



How is the global community approaching marine plastic litter?

**Policy Summary of the
G20 Report on
Actions against
Marine Plastic Litter**



Background

Plastics are versatile with wide-ranging applications, and they play a significant role in human livelihoods. However, the amount of plastic in the world's oceans has been rapidly growing year by year^{1,2,3}, posing a threat to the environment and to our way of life. Marine litter issues have been intensively discussed at various international fora, such as UNEA (United Nations Environment Assembly), G7, and G20. In light of the "G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter" agreed at the G20 Hamburg summit in July 2017, the "G20 Implementation Framework for Actions on Marine Plastic Litter" was established at the G20 Ministerial Meeting in June 2019 in Karuizawa.⁴ Maintaining this momentum, the "Osaka Blue Ocean Vision (OBOV)", aiming to reduce additional pollution by Marine Plastic Litter (MPL) to zero by 2050 through a comprehensive life-cycle approach, was first shared by G20 leaders at the G20 Osaka Summit in 2019 and has now been widely shared at various international fora as a common global vision. To achieve this vision, the G20 Implementation Framework was also endorsed by the G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration and has received additional support from multiple members.

Under the G20 Implementation Framework, G20 members agreed to share and update knowledge and information on relevant policies, plans, and measures taken/to be taken voluntarily, and promote policies and measures through peer learning from best practices. With this as a background, the first G20 report on Actions against Marine Plastic Litter was published in 2019⁵, followed by the second report published in 2020⁶ and the third report in 2021⁷ by extending the reporting scope to the countries and regions sharing the OBOV as well as institutions beyond the G20 community. These reports were produced under the responsibility of the G20 Presidency Country: the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2020 and the Ministry of Ecological Transition, Government of Italy in 2021. The Ministry of the Environment, Japan, and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) have provided support for the development of the reports since June 2019. For the 2021 Report, the Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) also contributed to developing the summary infographics over the past three years from 2019 to 2021.



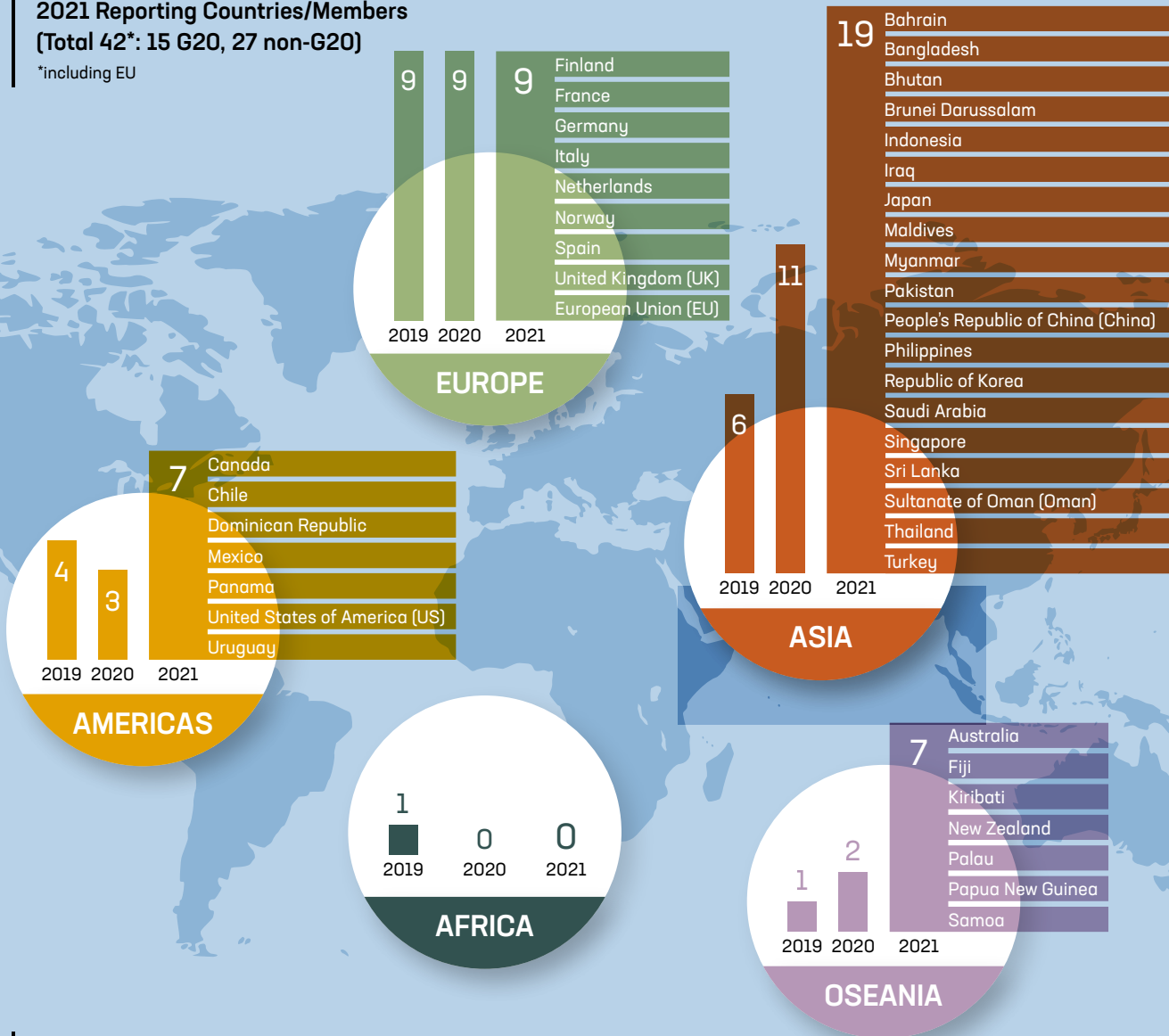
Who is involved in this initiative?

The first report received contributions from 20 countries in 2019, for the second report, from 25 countries (including non-G20) and 10 organisations in 2020, and for the third report, 42 countries (including non-G20) and 13 organisations shared their actions in 2021 as summarized below.

List of contributed countries and organizations for Report

2021 Reporting Countries/Members (Total 42*: 15 G20, 27 non-G20)

*including EU



2021 Reporting Organisations/NGOs (Total: 13)

Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Ocean Conservancy
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
Ellen MacArthur Foundation	United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
Global Environment Facility (GEF)	World Bank (WB)
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	World Economic Forum
International Resource Panel (IRP)	

These infographics show that the number of reporting countries has increased over the last three years. The majority of reported countries are located in Asia and Europe; however, reporting from non-G20 countries has also increased since 2020, which contributed to providing more variation in the reported regions in 2020 and 2021.

As these data indicate, actions on MPL are increasing worldwide, but progress is still limited. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic is leading to a surge in the production and consumption of masks and protective equipment, which are made of mainly plastic products. UNCTAD reported that the pandemic has increased marine plastic pollution from disposable products, such as plastic face masks and hand sanitiser bottles.⁸ While there has been a renewed realization of the importance and value of plastic, this does not change the gravity of the marine plastic litter problem.



Where we are and what has been done so far?

Countries, both G20 and non-G20, have actively worked on a variety of actions to combat marine plastic litter. In this reporting initiative, countries reported their policy status based on a legitimate framework for MPL and individual actions in the context of MPL. The reported numbers on each component during 2019–2021 are summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Summary of reported policy status during 2019–2021

	Number of reported countries		
	2019	2020	2021
Number of total reported countries	20	25	42
Number of reported countries with National Action Plans for MPL	17	17	26
Number of reported countries with legal frameworks for MPL	18	22	35
Number of reported countries with indicators for MPL	14	16	19
Number of reported countries with the following policy actions			
Introduce Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)	7	16	26
Reduce single-use plastic (shopping bags, straws, etc.) by regulations or voluntary measures	15	20	38
Restrict microplastics for cosmetics etc.	7	10	16
Improve waste management recycling system	17	20	35
Conduct clean-up activities for rivers and coasts	16	21	38
Take action on fishing gear	11	18	28
Install capturing trap/filter on drainage/river	8	14	24
Promote innovative solutions	14	18	31
Boost multi-stakeholder involvement and awareness-raising	18	21	38
Share scientific information and knowledge: R&D and Monitoring	15	20	33
Participate in international cooperation through international organizations, multi-national groups, etc.	16	21	39
Target region supported by your international cooperation initiatives/projects: Southeast Asia	10	15	22
Target region supported by your international cooperation initiatives/projects: Africa	4	7	9
Target region supported by your international cooperation initiatives/projects: Latin America	3	7	10

Table 1 indicates that the National Action Plans and legal frameworks for MPL were reported by more than half of the total reported countries over three years. For example, Australia has recently released its 2021 National Plastics Plan in addition to the 2019 National Waste Policy Action Plan. Under this new policy framework, Australia is attempting to take a whole lifecycle approach to the plastic challenge, including product design, recycling capacity, demand for recycled content, and plastic leakage into the environment.

Trends and examples of MPL specific policy actions

As for specific policy actions, more than 60% of all contributing countries have reported ongoing actions for components, such as: Reduce single-use plastic by regulations or voluntary measures; Improve waste management recycling system; Conduct clean-up activities for rivers and coasts; Promote innovative solutions; Boost multi-stakeholder involvement and awareness-raising; Share scientific information and knowledge (R&D and Monitoring), and Participate in international cooperation. Some interesting examples are introduced below from the latest 2021 report.

For example, the UK has announced that it will introduce a tax on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled plastic under the Resources and Waste Strategy for England policy. The Republic of Korea reported a microplastic monitoring research scheme, which has been conducted from 2021 to evaluate the pollution level of microplastic in the marine environment. Awareness-raising is also encouraged by many countries, with Japan being a good example. It published a brochure called “Good Practices by Japanese Companies for Reducing Microplastics” collecting the case studies and information regarding Japanese companies’ efforts and technologies related to microplastics. Additionally, some countries have focused on promoting innovation as one of the key solutions for MPL. These include encouraging plastic alternatives (i.e. biodegradable plastics), promoting circular product design (e.g. use of recycled materials or closed-loop recycling system across the product value chain). Indonesia has regulated producers to implement the “reduce” principle of the 3Rs requiring them to redesign their products and packaging to make them returnable, reusable, recyclable, more recycled contents, durable, compostable, refillable, and rechargeable. There is also a regulation requesting producers to take back their post-consumer products and packaging, which are circulated through recycle and reuse systems.*



* If you are interested in these actions and would like to know more details, please check our full report which is available online and/or the government’s original websites.

Areas for further progress

Despite this positive progress, we can also see that there are still some areas where further progress is required. For example, there is a lack of clear indicators for MPL policy and related actions. According to reporting, some advanced countries already have specific indicators and targets for MPL, but these are still limited. Disregarding this overall lacking of indicators, several countries reported ambitious targets and indicators, such as the US's national target to achieve a 50% recycling rate by 2030.

Actions to tackle microplastics should also be further improved. As seen in the table 2, less than half of the total reported countries stated that they have initiatives to regulate microplastics for cosmetics etc. in an official policy format over three years 2019-2021. In the 2021 report, 15 countries (out of 41 responses) reported they have established initiatives for microplastics regulation. Moreover, they were mostly developed countries, with developing countries showing less progress in terms of microplastics regulation.

Another important feature is Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). As the table shows above, EPR was reported by only seven countries in 2019 (which is less than half of the total reported); however, the reported numbers gradually increased in the following years. For example, the Maldives identified EPR as one of their key policy measures in the country's single-use plastic phaseout plan according to reporting carried out in 2021. Under this policy framework, industries such as importers, producers and distributors are required to take responsibility for sustainable product design, separate collection, and end-of life management of their products. In order to reduce or alter the usage of single-use plastics, which have been identified as a fundamental source of marine plastic waste, other economic instruments were also reported by several countries in line with EPR incentives. These include incentives to increase tariffs, duty exemptions for alternatives, levies requested to consumers (a levy on single-use plastic bags is the most commonly applied case), and providing business facilitation projects to boost the market for secondary, rather than virgin materials. Various countries have taken this comprehensive approach including economic, technological, and social policy measures.



Challenges reported by countries

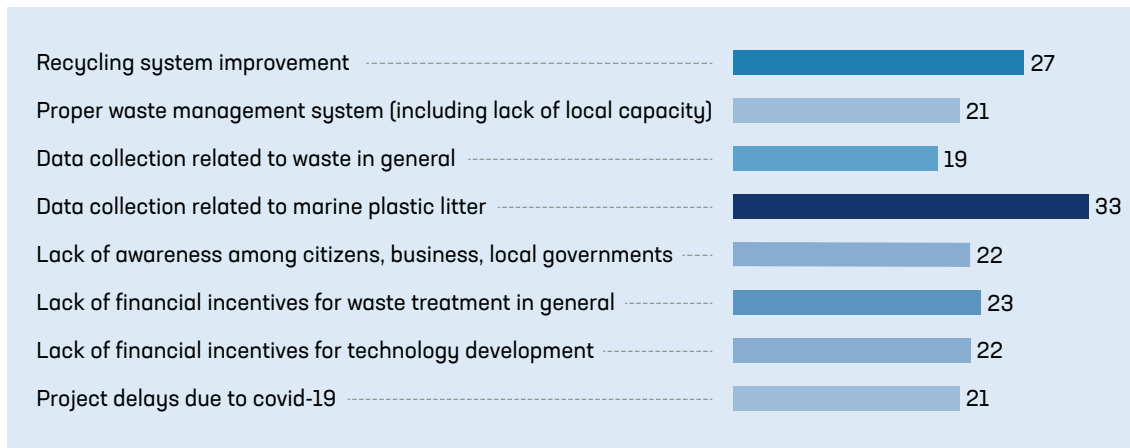


Figure 1: Challenges reported by countries in 2021

However, countries are reporting that challenges still remain. Under this reporting initiative, we asked countries what challenges they face in terms of MPL. The 2021 reporting shows that the most reported challenge was on data collection for MPL, followed by issues related to the recycling system, a lack of financial incentives for waste treatment and technology development, lower social awareness, a weak waste management system (including low local capacity), project delays due to COVID-19, and data collection for waste in general. Countries such as Sri Lanka also indicated governance issues as another challenge, especially the difficulties related to interagency cooperation for MPL. Therefore, more efforts targeting these reported challenges should be taken, not only at the domestic level, but also at the international cooperation level.

Cooperation for plastic free ocean

The global state of MPL is rapidly changing thanks to emergency actions in many parts of the world. As we have discussed in this briefing paper, many different types of policy, business, and voluntary actions have already been taken by countries. And it is not specifically G20 countries that are being proactive in this regard. We have also seen many non-G20 members conducting active and advanced initiatives in different regions. Forgoing forward, countries are expected to continue to contribute to information-sharing in the context of marine plastic issues. In particular, the sharing of data and information related to actual impacts of MPL policy measures should be encouraged so that countries can mutually refer to the impacts of such measures when looking to introduce new policies and legislations.

Finally, we hope this short summary paper will speak to the many people around the world who are interested in this critical issue, and encourage them to be more proactive, in line with international momentum within and beyond the G20 community.

References

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For efficient information-sharing, the reported information and relevant news are regularly updated at the G20 Marine Plastic Litter portal site, and the series of reports are downloadable for free at:

> 2021 Report:

<https://g20mpl.org/archives/1087>

> 2020 Report: <https://g20mpl.org/archives/988>

> 2019 Report: <https://g20mpl.org/archives/982>

