

Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics: A Global Review of National Laws and Regulations

Key Findings

Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics: A Global Review of National Laws and Regulations

This report provides the first global review of existing national laws and regulations that limit the manufacture, import, sale, use and disposal of:

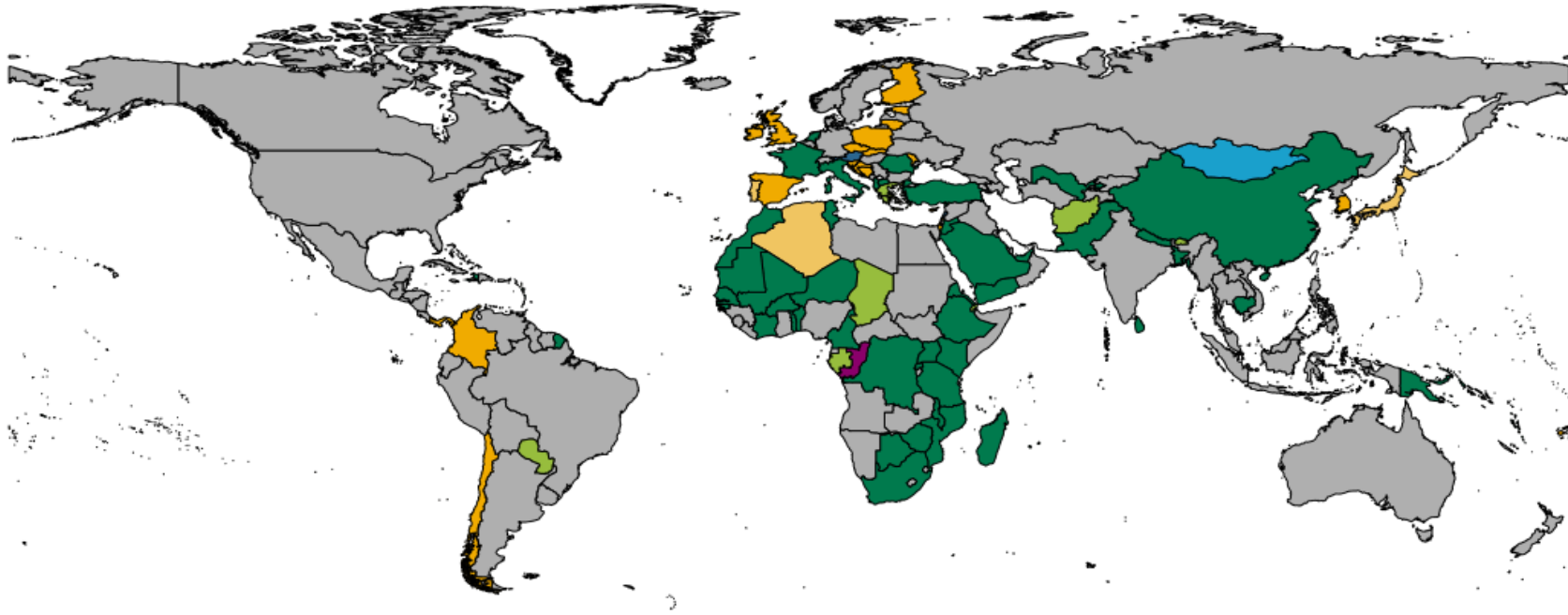
- 1) Plastic bags;
- 2) Other selected single-use plastics, including bottles, cups, straws and cutlery; and
- 3) Microbeads.



A Few Facts on Single-Use Plastics



- Plastic bags have been described as the world's **number one consumer item**.
- Plastic packaging is **mostly single-use**, especially in business-to-consumer applications, and a majority of it is discarded the same year it is produced.
- In 2015, plastic **packaging waste** accounted for **47% of the plastic waste** generated globally, with half of that appearing to come from Asia.
- While **China** remains the largest worldwide generator of plastic packaging waste, the **USA** is the largest generator of plastic packaging waste on a per-capita basis, followed by **Japan** and the **EU**.

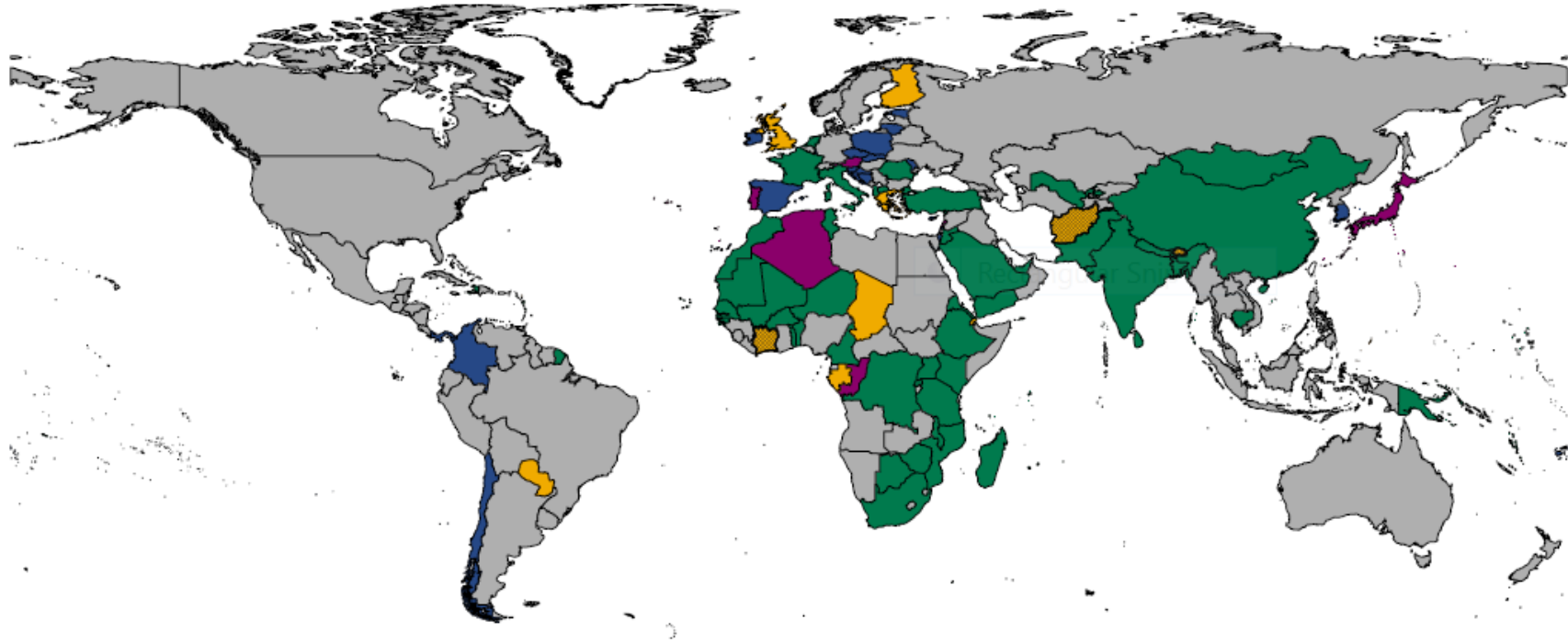


Plastic Bags

- No Data
- No Ban
- Ban on Manufacture
- Ban on Manufacture and Free Distribution
- Ban on Manufacture, Free Distribution and Import
- Ban on Free Distribution and Import
- Ban on Free Distribution
- Ban on Import
- Ban on Manufacture and Import

Plastic Bags Finding #1

As of July 2018, **127** out of 192 countries reviewed (about 66%) have adopted some form of legislation to regulate plastic bags



Plastic Bags Finding #2

The most common form of regulation is the ban on free retail distribution, which **83 countries** have adopted.

Manufacturing and import bans follow, with **61 countries** having adopted this form of regulation

Plastic Bags

-  Total Bans
-  No Data
-  No total or partial ban
-  Partial Ban on Manufacture or Import or Both
-  Partial Ban on Free Retail Distribution
-  Partial Ban on Free Retail Distribution and Import
-  Partial Ban on Manufacture, Free Retail Distribution, and Import

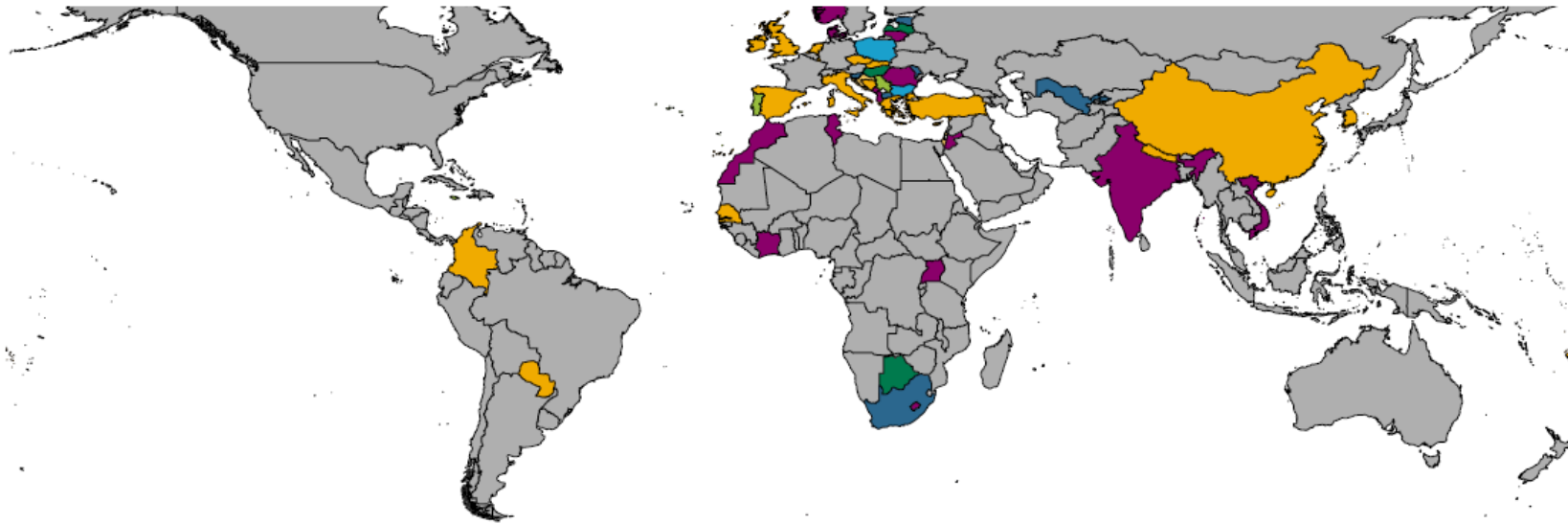


Plastic Bags Finding #3

Manufacturing and import regulations include governing the **thickness** and material **composition** of allowable plastic bags.

38 countries regulate the **thickness** of plastic bags. Thickness requirements vary between 15 and 100 microns.

41 countries have instituted some form of regulation on the material composition of plastics bags. Of these countries, **38** imposed bans or phase-outs non-biodegradable plastic bags, or incentivized the production, import, or use of biodegradable and/or compostable bags. **2** countries have required a certain type of recycled material.



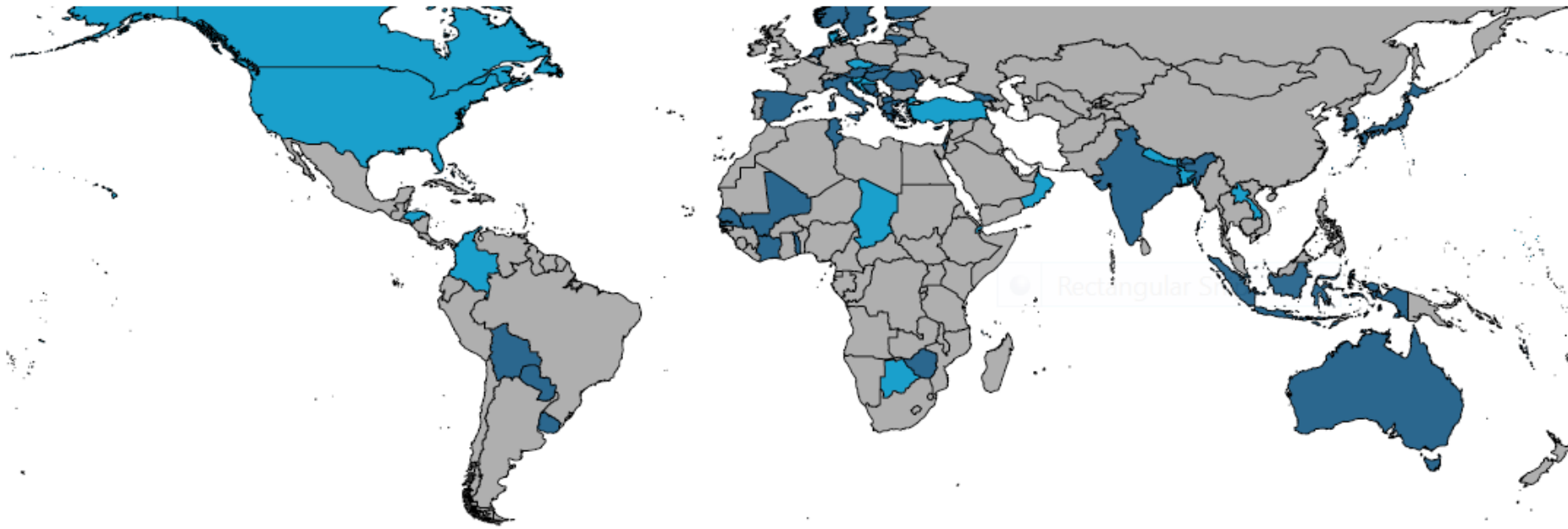
Plastic Bags

- No Data
- No tax on customer or retailer on distribution or manufacture
- Tax on manufacture of plastic bags
- Tax on distribution of plastic bags
- Tax on manufacture and distribution of plastic bags
- Fee on the distribution of plastic bags to end-users
- Fee on the distribution of plastic bags to end-users and tax on distribution
- Fee on the distribution of plastic bags to end-user and tax on manufacture
- Fee on the distribution of plastic bags to end-users, tax on manufacture and distribution



Plastic Bags Finding #4

Only **27** countries have instituted taxes on the manufacture and production of plastic bags while **30** charge consumers fees for plastic bags at the national level.



Plastic Bags

- No Data
- No Extended Producer Responsibility or special regulations on return or disposal
- Special regulations on return, or disposal only
- EPR and special regulation on return or disposal

Plastic Bags Finding #5

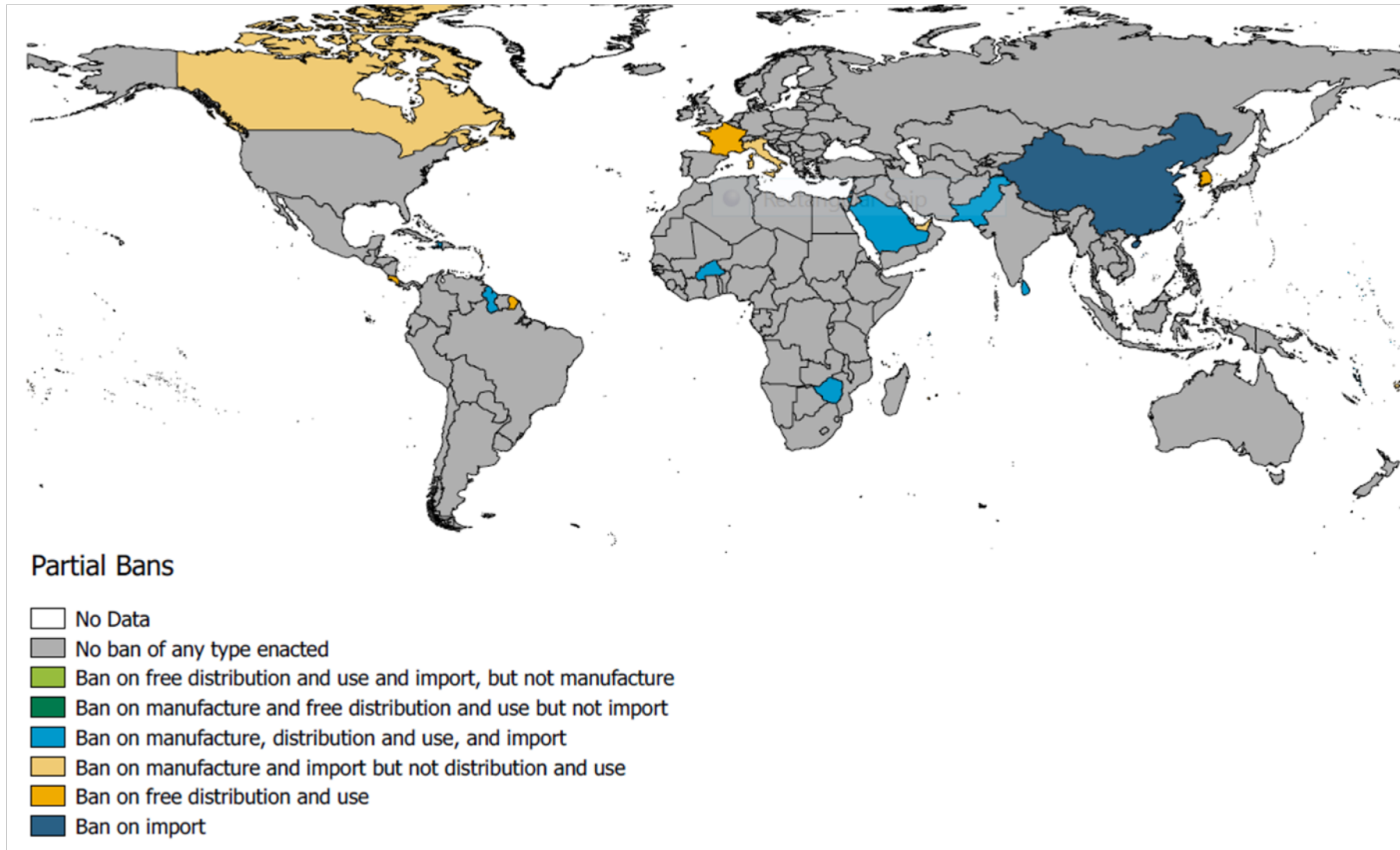
43 countries have included elements of extended producer responsibility related to plastic bags within legislation



Plastic Bags Finding #6

51 countries have adopted legislative requirements to implement recycling targets relevant for plastic bags.

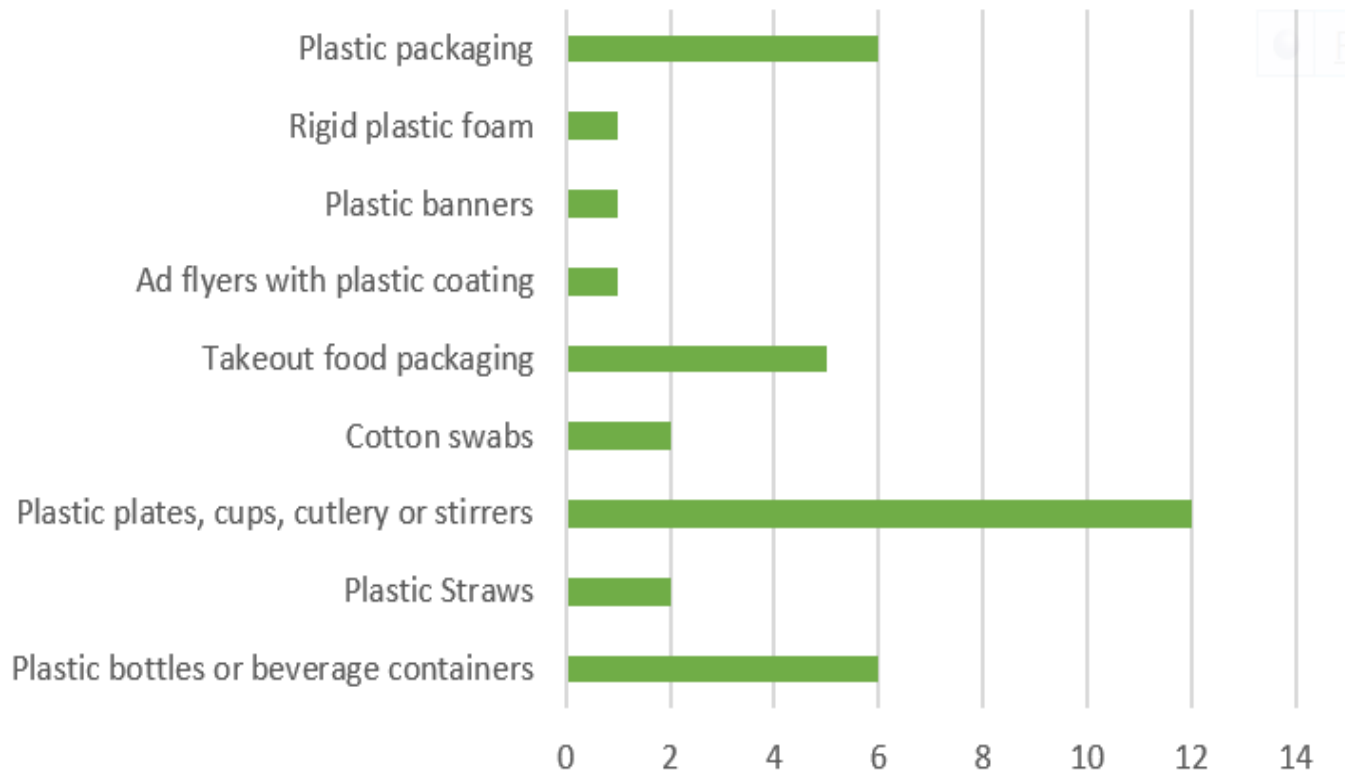
For example, the **EU** has a target for 55% of all plastic to be recycled by 2030 and for member states to reduce the use of bags per person from 90 a year to 40 by 2026.



Single-Use Plastics Finding #2

None of these bans are “total”. In other words, exceptions exist for certain products or materials, such as for so-called biodegradable plastics.

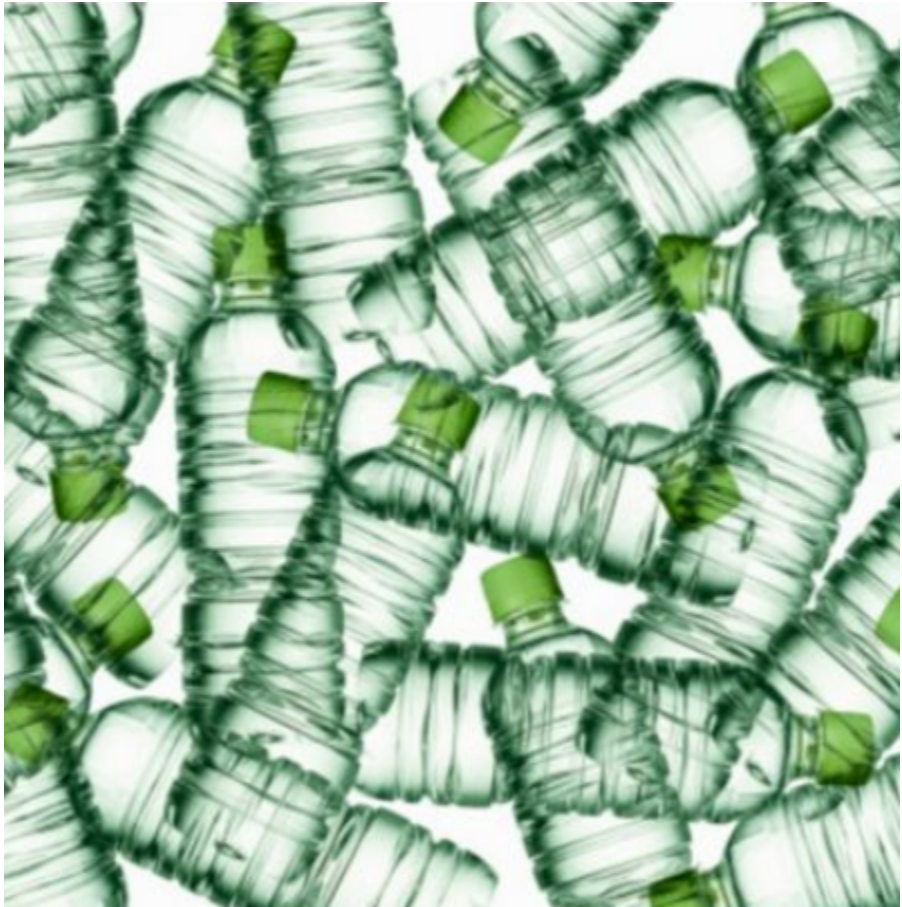
Number of bans by product type



Single-Use Plastics Finding #3

Small Island States have been disproportionately more likely to enact bans on single-use plastics—37% (10 countries) of national bans have come from these countries.

Bans on specific products most commonly focused on those associated with food service and delivery—a common disposable. **12 countries** target plates, cups, stirrers, and/or utensils while five target takeout containers and 6 target plastic bottles and beverage containers.



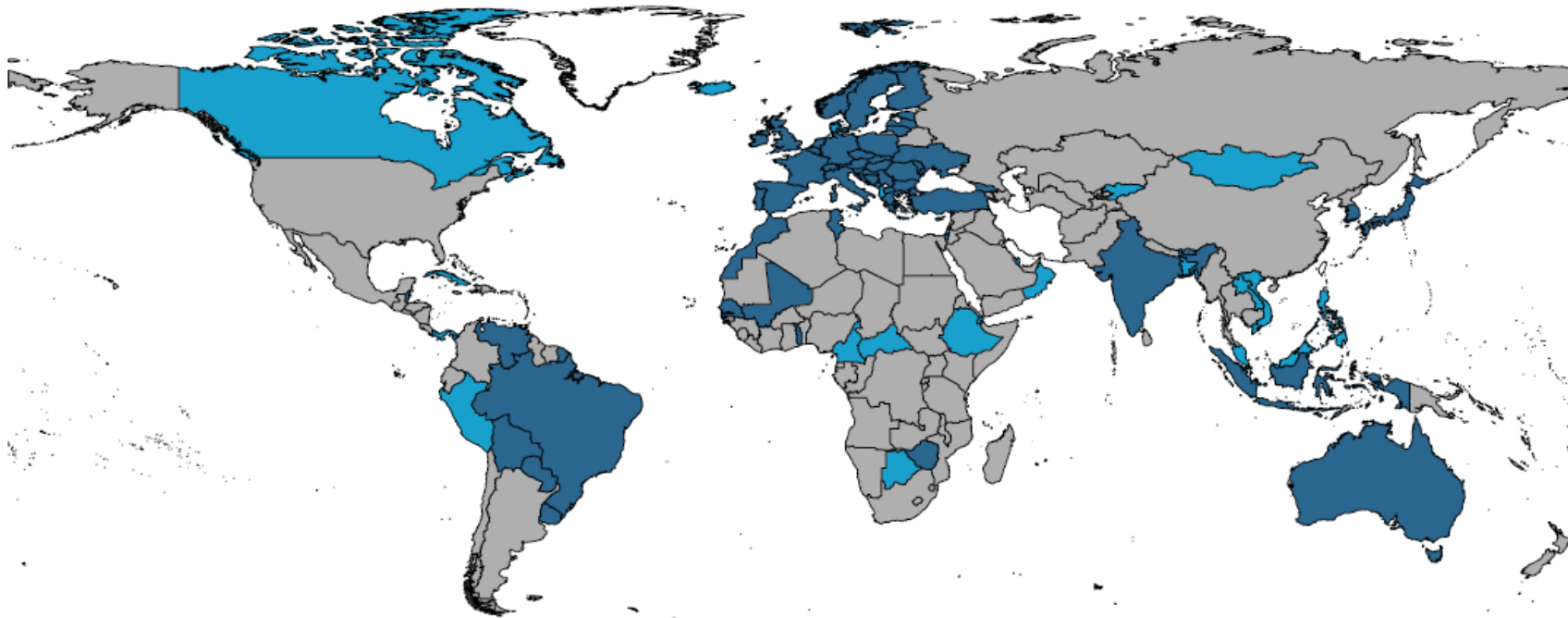
Single-Use Plastics Finding #4

29 countries have enacted some type of tax on single-use plastics, either as a special environmental tax, waste disposal fees or charges, or in the form of higher excise taxes for single-use plastics.





Europe has 17 countries that tax single-use plastics, more than any other region. 5 countries in **Latin America and the Caribbean**, 4 in **Africa**, and 3 in **Asia and the Pacific**, impose some form of tax.

Single-Use Plastics Finding #5

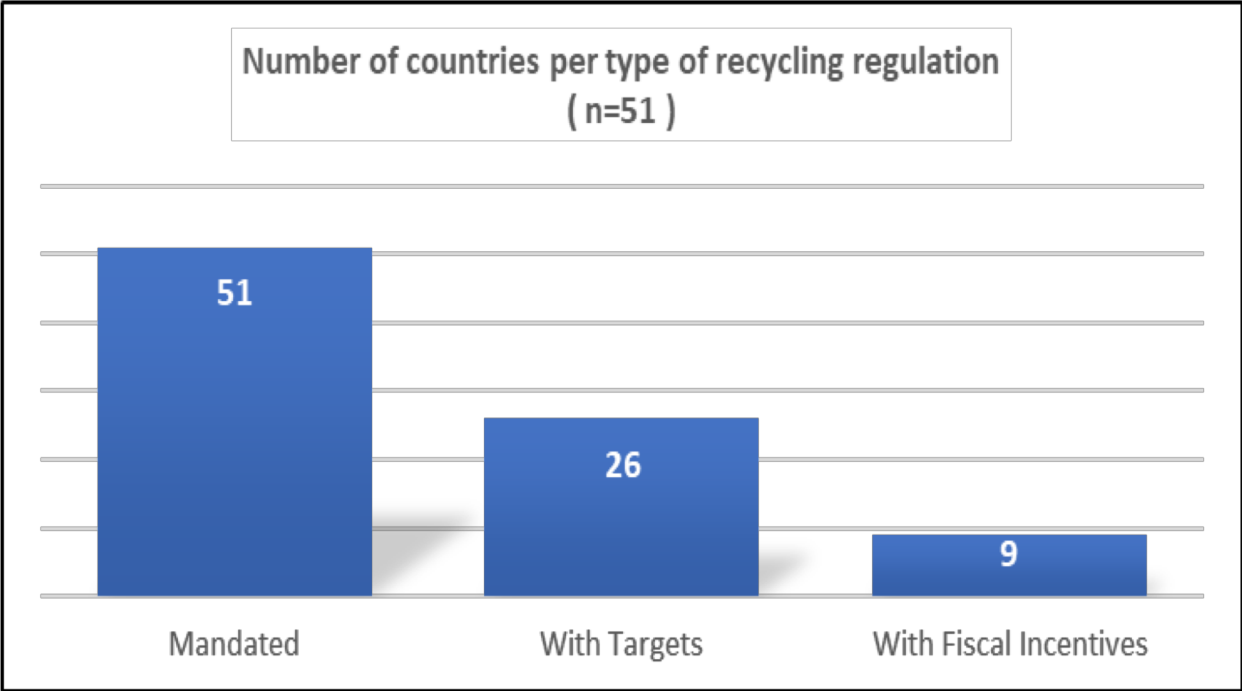
63 countries have enacted Extended Producer Responsibility measures, such as product takeback schemes, deposit-refund, and waste collection and takeback guarantees.



Single Use

-  No Data
-  Countries no extended producer responsibility (EPR) or recycling mandates that include single-use plastic items
-  Countries with recycling mandates that include single-use plastic items but no EPR
-  Countries with EPR for the return, collection, or disposal of single-use plastic items

Single-Use Plastics Finding #6



The most common legal measures for post-consumer use disposal for single use plastics are **recycling requirements** and **solid waste management laws** which may implicitly include single-use plastics under household or commercial waste or explicitly set targets for plastics.

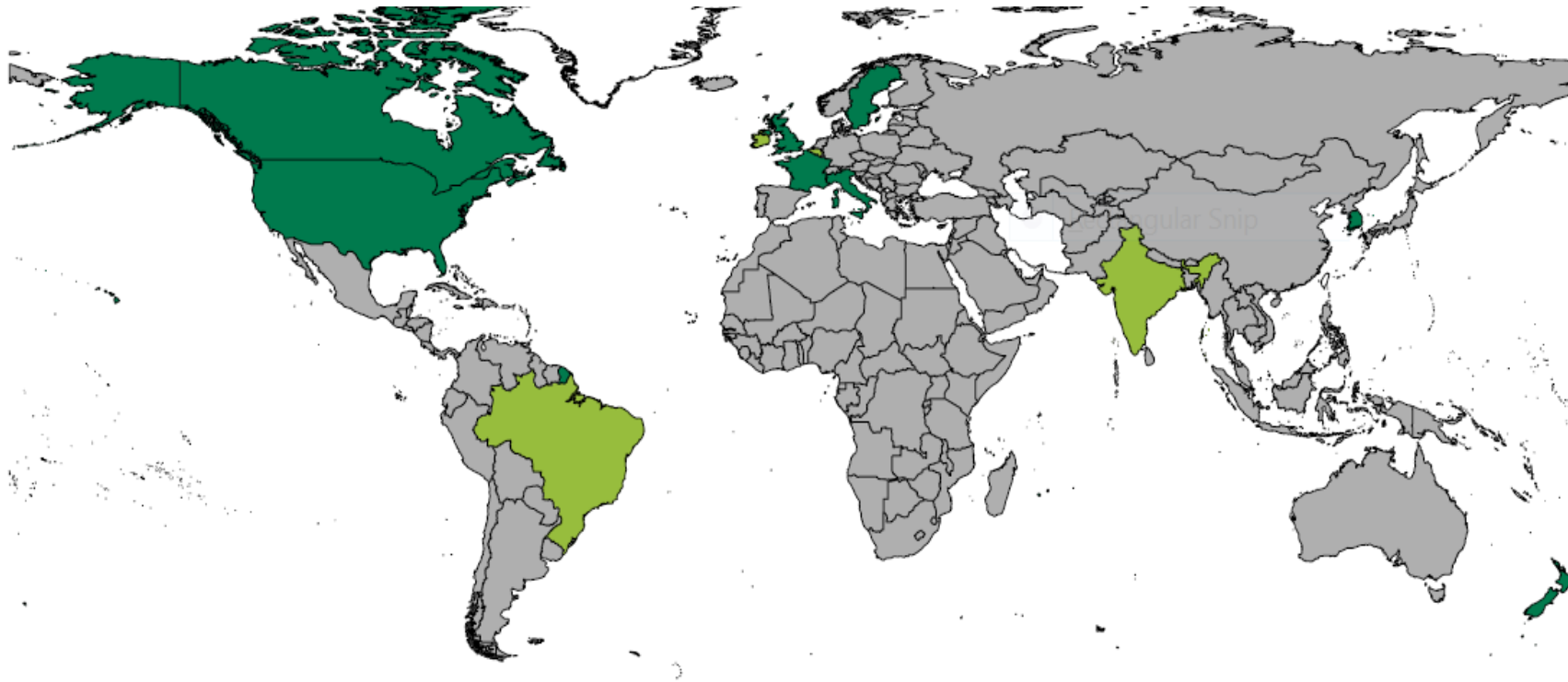
51 countries were found to have explicit regulatory mandates regarding recycling beyond general policy objectives. Of the 51 countries, **26 countries** include specific recycling targets. **9 countries** provided fiscal incentives to promote recycling activities.

Microbeads

Finding #1

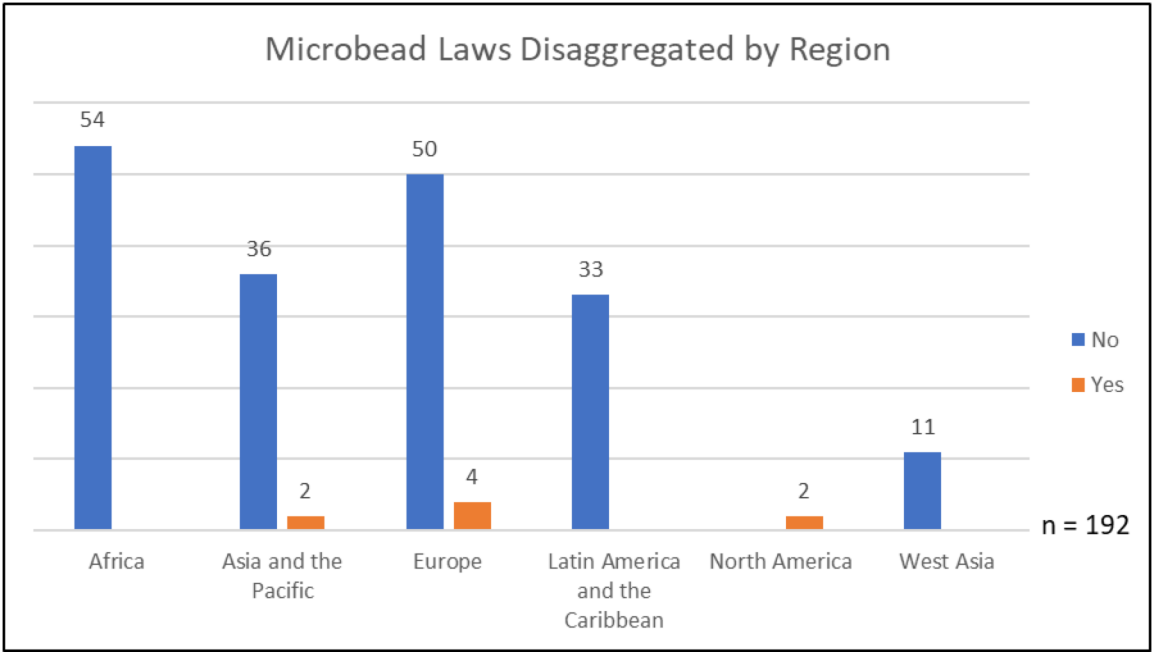
Definition: Man made plastic particles intentionally added to consumer products, typically less than or equal to 5 mm in size. Microbeads can vary in chemical composition, size, share and density.

As of July 2018, **8 out of 192 countries** worldwide (4%) have established legally binding bans of microbeads through national laws or regulations.



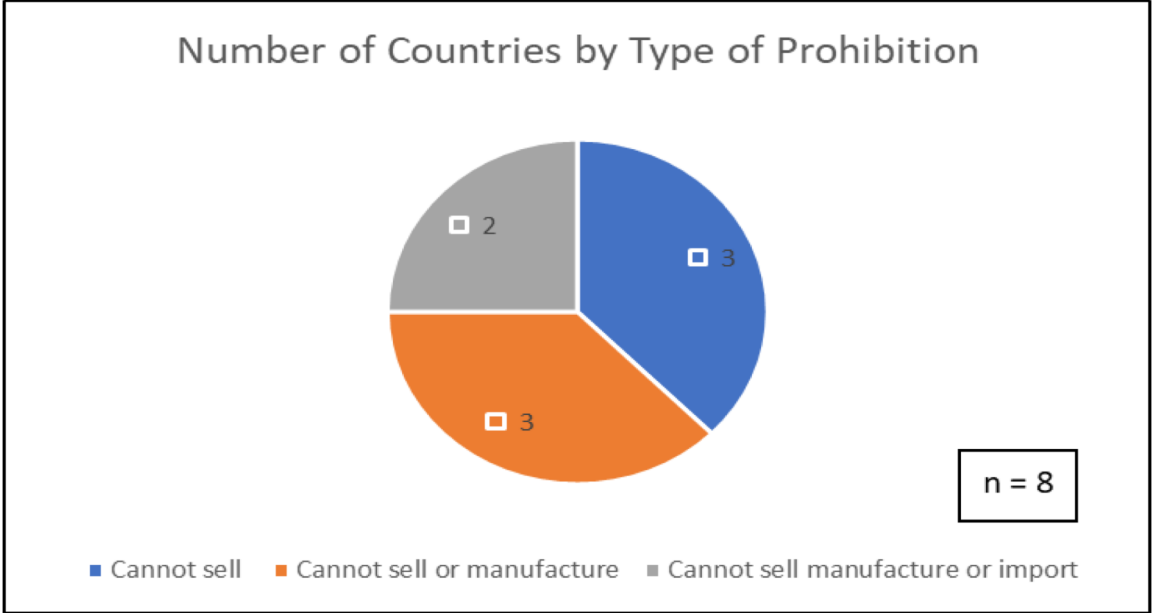
Microbeads

- No Data
- No Ban/Data Not Found
- New Law Proposed
- Partial Ban



Microbeads Finding #2

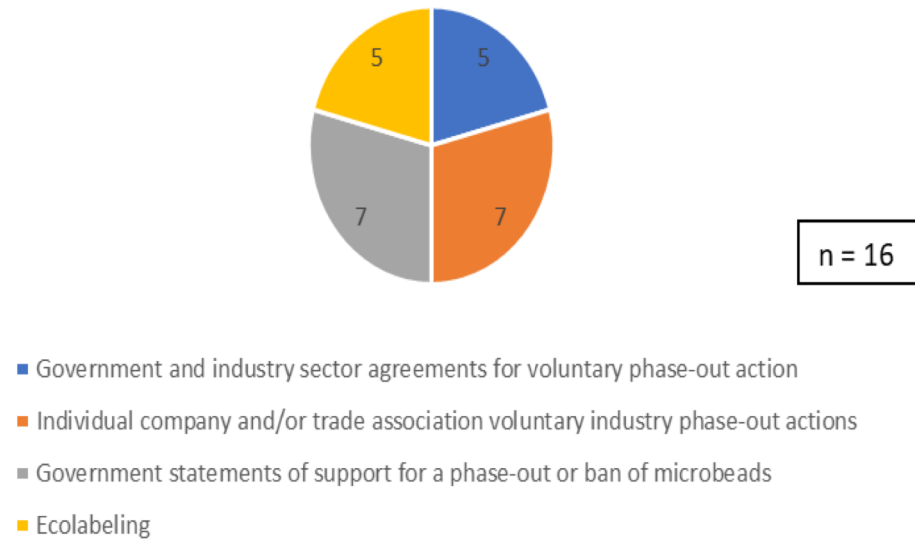
7 out of 8 of the countries with laws or regulations controlling the use and/or manufacture of microbeads include only a subset of personal care products documented to contain microbeads.



Microbeads Finding #3

The laws and regulations used to control microbeads share a number of similarities in definition of microbead, product types covered, and the size of microbead controlled; however, there are also important differences (size, specificity of plastic particles, type of products or water solubility).

Number of Countries by Type of Voluntary Approach



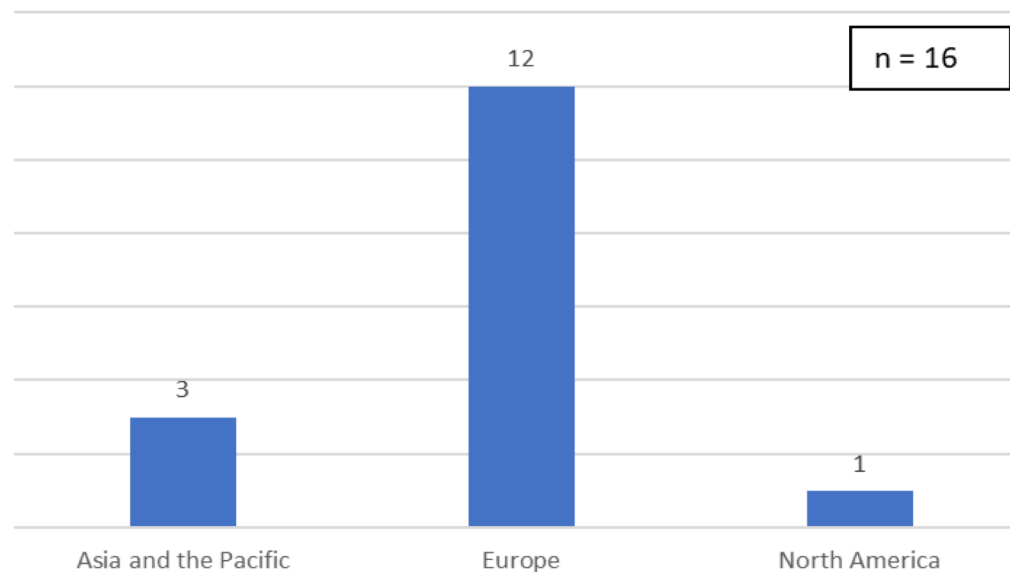
Microbead Finding #4

As at July 2018, 4 countries (Belgium, Brazil, India, and Ireland) and the EU have proposed new laws or regulations banning microbeads at the national level.

Microbead Finding #5

Governments, companies, and civil society organizations are utilizing a range of **voluntary approaches** to reduce the number of products containing microbeads. These include government and industry agreements, industry and company specific voluntary phaseouts, regional government statements of support, and ecolabeling.

Voluntary Approaches by Region



Conclusions on Plastic Bags:

- Plastic bags bans in most countries **do not cover the life-cycle** of plastics bags – manufacture and production, use and distribution as well as trade.
- **Partial bans** exist both related to material content and thickness in most countries.
- Even within countries that more strictly regulate plastic bags **several exemptions** exist to this requirement.
- Very few countries include expansive **tax controls or other incentives** to manufacture bags with more renewable materials or incentives for customers to use these bags or promote awareness of their importance.
- Targets that mandate **recycling rates** within legislation **vary widely** and while some important regional and country level examples exist **there is not a predominant approach** to include consumer level restrictions or percentage production reductions in use over time in many countries.

Conclusions on Single Use Plastics:

- **Bans** on single-use plastics have **increased** rapidly in recent years (since 2012);
- However, most common regulatory instruments remain extended producer responsibility, taxes and fees, and recycling rules to **reduce demand or manage disposal**;
- Roughly **half of the bans cover all stages of commerce** of single-use plastics—from production to distribution, import and use, while the rest focus on specific aspects;
- Countries have primarily targeted products in the **food service industry**, as well as **plastic packaging**.

Conclusions on Microbeads:

- To date, **eight countries** have passed laws or regulations at the national level while four, plus the EU, are in the process of passing new laws or regulations.
- This suggests that, to date, **few countries** have taken legal action to prohibit the use of plastic microbeads in products;
- The **scope** of products and **specificity** of terms used to describe the products covered under the law also **vary**;
- Countries have prioritized **personal care products** for bans and have not used national legislation to prohibit the use of microbeads in other types of cleaning or industrial products.
- At least **14 countries** have utilized **voluntary approaches rather than laws** at the country level to encourage the elimination of microbeads in personal care products.
- Beyond individual country actions, multinational companies, trade associations, and regional government bodies have all taken **voluntary initiatives** to spur the phase out of microbead-containing cosmetic and personal care products across the globe.

The report is available on UN Environment
website at <https://wedocs.unep.org/>

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