

The UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Zero Waste

THEMATIC BRIEF

Just Transition in Waste Management and Circular Economy



Source: Yunus Environment Hub

JUST TRANSITION

Circular Economy business models can help reduce waste by keeping resources in use longer and designing out waste. While moving from linear to circular strategies, we must also ensure social dimensions are addressed to benefit both people and planet.



Just transition principals are key to ensure decent work along the value chain, and, when combined with circular economy approaches, they can help create opportunities for new green jobs, strengthen local economies, and reduce waste generation.

It is important that developing and developed countries embrace just transition principals for systemic change that lifts up communities, workers and countries.

Linkages to Zero Waste

There is a need to ensure a just transition for stakeholders along the entire value chain. Effective waste management is key to ensure materials such as harmful plastics do not pollute the environment. At the same time, just transition principals must be implemented for workers in the sector to ensure human rights are respected.

Transitioning to circular economy business models can help improve upstream innovations and reduce waste. To accelerate the transition, we need to upskill businesses and future entrepreneurs on circular innovations and socially inclusive business models. Along with the environmental impact, this will also lay the founda-

tion for new, green job creation, that combined with proper training and skills development for workers can bring increased economic prosperity to local communities.

Objective

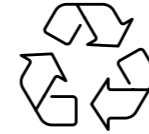


The objective is to share actionable recommendations for stakeholders, policymakers, and businesses for a just transition in the circular economy and waste management sector and, simultaneously, enable the adoption and growth of circular business models. The brief will highlight the need to move from linear to circular economy business models to reduce waste, and outline good practices to ensure a just transition in the process.

Key Findings and Implications

Social dialogue is key for a just transition. Planning and actions must include stakeholders across the value chain from governments, labour organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), companies, waste management organizations, academia, ensure representation from females for gender equality. Youth and local communities must also be involved for holistic impact.

Inspiration can be taken from other sectors or countries who have implemented a just transition, for example the energy sector.



Through best practice examples, we can learn from risks and challenges that were encountered and mitigated, as well as build off successful strategies for implementation. For the informal sector, a plan for a just transition must build and improve upon systems that waste pickers have already established while guaranteeing better and decent work, social protection, more training opportunities, appropriate technology transfer, support for infrastructure, and organising of workers. Additionally, it must also ensure greater job security for workers at all stages of the plastic value chain including waste-pickers and other workers in informal and cooperative settings, as well as any additional workers affected by plastic pollution.

Recommendations and Call to Action

- All stakeholders should be included in social dialogue when just transition policies/regulations are developed, including youth, vulnerable groups, gender representatives, etc.
- Upscale solutions need to increase resources for circular solutions that design out unnecessary waste.
- Provide public and employer support for retraining, reskilling, and formalization of work for vulnerable workers. Offer training on circular literacy to support businesses to shift from linear to circular, and educate future entrepreneurs to adopt a socially inclusive, circular business approach from the start.



- Guidelines and toolkits should be developed and included in the 'UN Plastics Treaty' to support Parties with implementing their obligations related to a just transition in waste management.
- Citizens must also be sensitized to increase adoption and support behaviour change for circular business models to thrive.

Just Transition

- ILO: 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.
- Climate Justice Alliance: Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.

Further Information

- [Building Back Better in ASEAN countries – Opportunities to Advance Circular Economy](#)
- [ASEAN Transition to a Circular Economy – Policy Brief](#)
- [International Institute for Sustainable Development: Opportunity to create similar resource for just transition in waste management: The Just Transition Toolbox for Coal Regions: Knowledge needs in the South-East-Asian context](#)
- [Towards a Sustainable Future: Recommendations for a Just Transition in Waste Management and Circular Economy in the ASEAN Region](#)

Contact us on advisoryboard.zerowaste@un.org
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Waste Management and Circular Economy

- ILO: 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 measures ensuring decent work.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): A circular economy should eliminate waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems. This approach aims to achieve circularity in waste management, balancing environmental goals with social and economic considerations.

References

1. [ILO Guidelines for a just transition](#)
2. [Just Transition Factsheet](#)
3. [OECD Just Transition Report](#)
4. [IAWP's Vision for a Just Transition for Waste Pickers under the UN Plastics Treaty](#)

