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National Guidance for Plastic Pollution Hotspotting and Shaping Action

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Introduction to the methodology



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This publication is supervised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)'s Life Cycle Initiative and the Consumption and Production Unit (Economy Division): Feng Wang, Llorenç Milà i Canals, Sandra Averous, Ran Xie, Elisa Tonda; and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN): Lea Dubois, Janaka de Silva. This report was developed with the financial support from the contribution from Norway to UNEP.

Recommended citation: United Nations Environment Programme (2020). National guidance for plastic pollution hotspotting and shaping action -Introduction report. Boucher J.,; M. Zgola, et al. United Nations Environment Programme. Nairobi, Kenya.

Design and layout: Anna Mortreux | Anagram Cover design: Anna Mortreux | Anagram

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ISBN No: 978-92-807-3793-6 Job No: DTI/2291/PA National Guidance for Plastic Pollution Hotspotting and Shaping Action

Introduction to the methodology

## FOREWORD

Plastic pollution is a key environmental challenge that has received significant public attention in recent years. While it is often attributed to a "take-make-dispose" economic model, plastic leakage is a complex issue with multiple sources and actors involved. Addressing this challenge requires all stakeholders joining forces to intervene at various levels.

Resolution No. 6 on marine plastic litter and microplastics adopted at the Fourth Session of the UN Environment Assembly in 2019 highlighted the importance of a harmonised methodology to measure plastic flows and leakage along the value chain. However, countries and cities are still faced with a key knowledge gap in understanding the magnitude of the challenge and in need of tools to address the root sources of the problem.

Co-developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the National Guidance for Plastic Pollution Hotspotting and Shaping Action contributes to filling this gap. The Guidance provides a methodological framework and practical tools applicable at different geographical scales.

The Guidance also goes one step beyond the quantification and qualification of plastic pollution. It also offers an effective interface between science-based assessments and policy making. The basis of the Guidance starts with mapping plastic leakage and its impacts across the values chain by collecting and analysing relevant data on plastic production, consumption, waste management and disposal, and prioritise hotspots. The Guidance enables governments in collaboration with key stakeholders to identify and implement corresponding interventions and instruments to address the prioritised hotspots. Once decision-makers are equipped with credible knowledge on their status using the Guidance, they can set targets, agree and implement actions, and monitor progress.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic reminds us once more that we are living in a fast-changing world where emergencies and sustainability challenges are closely linked with the health of our environment and human wellbeing. This Guidance allows users to locate the most relevant hotspots in evolving circumstances in such emergencies and with updated data and analysis, help define solutions to meet new and pressing needs of a country or city. The methodology also enables the tracking of plastic consumption in various sectors such as healthcare, agriculture and food, logistics and transport, as well as in households, in order to develop corresponding solutions to reduce the adverse impacts.

We anticipate that governments, industries and other relevant stakeholders will find this Guidance useful in shaping national and local strategies to close the plastic tap and improve circularity. Building upon this Guidance, UNEP and IUCN are committed to further enhance the harmonisation of methodology at global level jointly with partners and stakeholders, while simultaneously supporting the collection and sharing of data that addresses national and local priorities. We look forward to engaging with all of you in our common fight against plastic pollution.

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The attention on plastic pollution has intensified in recent years among national governments and the global community. The 'National Guidance for Plastic Pollution Hotspotting and Shaping Action' (hereinafter referred to as 'the Guidance') aims to provide a structure for the methods of identifying plastic leakage 'hotspots', finding their impacts along the entire plastic value chain, and then prioritising actions once these hotspots are identified. The Guidance sprung from our desire to address the challenge to define an effective strategy to address plastic pollution, in a systemic way. It is aimed at enabling countries, regions, or cities to take and use this structure, or framework, in their own environments.

Currently, a number of organisations and initiatives are looking to develop methodologies and approaches to assess the flow and leakage of plastics. They seek to address the complexity of the plastics value chain; the unquantified magnitudes of impacts on the environment, including marine ecosystems. There is a clear need for a better understanding of the origins of major plastic leakages as well as for more accurate knowledge on which actions will make the biggest impact. The Guidance attempts to address that need.

Countries, regions and cities will benefit from this more harmonised quantification of plastic leakage and impact, allowing them to establish a baseline for benchmarking and tracking the progress of interventions. As demonstrated in the Guidance, the assessment and tracking will need to be comprehensive, consistent, comparable and credible, based on a methodology which harmonises existing data, tools and resources. The Guidance takes a holistic approach, covering major types of plastic polymers and products, as well as their leakage and impacts along the full value chain. The Guidance is action oriented and supports the users with a reproducible workflow, with a set of tools and templates for data collection, analysis, diagnosis, planning and implementation.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Life Cycle Initiative have co-developed the Guidance: a harmonised methodological framework to be applied in the real world.

This Guidance will contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 12 which focuses on ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns, and SDG 14 which aims to conserve and sustainably use the services of the oceans, seas and marine resources. The Guidance will also contribute to the implementation of the resolutions adopted at the fourth session of United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA4) in March 2019, including but not limited to the resolution on achieving sustainable production and consumption (UNEP/EA.4/Res.1), the resolution on marine plastic litter and microplastics (UNEP/ EA.4/Res.6) and the resolution on addressing single-use plastic products pollution (UNEP/EA.4/Res.9).

### **ADDED VALUE** OF THE GUIDANCE

Addresses all types of plastic leakage, including:

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