



“Plastic in the EECCA (Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia) countries and around the world: legislation, production, consumption and disposal”

Executive summary

Plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental issues.

Researchers estimate that more than 8.3 billion tons of plastic has been produced since the early 1950s. About 60% of that plastic has ended up in either a landfill or the natural environment.

UNEP, in its press release on World Environment Day 2018, the theme for which was “Beat plastic pollution”, calls “to improve the way we manage our plastic waste...Only 9% of all plastic waste ever produced has been recycled. About 12% has been incinerated, while the rest — 79% — has accumulated in landfills, dumps or the natural environment.”

Microplastics, very small pieces of plastic, have become another big concern, since it can become embedded in animals' tissue through ingestion or respiration. The microplastics ingested by fish and crustaceans can be subsequently consumed by humans as the end of the food chain, posing a risk to human health.

“At every stage of its lifecycle, plastic poses distinct risks to human health, arising from both exposure to plastic particles themselves and associated chemicals. The majority of people worldwide are exposed at multiple stages of this lifecycle.” This is one of the conclusions of the report, *“Plastic and Health: The Real Price of Plastic Addiction”* released by the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) in February, 2019.

The world agrees there's a plastic waste crisis. The issue of combating plastic pollution is reflected in a number of documents adopted at the global level.

For example, one of the targets of Sustainable development Goal (SDG) #6, *“Ensure access to water and sanitation for all”*, is to, by 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution and eliminating dumping and minimizing releases of hazardous chemicals and materials.

Preventing and significantly reducing marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution, by 2025, is one of the main targets of SDG 14: *“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”*.

On 5 December 2017, in Nairobi, Kenya, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) passed the Draft resolution on marine litter and microplastics. This is in line with SDG target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to *“prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”*.

In March, 2019, the European Parliament approved the ‘Single-Use Plastics Directive’, banning a wide-range of single-use plastic items, such as straws, cotton buds and cutlery, by 2021 in the EU. The plastic products covered under the new law represent 70 percent of all marine litter items.

On May 10, 2019 the governments of 187 countries agreed to control the movement of plastic waste between national borders, in an effort to curb the world's plastic crisis. Nations agreed to add plastic to the Basel Convention, a treaty that regulates movement of hazardous materials from one country to another, in order to combat the dangerous effects of plastic pollution around the world. The pact was approved at the 14th Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention in Geneva, Switzerland. The decision was hailed by the vast majority of the 187 nations present as well as by the Convention's environmental watchdog organization, Basel Action Network (BAN), along with other civil society groups in attendance, as a breakthrough for environmental justice and an ethical circular economy.

In January 2018, IPEN, International Pollutants Elimination Network, a global network of public interest NGOs working together for a world in which toxic chemicals are no longer produced or used in ways that harm human health and the environment, following the outcome of the Central and Eastern Europe regional meeting on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), prepared its comments to the Resolution of the 4th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4). IPEN suggested to develop recommendations on measurable goals in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and highlighted new initiatives that should be combined with current emerging political/problematic issues, including the issue of plastic pollution.

EECCA countries have joined the battle against plastic by developing national plans and adopting laws that aim to phase out the use of plastic bags and single-use plastic items and then ban them; building new recycling plants, and educating citizens how to recycle.

One example of cooperation between government and entrepreneur bodies is in Kazakhstan, where the Memorandum on the phased reduction of the use of plastic bags in Kazakhstan was signed on September 20, 2019 by the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Atameken*, the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Association of Environmental Enterprises of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The entrepreneurs and individuals in EECCA region are trying to find new ways to turn single use plastic into new products – for example, Eco-Pouf company from Karaganda, Kazakhstan, produces handmade poufs made of plastic bottles. The companies from the EECCA region apply the circular economy approaches to reduce single use plastic waste and to introduce “green” alternatives to the customers – for example, the Group of Companies Kinglet, in Lahoysk, Belarus, produces biodegradable packaging made of corn starch.

Environmental NGOs are also contributing – for example, in Armenia and Belarus, NGOs are implementing a social campaign “A New Life in Exchange for Bottle Caps”. Activists collect plastic bottles caps, send them for recycling and then use the money to pay for treatment of critically ill children and adults or to buy medical equipment (for example, wheelchairs) for children and adults from low-income families.

Environmental activists in EECCA countries also implement clean-up campaigns at local and national levels to collect plastic waste, teach citizens how to recycle properly, develop smartphone applications that help in collecting plastic waste, and so forth.

Some campaigns to reduce the use of plastic bags are held nationwide. In November 2017, Greenpeace Russia launched a “Ban the Bag” campaign, inviting the Russia’s top 20 retailers to join.

The representatives of IPEN NGO members from EECCA countries, following their Regional Meeting which took place on August 27-28, 2018 on Lake Issyk-Kul, adopted the Resolution on solving plastic problems in EECCA region.

The participants of this Meeting called on EECCA governments to take the following steps to reduce accumulation of plastic waste in EECCA countries: 1) stop the production of single use plastic items, such as personal hygiene products made of plastic, food wrap, plastic containers, straws, plastic bags, disposable tableware (plates, cups, cutlery and so forth) and ban them by 2025; 2) encourage manufacturers to apply the circular economy approaches introducing “green” alternatives to the customers and turn recycled plastic into new, safer products that do not contain toxic chemicals; 3) raise awareness of plastic problems among consumers, manufacturers and suppliers of plastic products, gradually changing the citizens' consumption patterns in regard to

single use plastic items and plastic bags, and ultimately stop the receipt of single use plastic items to the markets of EECCA countries.

Eco-Accord, the Center for Environment and Sustainable Development, which is the IPEN EECCA Regional Hub, in cooperation with Greenwomen Analytical Environmental Agency, Kazakhstan, released the review “Plastic in the EECCA (Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia) countries and around the world: legislation, production, consumption and disposal” to draw the attention of authorities and the public to the problem of plastic pollution and to urge them to seek a change, including a change of the national environmental laws, policies and corporate behavior, and the citizens' consumption patterns in regard to single use plastic items and plastic bags.