

# ANALYSIS OF PROSPECTS FOR REDUCING PLASTIC POLLUTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan, as one of the rapidly developing countries in Central Asia, faces environmental challenges related to the increasing plastic waste. Rising rates of urbanization, growing consumption, and limited recycling opportunities exert significant pressure on the environment. Thousands of tonnes of plastic waste end up in landfills each year, many of which remain non-degradable for decades. In response to this issue, the government is undertaking proactive measures to reduce plastic pollution and transition towards more sustainable environmental solutions. This analysis highlights the current status, challenges, and prospects in this regard.

## Current situation: interview results

Interviews with plastic manufacturers and recyclers revealed the key trends and challenges in effectively reducing plastic pollution.

### 1. Prospects for reducing the production of plastic products:

- Manufacturers do not expect to reduce plastic production or to replace it with alternative materials in the near future.
- Manufacturers have noted steady growth in the production of plastic items. Due to the material's affordability and practicality, the demand for plastic products will remain high in the coming years.
- All stakeholders acknowledge the feasibility of eliminating various types of single-use plastics, such as straws, utensils, and cotton swabs.
- Manufacturers and government agencies stress the importance of promoting and funding the production of alternatives to plastic at the provincial level.
- All stakeholders are in favour of implementing the ROP system, which will provide an incentive to decrease plastic use and subsequently lower recycling fee payments.
- NGOs propose introducing a tax on plastic production to encourage the use of alternatives.
- NGOs indicate that there is a need for information and awareness campaigns among the public regarding sustainable plastic consumption.

## 2. Prospects for recycling:

- The use of plastic has increased in recent years, resulting in an increase in waste generation.
- Plastic recyclers in the Republic of Uzbekistan observe a significant potential for growth in processing volumes.
- There is a shortage of specific types of plastic for recycling, such as PP, PET, and PE.
- Recyclers aim to boost the volume of recycled plastic waste by importing from neighbouring countries.

## 3. Economic and social impacts:

- Manufacturers highlight potential social impacts, such as job losses, when plastic production is decreased.
- Producers highlight the high cost of current alternatives or the lack of available alternative materials.
- Recyclers foresee a decline in the economic performance of the waste management industry. At present, over 100 small and medium-sized plastic recycling businesses are functioning in Uzbekistan. These businesses not only serve the domestic market but also export plastic to neighbouring countries.

## 4. Technological Alternatives:

- Recyclers recommend substituting plastic with wood, metal, and clay-based materials.
- The manufacturer notes that switching to alternative materials for packaging is possible, although not for all products.

Interviews with recyclers and plastic producers revealed the complexity and multifaceted nature of plastic pollution. On the one hand, recyclers see a high potential for increasing recycling volumes, which indicates the development of this sector and its importance for the economy. On the other hand, producers note a stable growth in demand for plastic products, which creates additional barriers to reducing their use.

### Government initiatives to reduce plastic pollution

In recent years, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan has also started to focus on the issue of plastic pollution at the national level. One of the recent **Presidential Decrees, #PP-171, dated May 31, 2023**, introduces essential measures to mitigate plastic pollution and foster an environmentally sustainable economy:

#### 1. Environmentally friendly area

- This status is assigned to territories with special environmental requirements. From July 1, 2025, such territories will receive the status of “eco mahalla,” “eco-village,” and “eco-aul.”
- In these areas, the use of certain types of plastic products is banned, separate waste collection measures are introduced, and environmental standards are enforced.
- Fines have been implemented for failing to comply with environmental regulations,

which includes the unlawful use of prohibited plastic products.

- The amount of environmental damage is calculated according to approved methods, which makes the control system transparent.

## **2. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**

- A ROP system will be introduced on August 1, 2026. This system requires manufacturers and importers to arrange for the collection, recycling, and disposal of certain materials and goods.
- The list of goods subject to ROP includes items for product transport or packaging made of plastics, such as corks, lids, caps, and other closures, as well as tableware, kitchenware, cutlery, kitchen utensils, and various household and hygiene items made of plastics.

## **3. Innovation and support for new technologies**

- Developing the production of biodegradable materials such as starch and lactose pellets.
- Introduction of used PET packaging into the recycling system.
- Establishment of a deposit return system for used containers.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Both plastic producers and recyclers are concerned about the economic and social consequences of a possible plastic phase-out. Processors fear a reduction in economic activity and its impact on the country's export potential, while producers warn of the risks of job losses. From a technological point of view, finding alternative solutions is possible, but it requires detailed analysis. While replacing plastic with other materials may be effective in certain segments, such as packaging, plastic remains irreplaceable for many products.

An analysis of the current situation regarding plastic waste in Uzbekistan indicates that the issue necessitates a comprehensive approach that considers the interests of all stakeholders. On one hand, businesses acknowledge the need for transformation: recyclers recognize the potential for increasing recycling volumes but simultaneously highlight their high dependence on plastic due to the consistent demand for its products. On the other hand, producers emphasize the limited opportunities for substituting plastic with alternative materials, apprehensive that an abrupt shift away from plastic could negatively affect economic activities and employment.

On the government side, proactive measures are being taken to reduce plastic pollution. Legislative initiatives are being introduced to limit plastic use, enhance waste management, and implement the principle of extended producer responsibility. Simultaneously, conditions are being established for the development of new technologies, such as biodegradable materials and recycling systems, which help mitigate the negative impact on the environment.

Therefore, effectively reducing plastic pollution demands a balanced solution that considers the interests of recyclers, producers, consumers, and government agencies. An integrated approach, which includes incentives for recycling, support for innovative materials, and a phased introduction of regulatory mechanisms, will reduce negative socio-economic impacts and ensure sustainable progress in tackling the problem of plastic pollution in Uzbekistan.

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