

**A Plastic-Free Future for our MENA region
Saving New Generations
from Plastic Pollution with a Gender Lens**



1. The Current Plastic Pollution Catastrophe & the Fearful Future if we don't ACT!

1.1. Plastic pollution is a slow-moving catastrophe

Once hailed as a miracle material, today, **plastic pollution** is a **slow-moving catastrophe** choking our planet, infiltrating our bodies, and driving the climate crisis. It's not just an environmental issue, but it's a **human health emergency** and a **profound moral failure**.

- **Environmental issue and a human health emergency:** Plastic causes harm to human health throughout its lifecycle, from extraction to incineration. Over 99% of plastic is extracted from fossil fuel using **intensive energy in production**, and incineration releases a mix of harmful and toxic chemicals, and CO₂ into the air, ash, and sometimes the surrounding soil and water and into the atmosphere, contributing not only to **global heating and air pollution**—both of which hit the most vulnerable communities the hardest, but also health because one of the most harmful chemicals released are Dioxins (PCDDs) and furans that are persistent organic pollutants that are highly toxic even in tiny amounts; linked to cancer, immune system damage, and developmental issues¹. **Animals are also tragically harmed by plastic pollution**— For example, sea turtles and seagulls are mistaking plastic bags and debris for food, turtles often ingest deadly materials that block their intestines or cause internal injuries, while seagulls feed plastic to their chicks, leading to starvation or ruptured organs. Both animals suffer from entanglement in fishing lines and plastic rings, which can cripple, drown, or kill them slowly. Many wash ashore with stomachs full of plastic, dying in silence from a crisis they never caused. And while the Global North consumes and exports plastic waste, it is the **Global South, and regions like MENA, that are left to burn it, bury it, and breathe it in**. It is **refugees, waste pickers, and frontline communities** who pay the price with their deteriorating health, eroding dignity, and shattered futures. Their dignity is stripped away as they are forced to live and work in conditions that deny them safety, respect, and the basic right to a healthy life.
- **Moral failure:** This failure comes from knowing the damage, and continuing production. For decades, corporations and governments have been fully aware that plastic is toxic, persistent, and almost entirely unrecyclable. Still, production is set to **triple by 2060**, not because the world needs it, but because profits demand it. It is not only pollution, but it's a betrayal of **intergenerational justice**, as we leave behind a world poisoned by plastic for children who had no say in

¹ Verma, R., Vinoda, K.S., Papireddy, M., & Gowda, A.N.S. (2016). Toxic Pollutants from Plastic Waste — A Review. *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, 35, 701–708. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2016.07.068>

creating this system. A betrayal of community rights, where petrochemical plants, plastic-burning landfills, and toxic dumps are systematically placed in the poorest neighborhoods, both in MENA and beyond — from groundwater contamination near the Jubail petrochemical complex in Saudi Arabia², to refinery-driven air pollution across the region³, to petrochemical and heavy metal contamination along Morocco's industrial Atlantic coast⁴ and in Agadir Bay⁵, and the toxic landfill fires and waste-burning in Egypt's Greater Cairo⁶ and Lebanon's Costa Brava landfill⁷, filling the air with dioxins, heavy metals, and fine particulate matter that poison and choke vulnerable communities with poisonous smoke.

1.2. The MENA region's Vicious Battle Against Plastic Pollution

The Mediterranean is one of the world's most plastic-polluted seas: 6 out of the top 10 polluting countries on its shores are from the MENA region. With less than **10% of MENA countries having national plastic bans or producer responsibility laws**. The region is **heavily targeted by multinational corporations** for single-use plastics and fast-moving consumer goods, without accountability **and Europe exports thousands of tons of plastic waste to North Africa**, exploiting weak regulatory frameworks. This is **environmental racism and injustice** in action, a silent, suffocating violence wrapped in plastic.

If these issues remain unaddressed, the long-term consequences could be severe. **Marine ecosystems** will continue to deteriorate, **threatening food security and biodiversity**. Fishing and tourism-dependent communities **risk losing their livelihoods**. Public health will be increasingly compromised by the **spread of microplastics**, and the **climate impact** from unchecked plastic production and disposal will worsen. This context underscores the urgency of our campaign and the need for targeted, community-driven action.

² SGS (2024). *Environmental Site Assessment for a Petrochemical Company in Saudi Arabia*. <https://www.sgs.com/en-jo/news/2024/02/case-study-environmental-site-assessment-for-a-petrochemical-company-in-saudi-arabia>

³ Vohra, K., et al. (2021). *Global mortality from outdoor fine particle pollution generated by fossil fuel combustion*. *Environmental Research*, 195, 110754. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2021.110754>

⁴ UNEP/MAP (2018). *Assessment of Marine Pollution in the Moroccan Coastal Zone*. <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/27234>

⁵ *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2025). Assessment of heavy metal contamination and ecological risk in Agadir Bay, southern Morocco. ([ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com))

⁶ ARIJ (2021). *Cairo's Toxic Landfill Fires*. <https://arij.net/investigations/forest-fires-ciro-en>

⁷ Human Rights Watch (2017). *As If You're Inhaling Your Death: The Health Risks of Burning Waste in Lebanon*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/01/if-youre-inhaling-your-death/health-risks-burning-waste-lebanon>

2. Greenpeace MENA: a leading expert in tackling plastic pollution

2.1. Greenpeace MENA is worthy to be entrusted with Protecting Our Planet, Empowering Communities

Greenpeace MENA was established in 2018. It is one of the newest organisations in Greenpeace network, a network that since the **Greenpeace creation in 1971 has been instrumental in bringing global attention to environmental crises, leading to some major positive environmental changes** including global climate action mobilization. Greenpeace MENA is the only international environmental campaigning organisation operating across the whole region. It has strong local roots and reach. Almost all its coworkers are based in MENA countries, with a diversity of experiences, cultures, and identities that makes them strong and most effective in the region. **Greenpeace MENA has a light structure and its regional operating model is unparalleled: forging alliances, fostering collaboration for locally driven initiatives and solutions tailored to MENA context.**

2.2. Greenpeace MENA has a strong commitment to drive change through a plastic-free Future

The Greenpeace Plastic Free Future MENA Campaign

This campaign is a global one, dedicated to ending plastic pollution through advocating for strong global policies, **debunking false solutions**, and **promoting sustainable alternatives**. The campaign focuses on eliminating single-use plastics. The campaign pushes for a shift towards reusable, refillable, and zero-waste systems protecting oceans, wildlife, and communities from the harmful impacts of plastic pollution. The campaign raises public awareness, highlights effective solutions, community mobilization, and policy engagement. It aims to mobilize communities and policymakers to advocate for a strong Global Plastics Treaty that effectively addresses the plastic pollution crisis.

Greenpeace campaigns related to a plastic-free future have evolved over time, with significant actions including the [#PlasticFreeNow campaign in Hong Kong starting in 2018](#) and a more globally integrated approach as part of the [Break Free From Plastic \(BFFP\) movement](#), which Greenpeace joined in September 2016. In 2018, Greenpeace Canada launched a "plastic-free future toolkit" project in alignment with Earth Day's theme to end plastic pollution. 2022 onwards, Greenpeace has been actively involved in pushing for a legally binding global plastics treaty, advocating for negotiations to limit plastic production, restrict single-use plastics, and promote reuse systems.

Debunking false solutions

Many so-called "solutions" to plastic pollution are actually false fixes that delay real progress and protect corporate interests.

- **Recycling**, for example, is often promoted as a cure-all, yet only 9% of plastic ever produced has been recycled, with the rest ending up in landfills, oceans, or incinerators—*Greenpeace's Circular Claims Fall Flat* report exposes how industry uses recycling to justify more production.
- **Chemical or "advanced" recycling** is largely plastic-to-fuel incineration disguised as innovation, according to *Deception by the Numbers*⁸.
- **Bioplastics and compostables** are also misleading; many still contain fossil fuels, fail to degrade naturally, and require resource-intensive crops—*Bioplastics Are Not the Answer*⁹ explains why.

Meanwhile, plastic offsets and credit trading schemes are corporate greenwashing tactics that outsource cleanup to the Global South while production continues unchecked—Greenpeace warns against this in *Plastic Credits and Offsets Are a Distraction*¹⁰. Even cleanups, while important, only treat the symptoms—not the root cause of overproduction—The only solution to plastic pollution is to cut production. The real solution lies in cutting plastic production at the source, transitioning to reuse systems, and demanding a legally binding Global Plastics Treaty that holds polluters accountable and protects frontline communities.

Promoting Sustainable Alternatives

The solutions lie in cutting plastic production at the source, transitioning to reuse systems, and demanding a legally binding *Global Plastics Treaty* that holds polluters accountable and protects frontline communities.

The only true solution to plastic pollution is a dramatic reduction in plastic production and a systemic shift toward sustainable, reuse-based alternatives.

Campaigns like *Beyond Plastics* and the push for a *Global Plastics Treaty* call for corporate and governmental investment in refill stations, returnable containers, and circular delivery models—solutions already thriving in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These systems don't just cut waste—they also create jobs, reduce carbon emissions, and support a fairer economy. Greenpeace urges that any serious attempt to address plastic pollution must put reuse, reduction, and justice at the center—not profit-driven "green" distractions, particularly those that are community-led, affordable,

⁸ Greenpeace Report Accessed online through: <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/deception-by-the-numbers/>

⁹ Greenpeace Report Accessed online through: <https://www.greenpeace.org/southeastasia/press/66948/bioplastics-are-not-the-solution-to-the-plastic-pollution-crisis-says-greenpeace/>

¹⁰ Break free from Plastic Report Accessed online through: <https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/2024/11/28/plastic-credits-in-the-global-plastics-treaty/>

and rooted in local economies. According to the *Greenpeace and ReLoop: Reuse Systems Good for Climate and Waste report*, switching just 20% of single-use plastic packaging to reuse globally could eliminate tens of millions of tonnes of waste and emissions annually.

2.3. GP MENA has already made strong strides in this direction

- **Policy Advocacy:** We've been actively advocating for a robust Global Plastics Treaty, participating in the last three rounds of negotiations since 2024 (INC-4, INC-5, and INC-5.2). Our strategic narrative and sustained engagement with political experts, delegates, and media have helped secure increasing tier-one media coverage of the process.
- **Public Mobilization:** In May 2025 alone, we gained over 33,000 new supporters and collected more than 6,000 petition signatures in just one month.
- **Campaign Growth:** In the first half of 2025, our campaigns have seen a 20% average increase in reach and engagement — demonstrating growing public interest and resonance.

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Mobilizing for a Strong Global Plastics Treaty

Greenpeace MENA's participation in the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations expanded through observer engagement in multiple Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) sessions, including in Canada, South Korea, and Geneva, ensuring sustained representation of MENA perspectives in shaping a legally binding treaty. Advocacy efforts reinforced calls for full lifecycle regulation of plastics, binding production reduction targets, and equitable financial mechanisms for affected countries. Greenpeace MENA also urged our region's leaders to push for a strong, legally binding treaty that reduces plastic production, bans single-use plastics, includes re-use targets and provides robust and equitable financial mechanisms for Global South countries to support a fair transition to a plastic free future.

Exposing the Human Cost of Plastic Pollution

Greenpeace MENA produced '[A Sea of Plastic](#)', a documentary exposing the human cost of plastic pollution across Egypt, the UAE, Morocco, and Tunisia. Through real-life community stories, the film highlights how plastic waste is undermining coastal livelihoods, public health, and biodiversity, while amplifying local voices working to protect their environments and futures.

Creative Partnerships: Making Plastic Pollution Visible in Everyday Life

Greenpeace MENA partnered with media influencer **Reine Al Maila** to amplify people-centered narratives on plastic pollution across the region. The collaboration explored the human and environmental impacts of plastics, including links to women's health, food systems, and agriculture, translating complex science into accessible storytelling that strengthened public engagement around plastic-free solutions.

Our Supporters are Growing

In 2025, the Plastic-Free Future campaign continued expanding its global supporter base and mobilizing community action.

Key Numbers in 2025

10,000

Total petition signatures

7,600

New supporters in 2025

32,000+

Total petition signatures worldwide

Hundreds

Volunteers mobilized in beach cleanups across Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon

Next Campaign

Microplastics are everywhere - lurking in our food, water, and even the air we breathe. Disturbingly, these tiny particles have now been found inside our bodies.

While the world lurches from crisis to crisis, microplastics are silently infiltrating our lives, our communities and our planet.

It's time to react. Our best hope is to tackle the root of the problem, by reducing the amount of plastic being produced.

Tell the government to push hard for a strong Global Plastics Treaty to make plastic pollution a thing of the past.

Morocco



Tunisia:



Lebanon:

