns and live within sustainable limits—a message that should resonate with fashion designers, retailers, and consumers seeking to reform an industry.**