



Respecting the rights of waste pickers: A human rights due diligence toolkit

Introduction and key preparation

Toolkit prepared by First Mile, for and in collaboration with Tearfund, and funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)

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About this toolkit

In November 2022, the Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, Unilever and Nestlé launched the Fair Circularity Initiative (FCI). Convened by Tearfund, the aim was to bring businesses together to secure the human rights of workers within the informal waste sector and to recognise their critical role in circular value chains.

There are at least 40 million waste pickers globally. While carrying out a vital environmental and public health role, these waste pickers are vulnerable to a broad range of severe human rights impacts.

At the heart of the FCI are the [Fair Circularity Principles](#) which apply the expectations of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)¹ to the informal waste sector. The founding members of the FCI have committed to advance and adopt the Fair Circularity Principles in their value chains in collaboration with waste picker organisations. As new companies join, they will make the same commitment.

This set of tools was developed by First Mile for, and in collaboration with, Tearfund. It offers guidance to support brands in beginning to implement the Fair Circularity Principles through:

- mapping their value chains
- analysing human rights risks² and their root causes
- meaningfully engaging with waste pickers either directly or through a third-party

This allows users to implement an action plan to ensure prevention, mitigation and remedy of human rights impacts.

The tools cover the informal waste sector as a whole, but with a focus on waste pickers who are often the most vulnerable rights holders within this broader group.

The templates offered in the toolkit for data collection, risk assessment, action planning and monitoring are also available in an online format to use alongside the manual guidance documents. Details of how to access the online toolkit templates are available on Tearfund Learn website³.

We are working with TCI to align this toolkit with the Responsible Sourcing Initiative's harmonised framework⁴. For example this toolkit assesses impacts and tracks progress across five key thematic areas; economic empowerment, autonomy and inclusion, health and safety, collective representation and gender equality. A slight difference is that this toolkit has four phases, whereas the harmonised framework has five. However, the phrases of both resources broadly align and we have simply combined the 'Remediate' and 'Capacity Build' phase of the harmonised framework into one as that worked better with our original vision and structure.

¹[UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)

²[Fair Circularity Principles – Annex A](#)

³ <https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/tools-and-guides/2023/human-rights-due-diligence-toolkit>

⁴ <https://www.thecirculateinitiative.org/responsible-sourcing-initiative/>

The business case for human rights

Global plastic production has risen exponentially over the last few decades, amounting to some 400 million tons per year, a figure that – without urgent action – is set to double by 2040⁵. The process to negotiate a UN treaty on plastic pollution⁶ has raised global attention on the importance of tackling the plastic pollution crisis through a holistic approach across governments, businesses and civil society. At the same time global brands are committing to increasing the percentage of recycled plastic used in their packaging, and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes are growing in number across the world. EPR schemes seek to ensure that companies take responsibility for the collection, sorting, and recycling of the products and packaging they place on the market.

Under the UNGPs, companies have a responsibility to respect human rights throughout their operations and value chains. This means they have a duty to prevent and address actual and potential impacts with which they are or may be involved, in line with the nature of that involvement. Companies should carry out human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address impacts with which they are involved and take specific action⁷.

Recognising the need for learning that comes with the complex nature of this work may at first seem overwhelming and daunting for businesses. However, addressing the severity of human rights impacts and the vulnerability of the informal waste sector is key to driving positive business outcomes in a growing circular economy for plastics and other recyclable materials. There is a need for corporate leadership buy-in and an urgency to respect the human rights and dignity of waste pickers across the world. Engaging these tools will serve as the first stage in a process for companies to make progress in implementing the Fair Circularity Principles in their circular value chains.

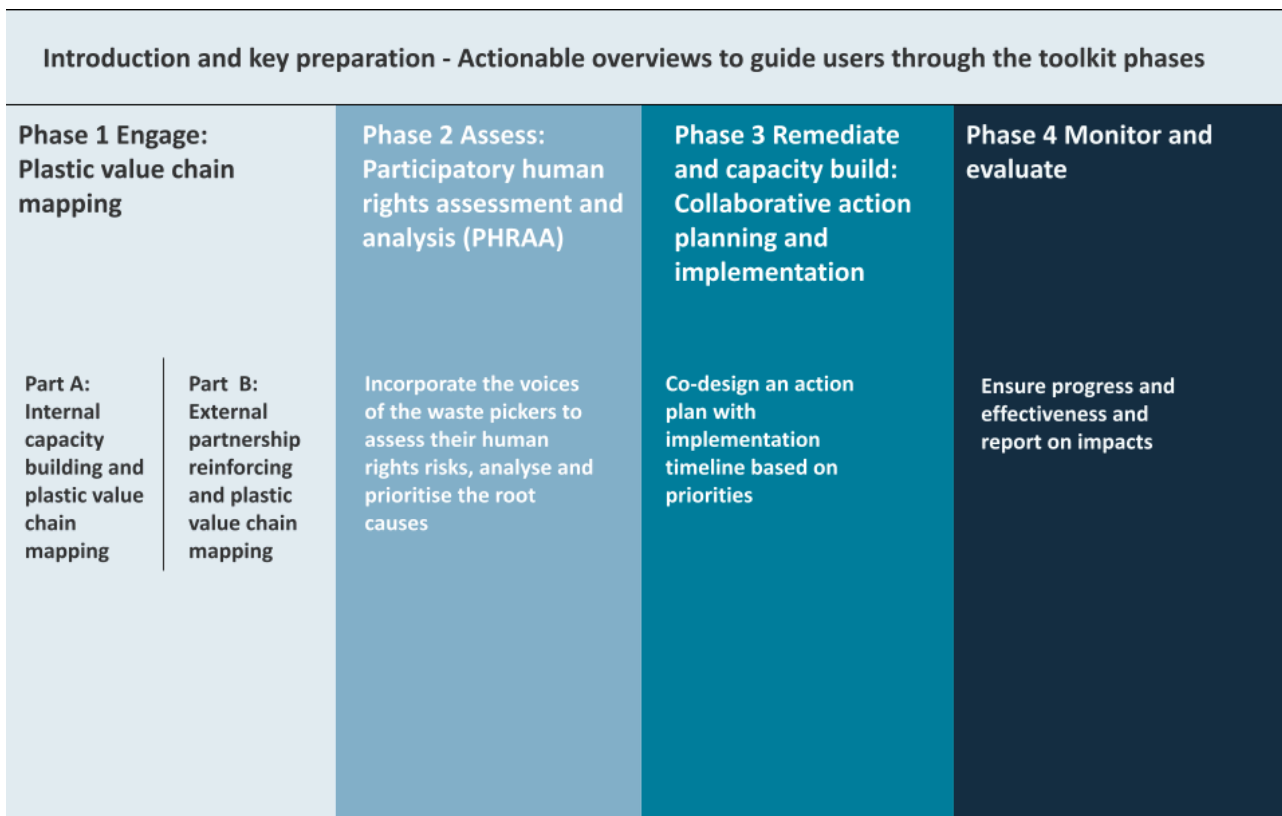
⁵[UN Environment Programme Drowning in Plastics – Marine Litter and Plastic Waste Vital Graphics](#)

⁶[UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution](#)

⁷[\(Shift, 2022\) Executive Summary: Principles for Corporate Engagement on Human Rights with the Informal Waste Sector – Applying the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to the Plastic Packaging Recycling Value Chain](#)

Four phase approach to support waste picker rights

This toolkit includes four phases:



Phase 1 Engage: Plastic value chain mapping of waste value chains and stakeholders in a specific context.

Phase 2 Assess: Participatory human rights assessment and analysis of human rights risks, root causes and priority concerns of waste pickers in particular contexts.

Phase 3 Remediate and build capacity: Collaborative action planning and implementation to address human rights risks and waste picker priorities.

Phase 4 Monitor and evaluate: to ensure continued progress and report on impacts.

Each phase contains actionable overviews to guide companies in their journey towards more socially responsible, sustainable and equitable value chains. To preview the four phases, please see the Toolkit logic model in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1: Toolkit logic model

Phase	Inputs – what users invest	Actions – what users can do	Outcomes – short, intermediate and long term
Introduction and key preparation	Time for foundational learning to inform and align efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete self-diagnostic assessment – read the suggested materials - Prepare to take concrete actions to map, assess and strengthen value chains 	<p>Short term – companies are introduced to key concepts and terms relating to the informal waste sector, poverty and social impact</p> <p>Intermediate term – companies build foundational insights into the contribution of the informal waste sector within their value chains</p> <p>Long term – companies are committed to continued learning about the informal waste sector and methods of partnership</p>
1. Engage: 1A: Internal capacity building and mapping	Knowledge base and capacity of the companies’ internal team along with leadership buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select a geography – conduct desk-based research on waste and labour laws to develop understanding of the country context and risks - Conduct a waste flow discovery exercise to identify formal and informal segments of the waste value chain - Identify knowledge gaps for further research 	<p>Short term – companies develop a focused value chain map of a selected geography with key partners and identified segmentations of formal and informal workers. Establish baseline quantitative and qualitative understanding of the formal value chain</p> <p>Intermediate term – companies identify objectives for external partnerships</p> <p>Long term – companies have increased visibility and understanding of the informal elements of their value chains and prioritise investment in partnering with waste pickers</p>
1. Engage: 1B: External partnership strengthening and mapping	<p>Expanded knowledge base and capacity of the companies’ internal teams</p> <p>Knowledge base of external partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connect with external partners in the formal sector - Connect to a local association of waste pickers in the country (or NGOs, CBOs) and interview them to gain an understanding of the informal waste sector, and particularly waste pickers in that context - Complete waste flow discovery exercise to identify and profile external suppliers - Review completed waste flow discovery exercises and identify traceability gaps 	<p>Short term – companies begin to understand human rights risks inherent in their recycling value chains and have meaningful discussions about their responsibility to engage. Companies identify necessary key external partners to engage to address gaps. Progress on reaching full traceability of formal actors</p> <p>Intermediate term – companies understand the importance of increasing traceability and visibility</p> <p>Long term – companies build sustainable partnerships with external key actors</p>
2. Assess: Informal sector assessment and analysis	<p>Time to hear and understand the voices and perspectives of workers at each tier of the informal supply chain</p> <p>Mapped waste flow and waste flow profile from the Engage phase for formal segments of the supply chain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build background knowledge through further reading on engagement with the informal waste sector - Leverage established connections with partners in the formal sector for introduction to informal partners - Conduct interviews with informal workers in the value chain - Map the selected value chain to source, where informal workers are engaged - Identify human rights issues across a broad spectrum, conduct a root cause analysis and prioritise according to informal workers’ needs - Consider intervention actions and efforts needed to fill the gaps 	<p>Short term – companies widen understanding of ethical principles when collecting data in the field. They also increase their understanding of the needs of each actor in the supply chain, and develop a prioritised list of root causes. Connections with workers throughout the entire value chain are established</p> <p>Intermediate term – companies understand how to apply a human rights framework to a selected value chain. Identify indicators and methodologies for collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data and align human rights issues to the Fair Circularity Principles</p> <p>Long term – companies build relationships that can be nurtured for potential partnerships and future programming</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply gender lens to human rights assessment and analysis - Prioritise a set of risks to address 	
<p>3 .Remediate and build capacity: Collaborative action planning, implementation and monitoring</p>	<p>Internal team capacity and resources to develop and implement an action plan</p> <p>Identified and prioritised set of human rights risks and root causes from the Assess phase.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Categorise human rights risks by root cause and identify any areas of intersection - Co-design an action plan that best fits the needs of informal workers - Ensure action plan aligns with the Fair Circularity Principles and is tailored to local contexts - Assess what is needed to implement an action plan - Assess programmes and existing solutions to identify human rights risk - Apply gender lens and considerations for women and vulnerable populations 	<p>Short term – companies establish timelines, key performance indicators (KPIs) and programme objectives for implementation of action plans. Align KPIs with a continuous feedback loop, making sure waste pickers voices are represented</p> <p>Intermediate term – companies understand how to address and prevent human rights impacts on the waste pickers in their value chains</p> <p>Long term – companies continuously improve efforts to address and prevent human rights impacts based on feedback from rights holders</p>
<p>4. Monitor and evaluate: Ensure progress and effectiveness and report on progress</p>	<p>Internal resource and team capacity to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention identified in the actions plan</p> <p>Data from the Implementation team on effectiveness of the action plan on the impacts on the waste pickers in the value chain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Set quantifiable measurements of success criteria or KPIs -Record the baseline for future comparison -Ensure the target is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound -Agree data collection and validation methods that involve waste picker participation -Consider inclusion of qualitative and quantitative data -Agree reporting format and frequency 	<p>Short term - through frequent monitoring and including waste picker voices, companies can take an agile approach to adjusting actions if necessary</p> <p>Medium term - companies continue to build the trust required for relationship building with the waste pickers in their value chain.</p> <p>Long term - companies continue to develop a deeper understanding of wider systemic changes and investments that are necessary to achieve meaningful change and real impacts on waste pickers in the value chain. Transparent reporting builds increased trust and brand loyalty with customers</p>

Key preparation

1: Who should use this toolkit?

While the users of this toolkit may vary across organisations depending on the size of the companies and teams, we recommend that it is used by people who are responsible for the following areas of work:

- human rights, responsible sourcing, ESG related audits, certification and reporting
- supplier engagement and management, including finance and procurement
- key decision-makers or budget holders who should participate in the development of action plans, eg an operations manager

2: Self-diagnostic for using the toolkit

To successfully employ these tools, it is critical that users first evaluate whether they are equipped to carry out the work internally or whether the support of a third party should be sought. To determine whether or not to proceed with the help of a third party, consideration should be given to the following areas:

- **Expertise** – knowledge of waste value chains and human rights is necessary to use all of the tools. Fortunately, you can develop this expertise with the necessary resources and time. If you do not have background knowledge on these topics through working in procurement, human rights, or value chain management, you can develop your knowledge independently.

Willingness to continue developing a foundational understanding of waste value chains and human rights is also critical to employing each tool and is part of investing in the process. To develop this understanding, review the resources provided in this introduction, and continue researching other educational resources provided through WIEGO⁸, OECD⁹, ILO¹⁰ and others engaging directly with waste pickers. See resources referenced in Fig. 2. In addition to these resources, much understanding can be developed through conversations with key actors and external partners. There must be direct engagement with waste pickers if your company is to build a productive partnership and sustainable relationship with the informal waste sector.

- **Capacity** – having the time, flexibility, and financial resources to use the tools is critical to their success. The tools will require time to complete outreach to workers and suppliers, to engage in direct and indirect data gathering and analysis, and to conduct follow-ups. If you are new to the topics covered in the tools, you will also experience a steeper learning curve that may require some additional legwork to adjust to.
 - Users who feel they have the capacity to complete this process independently with their internal teams can employ the tools to create a timeline with reasonable milestones that account for both their expertise and capacity.
 - Users who decide they do not have the expertise or capacity can consider hiring a third party experienced in responsible sourcing. Users can then allocate as much or as little of the work to the third party as appropriate.
- **Investment** – the four phases of the toolkit follow a thorough process to increase supply chain transparency and responsibility. This requires an investment in time and resources. Mapping is the first step in the process for companies to understand their waste value chains (Engage phase). Following that, the value chains must be assessed to determine where the human rights risks exist and where action is needed (Assess phase). Given the results of the assessment, actions can then be developed – in consultation with rights-holders – to mitigate these risks and address the issues at hand (Remediate and build capacity phase). Finally, implementation of those recommendations and monitoring will follow for as long as your company is engaged with the value chain (Monitor and evaluate phase).

Progress will take time. Waste pickers face challenges that are rooted in a history of discriminatory practices, systematic issues and a lack of standards. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix for this. The process requires commitment, diligence, collaboration, and patience to take the journey step by step. It requires establishing a relationship of trust and mutual respect and begins with a recognition of the work informal waste sector workers and waste pickers do and the value they bring. When conducting interviews, use the time to listen, learn, and build a relationship. Use the time to understand where and why vulnerabilities exist. Not all information will be gathered in a single conversation. Patience and an openness to learn and collaborate in this process will yield greater outcomes.

- **Engagement** – in the Assess phase, users will form connections with waste pickers to complete the value chain mapping and the human rights assessment. Before establishing these connections, users must understand the critical role worker participation plays in gaining a clear picture of the value chain down to the first mile. To note, the first Fair Circularity Principle¹¹ is to *‘Recognize the critical role of informal waste sector workers in plastics waste and recycling value chains.’* The text

⁸[WIEGO](#)

⁹[OECD](#)

¹⁰[ILO](#)

¹¹[Fair Circularity Initiative Principles for Corporate Engagement with the Informal Waste Sector Aligned with the UNGPs](#)

states that ‘Meeting this principle in practice requires public and private sector actors in plastics value chains to include waste pickers as relevant and legitimate stakeholders – and their interests and concerns as essential considerations – in local, national and international dialogue and policy-making arenas and in business decision-making.’ Furthermore, Principle 5, which is to ‘Engage meaningfully with informal waste sector workers,’ states: ‘Engagement with affected stakeholders is central to the concept of human rights due diligence. Companies in plastics packaging recycling value chains should engage meaningfully and respectfully with informal waste sector workers, in ways that acknowledge their human dignity, in order to inform those companies’ understanding of risks and impacts, and in the design of efforts to prevent and address those impacts.’

Informal and formal sectors often have little or no meaningful dialogue between each other. This lack of connection leads to little or no visibility of the informal segment, which enables human rights risks to go unchecked with no support or intervention.

Connecting with informal waste sector workers and waste pickers by establishing traceability and beginning data collection is vital to establishing a baseline understanding of their work, including where they source materials, the volumes collected/sold, the income received, the challenges and needs experienced, and ideas for solutions. Users may gather some of this information in the Engage phase from formal actors, but the *Assess Phase: Participatory human rights assessment and analysis tool* will require users to connect directly with waste pickers to validate and contextualise the Engage phase findings, gather further information on the challenges they face, and identify possible actions for the prevention and mitigation of root causes.

Educational resources

1. Introduction to the intersection of the informal sector, poverty, gender and social impact

Waste pickers are usually independent individuals who collect valuable waste material and sell it to an aggregator to make an income to take care of themselves and their families. They often collect waste material in bags or large sacks. Some also use tools like metal picks and wheelbarrows or trolleys. In a more organised setting, waste pickers might be a part of a collaborative or a cooperative and they may be collecting or receiving material from households, businesses or the local municipality. In many contexts, waste pickers play a substantial role in the collection, sorting and recycling of plastics and other materials, collecting as much as 60% of the plastic waste that is recycled globally¹². In doing so they are preventing it from reaching oceans and from being openly dumped or burned, mitigating the consequent environmental and public health impacts. Waste pickers’ historical and ongoing contributions to waste management and recycling are significant, and many operators in the sector have considerable expertise and experience. At the same time, they are vulnerable to a broad range of severe human rights impacts. See the [Fair Circularity Principles Annex A](#) for a description of common human rights impacts experienced by waste pickers.

Fig.2: Resources about the informal waste sector

Resource	Links
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¹²[Systemiq Breaking the Plastic Wave](#)

Background on the informal sector	History and Debates of the Informal Sector from WIEGO Statistical Picture on the Informal Sector from WIEGO Introduction to Waste Pickers from WIEGO
Links between the informal sector and poverty	Links with Poverty from WIEGO
Socially responsible plastic value chains	The NextWave Plastics Framework for Socially Responsible Ocean-Bound Plastic Supply Chains Mapping Local Plastic Recycling Supply Chains from The Circulate Initiative
Assessment of pathways towards stopping ocean plastic pollution and understanding of the global role of the informal waste sector	Breaking the Plastic Wave Report from Pew/Systemiq Building Inclusive Markets for Plastic Waste Management & Recycling in South and Southeast Asia
Vulnerability of informal partners	Tackling Vulnerability in the Informal Economy from OECD
Corporate human rights responsibilities towards waste pickers	Shift (2022) Executive Summary: Principles for Corporate Engagement on Human Rights with the Informal Waste Sector – Applying the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to the Plastic Packaging Recycling Value Chain

2. Applying a gender lens

A key cross-cutting principle in the [Fair Circularity Principles](#), Principle 6: ‘Apply a gender lens in efforts to address human rights impacts in the informal waste sector’, will be applied throughout this toolkit with an intentional lens on gender equality and addressing the specific vulnerabilities female waste pickers disproportionately face. Female waste pickers experience gender-based disparities that often impact their personal safety, and ultimately their ability to access equal economic opportunities and resources. In the light of this, the following educational resources emphasise the importance of incorporating gender perspectives to address the human rights impacts on women. Since limited resources exist specifically on female waste pickers, some of these readings focus on women workers in supply chains within agriculture, or the garment industry, but can be adapted for the informal waste sector.

Note that a general guidance on applying a gender lens to this process will be provided in each tool. However, it’s important to build this foundational understanding before you begin.

Fig.3: Resources on gender and the informal sector

Resource	Links
A framework for conducting gender-responsive due diligence in supply chains	BSR Gender Data Impact Framework report
Addressing the gender dimension of informality	Tackling Vulnerability in the Informal Economy from OECD
Theoretical considerations on gender, empowerment and waste	From Theory to Action: Gender and Waste Recycling A Toolkit for Teachers, Researchers and Practitioners from WIEGO
Women's role in accelerating circular value chains – informal waste sector perspectives	Informal Sector Perspectives, a Tearfund webinar Gender and waste nexus from UNEP & GRID-Arendal

While across all sectors women face gender gaps and bias in the workplace, female waste pickers are especially vulnerable to experiencing ingrained social and economic structural barriers to their work that further disadvantage and marginalise them. Women also experience intersecting inequalities due to age, class, social status, religion, race and ethnicity. It is crucial to recognise that intersecting identities and systems of power are deeply intertwined and cannot be understood separately. They uniquely shape a woman's experience of oppression and inequality. Therefore, a gender-responsive analysis should consider the various forms of discrimination that women face based on their individual situations. Fig. 4 lists some of the specific challenges and inequities female waste pickers may face, and their associated human rights issues.

Fig. 4: Gender specific challenges and inequities within the informal waste sector

Human Rights Issues	Challenges
Personal safety and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women can face threats of physical danger and violence in the competitive environments of landfills as well as on streets, especially when collection takes place at night. • Women lack the appropriate clothing, shoes, and protective equipment like gloves and sun protection to work safely in an exposed environment. • Women face specific health risks from breathing in fumes while working in landfills. • Women are disproportionately impacted by the lack of privacy and basic sanitation, and potential exposure to sexual and physical violence.

<p>Gender division of labour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are more involved in collection and sorting, while tasks which are often considered ‘masculine’, involving machinery and processing, are usually carried out by men. These jobs also tend to involve higher pay, resulting in pay inequality. • Women often lack authority and do not occupy positions of power and decision making within their communities. This presents a further barrier to achieving economic independence and equal recognition for their work. • This division of labour is often based on cultural norms and beliefs about what women cannot or should not do. This ultimately leads to female waste pickers having lower incomes, more hazardous working conditions, and less control over their work in comparison to their male counterparts¹³.
<p>Discrimination and harassment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are often relegated to collecting plastics, while men collect more valuable materials, resulting in women being subjected to violence if they attempt to collect more valuable materials. • Women often face harassment and severe stigma associated with their work.
<p>Further impacts on livelihoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are often excluded from (or face further barriers in accessing) economic inclusion and social and financial services such as formal banking systems, identity cards, and healthcare. • Outside of work, women also often fulfil additional roles at home as mothers and primary caregivers, further limiting their time for economic and leadership opportunities.

Cultural gender norms can contribute to a lack of recognition and difficulties in uncovering and addressing these issues. Global gender indices, such as the OECD Development Centre’s Social Institution and Gender Index (SIGI)¹⁴ suggests the underlying drivers of gender inequality and allows users to check the state of overall gender equality at the country level. This can reveal whether an identified human rights risk is a gendered issue specific to women, is ‘surprising’ or ‘expected’ within a country’s cultural context, and provides insight into root causes in line with the country context. Of course, even if an issue is ‘expected’, this does not mean it should not be addressed as a human rights impact. Rather, understanding the country context acts as a baseline and highlights areas to pay special attention to when addressing the issue. Users should also consult a local gender expert to better understand where to begin, what to look for, and how to address gender-based issues when they surface while engaging in this process.

It is important to note that given the above context and gender lens considerations, the goal of gender equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, practical and strategic needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. It also implies that the differentiated risks, constraints and vulnerabilities experienced by women and men are identified, prevented and mitigated in all actions. Gender equality is not solely a women’s issue, but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development. For additional information, refer to the UN Entity for Gender Equality & the Empowerment of Women¹⁵.

¹³[Waste Picker Integration Guideline for South Africa](#)

¹⁴[OECD Development Centre’s Social Institution and Gender Index](#)

¹⁵[UN Entity for Gender Equality & the Empowerment of Women](#)

Glossary

The following glossary of terms will support users to develop the necessary vocabulary to fully engage these tools:

- **Aggregator:** Intermediary organisation that purchases and consolidates recyclable materials from waste pickers and/or cooperatives, and often sells the sorted material to formal partners in the value chain, including balers and/or recyclers.
- **Assessment:** Analysis and study of a value chain to understand the waste flow, material volume processed, and the key partners involved as well as their needs to support decision making.
- **Baler:** Intermediary partners in the value chain that sort, process and compact recyclable materials before selling the bales to recyclers.
- **Child labour:** Not all work done by children under the age of 18 is child labour. According to the ILO, child labour is any type of employment or work which by its nature, or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons.¹⁶
- **Community-based organisation (CBO):** A public or private non-profit organisation of demonstrated effectiveness that— (A) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (B) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community.
- **Cooperative:** Enterprise operated by a team of waste pickers who aggregate and sell recyclable material collectively. The operations of these facilities are overseen by the cooperative members.
- **Dignity:** Recognition of one's inherent value that provides a foundation for respect, honour, and ethical treatment.
- **Formal waste sector:** Individuals who are employed by public service providers and private waste companies that are officially recognised by state authorities.
- **Gender:** Refers to socially constructed roles of power relations among men, women, and gender nonbinary persons who may be affected differently by business activities. Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities that all persons should enjoy, regardless of their gender.
- **Human rights:** Rights inherent to all human beings that extend to all areas of life, including the economic, social, cultural, civil and political facets. These rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education and more.¹⁷
- **Informal dumpsite:** Non-official dumps started in communities or neighbourhoods, usually by the residents, not officially managed, planned, or controlled by authorities.
- **Informal sector:** WIEGO (2012) state: 'There are three related official statistical terms and definitions which are often used imprecisely and interchangeably: the **informal sector** refers to the production and employment that takes place in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises (1993 ICLS)¹⁸, **informal employment** refers to employment without legal and social protection – both inside and outside the informal sector (2003 ICLS)¹⁹, and the **informal economy** refers to all

¹⁶[ILO, Minimum Age Convention](#)

¹⁷[UN – Human Rights](#)

¹⁸[Resolution concerning statistics of employment in the informal waste sector. Adopted by the Fifteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians \(January 1993\) –
https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/resolutions-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_087484/lang--en/index.htm](#)

¹⁹[Guidelines concerning a statistical definition of informal employment. Adopted by the Seventeenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians \(November 2003\) –
https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_087622/lang--en/index.htm](#)

units, activities and workers so defined and the output from them. Together, they form the board base of the workforce and economy, both nationally and globally.²⁰

- **Informal waste sector workers** are defined as workers in the waste and recycling sector whose remunerative work (i.e. both self employments and wage employment) is not registered, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, as well as non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise. Informal workers do not have secure employment contracts, workers' benefits, social protection or workers' representation.²¹ While the Fair Circularity Principles refer both to informal waste sector workers and waste pickers, the Fair Circularity Initiative now refers to 'waste pickers' in documentation.
- **Post-consumer resin (PCR) supplier:** Formal actor, usually at tier 1 or 2 of the value chain, that purchases flakes from recyclers and pelletises this flake into PCR for use by brands/manufacturers.
- **Recycler:** Formal organisations, usually at tier 3 or 4 of the plastic value chain, that receive baled recyclable materials ready to be processed and flaked. Recyclers sell the flaked materials to PCR suppliers.
- **Tier system:** System of key partners who make up a value chain. The tiers begin with the actor in closest proximity to the value chain's final product, tier 1, and extend from there to the earlier partners in the chain.
- **Waste flow:** Chain of locations and partners that oversee the circulation of waste from origin, such as landfills, canals, streets or households, to processing for reuse, recycling or disposal. Throughout the tool, this may be referred to as the waste value chain.
- **Waste picker(informal waste sector worker):** Waste pickers can be described as people who participate (individually or collectively) in the collection, separation, sorting, transport and sale of recyclable and reusable materials and products (paper, plastic, metal, glass and other materials) in an informal or semi-formal capacity, as own workers who subsequently achieved formal work arrangements through their organisations.²²

²⁰Chen, M.A. (2012) *The Informal Economy: Definitions, Theories and Policies*. WIEGO Working Paper No.1 2012. https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Chen_WIEGO_WP1.pdf

²¹ <https://www.ilo.org/resource/45-informal-economy-workers>

²² https://globalrec.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/position-revised-zero-draf_inc4_iawp_v01_english.pdf