Glossary (Proposal and comments)

This glossary was developed within the context of the project: "UNEP/EC Project Identifying and quantifying plastic contaminant sources and leakages into the aquatic environment". The document contains proposals for terms and comments from experts.

Proposed Terms	Meaning	Source	Expert comment	Expert comment	Expert comment
Added stock	Plastic put on the market on a given year that is not becoming waste within the same year. This part of the plastic input is considered as plastic stock for the given year as it will become waste in another year (e.g. plastic used in construction or automotive). Similarly, though, there will be plastic that was put on the market in previous year and that will become waste in the chosen year. The difference between these two quantities is the added stock.	UNEP/IUCN			**Proposed language:** A Plastic put on the market in a given year that does not become waste within that same year is classified as plastic stock. This portion of the plastic remains in use and is expected to become waste in future years (e.g., plastic used in construction or automotive sectors). At the same time, plastic from previous years, which was initially stock, may transition into waste in the selected year. The added plastic stock is determined by the difference between the new stock and the stock becoming waste from previous years.
Collection rate	Ratio between the plastic waste collected and generated. Waste Collected includes: Waste export,	UNEP/IUCN	Ratio between the plastic waste collected and generated. Waste collected includes all plastic waste		**Proposed language:** Plastic waste collection rate? The ratio of plastic waste collected to the total plastic

	Recycling, Properly disposed and Improperly disposed.		destined for disposal, including recovery and non-recovery operations and exports, whether it is disposed in an environmentally sound manner or not.		waste generated. Collected waste includes exported waste, recycling, properly disposed waste, and improperly disposed waste.
Domestic waste	Waste generated within the country.	UNEP/IUCN	This term is confusing. Domestic waste many times is used to identify household waste. I would suggest to use the term "national plastic waste generation" instead, or something similar.		Are we here referring to MSW or plastic domestic waste, or are we including all types of waste (industrial, agricultural, etc) or plastic waste from all those activities?
(Plastic) product exports	Export of any plastic by the country , in any form, be it primary polymer, plastic product, or plastic embedded in a product (plastic share in cars or phones). It does not include export of plastic waste.	UNEP/IUCN	If exports of plastic waste is excluded, I suggest to refer to the term as plastic products. Suggest to align the export and import definitions with those used by the key global data holders at the moment (e.g. UNCTAD). Under this, there are some critical terms that could also warrant explanation, as the data are there. These include: include: - Final manufactured goods Intermediate forms of plastic Intermediate manufactured plastic goods Plastic in primary forms Plastic packaging - should be defined separately Plastic waste		

			(some can be found further down the list, but need to ensure they align in definitions).		
Formal sector	Waste management activities planned, sponsored, financed, carried out or regulated and/or recognized by the local authorities or their agents, usually through contracts, licenses or concessions.	UNEP/IUCN	If it is formal sector, usually an authorization from the competent authority (usually environment)	Waste management activities planned, sponsored, financed, carried out or regulated and/or recognized by the local authorities or their agents, usually through authorizations, contracts, licenses or concessions.	
Hotspot		UNEP/IUCN	Note that a hotspot in environmental monitoring is an extreme concentration, in this case of litter (GH) . It may be confusing to have two items that have completely different definitions? The plural vs singular isn't necessarily the distinguishing factor (there can be more than one hotspot also in the leakage context?)		
Hotspots	Refer to the most relevant plastic polymers, applications, industrial sectors, regions or waste management stages causing the leakage of plastics into the environment (including land, air, water and marine environment), as well as associated impacts, through the life cycle of plastic products.	UNEP/IUCN	I Suggest to have one term (singular)here, then spilt in the 2 (or more) different uses of the word. The definition for hotspot in singular or in plural should be the same. If more than one definition is used, then explain both. The definition for hotspot in singular or in plural should be		Maybe this needs to be clearly linked to the hotspot definition, otherwise can be confusing . Does it make sense to change it to Key source. Hotspots is very confusing with the term above hotspot. But I am also aware that this description is provided in the UNEP DOC

			the same. If more than one definition is used, then explain both. This is referring to critical points in the processes, right? It is different to the previous definition of hotspot as a location. Suggest to use different term to add clarity that one is in the process and the other one is the location were leakage occurs.		For example: key source: waste management, hotspot: leakage during waste transport Suggested Language: Refer to the production of most relevant plastic polymers, applications, industrial sectors, regions, or waste management stages causing the leakage of plastics into the environment (including land, air, water and marine environment), as well as associated impacts, through the life cycle of plastic products.
(Plastic) product limports	Import of any plastic in the country, in any form, be it primary polymer, plastic product, or plastic embedded in a product (plastic share in cars or phones). It does not include import of plastic waste.	UNEP/IUCN			
Improperly disposed	Waste fraction that is disposed in a waste management system where leakage is expected to occur, such as a dumpsite or an unsanitary landfill. A dumpsite is a particular area where large quantities of waste are deliberately disposed in an	UNEP/IUCN	The Basel Convention refers to this to environmentally sound management and non-environmentally sound management. Suggest to use this terms instead. ESM is defined as implementation of all practicable steps to ensure		Waste disposed of on dumpsites or unsanitary landfills where leakage is expected to occur. A dumpsite is a particular area where large quantities of waste are deliberately disposed in an uncontrolled

	uncontrolled manner and can be the result of both the formal and informal sectors. A landfill is considered as unsanitary when waste management quality standards are not met, thus entailing a potential for leakage.		that the wastes are managed in a manner which will protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects which may result from such wastes. This includes implementing best available techniques and best environmentally practices. Engineered landfill is the correct term used under the Basel Convention to refer to landfills for household waste, specially engineered landfills for hazardous waste, etc. Suggest to stick to the Basel Convention terminology. Proposed language: Waste fraction that is disposed in a waste management system where leakage is expected to occur, such as a dumpsite or an non-ESM engineered landfill. A dumpsite is a particular area where large quantities of waste are deliberately disposed in an uncontrolled manner and can be the result of both the formal and informal sectors. A engineered landfill is considered as non-environmentally sound management when waste management quality		manner and can be the result of both the formal and informal sectors. A landfill is considered as unsanitary when waste management quality standards are not met, thus entailing a potential for leakage.

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Informal sector	Individuals or a group of individuals who are involved in waste management activities but are not formally registered or formally responsible for providing waste management services.	UNEP/IUCN			
Leakage	It is defined as the plastic released to the rivers and oceans. The leakage rate is ratio between leakage and total waste generated, and its value is given in percentage.	UNEP/IUCN	Consistency with other definitions. Releases to soil can also be considered, right? I am not sure this definition is clear enough. Is it only in the context of plastic waste (as per second part of the definition) or plastic overall (e.g. Also production process?). OR is this referring to two components resulting from plastic activities: the waste (accounted for) and leakage (not accounted for/escaping)?. I think it needs clarification - it could be read in two ways. Proposed language: It is defined as the plastic released to the rivers and oceans water bodies, soil, air, etc. The leakage rate is ratio between leakage and total		Leakage can also be on terrestrial ecosystems. I will write it as entering terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Proposed Language: It is defined as the released of materials or substances (gas, liquid or solid) to the environment. The waste leakage rate is a ratio between leaked waste and total waste generated, and its value is given in percentage.

			waste generated, and its value is given in percentage.		
(Plastic) Leakage	Quantity of plastic entering the oceans as well as other environmental compartments (e.g. rivers, soil, air)	UNEP/IUCN	Proposed Language: Quantity of plastic entering the oceans as well as other environmental compartments (e.g. water bodiesrivers, soil, air)		The quantity of plastic that escapes—either intentionally or unintentionally—during production processes, usage, and waste management, entering the oceans as well as other environmental compartments, such as rivers, soil, and air."
Leakage	The generic term leakage is defined here as the combination of losses and releases. The loss is the quantity of plastics that leaves a properly managed product or waste management system, as the fraction of materials that is detached from the plastic product during manufacturing, use or transport for microplastics or as mismanaged waste for macroplastics. Losses are specific to various sources and activities (e.g., the processes of losing all types of plastics into the environment through abrasion, weathering or	The Plastic Leak Project	Combine with previous definitions.		

	unintentional spills during production, transport, use, maintenance or recycling of products containing plastics, and littered plastic packaging). The releases are the fractions of the loss that are ultimately released into different environmental compartments				
Littering	Incorrect disposal of small, one-off items, such as: throwing a cigarette, dropping a crisp packet, or a drink cup. Most of the time these items end-up on the road or on side-ways. They may or may not be collected by municipal street cleaning.	UNEP/IUCN			
Mass balance		UNEP/IUCN	Proposed Language: Mass balancing is a mathematical process aiming at equalizing inputs and outputs of a given material flow across a system boundary. In our case, inputs consist of domestic production and imports of plastic products and waste, while outputs consist of exports, waste generation		

			and increase of stock. A mass balance allows to check data consistency and helps reconcile different datasets when needed.		
Mismanaged waste	It is defined as the sum of uncollected and improperly disposed waste. It is plastic that is prone to be released to the environment .	UNEP/IUCN	An important fraction is open burned /uncontrolled burned, so this to be considered when calculating the released fraction		
Mismanaged waste		Global Waste Management Outlook 2024	Suggested language: Collected waste that has been released or deposited in a place from where it can move into the natural environment (intentionally or otherwise). This includes dumpsites and non-ESM engineered landfills. Uncollected waste is categorised as unmanaged		
Plastic	Plastic is a material that contains as an essential ingredient a high polymer and which, at some stage in its processing into finished products, can be shaped by flow.	International Standards Organisation (ISO). 2013. ISO 472:2013 Plastics – vocabulary. Available at			

		https://www.iso.org/standard/44102.html			
Plastic in semi-finished plastic products	Semi-finished plastic products are usually used as input for further manufacturing. They are referred to as being in the 'intermediate consumption' stage, such as plastic tubes, plastic plates, and plastic strips.	UNEP and UNITAR (2025). Statistical guideline for measuring flows of plastic throughout the life cycle. Nairobi and Bonn, Kenya and Germany (in progress)			
Plastic in finished products	Finished products are consumed in the final consumption phase. Plastic in finished products can be categorised and disaggregated into two mutually exclusive categories: 'finished plastic products' and 'plastic embedded in plastic-containing products'.	UNEP and UNITAR (2025). Statistical guideline for measuring flows of plastic throughout the life cycle. Nairobi and Bonn, Kenya and Germany (in progress)			
(Finished) plastic products	Finished plastic products are finished products made of plastic, excluding plastic in primary forms and plastic in semi-finished plastic products.	UNEP and UNITAR (2025). Statistical guideline for measuring flows of plastic throughout the life cycle. Nairobi and Bonn, Kenya and			

		Germany (in progress)			
Plastic-containing products	Plastic-containing products are products in which plastic is used as a component along with other non-plastic materials.	UNEP and UNITAR (2025). Statistical guideline for measuring flows of plastic throughout the life cycle. Nairobi and Bonn, Kenya and Germany (in progress)			
Plastic content in products	The plastic content in products represents the mass percentage of plastic in different products.	UNEP and UNITAR (2025). Statistical guideline for measuring flows of plastic throughout the life cycle. Nairobi and Bonn, Kenya and Germany (in progress)		This may seem straightforward but when one talks about products such as paint this becomes extremely difficult to define. I suggest revising this to make sure this can work for as many classes of product as possible	
Plastic to the environment		UNEP and UNITAR (2025). Statistical guideline for measuring flows of plastic throughout the life cycle. Nairobi and Bonn, Kenya and	Plastic to the environment refers to plastic waste flows that end up in the environment, including waste flows direct from industry and households, and are not covered by formal and sound waste management and adequate final disposal		

		Germany (in progress)	options, such as landfilling, recycling, or energy recovery.		
Plastic waste	Based on the conceptual definition of waste proposed in the CES Framework on Waste Statistics, plastic waste is defined as plastic in primary forms, semi-finished plastic products, finished plastic products, or plastic embedded in plastic-containing products, which the holder discards, intends to discard, or is required to discard.	UNECE. 2022. Conference of European Statisticians Framework on Waste Statistics.			
Plastic Waste	Any discarded plastic (organic, or synthetic, material derived from polymers, resins or cellulose) generated by any industrial process, or by consumers.	European Environmental Agency			
Polymers in primary forms	"Liquids and pastes, including dispersions (emulsions and suspensions) and solutions;	European Commission. Classifying plastics.			
Production	Polymer production either from primary virgin source or secondary source (recycled plastic from previous year). It does not include the manufacturing of final	UNEP/IUCN			

	products in the country, as this would lead to double counting.				
Properly disposed waste		UNEP/IUCN	Suggest to refer to Basel technical guidelines: Technical guidelines on the environmentally sound disposal of hazardous wastes and other wastes in specially engineered landfill (D5)	Waste fraction that is disposed in an environmentally sound mannerwhere no leakage is expected to occur, such as an incineration facility or a engineered landfills for household wastes.	
Properly managed waste	A system where no leakage is expected to occur such as recycling, incineration or properly managed sanitary landfills	The Plastic Leak Project			
Recycling	Domestic recycling of waste generated in the country. It does not include recycling of imported waste nor waste collected for recycling in the country that is exported abroad.	UNEP/IUCN	Suggest to use the term: Domestic recycling. Please note the relevant definition in the Glossary of Terms of the Basel Convention (UNEP/CHW.13/4/Add.2. Please note that it is very difficult in practice to distinguish plastic waste recycled from local sources and from imports of plastic waste. Suggest count them as one single fraction and exclude what is exported for disposal abroad.		

Release rate	It is defined as the ratio between leakage and total mismanaged waste, and its value is given in percentage.	UNEP/IUCN			
Uncollected Waste	Waste fraction that is not collected, either by the formal or the informal sector.	UNEP/IUCN			
Wastes (Suggested by Expert)	"Wastes" are substances or objects which are disposed of or are intended to be disposed of or are required to be disposed of by the provisions of national law. When assessing whether a substance or object is waste or non-waste, all the circumstances must be taken into account. The origin of the substance or object may also be relevant. Waste may cease to be waste if: 1) it has been prepared for reuse, 2) it has gained end-of-waste status as a result of a recovery operation and it meets defined criteria set out in national legislation, or	Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal; Glossary of Terms of the Basel Convention			

	3) it has undergone a recycling operation, when that operation is completed.				
Waste disposal	Waste disposal is any operation which main purpose is not the recovery of materials or energy even if the operation has as a secondary consequence the reclamation of substances or energy.	EU Waste Framework Directive in UNECE. 2022. Conference of European Statisticians Framework on Waste Statistics. UN.	Please note the relevant definition in the Glossary of Terms of the Basel Convention (UNEP/CHW.13/4/Add.2). Not in line with the Basel Convention. Disposal refers both to non-recovery operations (incineration, landfilling, etc.) and recovery operations (recycling, materials recovery, energy recovery, etc.)		
Waste export	Plastic waste collected in the country and exported abroad. It does not include the re-export of imported waste.	UNEP/IUCN			
Waste generated	Country domestic plastic waste generation computed as: Production + Import – Export – Added stock.	UNEP/IUCN			
Waste import	Import of plastic waste from other countries.	UNEP/IUCN			
Waste management	Set of lawful activities carried out by economic units of the formal sector, both public and private for the purpose of the	Defined by the Task Force, based on UNSD/UNEP and			

	collection, transportation, and treatment of waste, including final disposal and after-care of disposal sites.	Eurostat/OECD Questionnaire, and EU Waste Framework Directive IN UNECE. 2022. Conference of European Statisticians Framework on Waste Statistics. UN.			
Waste recovery	Waste recovery is any operation the principal result of which is waste serving a useful purpose by replacing other materials which would otherwise have been used to fulfil a particular function, or waste being prepared to fulfil that function, in the plant or in the wider economy.	EU Waste Framework Directive IN UNECE. 2022. Conference of European Statisticians Framework on Waste Statistics. UN			
Informal waste-handling	Informal waste-handling is defined as collection, transportation, treatment and disposal of waste by the informal sector.	UNECE. 2022. Conference of European Statisticians Framework on Waste Statistics. UN.			

Additional Terms proposed by experts

Term	Definition	Source
Marine Debris	Marine debris is any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment. Marine litter consists of items that have been made or used by people and deliberately discarded into the sea or rivers or on beaches; brought indirectly to the sea with rivers, sewage, storm water or winds; or accidentally lost, including material lost at sea in bad weather	https://www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/tl0040
Plastic pollution	Plastic pollution is defined broadly as the negative effects and emissions resulting from the production and consumption of plastic materials and products across their entire life cycle. This definition includes plastic waste that is mismanaged (e.g., open-burned and dumped in uncontrolled dumpsites) and leakage and accumulation of plastic objects and particles that can adversely affect humans and the living and non-living environment.	https://leap.unep.org/en/knowledge/glossary/plastic-pollution
Macroplastics	Describes plastic items with a diameter ≥ 5 mm.	https://www.giz.de
Microplastics	Microplastics are routinely defined as small particles or fragments of plastic measuring less than 5 mm in diameter. Some microplastics are purposefully manufactured for industrial and domestic purposes ('primary' microplastics). These include 'microbeads' used in cosmetic and personal healthcare products, such as toothpaste. 'Secondary' microplastics are created by the weathering and fragmentation of larger plastic objects	(PDF) Marine plastic debris and microplastics - global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change
Single-use-plastics	Single-use plastic products (SUPs) are used once, or for a short period of time, before being thrown away	https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/plastics/single-use-plastics_en
Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)	Extended producer responsibility is a policy approach that makes producers responsible for their products	https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/extended-producer-responsibility-and-economic-instruments.html

	along the entire lifecycle, including at the post-consumer stage.	
Ghost gear	Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear	https://resolutions.unep.org/resolutions/uploads/essential_elements_-_fishing_gear_online.pdf

Term	Definition	Source
Monitoring	The acquisition of numerical data or progress of processes.	
Environmental Monitoring	The acquisition of numerical data on environmental concentrations, fluxes and input of pollutants.	https://www.unep.org/resources/pollution-solution-global-assessment-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution
Socioeconomic monitoring	The acquisition of data on production, processes, material streams and related data.	
Implementation monitoring	Collecting information on the advancement of implementing e.g. legislation or measures.	
Modelling		
Environmental litter sink	Final deposition area/fate of litter, including after subsequent physical or chemical degradation	
Litter accumulation area	Area in which pollutants are accumulating, due to closeby sources, river dynamics, river/seafloor morphology, through currents or other processes.	
Environmental database	Database that hosts numerical data deriving from environmental monitoring.	
Litter source apportioning	The quantitative attribution of environmental fluxes and concentrations of pollutants to their sources.	

Litter pathway	Physical pathway of litter after entering the environment, e.g. by water run-off, streams, rivers, currents.	
Environmental litter source	Physical entry point of litter into the environment.	
Environmentalitter categories	The attribution of macro litter items to an agreed list of item categories, enabling their comparable monitoring and data analysis as well as linking with their source/origin.	https://mcc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/main/dev.py?N=41&O=459

Term	**Explanaition**
Waste Control Facilities	Waste control facilities are places that handle waste from its disposal to its management. They include various facilities, such as solid waste management facilities, treatment, storage, disposal facilities, and solid waste processing facilities (Environment Agency, 2018, Statutory Guidance: Waste Duty of care: code of practice, Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs, UK)
Plastic Value Chain:	The Plastic Value Chain is a value chain that involves plastic material production, plastic product manufacturing, plastic product use and waste generation, plastic waste collection and handling, plastic waste sorting, plastic waste recycling, and plastic recycled market (Olatayo, K. I., Mativenga, P. T., & Marnewick, A. L. (2023). Plastic value chain and performance metric framework for optimal recycling. Journal of Industrial Ecology, 27, 601–623. https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.13384).
Waste Transportation:	Waste transportation is the process of moving waste from where it's created to its destination. This includes the collection of waste and its transportation to a facility for treatment, recycling, disposal, or transfer. Waste transportation can also include the use of pipelines and chute systems (Environment Agency, 2024, Waste: Export and Import, Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs, UK).

Waste Sorting:	Waste sorting is the process of separating waste into different categories, such as paper, glass, or plastics, so that it can be recycled or reused. Waste sorting can take place at many levels, including households, businesses, and materials recovery facilities (Rogoff, M. J. (2014). 1 - Introduction. In M. J. Rogoff (Ed.), Solid Waste Recycling and Processing (Second Edition) (pp. 1-9). Oxford: William Andrew Publishing).