

WEBINAR SERIES:

EU Green Deal Policies and their
Relevance in Asia-Pacific

switchasia

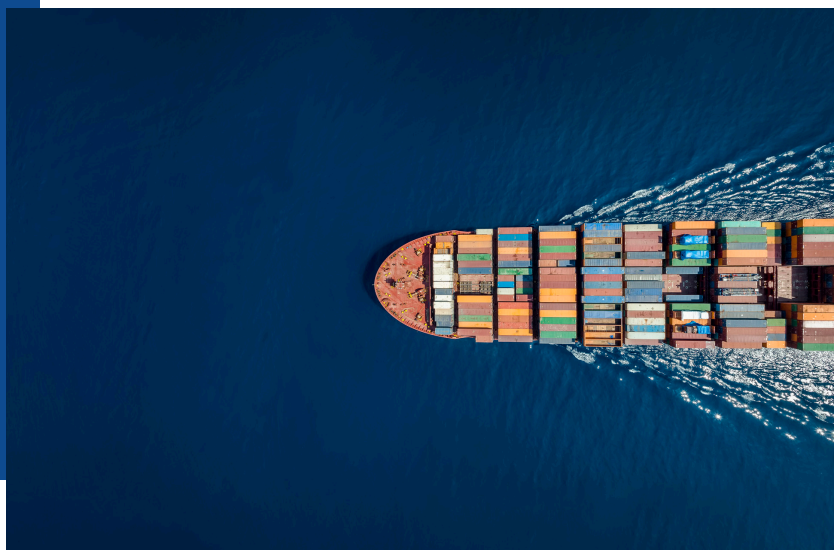


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EU Waste Shipment Regulation: Implications and Opportunities for the Asia-Pacific Region

Knowledge Brief



Context

The **EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component** and the **European Environment Bureau** held a **webinar** on the 23rd of January 2025 about the “EU Waste Shipment Regulation: Implications and Opportunities for the Asia-Pacific Region”. It is part of a **series of webinars**, which seeks to explore the implications of EU policies related to Sustainable Consumption and Production for its partner countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. It aims to understand the goals of these policies, their relevance in specific contexts, and their implications for stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific, particularly concerning legislation that has emerged from EU policies. This Knowledge Brief aims to capture the ideas shared during the webinar but is not a comprehensive analysis of the policy. The webinar focused on clarity and diversity of views, rather than comprehensiveness.

Key Take-away Messages

The objective behind the Waste Shipment Regulation is to support a circular economy and to ensure that waste is managed in an environmentally sound manner in the EU and abroad. It aligns with global commitments including the Basel Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals, notably SDG 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production. It is also meant to prevent that the EU exports its waste challenges to third countries. The WSR does not intend to stop any waste exports – countries that are able to manage waste materials sustainably can apply to be able to receive waste materials.

Stakeholders also stressed that the situation – opportunities and challenges – experienced by countries receiving secondary materials for recycling vary significantly between different countries, materials and value chains. There is a specific focus on plastics, textiles and e-waste. Some countries may not yet have systems to handle safely certain imported materials, while other countries have set up systems to extract valuable secondary materials from locally generated and imported waste materials.

Introduction

The **EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component** and the **European Environment Bureau**, held the webinar **EU Waste Shipment Regulation: Implications and Opportunities for the Asia-Pacific Region** to discuss latest changes to the EU’s legal framework governing the transboundary movement of waste, a legislative

initiative under the European Green Deal. With the help of leading experts, the webinar zoomed in to possible implications for different business sectors in the Asia-Pacific region such as plastic recycling.

Dr. Zinaida Fadeeva, Team Leader SWITCH-Asia Programme, mentioned waste textiles are one example in her introduction: *"The growing volume of low-quality textiles through the fast fashion trend often ends up in landfills. These materials create a significant barrier to recycling. Within the EU measures such as Extended Producer Responsibility for textile manufacturing and mandatory sorting before exporting are critical for addressing this challenge".*

The Waste Shipment Regulation (WSR) – origins and objectives

The Waste Shipment Regulation (WSR) is in place since **1993**. It implements the Basel Convention, which was adopted in 1989 and entered into force in 1992. The WSR ensures a system for the EU to **control waste shipments** within its borders as well as imports and exports of waste. The WSR recognises that waste contains **valuable secondary raw materials** but that uncontrolled movements of waste can have **negative impacts on the human health and the environment**.

At the time when the Basel Convention was adopted, and the WSR put in place, economic growth and globalisation had led to an **increase in waste and an increase in waste transport** across boundaries. In 1990, OECD countries exported around 1.8 million tons of hazardous waste. Although most of this waste was shipped between OECD member states, several high-profile incidents of hazardous waste-dumping and threats to public health in countries with weak protection mechanism led to calls for regulation. The Basel Convention sets clear rules of transboundary shipment of hazardous waste, and the **Basel Ban Amendment**, which entered into force in 2019, bans all shipment of hazardous waste from OECD to non-OECD countries.

Tighter rules in waste importing countries in the Asia-Pacific

Experiencing negative impacts of uncontrolled waste imports, different countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been regulating waste imports more strictly. **China's** 2018 Operation National Sword which banned the import of 24 types of solid waste, including certain plastics, paper, and textiles, resulted in major shifts in global waste streams, including those from the EU to the Asia-Pacific region. With this policy, China aimed at reducing environmental pollution from contaminated recyclables.

As of January 2025, **Thailand** has enforced a ban on importing plastic waste to combat pollution. This decision follows China's earlier ban, which in return had led to increased plastic waste imports into Thailand. **Malaysia** has taken significant steps against illegal plastic waste imports. In mid-2024, authorities also seized over 100 containers of illegally imported electronic waste, primarily from Western countries, as part of efforts to prevent "waste colonisation."

Currently, **Malaysia and Vietnam are the biggest importers of plastic waste in Asia**. China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Indonesia are all major importers of **textile waste**. China, Pakistan and Thailand have **banned the import of WEEE** (however, China is still amongst the largest importers of WEEE through **informal and illegal imports**).

What is new?

The WSR recast under the European Green Deal is meant to ensure that the EU **does not export its waste challenges** to third countries and contributes to environmentally sound management of waste. There are rules that apply for waste transports **within the EU and to OECD countries**, and different rules that apply to waste shipments to **non-OECD countries**, that is, most of the Asia-Pacific region. The new WSR includes a **general ban on waste exports for disposal** and a **ban on hazardous waste exports** for recovery to **non-OECD countries**. Where waste is shipped outside the EU, e.g. for recycling, this is only possible with a guarantee that it is managed in an environmentally sound manner in the countries of destination. The new WSR also

seeks to **strengthen enforcement to prevent illegal shipments of waste** occurring within the EU, as well as from the EU to third countries, and to **increase traceability** of waste shipments within the EU.

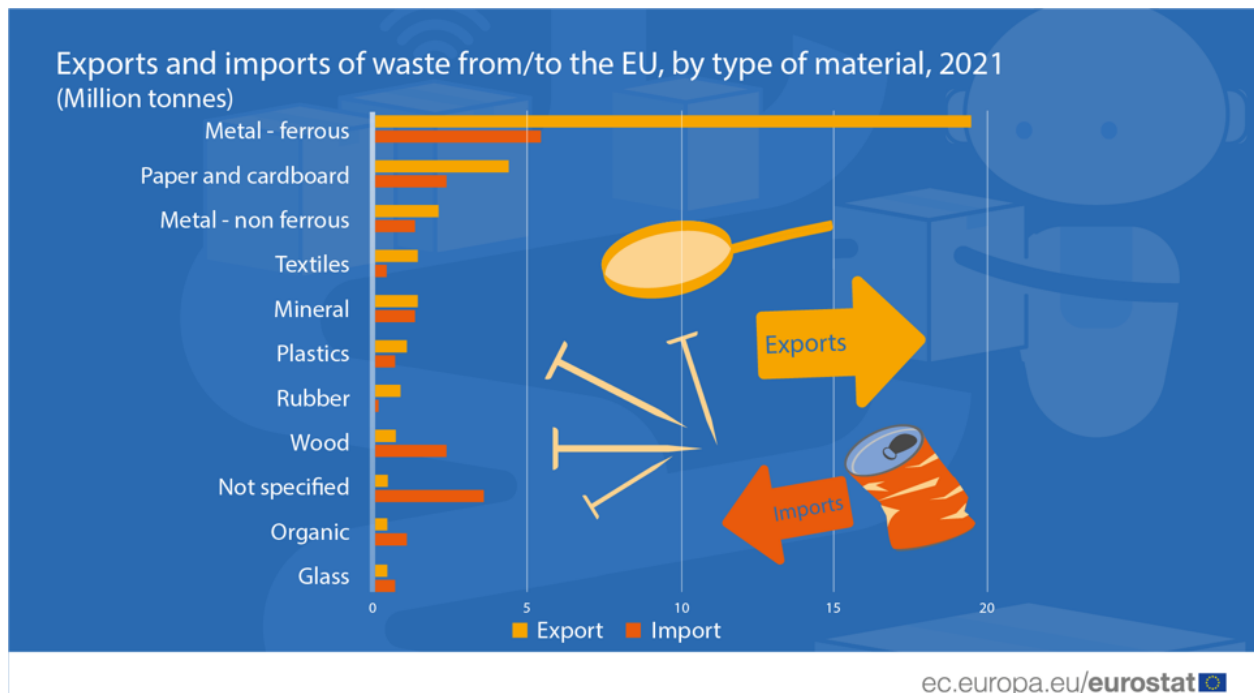


Figure. 1: Exports and imports of waste to and from the EU (source: Eurostat)

Although the **new Waste Shipments Regulation entered into force on 20 May 2024**, most provisions will **apply from 21 May 2026** and most **export rules will apply from 21 May 2027**. Until then, the provisions of Waste Shipment Regulation 1013/2006 continue to apply. With the new Regulation, procedures will **move away from a paper-based approach to an electronic one**. A central EU system will ensure the smooth operation of this exchange from May 2026.

Non-hazardous waste – what is changing?

The **export of non-hazardous waste**, also known as ‘green-listed’ waste, will generally **be prohibited to non-OECD countries** – this includes plastic waste that is hard to recycle, mixed municipal waste, all waste for disposal. The EU will enforce **stricter rules on non-hazardous waste exports** for recovery. For exports for recovery, new rules will apply from **21 May 2027** onwards, and those rules differentiate between OECD countries and non-OECD countries. **Non-OECD countries** willing to continue receiving non-hazardous waste from the EU need to **submit their request** to the Commission by **21 February 2025**. They need to demonstrate their ability to treat this waste environmentally soundly, as per Annexes VIII and IX of the Regulation.

“It does not mean we close the door to shipping waste”, said Michael Bucki, Minister Counsellor to the EU Delegation to Thailand. “There is a possibility for those countries who are interested, willing and able to manage waste sustainably to apply”.

Companies **exporting waste from the EU** will have to demonstrate that the waste exported is properly managed in the facility that manages the waste in the recipient country. They must ensure that **independent audits** are carried out in the facilities to which they ship waste, demonstrating that those facilities manage waste in an **environmentally sound manner**. In the absence of a positive audit, the companies must **stop exporting their waste** to the facility concerned.

Specific rules for plastic, textiles and WEEE

Shipments of plastic waste are subject to a **specific regime**. Any authorised export of plastic waste outside the EU will be subject to the **Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure**, a key provision of the Basel Convention

from 21 May 2026. There is an export **ban to non-OECD countries from 21 November 2026**, with a derogation possible upon **request from non-OECD countries after 21 May 2029 where the recipients can demonstrate** their capacity to manage such waste in an environmentally sound manner; that is, plastic waste exports will effectively be banned for 2.5 years.

Regarding textiles, the new WRS does not impose a blanket ban on the export of textile waste to non-OECD countries. However, it introduces stricter controls to ensure that such exports are managed sustainably. Under the regulation, exports of waste to non-OECD countries are **permitted only if the importing country explicitly consents and demonstrates the capacity to manage the waste in an environmentally sound manner**. These requirements will apply from 21 May 2027. Additionally, starting in 2025, EU Member States are mandated to establish **separate collection systems for used textiles** under the Waste Framework Directive. This initiative aims to enhance the circularity of textiles within Europe. In 2024, Denmark, France, and Sweden advocated for **new global regulations under the Basel Convention to address the export of hazardous textile waste** to developing countries.

Dr Peter Lund Thomsen from the Copenhagen Business School argued that countries such as Pakistan and India have a strong recycling sector for textile waste. *"We do not have the capacity to grade and sort it"*, he argued, and stressed that the EU should collaborate with third countries to support circularity in the textile sector.

The classification and **rules for shipments of electrical and electronic waste** (known as 'e-waste') were changed to take account of new international rules agreed under the Basel Convention on this point. New entries were introduced in the Annexes of the Basel Convention to classify e-waste. Hazardous e-waste is classified under entry A1181, while non-hazardous e-waste is classified under entry Y49. This **new classification is effective from 1 January 2025**. To implement this new classification, the EU has adopted two delegated acts ([2024/3229](#) and [2024/3230](#)) to amend the EU's Waste Shipments Regulation. From **1 January 2025, the export of all e-waste from the EU to non-OECD countries will be prohibited**.

Challenges to be addressed

Yuyun Ismawati, Founder of the Indonesian Zero Waste Alliance, explained that as someone working on waste in developing countries, she has experienced the difference between an expectation of circular economy practices and the reality on the ground. She stressed that what is needed is "to achieve the environmentally sound management including the **elimination of hazardous chemicals in products** so they can be safely produced and recycled" instead of feeding what she referred to as a **"toxic circular economy"**.

Maria Durleva, from the Division on International Trade & Commodities Trade at UNCTAD, stressed the **role of informal workers** in the waste and recycling sector in many parts of Asia, a region of high diversity when it comes to the waste and recycling sector. She argued that the European Green Deal and its policies and an integration of informal waste workers into formal systems through training, protection and improved working conditions is important.

Combatting illegal waste shipments

An EU **'waste shipment enforcement group'** will be established to increase cooperation and coordination against illegal shipments of waste, comprising environmental, customs, police and other relevant national inspection authorities, as well as European and international law enforcement networks. The European Commission will be empowered through its anti-fraud office - **OLAF** - to **support transnational investigations** by EU Member States on waste trafficking. The EU will support other countries in **fighting waste trafficking** through various channels of international cooperation.

Ioana Cotutiu, Programme Coordinator for Illegal Trade in Waste at UNODC's Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, stressed that *"we cannot look at a circular economy without tackling waste trafficking"*. She mentioned concrete cases of how illegal waste shipments arrived, for instance, in Thailand and Malaysia,

in particular after China tightened its rules. One example is waste declared as paper waste but upon inspections turning out to be household waste for disposal. Illegal waste trafficking is organised by criminal networks, and 15-30% of waste shipments are estimated to be illegal, generating billions of profits each year. *“Trafficking is a symptom of the current economic model based on ‘take-make-consume-throw’. The root cause is the way how things are produced and consumed”.*

Conclusion

The WSR is part of a larger set of measures aimed at cleaning up and slowing down material flows to move towards a circular economy. Waste management begins with how products are designed, but at end of life also includes making sure waste shipments do not undermine the environmentally sound management of waste and recycling. With stricter regulation, the EU seeks to minimise the risk of outsourcing waste problems and to ensure that materials are recycled and not wasted. Governments and businesses in third countries, including in the Asia Pacific, are invited to align with waste management and recycling standards set out under the European Green Deal if they like to continue to receive materials from the EU. The Union is also offering information, support and cooperation to ensure the WSR can be supported by partners outside the EU.

References

- [European Commission information page](#) on waste shipments.
- [UNODC explainer](#) on waste trafficking.
- [Plastic Waste Management and Burden in Indonesia](#), report by the Zero Waste Alliance Indonesia.

Watch the recording [here](#).

