

RIGHT TO REDUCE

TOXIC-FREE REUSE AND REDUCTION-ENABLING SYSTEMS
AS REAL SOLUTIONS TO PLASTIC POLLUTION



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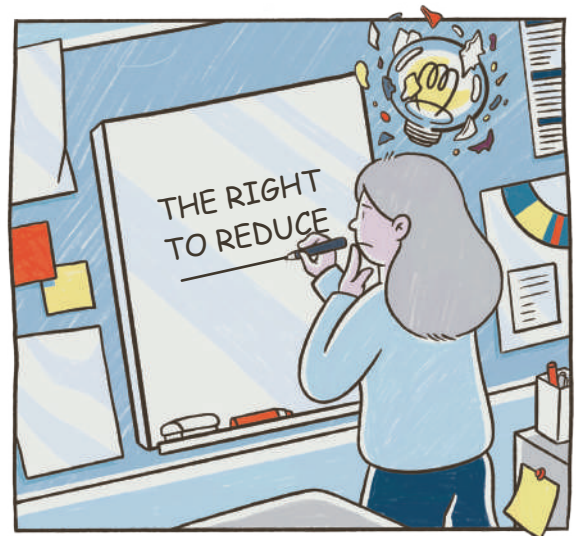
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I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This **Right to Reduce** policy white paper asserts that the ability to reduce consumption of plastics and materials is a human right. This paper understands the right to reduce as an enabling dimension of an existing, internationally recognised **human rights** obligation. This right is realised through systems and practices that protect the health of people and the planet, and is grounded in the right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment, and protection from toxic harm for present and future generations.



This policy white paper demonstrates that today, individuals are systematically denied the right to reduce due to the dominance of plastics in everyday life, leaving people with little meaningful ability to avoid plastic consumption. This right to reduce is guaranteed by the establishment of **toxic-free reduction-enabling systems**, a concept that encapsulates reuse, refill, repair, and other systems that fundamentally challenge the current system of plastic overproduction and overconsumption, while rejecting **false solutions**, such as the prioritisation of recycling, waste-to-energy, and other waste management measures over reduction of plastic production in national policies.¹



Drawing from semi-structured interviews with 18 stakeholders in Thailand and Indonesia (2), as well as three workshops, three meetings with citizens, communities, and reuse, refill, and repair practitioners in Thailand, this paper assesses various forms of reduction-enabling systems, their benefits, opportunities, and challenges. From these examples, recommendations are made to policy-makers in the global plastics treaty (GPT) space on what provisions and interventions can protect the right to reduce. These recommendations include enshrining toxic-free reduction-enabling systems and the reduction of plastic production in the GPT.

INTRODUCTION

Plastics are embedded in every aspect of modern life, making refusal or avoidance increasingly difficult. With their widespread use, from food packaging and household goods to clothing, plastics are now found not only in our environment, but in our bodies. The plastic crisis is therefore not just an environmental issue, but a public health crisis that begins at the stages of extraction and production and continues throughout the plastic life cycle.

Despite this reality, the current system remains deeply rooted in using plastic and sustaining a throw-away culture.² Products and services designed for multiple use have been replaced by cheaper, single-use alternatives.³ The high level of production and surrounding single-use-based infrastructures means that behavioural change alone cannot challenge this status quo.⁴ The Environmental Justice Foundation's (EJF) [False Solutions](#) report illustrates how Thai government policies have focused more on voluntary measures and encouraging behavioural changes rather than systemic reforms, a pattern routinely replicated across the globe.⁵ In reality, choice is constrained when coffee is served in disposable cups for dine-in customers, safe drinking water in many countries is primarily available in bottles,⁶ and food is routinely provided in single-use packaging.



The concept of a right to reduce refers to **the ability of individuals to lower their consumption of plastics and other materials through systems and practices that protect human health and the environment.**

This paper draws on qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews with reuse, refill, and repair practitioners, waste worker associations, brand owners, major producers, retailers, medical professionals, frontline communities, and other stakeholders in Thailand and Indonesia, alongside EJF's practical experience implementing and advocating for refill systems in Thailand. While geographically focused on Thailand, the findings have clear global relevance, particularly for GPT negotiators and national policymakers to secure such systems in order to safeguard human health and the environment.

Food sold exclusively in plastic packaging gives consumers little agency in making behavioural changes. © EJF 2025.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

EJF: The Environmental Justice Foundation

FALSE SOLUTIONS:

Approaches or policies that are presented as solutions to a given collective problem, but reject, avoid, devalue, delay or otherwise pose a burden to social, economic, political or infrastructural reforms that address the root cause of the problem, and may generate other problems or shift the burden to future generations, other ecological systems, or other parts of the human society, especially marginalised groups.

MNPS: Micro and nanoplastics

ONE HEALTH:

A perspective that unifies human health with that of wildlife and the ecosystems at large.⁷ Throughout this report, any reference to health refers to one health, and thus includes human health, as well as the health of the planet, ecosystems, and wildlife.

REFILL:

A type of reuse system where the packaging and containers are owned, managed, and cleaned by consumers.⁸

RIGHT TO HEALTH:

According to the World Health Organisation and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, “the right to health means that governments must generate conditions in which everyone can be as healthy as possible”.¹¹

RIGHT TO REDUCE:

The ability for individuals to reduce their consumption of plastics and materials through systems and practices that protect the health of people and the planet. A right to reduce can also be conferred upon countries and communities, that they can choose to produce, import, and/or consume less plastics and plastic products.

TOXIC-FREE REDUCTION-ENABLING SYSTEMS:

Systems, infrastructures, including legal, economic, and social mechanisms and structures that fundamentally change the pattern of overproduction and overconsumption, while prioritising the protection of health. Such systems reject false solutions that do not address the root cause of the problem (see definition of false solutions above).

GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY (GPT):

A potential instrument to address plastic pollution on a global level, currently officially referred to as “an international legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution, including in the marine environment”. It is being developed by an international negotiating committee of more than 170 nation-states, as mandated by the United Nations Environmental Assembly.

RIGHT-TO-REPAIR:

The concept that consumers and citizens should have access to products that are designed to be durable and repairable, and should have access to services that can repair products that they have bought, as well as access to tools and documentation.⁹

RETURN-FOR-REUSE:

A type of reuse system where the packaging and containers are owned, collected, managed, and cleaned by producers or service providers.¹⁰



RIGHT TO REDUCE: A HEALTH IMPERATIVE

The shared health of people and the planet is at stake when it comes to guaranteeing the right to reduce. At the beginning of the last round of the GPT negotiations, the Lancet medical journal released a landmark review called “The Lancet Countdown on health and plastics”. According to the document, the health impacts of only three plastic chemicals across 38 countries were associated with over 500,000 deaths in 2015 alone, and incurred \$US 1.5 trillion in economic costs.¹²



Today, beyond the 38 countries surveyed in the Lancet review, virtually all humans in the world are exposed to micro and nanoplastics (MNPs) and their associated chemicals. MNPs can seriously impact the body in the form of physical stress and damage, apoptosis, necrosis, inflammation, oxidative stress and immune responses.¹³ MNPs contribute to inflammations and disruptions that exacerbate heart disease.¹⁴ While further results are still emerging, “the negative effects that microplastics can have on respiratory health are clearly evident”.¹⁵

In spite of this looming public health crisis, plastics products still permeate the lives of humans across the globe.

“



Our exposure [to plastics] starts even before birth. The individual risk increase may seem [minor]. No one's death certificate states “microplastics” as the cause of death. Instead, they die from heart disease, cancer, or other conditions. Plastics aren't listed, but they are one of the risk factors - they contribute to their development.¹⁶

Dr. Rungsrit Kanjanavit,
Cardiologist, Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University

”



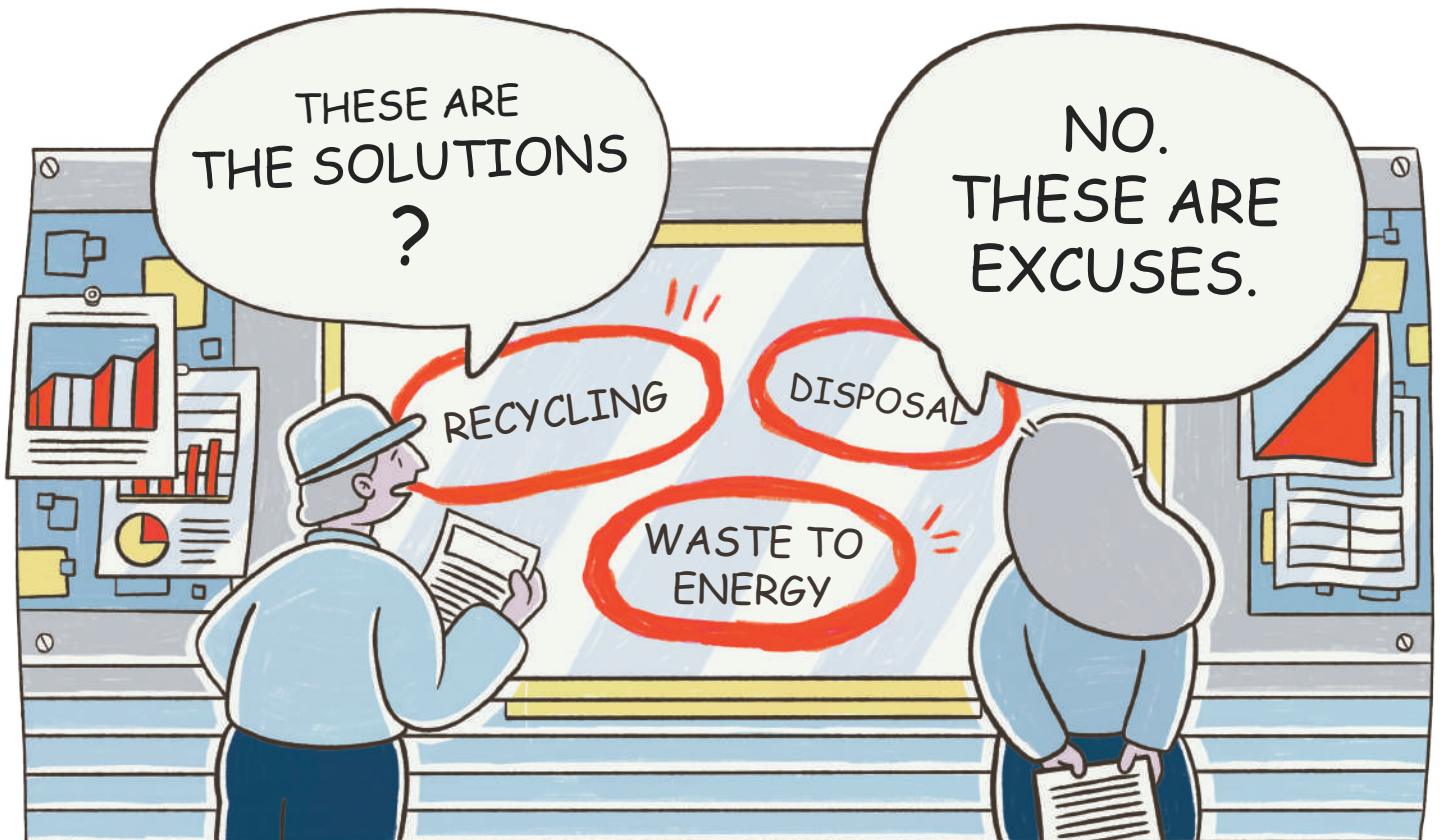
The widespread consumption of single-use plastics presents the world with a looming public health crisis. © EJF 2025.



If an individual chooses to reduce their consumption of plastics to protect their health from MNPs and chemicals, they are often presented with no obvious alternatives. Without laws ensuring a deposit-refund system for non-plastic food packaging, an individual consumer has no choice but to rely on food packaged in single-use plastics. In places where affordable fresh products are only available in plastic packaging, residents cannot cook without including MNPs as an ingredient. In countries where tap water is not drinkable, the majority of the population will have to use plastic water bottles, unless infrastructure for accessible refill stations is established.

I SINGLE-USE CULTURE: A STRUCTURAL BARRIER TO REDUCTION

Plastics were originally developed to replace scarce and environmentally destructive materials such as ivory, offering a more affordable and durable alternative.¹⁷ Today, this purpose has been fundamentally reversed. Longevity of products has declined, embedding disposability into everyday consumption.¹⁸ This shift has transformed plastics from a material associated with durability into the backbone of a global single-use culture, structurally limiting opportunities for reduction from the outset.



The dominance of single-use plastics overwhelms downstream solutions such as recycling and waste management. The volume of short-lived plastic products entering the market far exceeds system capacity, and plastics cannot be recycled indefinitely due to their chemical properties.¹⁹ Most plastics degrade in quality with each recycling cycle, requiring the continuous addition of virgin plastic, and are further constrained by additives, polymer blending, and contamination.²⁰ As a result, recycling and other downstream measures merely delay disposal while enabling continued plastic production, functioning as damage control rather than effective solutions.

■ FACT BOX:

Most plastics degrade in quality with each recycling cycle, requiring the continuous addition of virgin plastic, and are further constrained by additives, polymer blending, and contamination.

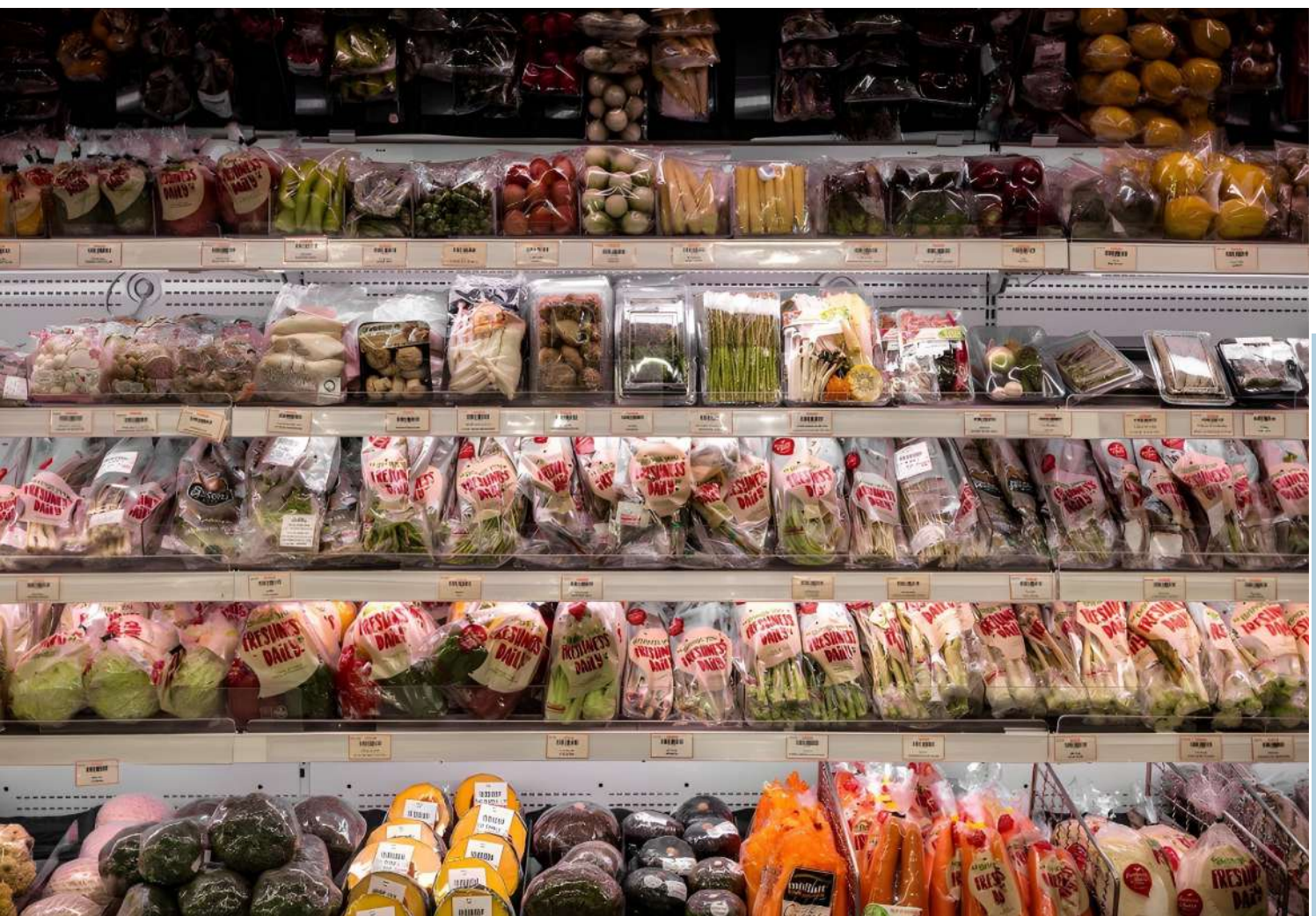


Single-use plastics outcompete reusable and refill-based systems on both cost and convenience, making plastic avoidance increasingly difficult for individuals and communities.²¹ Convenience, low cost, and widespread availability normalise disposability, while current production and retail systems prioritise recycling narratives that legitimise ongoing expansion of single-use plastics as a profitable market.²²

The ubiquity and cheapness of plastics are a result of the oversupply and overproduction of virgin plastics.²³ Today, the economic loss from plastic pollution²⁴ is often not included in the price of plastic products. The price of plastic pollution, currently not factored in by plastics producers, is an externality of our current economic system - for example, the health costs for communities living near and around petrochemical sites or consumers who ingest MNPs in their daily diets. In parallel, the current system of consumption provided by service providers (e.g. supermarkets, retailers, distribution and delivery systems) has entrenched the consumption of single-use plastics into our collective behaviour and culture. Without a deliberate transition away from single-use culture and toward upstream reduction and reuse systems, people are structurally prevented from participating in reduction.



A market (above) and a supermarket (below) in Thailand - the contemporary mode of consumption is based on single-use plastics. Reduction is impossible without systemic intervention. © EJF 2025.



I FROM OVERPRODUCTION TO REDUCTION ECONOMY

EJF's interviews with street vendors and refill practitioners in Thailand reveal a consistent barrier to plastic reduction: the petrochemical economy creates an unfair cost advantage for cheap, toxic single-use plastics, making reuse and refill less economically competitive. While the service providers interviewed for this report may be willing to shift to safer, sustainable systems, meaningful change hinges on correcting current market distortions so that reduction models can generate sufficient revenue to comply with standards, build capacity, and scale.

The harm plastics cause to human health and the environment is absent from their market price. While virgin plastic prices fluctuate with factors such as oil feedstock costs, chronic oversupply is a major driver of their artificially low price.²⁵ This state of oversupply has made the long-term profitability of large petrochemical and plastic companies more questionable.²⁶ Nevertheless, according to a 2024 report by the Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, eight of the nine major fossil fuel companies (six integrated oil and gas companies and three petrochemical companies)²⁷ are collectively investing over \$US 70 billion in assets that support the production of single-use plastics.²⁸



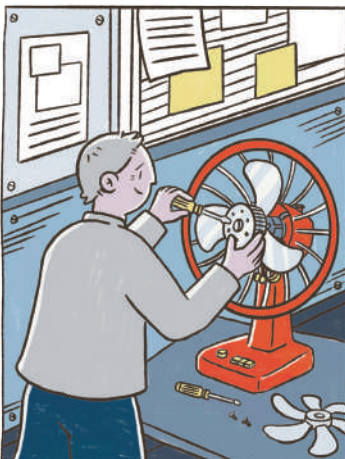
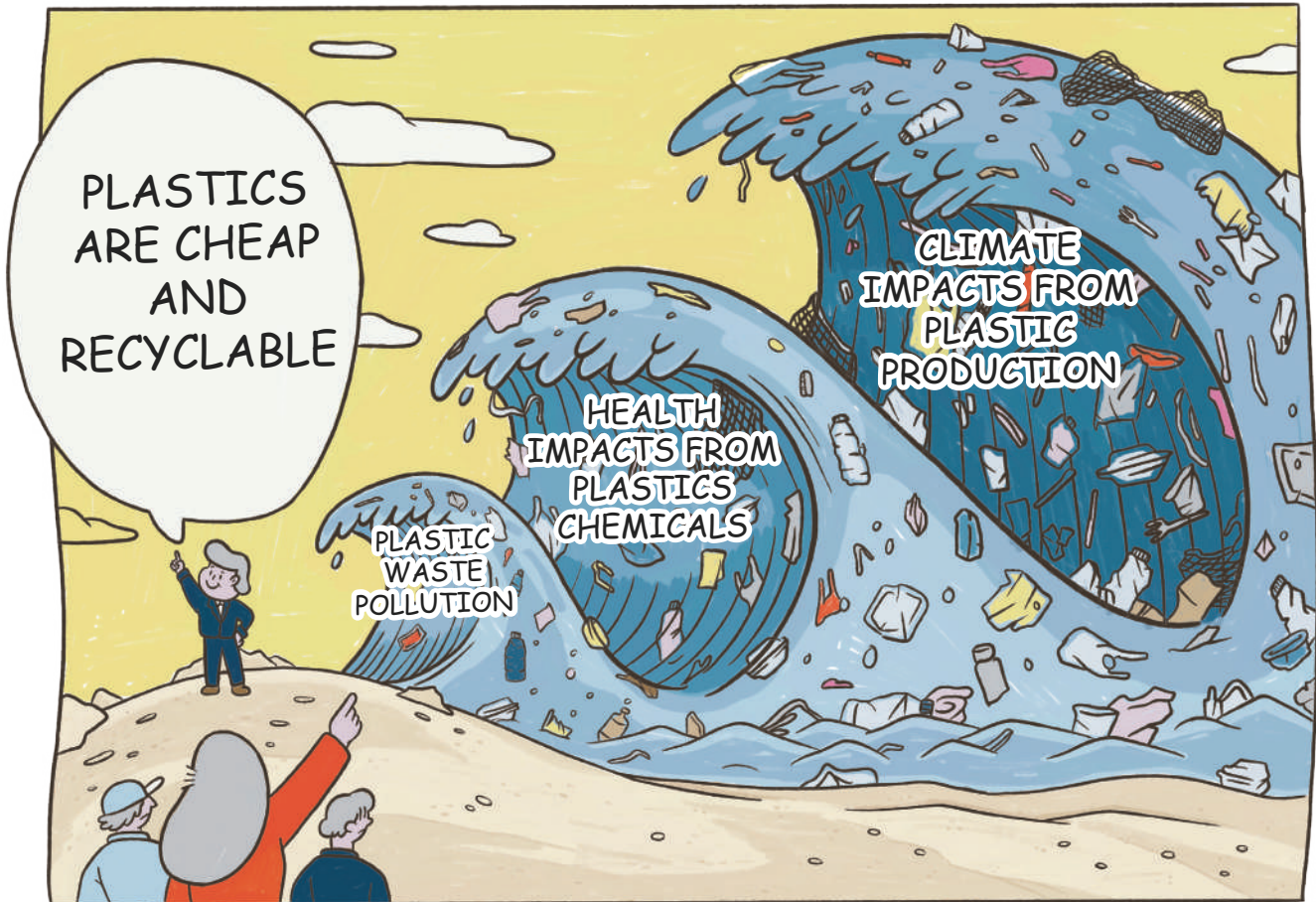
A petrochemical complex in Rayong province, Thailand. © EJF 2025. In Thailand and elsewhere, subsidies to petrochemical companies and plastics producers obscure the economic non-viability of single-use plastic production.

High rates of subsidies for petrochemical and plastic producers may have obscured the economic non-viability of petrochemical expansion. A 2025 report estimates that subsidies poured into primary plastic polymer producers reached US\$80 billion in 2024 and could rise to US\$150 billion by 2050.²⁹



Subsidies to primary plastic polymer producers reached US\$80 billion in 2024 and could rise to US\$150 billion by 2050.

Recent studies have begun quantifying both the economic costs of plastic pollution and the benefits of reduction-enabling systems such as reuse, refill, and repair. A 2024 study estimates that eliminating plastic pollution, including production reduction by 2040, would cost US\$18.3–158.4 trillion, while the cost of inaction would be even higher at US\$13.7–281.8 trillion³⁰; health damages from plastics alone are estimated at US\$1.5 trillion across just 38 countries.³¹ While the benefits of reduction are harder to measure within GDP-based frameworks, repair systems offer the most clearly quantifiable consumer and economic gains and provide a useful model for future analysis.



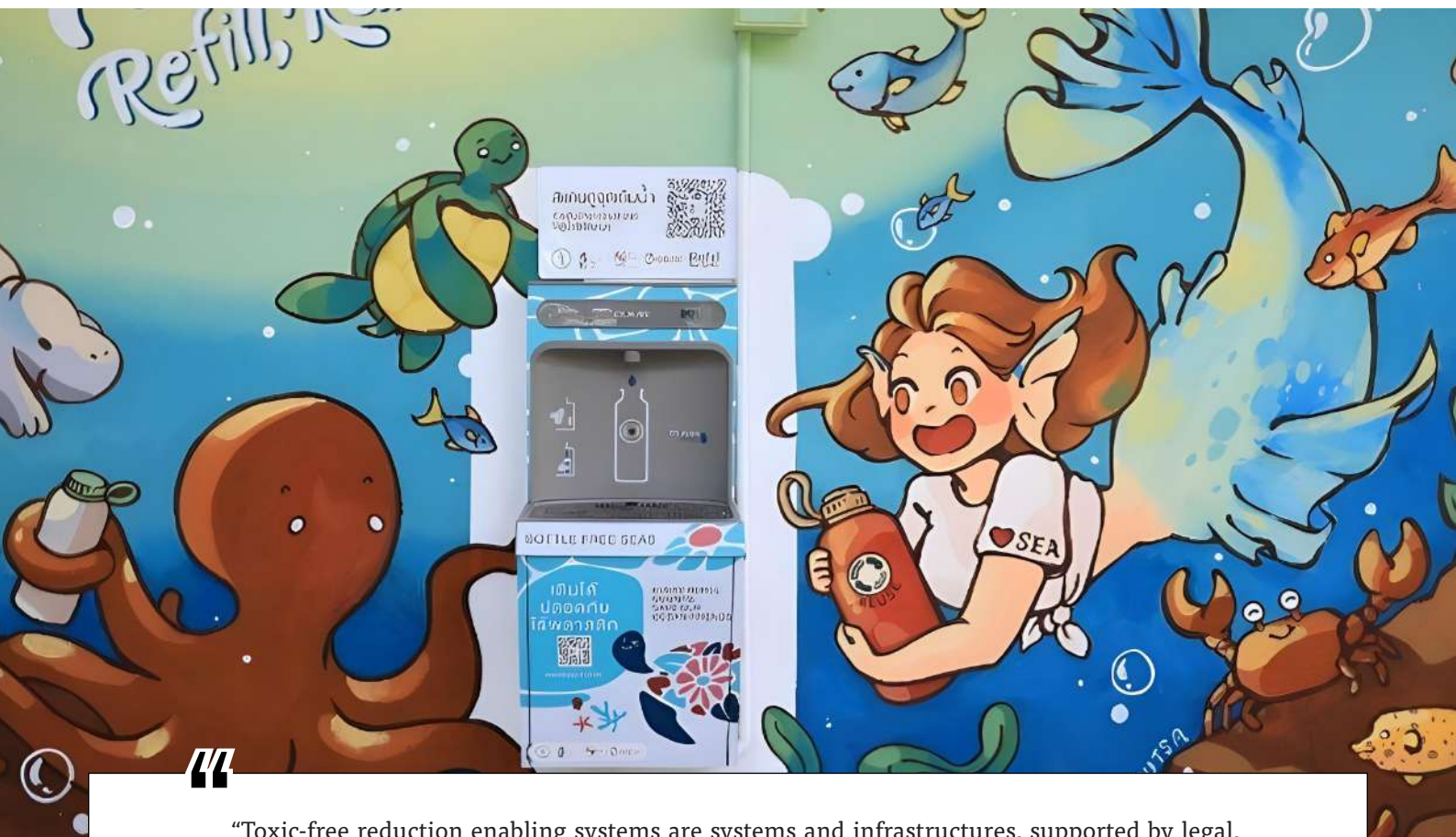
In Thailand, the Mirror Foundation, seeking to address the problem of an ageing population being unable to access work, initiated a project for elderly, urban citizens to help repair donated materials. This work helps generate an income for this vulnerable group, while increasing the market value of used materials.³² A study on the circular economy in Yangon and Bangkok defines value generated by the circular economy as gains by consumers through reuse, repair, and recycling. It estimated that a healthy circular economy generates values of US\$197 per person per year and US\$82 per person per year in Yangon and Bangkok, respectively.³³ The study emphasizes that “the repair loop is the primary contributor to the [circular economy]’s value in both cities.”³⁴

I ROAD TO THE RIGHT TO REDUCE: TOXIC-FREE REDUCTION-ENABLING SYSTEMS

To drastically cut the production of plastics, we need systems and infrastructure that enable people to reduce their consumption of plastics and single-use materials: a reduction-enabling system. Those systems must prioritise health: being toxic-free. During the past rounds of the GPT negotiation, “**toxic-free reduction-enabling systems**” did gain traction as a term to encapsulate various systems such as reuse, refill, and repair. Without such systems in place, the structural conditions that drive overproduction and overconsumption will continue to obstruct behavioral changes. Ensuring the right to reduce requires a systemic transition away from single-use plastics toward infrastructures that safeguard health, environmental integrity, and intergenerational equity.

Based on its research and on-the-ground experience, EJF uses the term “toxic-free reduction-enabling systems” to describe systems and infrastructures that make reduction possible in everyday life. These include legal frameworks, economic incentives, and social arrangements that move societies away from overproduction and overconsumption, rather than managing their consequences. Crucially, reduction-enabling systems are designed to exclude false solutions that perpetuate plastic dependence instead of addressing its root causes.

Refill stations established under EJF’s Bottle Free Seas project in Bangkok city is able to reduce an average of 100,000 plastic bottles per month. (C) EJF



“Toxic-free reduction enabling systems are systems and infrastructures, supported by legal, economic, and social mechanisms, that fundamentally shift patterns of overproduction and overconsumption, while prioritising the protection of health. By design, these systems exclude false solutions that fail to address the root causes of plastic pollution.”

EJF’s definition of “toxic-free reduction-enabling systems”



PLASTIC
PRODUCTION
GROWS.



WE RECYCLE
JUST 9%



THEN
WE PRODUCE
MORE.



FALSE
SOLUTION
APPROVED.

EJF's [False Solutions](#) report demonstrates that previous efforts to address plastic pollution in Thailand and Southeast Asia have fallen short because they fail to tackle the root causes of the crisis: plastic overproduction and overconsumption.³⁵ Within this framework, certain technologies can play a role in improving waste management; however, when positioned as the primary focus of national policy, they risk diverting attention from the structural reforms that are urgently needed.

For example, while recycling and bio-based plastics may reduce reliance on virgin fossil-based feedstocks, they simply substitute one raw material with another, recycled plastics or plant-based inputs, without altering underlying consumption patterns of energy and raw material wastage. The result is the continued use of single-use products, whether made from recycled or bio-based materials, perpetuating the same linear throwaway culture, rather than addressing the root causes of overproduction and overconsumption.

In contrast, toxic-free reduction-enabling systems fundamentally shift both production and consumption patterns, going beyond substituting material inputs. The systems also deliver significant environmental benefits. Even modest shifts away from single-use packaging can dramatically cut plastic pollution, resource use, and emissions. Research shows that making just 10-20% of packaging reusable could halve the amount of plastic leaking into the oceans. A systemic transition from rigid single-use to rigid returnable packaging can reduce waste by up to 90% and cut plastic use by more than half.³⁶

Beyond packaging, system-wide transitions to reuse and repair reduce pressure on natural resources across the entire lifecycle. Studies find that reuse systems can lower water use and greenhouse gas emissions by 30-70%,³⁷ while repair and other value-retention practices can reduce the need for new raw materials by up to 90%.³⁸ These approaches do not offer marginal improvements; they fundamentally change how much material is produced, used, and discarded.



UP TO 50%
LESS PLASTIC WASTE
INTO THE OCEAN WITH
JUST 10-20%

REUSABLE PACKAGING

**UP TO 90%
LESS WASTE**

FROM
RETURNABLE
PACKAGING
SYSTEMS

REUSE
WORKS.

**54-76%
REDUCTION**

IN PLASTIC USE
BY REPLACING
SINGLE-USE
RIGID
PACKAGING

**UP TO 90%
LESS**

VIRGIN
MATERIAL USE
THROUGH REPAIR
AND VALUE
RETENTION

30-70%

CUTS IN
WATER
USE AND
EMISSIONS
THROUGH
REUSE
SYSTEMS

I TOXIC-FREE REDUCTION-ENABLING SYSTEMS IN PRACTICE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

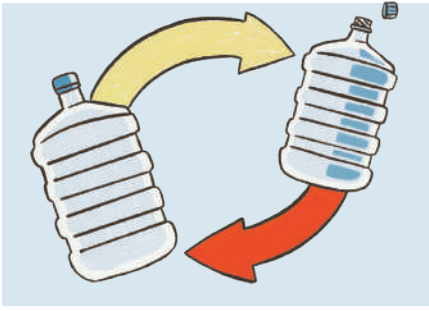
Advancing reduction-enabling systems requires a clear understanding of both the conditions that enable their development and the barriers that continue to limit their establishment and scale within a landscape dominated by single-use models.



A Refill shop selling various items, including cosmetics, shampoos, soaps, and dry food in Bangkok, Thailand. © EJF 2025.

METHODOLOGY

To inform this analysis, EJF conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with reuse, refill, and repair practitioners, waste worker associations, brand owners, major producers, retailers, academics, frontline communities, and other stakeholders.³⁹ Two in-person workshops were held among citizen groups and fishing and coastal communities to assess the potential of reduction-enabling systems. One online workshop was conducted among five reduction practitioner groups in Thailand. Furthermore, three meetings were held with citizens, communities, and reuse, refill, and repair practitioners in Thailand. Building on these insights, this report analyses the opportunities and constraints associated with three reduction-enabling systems that demonstrate transformative potential: return-for-reuse, refill, and repair.



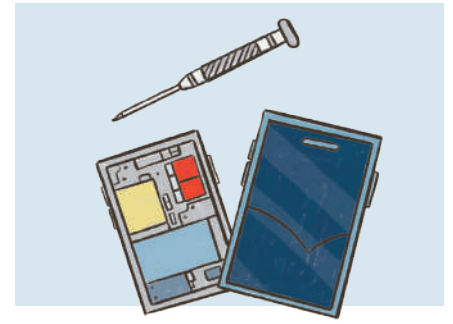
1. RETURN-FOR-REUSE

In return-for-reuse systems, containers and packaging are **owned and managed by companies or service providers**. Consumers use these items for a defined period before returning them to be cleaned, refilled, and placed back into circulation, significantly reducing the need for single-use packaging.



2. REFILL

Refill systems enable consumers to access products by **bringing their own durable, reusable containers**. By eliminating disposable packaging altogether, refill models directly reduce material demand and support long-term shifts away from single-use consumption.



3. REPAIR

Repair focuses on **extending the lifespan of products by ensuring they are designed to be durable and fixable**. It means that consumers and communities have access to repair services, tools, spare parts, and technical information, allowing products to be maintained, reused, and kept in use rather than discarded.

Other toxic-free, reduction-enabling systems exist globally, but these three examples capture the core principles. In each case, the single-use model is directly challenged, enabling real reductions in plastic production rather than merely substituting plastics with other materials. **They represent the inverse of false solutions, delivering lasting social, infrastructural, and economic change without displacing environmental harm onto other systems or future generations. These are genuine solutions to the plastics crisis.**

Photo from: Repair Community Thailand, a non-profit group established by volunteer consumers with the goal to promote right-to-repair, repair culture, and repair economy, through activities such as repair cafe and development of repair database. The photo shows an activity at one of the repair cafes.



I BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN REDUCTION-ENABLING SYSTEMS

Below is a table summarising the key impacts, benefits and opportunities obtained from interviews, meetings, and workshops. Given that **these systems all yield the environmental impact of reducing production and consumption, the table focuses on the social and economic benefits of these systems.**

System type :

RETURN-FOR-REUSE IN CLOSED SPACES



Description and examples of existing practices

Individuals consume the products in a closed space, with packaging provided by the owner of the space or a service provider.

Example: restaurants and canteens that serve food in reusable containers.

Social and economic benefits

Reduced waste management cost for service providers, location owners, or local authorities, where applicable.

Job opportunities from washing, cleaning, and the circulation of packaging.

Opportunities for expansion

No behavioural change required from the consumer

Low packaging loss due to controlled environments

System type :

RETURN-FOR-REUSE IN SEMI-CLOSED SPACES



Description and examples of existing practices

Individuals consume products in a temporary space, where there is no existing infrastructure for waste management or packaging circulation.

Example: events and fairs

Social and economic benefits

Reduced waste management cost for service providers, location owners, or local authorities, where applicable.

Opportunities for expansion

Manageable packaging loss in semi-closed spaces

Highly visible model that normalises reuse

System type :

RETURN-FOR-REUSE IN OPEN SPACES



■ Description and examples of existing practices

Consumers can bring the product and packaging out of a confined space, back to their residence and elsewhere. They must return packaging to specific drop-off points.

Example: Alner and Allas are two ventures in Indonesia that capture this model. Alner provides fast-moving consumer goods companies with returnable packaging, which is sold at points of sale, including local family-owned stores (“warung”) or waste banks. Once the product is used, the packaging can be returned to those points of sale, at which point the consumer receives a cashback reward for their next purchase. Another venture, Allas, focuses on the returnable packaging for food and beverages. Both of these ventures are part of Enviu, an Indonesian “non-profit venture-building studio”.

■ Social and economic benefits

Reduced waste management costs for consumers, residential areas, and local authorities.

Can integrate local shops and waste collectors. One interviewee in Thailand noted that waste collectors can function as a deposit point for an open return-for-reuse system for delivery packaging. In fact, the circulation of glass bottles in Thailand is an existing example where waste collectors act as a potential deposit point for reusable packaging. However, at present, the system does not fully extend to consumers.

Can create green jobs in circulation systems. Food vendors and community waste collectors reported in interviews that, with sufficient support, this can preserve their income while incurring environmental benefits.

■ Opportunities for expansion

Enables container return across multiple locations

Can include fast-moving consumer goods, with the support of major companies and supporting legislation

Scalable beyond closed spaces

Supports shared reuse infrastructure

System type :
REFILL FOR PUBLIC GOODS



■ **Description and examples of existing practices**

Consumers bring their own packaging to receive public goods such as water.

Example: EJF's Bottle Free Seas project, which installed 10 water refill stations in Bangkok in collaboration with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

■ **Social and economic benefits**

Increases access to clean drinking water while reducing household costs

Reduces health risks linked to dehydration, which can incur public health costs

Improve the function of public spaces such as parks and government-owned spaces.

Reduce waste management costs for local authorities.

■ **Opportunities for expansion**

Does not require significant behavioural change

Scalable beyond closed spaces

System type :
REFILL FOR COMMERCIAL GOODS



■ **Description and examples of existing practices**

Goods are sold in ways that require consumers to bring their own packaging.

Example: Refill shops and bulk stores, markets and restaurants that accept personal containers.

■ **Social and economic benefits**

Reduced waste management costs for consumers, residential areas, and local authorities.

Lower the packaging cost for vendors and retailers. This reduced cost could translate into lower prices for consumers.

■ **Opportunities for expansion**

For many types of goods that are made on the spot or sold without packaging, no further investment is required for the vendor, since the consumer is expected to bring the packaging.

System type :
REPAIR



■ **Description and examples of existing practices**

Products owned by consumers can be repaired to extend their lifespan, preventing the need for additional consumption.

■ **Social and economic benefits**

Protects consumers and ensures their right to extend the lifespan of their products.

Lowers costs for consumers significantly.

Reduce waste management for local and national authorities, especially difficult-to-manage waste, such as electronics.

Increase value in the circular economy: repaired goods are more valuable than waste.

Generate skilled and artisanal jobs, often in small to medium enterprises. Protection of valuable skills and knowledge in product repair.

■ **Opportunities for expansion**

Knowledge and systems of repair already exist, but need to be protected.

A right to repair is consistent with the general consumer's demand to reduce spending.



Water refill system with non-plastic containers in a coffee shop in Minamata city, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. © EJV 2026.

The analysis shows that toxic-free reduction-enabling systems offer environmental, social, and economic benefits by directly replacing single-use models with durable, circular alternatives. Across settings, these systems significantly reduce plastic production, waste generation, and associated management costs, while lowering resource use and emissions. They require minimal behavioural change from consumers, are adaptable to both closed and open environments, and can be scaled through existing retail and service networks. At the same time, they create opportunities to strengthen local economies by integrating small businesses, waste collectors, and repair services, improving access to essential services such as safe drinking water, and reducing costs for consumers. Together, these systems demonstrate that meaningful reduction is both feasible and beneficial when supported by the right policies and infrastructure.

CHALLENGES:

Despite their proven impacts, toxic-free reduction-enabling systems face significant structural barriers that limit their scalability and undermine their competitiveness within an economy still dominated by single-use models. Challenges identified by interviewees are consolidated below:

1. RETURN-FOR-REUSE SYSTEMS



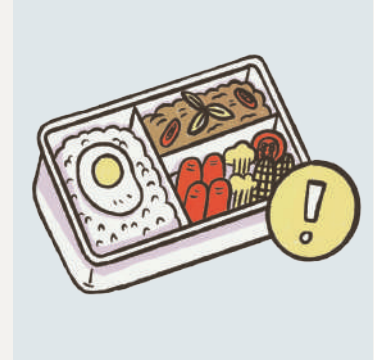
Stringent design requirements:

Reusable packaging must meet high toxic-free and durability standards to ensure safety and longevity.



Operational costs:

Food providers, service operators, and event organisers often bear the costs of collection, cleaning, and maintenance.



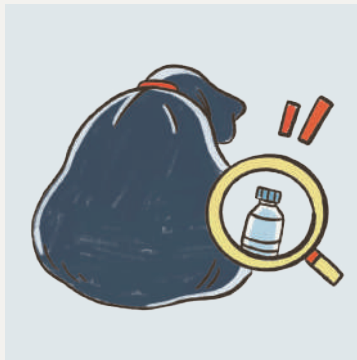
Infrastructure constraints:

Systems are often limited to locations with sufficient dine-in space and struggle to scale in takeaway- or delivery-dominated settings.



Collection and return challenges:

Packaging loss can occur where deposit schemes are unclear or return points are poorly designed or insufficiently accessible.



Economic misalignment:

For waste collectors, reuse must be financially more attractive than recycling (e.g. higher resale value for reusable glass bottles).



Consumer convenience:

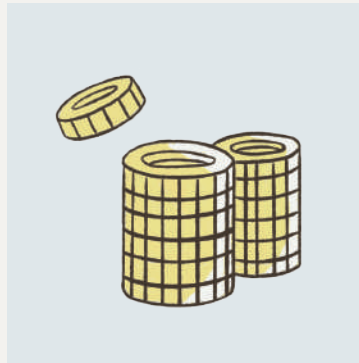
Single-use packaging is often perceived as more convenient, creating behavioural barriers to uptake.

2. REFILL SYSTEMS



High standards and oversight:

Refillable containers and refill infrastructure require strict, toxic-free, durability, transparency, and traceability standards.

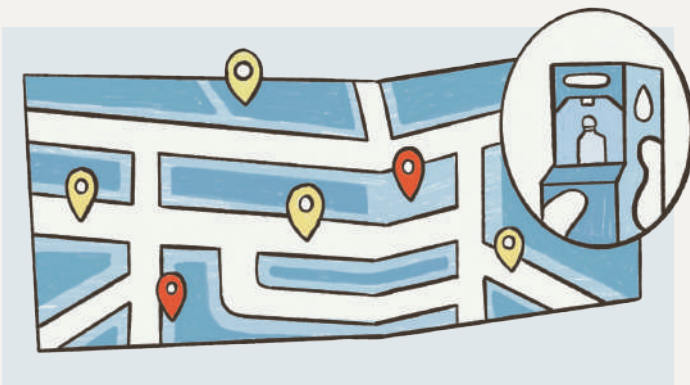


Upfront and operational costs:

Significant investment is needed for infrastructure, logistics, transport, cleaning, and system management.



Perceived convenience of single-use: Single-use packaging continues to dominate due to convenience and familiarity.



Accessibility gaps:

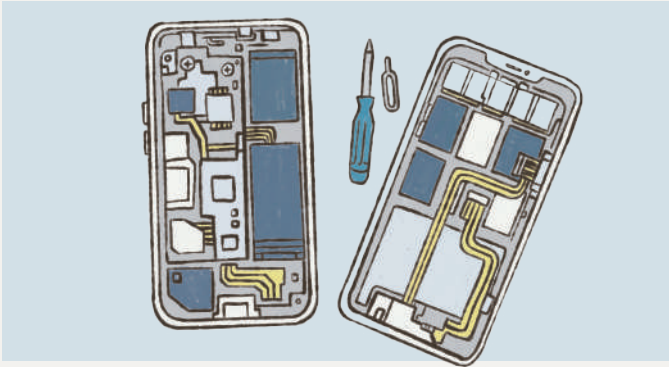
Refill points must be widely distributed and easy to access to achieve meaningful impact, which remains challenging in many areas. Additionally, consumers reported being rejected by vendors or restaurants when they offer their own containers.



Behavioural and geographic factors:

System effectiveness depends on local habits. For example, urban populations may be more likely to carry reusable bottles than rural or informal workers.

3. REPAIR SYSTEMS



Product design barriers:

Many products are not designed to be durable or repairable, limiting the feasibility of repair. Planned obsolescence - the design of products with limited lifespan to ensure consumers are forced to continuously purchase new versions of the product - remains an issue, especially in countries where there are no laws guaranteeing a consumer's right to repair.



Lack of access to information:

Producers and brand owners often fail to provide repair manuals, spare parts, or technical guidance.



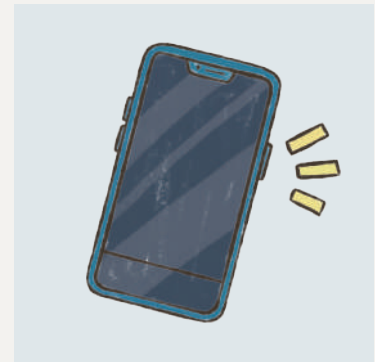
Skills erosion:

Repair knowledge and craftsmanship are declining, particularly as skilled workers age without adequate succession or training.



Cost competitiveness:

Repair must be more affordable than replacement to be viable for consumers.



Awareness and accessibility:

Consumers often lack information about repair services or the skills needed for basic self-repair.

Despite their transformative potential, reuse, refill, and repair systems remain constrained by high standards and costs for toxic-free design, infrastructure, logistics, and maintenance, alongside limited accessibility and weak economic incentives. These barriers are compounded by products and services not designed for reuse, refill, or repair, declining skills, and a system that continues to privilege the convenience and low cost of single-use models. Overcoming these structural challenges is essential to enabling the right to reduce.



“

As long as there is no government-supported backbone. What we call ‘reuse infrastructure’ will not be very competitive with the single-use plastic systems... or the government must put a very heavy tax on plastic packaging - that’s the only way to make it competitive.”

Owner of a refill shop in Indonesia

”

Photo by Repair Thailand Community - the Repair Cafe allows consumers to learn basic repair skills, such as sewing, building capacity for reduction of new textile consumption - a key source of plastic pollution.



I ENSHRINING TOXIC-FREE REDUCTION-ENABLING SYSTEMS IN THE GPT

The table below provides some examples of what standards and interventions can be included in the GPT to enshrine the right to reduce.⁴¹ The elements proposed for the GPT can also be translated into national or local legislation and policies, depending on the context of the respective countries.

Location in the treaty text	Provisions and elements to enshrine the right to reduce
Throughout the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The protection of health and the environment ● The recognition that the treaty must address the full life cycle of plastics, including extraction and production
Chemical provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provisions to control and ban chemicals of concern are included in their own separate article. Governance of chemicals must include the prohibition of production, distribution, import, and export, covering the full life cycle of a toxic chemical.
Transparency and traceability provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A provision ensuring the transparency and traceability of chemicals throughout the life cycle of products
Article 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bans of single-use plastic products and other plastics that impact health and the environment
Article 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Toxic-free reduction-enabling system is recognised as a mandatory target and measure to ensure that products designed to be reused, refilled, and repaired, are, in practice, reused, refilled and repaired. ● A product design article that ensures the reduction of material used, prioritising less plastic production and usage. In this sense, the product design article should not be confined to plastic products, but products containing plastics, where plastics could be phased out. ● A provision ensuring the reusability, refillability, and reparability of products that prioritise the protection of health.
Article 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Retain the article on the reduction of plastic production, with provisions to set ambitious, mandatory, and time-bound reduction targets.
Article 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include releases of MNPs and chemicals from plastic products and other forms of pollution from plastic production, to ensure the full environmental and health cost of single-use plastics are internalised.
Article 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Retains an article ensuring a just transition for all stakeholders. Those currently relying on income from within the plastic value chain should be given the choice to transition towards green jobs in a reuse, refill, and repair economy.
Articles related to finance and capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding mechanisms must prioritise the establishment of toxic-free reduction-enabling systems and other activities to tackle overproduction and overconsumption.



Dried products are sold in refillable form in Negombo, Sri Lanka. © EJF 2025.

In the last round of the GPT negotiation, Article 5 on product design and Article 8 on waste management became the focus points for the establishment of toxic-free reduction-enabling systems. Thailand, the Philippines and Cambodia pushed for “toxic-free reuse, refill, repair, and other reduction-enabling systems” with the goal of reducing plastic consumption.⁴² Indonesia submitted a statement which supported the inclusion of “reuse systems” in the GPT.⁴³ The African group, consisting of 54 nations, supported the establishment of “toxic-free reuse, refill, repair systems”.⁴⁴ The United Kingdom and Chile submitted a proposal on behalf of 32 countries, including Pacific Small Islands Developing States, which included reuse systems and targets.⁴⁵

“

The [GPT] should include specific provisions ensuring the development of refill and reuse infrastructure, this is essential to support the achievement of effective plastic waste reduction.

”

Delegation of Thailand to INC-5.2⁴⁶

“

Support for Toxic-free Reuse Systems - there is a need in the [current draft of the plastics treaty] to clearly separate reuse from recycling to follow the waste hierarchy and avoid confusion in the order of priority of design principles;”

”

African Group of Negotiators, INC-5.2⁴⁷

“

... to include a framework for the establishment, preservation and continuous development of reuse, refill, repair and other relevant circular systems.

”

Delegation of the Philippines to INC-5.2⁴⁸

The momentum at the last GPT negotiations illustrates that countries from regions around the world understand the need to protect the right to reduce. It is time that this momentum becomes truly global.

I CONCLUSION

This policy white paper shows that reducing plastic consumption, once a normal practice, now requires protection in an economy built on overproduction and single-use plastics. Reduction-enabling systems such as reuse, refill, and repair operate in a policy and economic vacuum, struggling to survive while petrochemical and single-use models are favoured. To reverse this, governments must ensure the true health and environmental costs of plastics are reflected in economic decision-making. Additionally, governments must recognise the potential for reduction-enabling systems to address plastic pollution across the plastic life cycle - the manifest goal of the GPT. This recognition must lead to a concerted push to ensure that these systems are included in the GPT. This will ensure the treaty becomes a pathway for societies around the world to bring an end to the single-use era.



Single-use plastic bottles in a waste collection facility in Thailand, © EJF 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EJF urges governments to ensure that all people are guaranteed the right to reduce their consumption of plastics, with the ultimate goal being the drastic reduction in the global production of plastics, which will protect the health of people and the planet. To achieve this, we recommend that all governments:

- 1 Ensure that toxic-free reduction-enabling systems and practices, including reuse, refill, and repair are included as mandatory provisions in the global plastics treaty (GPT), with clear timeframes and instruments for implementation. The protection of health must be the paramount principle for such a provision.
- 2 Ensure that the GPT contains instruments that can provide dedicated, sustainable, and accessible funding mechanisms for toxic-free reduction-enabling systems and practices, including reuse, refill, and repair. Such mechanisms must be sensitive to the needs of developing countries and must be readily accessible to communities and reduction-enabling practitioners.
- 3 Ensure that the GPT contains provisions to reduce the production of plastics, strict prohibitions and controls on chemicals of concern, prohibitions of toxic and unnecessary plastics, including single-use plastics.
- 4 Ensure that the GPT contains provisions for the design of products to enable the reduction of plastics, including but not limited to reusability, refillability, and reparability. The protection of health must be the paramount principle for such a provision.
- 5 Set national targets and enact legally-binding plans and instruments to establish, scale, and maintain toxic-free reduction-enabling systems and practices, including reuse, refill, and repair. The protection of health must be the paramount principle for such plans and instruments.
- 6 Ensure that the design and implementation of national targets and plans for toxic-free reduction-enabling systems are conducted with a dynamic just transition principle in mind, utilising a meaningful participatory approach that leaves no one behind, including those working within the plastics value chain.
- 7 Set mandatory and ambitious time-bound targets to reduce the production, consumption, and supply of plastics in one's country. Set a moratorium on the expansion of the petrochemical and plastics industry, including an end to subsidies to the industry.
- 8 Divert subsidies that are currently provided to the petrochemical and plastics industry to fund toxic-free reduction-enabling systems and practices, with a focus on protecting and scaling existing practices and systems. Additionally, ensure that sustainable and accessible funding is provided for the establishment, scaling, and maintenance of toxic-free reduction-enabling systems, and adheres to the polluter pays principle.
- 9 Implement a national ban on unnecessary and toxic plastics, including single-use plastics. Financial instruments such as single-use taxes can be mobilised to reduce demand for single-use plastics.
- 10 Implement national laws and legislations to prohibit chemicals of concern in materials and products across all sectors, including mandatory design standards that enable reduction and protect health.

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TOXIC-FREE REUSE AND REDUCTION ENABLING SYSTEMS



AS REAL SOLUTIONS TO PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) exists to protect the natural world and defend our basic human right to a secure environment.

Our work to secure environmental justice aims to protect our global climate, ocean, forests, wetlands, wildlife and defend the fundamental human right to a secure natural environment, recognising that all other rights are contingent on this. EJF works internationally to inform policy and drive systemic, durable reforms to protect our environment and defend human rights. We investigate and expose abuses and support environmental defenders, Indigenous peoples, communities, and independent journalists on the frontlines of environmental injustice. Our campaigns aim to secure peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures. Our investigators, researchers, filmmakers, and campaigners work with grassroots partners and environmental defenders across the globe.

EJF has teams based in Belgium, France, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the UK. Our investigators, researchers, filmmakers and campaigners work with grassroots partners and environmental defenders across the globe.

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