

Better and harmonized statistics on plastic flows in the Nordics

Better plastic statistics is essential to develop good policies on plastics, and to measure their effects. A Nordic project found several challenges and solutions that should be prioritized in this work.



This report summarizes the findings and recommendations from a Nordic workshop focused on improving data collection and harmonization related to plastic material flows. The aim of the workshop was to identify key statistical information for national inventories and address critical knowledge gaps in data collection and quality.

If you want to read the full report on better and harmonized statistics on plastics in the Nordics, please click [here](#).

Better data required at global and national level

In 2022, the UN initiated negotiations for a global agreement to end plastic pollution, emphasizing the entire life cycle of plastic products. The Nordic Council of Ministers launched a project to support Nordic countries in creating national plastic inventories. A workshop was held in Oslo in February 2024, bringing together technical experts from statistics bureaus, customs offices, and environmental agencies to address these issues.

Key Findings

The workshop participants identified several challenges and knowledge gaps:

- **Waste Export Issues:** Insufficient HS codes, control, inspection, and data regarding end-of-life fates of plastic waste export
- **Product Information:** Lack of detailed data on plastic shares, additives, and polymers in plastic products
- **Data Gaps:** Missing data on large waste sources, infrequent updates on plastic products and waste, and insufficient data for enabling closed-loop recycling
- **Methodological Issues:** Difficulties in mapping end-of-life fates and double counting of semi-finished/finished products

Recommendations

The report suggests enhanced cooperation among Nordic countries in several areas:

- **Customs Authorities:** Improve data on waste shipments through common digital systems, address frontline experiences in implementing new waste shipment regulations, harmonize supervision and risk profiles, and collaborate on technology investments.
- **Statistical Methodology:** Follow up on UNITAR's Plastic-KEYs, ensure common data reporting on plastics, develop harmonized waste reporting, map available data from large industries, and establish standardized methods for waste analysis
- **Environmental Agencies:** Enhance product passes with information on polymer composition and support measures to improve information flow between providers and demanders of plastic feedstock

Potential solutions include close follow-up of the implementation of the new waste shipment regulation, actively contributing to the development of technical standards, and providing capacity building and technical gear for surveillance officers, along with searchable waste shipment documentation.

The Nordic countries can also collaborate with UNITAR to further develop the Plastic KEYs initiative, which helps harmonize data on plastic products and waste.

The technical experts also saw potential in forming a Nordic working group to standardize methods for waste analysis to get better insight into major waste streams such as the construction sector and industry.

UNITAR – statistical guidelines for plastics

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) can be a big part of the solution. Their work might solve several key challenges, particularly when it comes to the plastic content of various products. UNITAR is developing statistical guidelines for plastic flows and plastic monitoring within [The Sustainable Cycles Programme \(SCYCLE\)](#).

UNITAR are developing "Plastic-KEY" - a plastic toolkit. The kit will include information on average plastic content and polymer composition of a range of products. It will also help map the links between plastic consumption and waste management.