



This paper has been compiled by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, with input from the UN Environment Programme in relation to the government signatories.

THE GLOBAL COMMITMENT FIVE YEARS IN: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation shocked the world with the prospect of a future in which there could be more plastic than fish in the ocean. Through this analysis, and the critical work of many other organisations, the enormity of the plastic pollution problem became apparent and a global debate ignited.

Two years later, the Global Commitment was launched, quickly becoming the biggest global voluntary effort to tackle plastic waste and pollution.

It was conceived by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and UN Environment Programme, along with key stakeholders, as an early attempt at a globally coordinated response to the problem. At a time of limited and fragmented action on the topic, it marked a moment in which a group of leaders came together with the intent to drive action and lay critical foundations for systems change.

Over 1,000 organisations from across the world, including businesses representing 20% of all plastic packaging used globally and 55 government signatories, have since mobilised behind the Global Commitment's [common vision](#) to stop plastic packaging becoming waste. It is a vision of a circular economy in which we eliminate the plastic we don't need; innovate towards new materials and business models; and circulate all the plastic we still use. In joining, signatories took a leap of faith by signing up to ambitious 2025 targets. They then collectively committed more than USD 10 billion towards meeting those goals.

Over the last five years, Global Commitment business signatories have significantly outperformed their peers in tackling plastic waste, showing that a concerted effort can unlock change. They have reduced their use of several plastic items commonly identified as problematic or avoidable; stabilised their use of virgin plastics – avoiding nearly three million tonnes of virgin plastics production a year compared to business as usual; and more than doubled their share of recycled content.¹ The latter achievement is avoiding more than two million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year and keeping one barrel of oil in the ground every two seconds.

The Global Commitment has also catalysed change far beyond its signatory group. It has done so by creating broad alignment on the vision, providing unprecedented transparency, revealing barriers, and laying the foundations for the Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty as well as for 11 national and regional Plastics Pacts.

At the same time, with a large part of industry not yet taking action, and signatories likely to miss key 2025 targets, the world is off track to eliminate plastic waste and pollution. Currently, 80% of the global plastic packaging market is not covered by the Global Commitment and performing, on average, much worse than the 20% who have signed up. Also within the signatory group, there is significant variation in performance. And, just as it is important to acknowledge the progress made, it is important

to acknowledge that the Global Commitment and its signatories will likely not realise all the 2025 ambitions they set out with. Transparency has always been a key component of the Global Commitment. In a world that is still awash with plastic waste and pollution, posing a threat to nature, climate, and human health – it is imperative that we learn both from the progress made and where it is lacking, so that we can move forward at pace.

The learnings so far reinforce the need for more, and more ambitious, binding policy measures, as well as accelerated voluntary business action.

This cannot be an either-or: both are crucial to tackling plastic waste and pollution at the pace and scale required.

The international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to meet the scale of the challenge and accelerate global change. It is the best prospect for rapid and systemic worldwide impact. By putting in place legally binding global rules and measures, an international legally binding instrument can ensure that all countries act in concert to unlock circular economy solutions to end plastic pollution. In parallel to the negotiation of the instrument, governments should also ramp up the implementation of effective regulations in their own jurisdictions.

Voluntary business action that complements long-term policy change will also remain vital to push progress further, faster.

Regulation will not solve everything, given the highly complex nature of the plastic and packaging waste and pollution issue. Voluntary business action will continue to play a crucial role in innovating, showing what's possible, and creating demand for solutions. The past five years have proven that committed businesses can make a meaningful difference and that the vast majority of businesses can do more than they are doing today. Waiting for regulation cannot be an excuse for inaction – and companies leading the way will reap the rewards. Equally, businesses need not wait for regulation to enable change, but can play an active role in advocating for it.

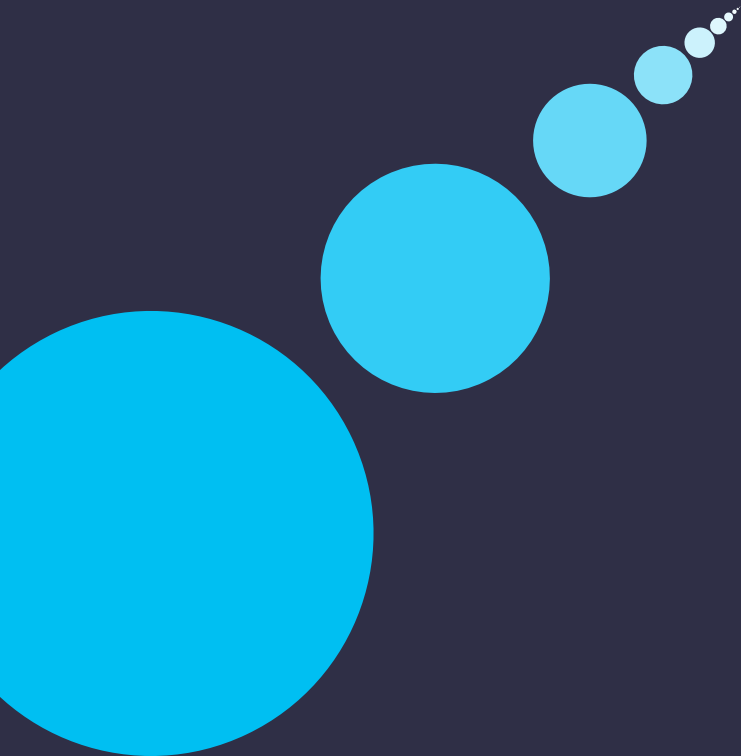
Based on the insights from the last five years, we call on policymakers, negotiators of the international legally binding instrument, and businesses, to:

(1) Replicate, scale, and mandate the solutions that industry leaders have already compellingly demonstrated are possible. Limiting virgin plastics use, eliminating problematic and avoidable plastic items, and increasing recycled content are all areas where Global Commitment business signatories have shown significant progress is possible, but where the market as a whole is lagging behind. Therefore, policymakers have an opportunity to accelerate the shift by creating a higher level playing field where the entire industry advances in these areas. In parallel, businesses should further scale these solutions to accelerate the progress needed and as such stay ahead of regulation and respond to increasing shareholder and customer pressure.

(2) Overcome, through concerted policy and business action, three pivotal hurdles currently blocking progress: scaling reuse, flexible plastic packaging in high-leakage countries, and lack of infrastructure to collect and circulate packaging. Over the last five years, it has become clear that even industry leaders have made limited progress in these areas. Overcoming these pivotal hurdles is critical – otherwise, progress will simply plateau long before coming close to solving plastic waste and pollution. To do so, bold policy interventions and business innovation will be needed.

Looking ahead, the Global Commitment will continue to serve as a key force in driving voluntary action and openly sharing both successes and obstacles with the world to inform and complement the international legally binding instrument. We will, together with signatories and stakeholders, chart a path for the Global Commitment beyond 2025, evolving it based on the learnings we now have, for maximum impact towards 2030.

We know there is still much work to be done, and we need to move faster, however the foundations laid in the last five years give us hope. It will be hard, but we forge ahead – together – with much more clarity on what needs to be done and committed to the vision of a world in which plastic never becomes waste or pollution.



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