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ZERO WASTE DAY 2024

WRAP-UP REPORT



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2.1B – 2.3B

tonnes of municipal solid waste
are produced annually

2.7B

people lack access to
waste collection

US\$361B

cost of waste pollution and
management annually

Photo: Unsplash

Nature doesn't waste. Nor should we.

In a relentless pursuit of comfort and convenience, humanity has created a torrent of waste pollution. From electronics and food to plastic and textiles, waste pollution disrupts ecosystems, threatens economic prosperity and harms human well-being.

Humanity generates between 2.1 billion and 2.3 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste annually. Yet some 2.7 billion people lack access to waste collection.

To [#BeatWastePollution](#), experts say humanity must adopt a zero-waste approach, which promotes responsible production and consumption, fosters environmentally sound waste management with a focus on upstream solutions, and contributes to sustainable development.

To commemorate the second annual [International Day of Zero Waste](#) on 30 March, United Nations (UN) agencies, governments, non-profit organizations and individuals from relevant sectors raised awareness of the need to bolster waste management while engaging in upstream solutions like redesign, reduction and reuse.

The UN General Assembly unanimously established Zero Waste Day during its seventy-seventh session in 2022. The day is jointly facilitated by the [UN Environment Programme](#) (UNEP) and the [UN Human Settlements Programme](#) (UN-Habitat).



António Guterres
Secretary-General,
United Nations

“Governments at all levels must build circular economies that address resource depletion and management, and invest in modern waste-management programmes anchored in reuse, remanufacturing, recovery and waste prevention.”



Inger Andersen
Executive Director,
United Nations
Environment Programme

“The International Day of Zero Waste is a reminder that our planet cannot keep endlessly giving up resources and receiving pollution in return. And we can’t keep letting poorly managed waste compromise people’s health. Nature doesn’t waste. And nor should we.”



Michal Mlynár
Acting Executive Director,
United Nations Human
Settlements Programme

“Zero waste makes sense on every level. By retaining materials within the economy and enhancing waste management practices, we bring benefits to our economies, our societies, our planet, and ourselves.”



“Overconsumption is killing us. Humanity needs an intervention.”

António Guterres
Secretary-General, United Nations

UN leaders call for action in addresses

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen and UN-Habitat Acting Executive Director Michal Mlynár all delivered addresses stressing the importance of zero waste for social, economic and environmental benefits.

“As trash decays, it spews planet-warming greenhouse gases into our atmosphere, poisons our water and soil, and inflicts illness, disease and even death among people around the world,” Mr. Guterres [said](#) in his video address. “Overconsumption is killing us. Humanity needs an intervention. On this Zero Waste Day, let’s pledge to end the destructive cycle of waste, once and for all.”

He called for action from businesses, consumers and governments to bolster waste management and shift towards zero waste. Mr. Guterres also emphasized the work of the [Advisory Board of Eminent Persons on Zero Waste](#), established during a High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly for the day’s inaugural observance in 2023.

“The International Day of Zero Waste is a reminder that our planet cannot keep endlessly giving up resources and receiving pollution in return. And we can’t keep letting poorly managed waste compromise people’s health,” Ms. Andersen [said](#) in her remarks.

Mr. Mlynar highlighted the “urgent need for sustainable management practices in human settlements” in his address.

“The International Day of Zero Waste serves as a poignant reminder that cities play a pivotal role in implementing sustainable waste management practices,” he [said](#). “Cities can foster healthier environments and build resilient communities.”

Leaders champion zero waste at official UNEP/ UN-Habitat observance in Nairobi



Credit: UNEP/Ahmed Nayim Yussuf

UNEP and UN-Habitat, alongside the Republic of Türkiye, co-hosted the official observance of Zero Waste Day in Nairobi on 27 March. The observance – held in-person and [live-streamed](#) – featured addresses and presentations from representatives of Member States and grassroots organizations.

It included a [video testimonial](#) from Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan, First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye and chairperson of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board.



Credit: Republic of Türkiye

“The zero-waste movement brings together people from all groups under its roof by offering individual and active volunteering opportunities on the environment,” she said. “The recognition that every resource we consume must be used responsibly lies at the heart of the zero-waste approach.”

UN representatives also reaffirmed their commitment to zero-waste initiatives at the event.

“UN-Habitat remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering knowledge-exchange and capacity-building in waste management, as well as supporting local and national governments in implementing interventions for the transition towards a zero-waste society,” said Rafael Tuts, UN-Habitat Director of Global Solutions.

Sheila Aggarwal-Khan, Director of UNEP's Industry and Economy Division, addressed her remarks to the 20 schoolchildren in attendance from Nexa International School's zero-waste project.

“The most important thing for us to look at is the reduction (of waste),” she said. “To look at the full lifecycle of any product ... so that we don't have to deal with the volume of waste that will be created 25 years from now when you're in these seats?”

Representatives from Member States described their zero-waste projects and called for enhanced collaboration and action.

Ambassadors from Türkiye, Costa Rica, Israel, Belgium and the United States presented projects on waste reduction and carbon neutrality, highlighting information exchange and collaboration for waste management. They also focused on the need for investments in educating people about zero waste, developing infrastructure and adopting technology in waste reduction.

UN events accelerate zero- waste momentum

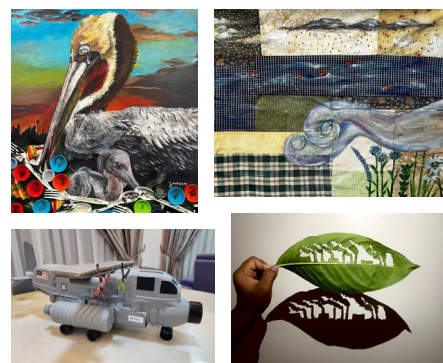


The President of the UN General Assembly, Dennis Francis, and more than 100 participants attended the UNEP/UN-Habitat observance at the UN Headquarters in New York on 27 March. Representatives from several Member States described initiatives at local and international levels aimed at reducing waste and fostering responsible waste management practices. Shannon Lisa, a focal point from the [Major Group for Children and Youth](#), detailed young people's concerns and local perspectives on chemical waste management in the tri-state area.

UNEP's Caribbean Sub-Regional Office, the International Environment Technology Centre ([UNEP-IETC](#)) and the [Children and Youth Major Group](#) to UNEP co-organized "[Zero Waste Futures](#)", an online seminar to promote zero-waste initiatives and inspire youth engagement. More than 500 people registered for the event. Panellists included expert speakers and youth representatives from various regions.

Zoë Lenkiewicz, lead author of UNEP's [Global Waste Management Outlook 2024](#) report, presented key data, challenges and solutions related to the waste pollution crisis. UNEP's Shanta King and Maria Hughes provided insights into waste management in the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific, respectively. Four youth leaders then delved into challenges in waste management across various regions and how youth can play a critical role in

overcoming them. Speakers included Nav Agarwal of Indian social initiative [One Step Greener](#), Nobuhle Zulu of South African organization [Captain Fanplastic](#), environmental journalist Rabeb Aloui and Mathias Charles of Lebanese social enterprise [Live Love Recycle](#).



Credit: UN University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability

To mark Zero Waste Day, the UN University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) exhibited the winners of the "2023 RCE Youth Art Challenge: From Waste to Art" at its headquarters in Tokyo. Every year, UNU-IAS hosts a global competition for those aged 35 and under to produce and submit environment-themed artwork. In 2023, the theme was SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, and there were 212 entries from 34 countries, with [nine winners](#).



Credit: UNEP Asia Pacific

The UNEP-coordinated Geneva Environment Network (GEN) co-hosted a [hybrid conference](#) with UN-Habitat to raise awareness of zero-waste initiatives. The conference also highlighted Geneva's role as a major global hub for the governance of hazardous substances and home to several international organizations and Multilateral Environmental Agreements targeting zero waste. Speakers included Güven Begeç, the Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the UN Office at Geneva; Dilara Abdullayeva, Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan; and Carlos Silva Filho, President of the [International Solid Waste Association](#) and a member of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Zero Waste.

In Bangkok, UNEP and UN-Habitat collaborated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand to host a Zero Waste Day observance. The event featured a panel discussion about Thailand's path to zero waste and a workshop highlighting the importance of repairing products in advancing the circular economy.

UNEP also prepared a poster and banner exhibition for its #BeatWastePollution

campaign at Beijing Capital International Airport.

These were among the 13 key events that UNEP and UN-Habitat hosted across all regions – from Austria to Thailand – in support of Zero Waste Day. UN country offices also held side activities and social media campaigns.

Türkiye participated in events hosted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna and by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris. The Zero Waste Foundation, serving as an adviser and working closely with missions of Türkiye, assumed a leadership role in organizing Zero Waste Day events. In a monumental initiative aimed at promoting global sustainability, the foundation marked Zero Waste Day across several countries, garnering widespread support for waste reduction and environmental conservation efforts. This significant milestone was not only a testament to the growing international momentum towards sustainability but also a reflection of the foundation's tireless advocacy for responsible waste management practices.

Advisory Board on Zero Waste highlights good practices

To commemorate Zero Waste Day, UNEP, UN-Habitat and the [One Planet network](#) organized a campaign dedicated to collecting zero-waste best practices, solutions and case studies. The Secretary-General's Advisory Board of Eminent Persons on Zero Waste selected [16 good practices](#) from across the world that embody the zero-waste approach. Each practice offers insights and lessons for replication and adaptation in other contexts. The campaign brought together 92 new case studies submitted to the One Planet network's [database](#), bringing its total zero-waste entries to over 400.

Spokespeople from three of the good practices presented their work during the UNEP/UN-Habitat Nairobi event. The first outstanding practice, "[Plastic Free Balearics](#)", is a certification to incentivize single-use plastic reduction in the hospitality industry of Spain's Balearic Islands. The second, "[FINTRAFs](#)", equips Indigenous women working in Nigeria's cassava value chain with machines and skills to increase productivity and minimize post-harvest losses by recycling cassava peel into nutritious animal feed. The third, "[From glass waste to wealth!](#)" focuses on reducing glass waste at a resort in Oman.

New UNEP reports spotlight waste pollution crisis, solutions

UNEP published its [Food Waste Index Report 2024](#) on Zero Waste Day. The report, co-authored with the United Kingdom-based non-governmental organization Waste and Resources Action Programme, provides the most accurate global estimate on food waste at the retail and consumer levels. It found that households waste over 1 billion meals a day each year despite 783 million people going hungry.

Ahead of Zero Waste Day, UNEP also published the [Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 \(GWMO 2024\)](#), providing an update on global waste generation and the cost of waste and its management. The report reveals that 2.1 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste is produced annually, and the cost of waste management and externalities is estimated at US\$361 billion each year.

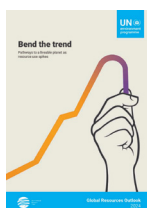
"We need to start thinking of rubbish, trash as a resource, shift to zero-waste practices and ensure a just transition for many folks, including waste pickers, and we need to take a careful look at gender and socioeconomic disparities in many communities," Ms. Andersen [said at the launch event](#), held on the sidelines of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6).

Report authors and food loss experts presented some of the report's key findings and highlighted regional plans to tackle food waste during the virtual launch event. Speakers included Adalberto Maluf, Brazil's National Secretary for Urban Environment and Environmental Quality; Thembelihle Ndukwana, South Africa's Director of Agro-Processing; Hodayah Finman, Deputy Director of International Affairs at the United States Environmental Protection Agency; and Alwin Kopse, Head of International Affairs and Food Systems at Switzerland's Ministry of Agriculture.

UNEP also released the [Global Resources Outlook 2024](#) on the sidelines of UNEA-6. The report focuses on how rising trends in global resource use have continued or accelerated. Without urgent and concerted action, resource extraction could rise by 60 per cent by 2060.



Global Waste Management Outlook 2024: Beyond an age of waste



Global Resources Outlook 2024: Bend the trend



Food Waste Index Report 2024: Think Eat Save

“We need to start thinking of rubbish, trash as a resource, shift to zero-waste practices and ensure a just transition.”

Inger Andersen
Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme

Photo: Unsplash

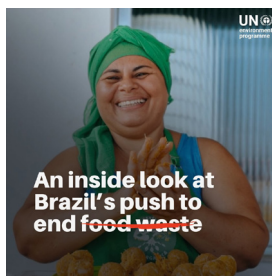
Data interactive presents state of waste pollution

To support *GWMO 2024*, UNEP published “[Waste Pollution 101](#)”, a long-form data interactive that synthesizes the key findings of the report and presents an overview of the waste pollution crisis. Through intuitive design, illustrations, and interactive charts and maps, *Waste Pollution 101* is an easy-to-use resource for individuals, the private sector and governments alike.

The interactive is presented in five sections. The first describes the issue of waste pollution and why addressing it is

critical. The next provides an overview of the different types of waste and how they impact human well-being, the environment and the economy. The next sections detail the overall implications of waste pollution and include projected outcomes under three scenarios: waste management as usual, ending open dumping and burning by 2050, and shifting towards a circular economy. Next, the interactive provides steps that individuals, businesses and governments can take at all levels to #BeatWastePollution.

Stories highlight unique experiences



UNEP and UN-Habitat produced an [explainer](#) to highlight how stakeholders at all levels can embrace zero waste to overcome the waste pollution crisis. The story addressed six key forms of waste

pollution – food, textiles, electronics, resource extraction, plastic, chemicals and hazardous waste – while highlighting the pivotal role of cities and waste-management infrastructure.

UNEP also produced an in-depth [feature story](#) examining food loss and waste in Brazil. The story draws from the *Food Waste Index Report 2024* and includes interviews with Brazilian government officials, researchers and community activists.

UNEP and UN-Habitat jointly issued a [release](#) highlighting the Secretary General's Advisory Board of Eminent Persons on Zero Waste's good practices selections following the Nairobi commemoration.

Social media campaigns, news uptake spur momentum



UNEP and UN-Habitat built upon the strong digital presence and visual identity they established in 2023. They released shareable social media assets and graphics in multiple languages via a [dedicated hub](#) with key messages, a marketing brief and more.

UNEP, UN-Habitat and the One Planet network posted 170 times on their various social media platforms – including 70 posts in English – reaching millions across the world. The programmes made posts in all UN languages, Japanese, Portuguese and Serbian. Other UN agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and the UN Development Programme, also shared Zero Waste Day posts.

UNEP and UN-Habitat prepared a [Public Service Announcement](#) video, which received more than 170,000 views. UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors [Antoinette Taus](#), [Roberta Annan](#) and [Dia Mirza](#) all provided

video messages urging for stronger action to #BeatWastePollution and embrace zero waste. These accumulated over 10,000 engagements and over 300,000 views on social media.

In the one week following Zero Waste Day, 490 media outlets across 78 countries published nearly 800 articles in 16 languages directly related to the day. This is an increase from the 628 articles published in 459 media outlets during the one week after the 2023 observance. Media from China published the most articles, followed by Canada and Venezuela.

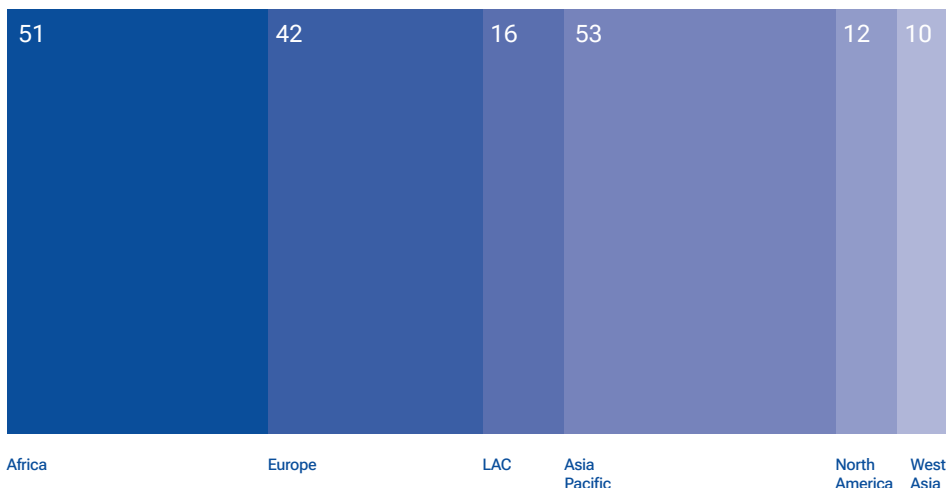
Additionally, one-week monitoring of the *Food Waste Index Report 2024* revealed 1,776 articles published in 1,410 media outlets across 101 countries in 29 languages. Meanwhile, GWMO 2024 spawned 273 articles published in 247 media outlets across 44 countries in 12 languages.

External activity registrations drive impact

Through outreach channels and regional offices, UNEP and UN-Habitat invited individuals, schools, organizations, governments and other stakeholders to register activities for Zero Waste Day. UNEP and UN-Habitat received nearly 200 activity registrations, with India, Italy, Kenya and Morocco among the most represented countries.

These activities included conferences, training modules, school campaigns, waste collection drives and art competitions. They all helped to raise awareness of the importance of responsible consumption and production practices and urban waste management across a wide demographic range.

Registered activities by region



The [Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives \(GAIA\)](#), a non-profit dedicated to fostering a just transition to zero waste without incineration, hosted an online seminar called “The Year of Zero Waste” featuring policymakers, grassroots community leaders and experts, including UN-Habitat. The seminar focused on how to escalate progress on zero waste worldwide based on current trends, obstacles and proven strategies. Panelists discussed cross-cutting themes that enable the transition into zero waste, including climate and waste management finance, social inclusion, waste prevention through plastic reduction, organic waste management and more. GAIA also released a [video](#) showcasing success stories from zero-waste cities and

communities in Asia Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and North America.

Zero Waste Europe, the European chapter of GAIA, held a [month-long awareness-raising campaign](#) to celebrate Zero Waste Day. The group prepared dedicated posts and communications products such as infographics, stories, videos and seminars in support of the campaign, which included four themed weeks. They were: Prevention first, Impactful policies, New economies and Thriving communities. Zero Waste Europe [comprises](#) 36 local and national non-governmental organizations sharing common values and objectives and working together for a zero-waste future.

About UNEP, UN-Habitat, One Planet network

UNEP, as the global authority that sets the environmental agenda, is well-positioned to continue guiding the shift to zero waste through its regional and global programmes, which address all forms of waste across their entire lifecycles. The expertise of UNEP-IETC and the [Life Cycle Initiative](#) can help inform best practices.

UN-Habitat is the focal point for all urbanization and human settlement matters in the UN, guiding cities towards sustainable urbanization, including addressing and improving their municipal solid waste management. It is well-positioned to provide the expertise needed to help cities incorporate zero waste into waste management strategies, including through [Waste Wise Cities](#) and the [African](#)

[Clean Cities Platform](#). It offers [data and monitoring](#), [sharing of knowledge](#), advocacy and education, and support for tangible project development.

The One Planet network is a global community of practitioners, policymakers and experts, including governments, businesses, civil society, academia and international organizations, that implements the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production and works towards achieving SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. It operates the [Zero Waste Knowledge Hub](#) and is thus well-positioned to showcase effective and inspiring zero-waste projects.

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