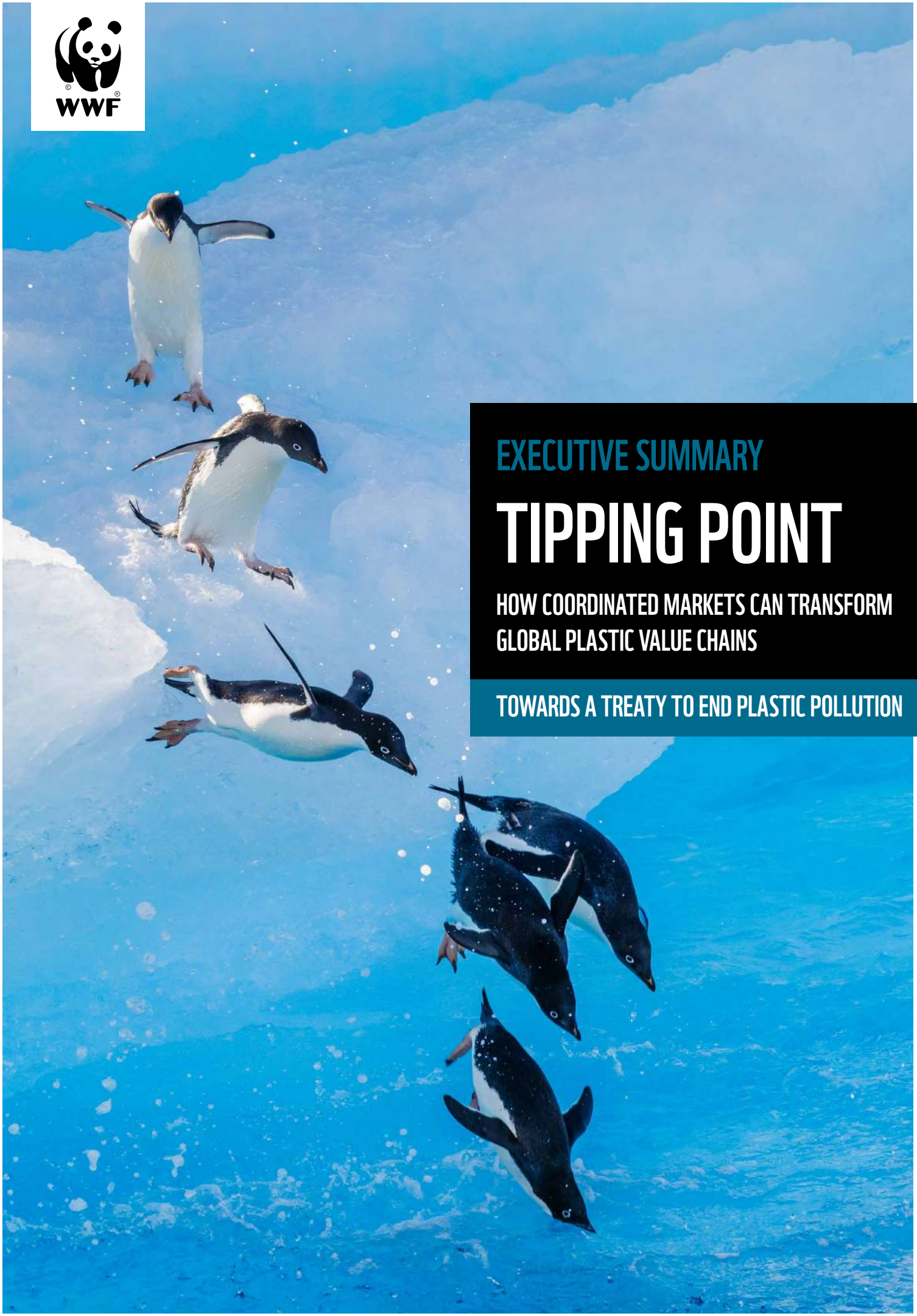


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TIPPING POINT

HOW COORDINATED MARKETS CAN TRANSFORM GLOBAL PLASTIC VALUE CHAINS

TOWARDS A TREATY TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION

EXCUTIVE SUMMARY

The path to an effective treaty to end plastic pollution can be first led by a critical mass of countries willing to coordinate their actions through binding, harmonised measures; it does not depend on universal participation at the outset. Countries that have already voiced their support for essential binding common rules in the treaty represent 20-40% of global plastic demand. This is well above the Critical market threshold of 20%, at which coordinated rules can reshape global value chains beyond the initial regulated markets for many high-risk plastic products, and significantly reduce the pollution they generate. For the countries willing, it is time to get the job done.

Plastic pollution is a global crisis that no country can solve alone. Despite rising political attention, including the ongoing negotiations on a legally binding global treaty, plastic production, consumption and leakage continue to rise rapidly. Without ambitious international actions, plastic pollution is projected to more than double by 2040. Over the past three decades, fragmented national and regional responses have failed to deliver the systemic change needed. Meanwhile the treaty negotiations struggle to conclude on meaningful measures that all countries can agree on.

This report finds that countries already supporting harmonised, binding measures collectively hold enough market power to begin shifting many high-risk plastic product value chains, provided the measures are well designed, product-specific, and coupled with robust implementation support. By acting together and implementing common binding rules, they can create strong incentives for producers, investors and trading partners to align with new market expectations. As the economic benefits become clearer, the incentives for participation increase for additional countries over time.

The opportunity for leadership exists today. Countries that are ready to act do not need to prolong negotiations indefinitely, nor settle for a weak treaty that lacks meaningful action. No environmental treaty requires universal participation to enter into force. *The key treaty design challenge is identifying the level of participation and leverage needed at the outset,* to make compliance commercially rational for economic actors, thereby strengthening the incentives and support that make participation more attractive for other states later on. Similar to how effective multilateral environmental agreements have historically started and then strengthened: the most credible path to ending the growing plastic pollution crisis is a strong treaty led by first movers willing to get to work, that are capable of delivering immediate impact, strengthening over time, and attracting broader participation as its benefits become increasingly evident.

KEY FINDINGS

1. MARKET ACCESS IS A POWERFUL LEVER FOR TREATY EFFECTIVENESS

When a group of countries coordinate around binding common rules for high-risk plastic products put on the markets within their jurisdictions, their collective influence travels upstream. Manufacturers wishing to serve these coordinated markets, regardless of where they are based, are incentivised to comply with the rules. Once enough countries have adopted common rules, it becomes a rational economic response for more companies to adapt accordingly, beyond the markets where these regulations exist—making the case for other countries to join in over time. Market access is where regulatory leverage is strongest and most resilient to free-riding. A well-designed treaty can drive transitions to address plastic products with high pollution risks through the following mechanisms:

- **Phase-outs and design requirements** tied to binding common rules of coordinated markets will eliminate or significantly reduce pollution from the highest-risk plastic products.
- **A coalition of countries, with a sufficient share of the global market demand, adopting harmonised measures** will deliver economies of scale, a level playing field for producers, reduced transaction costs, and clear investment signals.

2. AMBITIOUS COUNTRIES HAVE THE ABILITY TO SHIFT GLOBAL MARKETS

The report calculates the global plastic demand shares of four existing, publicly verifiable groups of countries supporting essential treaty measures, to assess whether they have enough collective market power to shift global plastic value chains. These measures include common binding rules on phase-outs and design requirements for high-risk plastic products, robust implementation support, and mechanisms to strengthen the treaty over time.

The collective shares of these supportive countries are then compared to the market threshold required for select high-impact upstream measures—phase-outs of avoidable plastic products and design requirements for plastic products to minimise pollution risks—to be effective, specifically in two aspects:

- **Viability** of a measure: achieved when the demand share of regulated markets is large enough that developing and supplying a compliant product becomes commercially worthwhile.
- **Cascading effect** of a measure: triggered when the demand share of regulated markets is large enough that firms standardise globally rather than maintain parallel product lines, as a rational economic response for plastic products with concentrated global supply chains.

The report finds that different groups of countries supportive of essential treaty measures represent from 20% to more than 40% of global plastic demand. Each group includes countries from across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe—showing aligned countries with broad regional representation and diverse levels of economic development. The EU as a bloc, accounting for up to 11% of global demand, contributes considerable weight in consumer-market terms to all four groups of supportive countries.

Crucially, the assessment finds that the demand shares of all groups exceed the threshold needed for viability of selected high-impact upstream measures, and to trigger cascading effect for many high-risk plastic products with concentrated global supply chains.

This means that, for selected measures and product categories with the relevant market characteristics, coordinated rules adopted by the countries of any of these groups are highly likely to be economically viable and create incentives for companies to standardise beyond the participating markets.

Table 1: Assessment of demand shares of countries supporting a strong treaty with common binding rules

Groups of countries	Basis	Demand Share[4]	Assessment
Active supporters (123 countries)[1]	Countries' positions during the negotiations[3]	**24–30%**	✔ Exceeds the threshold needed for viability and to trigger cascading effect
Active and Evolving supporters[2] (145 countries)	Countries' positions during the negotiations[3]	**38–41%**	✔ Well above the threshold needed for viability and to trigger cascading effect
High Ambition Coalition members (73 countries)	Formal coalition membership	**22–33%**	✔ Exceeds the threshold needed for viability and to trigger cascading effect
Nice Wake-Up Call signatories (95 countries)	Signed and published declaration	**20–28%**	✔ Exceeds the threshold needed for viability and to trigger cascading effect

1 Active supporters are countries supporting all essential treaty measures: common binding rules on phase-outs and design requirements for high-risk plastic products, robust implementation support, and mechanisms to strengthen the treaty over time.
2 Evolving supporters are countries supporting some but not all essential treaty measures: common binding rules on either phase-outs or design requirements for high-risk plastic products, robust implementation support, and mechanisms to strengthen the treaty over time.
3 Countries' negotiating positions tracked and published by WWF on the Global Plastic Navigator, https://plasticnavigator.wwf.de (accessed June 2026), and supplemented by the authors' assessment of recent developments in countries' negotiating positions and policy contexts.
4 Range of demand share is based on two methods, see details in Demand-side shares in the Appendix..

3. DIFFERENT TIPPING POINTS FOR DIFFERENT PRODUCTS

The market share required for treaty measures to be effective varies by plastic product category. The specific share depends on the products' market characteristics, including the availability of compliant solutions, switching costs, supply-chain concentration and the role of large buyers or leading firms. Drawing on practical regulatory examples and analysis of these characteristics, the report identifies three relevant market thresholds for measures and high-risk plastic products to be addressed in the treaty, each with different implications for whether treaty measures are viable and how likely they may cascade widely beyond the markets of participating countries.

The central finding is that most high-impact treaty measures do not require universal participation for viability and cascading effect. For many plastic product categories, coordinated markets representing around 10–20% of global demand can make implementation of most binding common rules commercially viable and trigger wider market shifts.

This provides a framework for prioritising treaty measures that could and should be adopted by willing countries at the outset. At the Minimal threshold, common binding measures adopted by a small group of countries can be economically viable but are unlikely to reshape global markets on their own—especially if the regulated plastic products have localised supply chains—spillover and broader harmonisation may only happen when more countries join.

Table 2: Market thresholds and their potential to shift market dynamics

Market threshold	Global demand share for viability	Practical examples	Plastics relevance	Potential for cascading effect
Minimal	**1–3%**	Rwanda single-use plastic (SUP) bag ban; French SUP cutlery ban	Phase-outs of single-use plastic products that are readily avoidable or can be replaced with low-cost available alternatives, e.g., single use plastic cups, straws, dolly ropes.	Low
Critical	**10–20%**	EU REACH (~15%); EU RoHS (~15%)[1]	Design requirements for high-risk plastic products where compliant solutions are technically feasible, e.g., tyres (redesigned to minimise microplastic shedding), packaging (redesigned with recyclable mono-material).	High
Dominant	**50–70%**	Montreal Protocol (66%); MARPOL (>50%)[2]	Phase-downs/ phase-outs of total plastic production and consumption volumes, which face significant risk of free-riding, relocation and non-compliant supply.	High

1 the EU laws for Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), and Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS); **2** the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)

When the collective demand share of willing countries reaches the Critical threshold, their adoption of common binding rules on many high-risk plastic products becomes economically viable and can trigger, particularly for plastic products with concentrated global supply chains, wider standardisation for firms globally.

To adopt measures with significant risks of free-riding, relocation and non-compliant supply—for example the phase-downs/outs of total plastic production and consumption volumes—the collective demand share of willing countries needs to reach the Dominant threshold at the outset for the measures to be effective. Binding common rules for phase-outs and design requirements for high-risk plastic products, coordinated from the demand side, are less likely to face free-riding risks and therefore unlikely to require a Dominant threshold at the outset.

To explore how these thresholds operate in practice, the report analyses the market characteristics of three plastic product value chains that represent different transitions expected under the treaty's binding common rules:

- **Single-use plastic cups:** relevant to phasing out readily avoidable single-use products;
- **Yoghurt containers:** relevant to redesigning necessary products where circular solutions are already feasible; and
- **Tyres:** relevant to reducing pollution from products that require substantial innovation.

Together, the analysis shows why some measures can be implemented at Minimal market share, such as low-cost phase-outs, while others require a Critical share of coordinated demand to trigger wider market transformation, such as design requirements for circularity and pollution reduction.

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CUPS (Phase-out)

Market threshold for viability: **MINIMAL** (<3%)

Potential for cascading effect at this threshold: ✗ Low

Alternatives exist and little additional R&D is needed. Because supply chains are localised and the market is highly dispersed (top 5 producers = ~25–30% share; no single buyer >1.5%), the direct impact is likely to remain within adopting markets—although spillover, scaling and regional harmonisation can expand the effect as more countries join.

YOGHURT CONTAINERS (Design requirement—Mono-material recyclability)

Market threshold for viability: **CRITICAL** (10–20%)

Potential for cascading effect at this threshold: ✔ High

Mono-polypropylene container design exists at scale and switching costs are relatively low for producers and buyers. Although production is fragmented, demand is concentrated among large brands that can set specifications for converters, allowing the cascade to run through buyer power.

TYRES (Design requirement—Microplastic reduction)

Market threshold for viability: **CRITICAL** (10–20%)

Potential for cascading effect at this threshold: ✔ High

Significant R&D is required because no low-shedding alternative is yet commercially available at scale. However, production is concentrated among a small number of globally active firms (top 5 = ~48% of global sales; globally distributed footprint) making global standardisation economically rational once coordinated markets reach the Critical threshold.

COUNTRIES CAN BEND THE GLOBAL PLASTIC POLLUTION CURVE WITHOUT WAITING FOR EVERY COUNTRY TO BE READY AT THE SAME MOMENT, BY BECOMING FIRST- MOVERS ON COMMON BINDING RULES ON PHASE-OUTS AND DESIGN REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH-RISKS PLASTIC PRODUCTS.

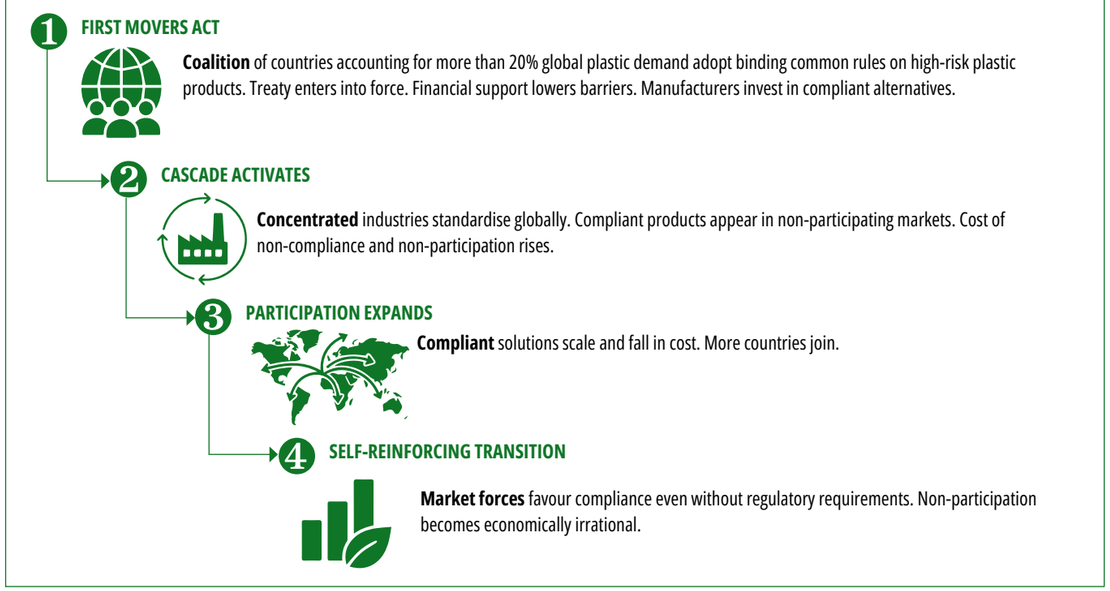
4. FIRST MOVERS CAN CREATE TIPPING POINTS FOR TRANSFORMATION AND INCENTIVISE PARTICIPATION OVER TIME

Universal participation is not a precondition for treaty effectiveness. The analysis shows that countries already aligned around binding common rules account for enough global plastic demand to begin shifting markets:

- **Harmonised phase-outs of readily avoidable single-use plastic products with localised supply chains** can become economically viable even at Minimal market threshold; while impact grows as more markets harmonise and spillover increases.
- **For design requirements (to increase circularity and minimise pollution) on plastic products with concentrated global supply chains**, coordinated rules of markets collectively reaching the Critical threshold trigger company-level standardisation well beyond initial participating markets.

The treaty should therefore be designed to initiate a self-reinforcing regime, in which aligned and willing countries move first—coordinating their markets under binding common rules, allowing compliant solutions to scale, and making participation the progressively more rational and attractive choice for other countries over time.

HOW FIRST MOVERS CREATE TIPPING POINTS FOR GLOBAL TRANSITION



Four strategic design principles for an effective treaty follow from this analysis:

- **Link obligations to market access:** Common binding rules are set for placing specific high-risk plastic products on the market, which will reach every manufacturer wishing to serve participating markets, regardless of where production occurs.
- **Trigger entry into force through market coverage:** Treaty enters into force when parties account for 20% of global plastic consumption, calculated from publicly available data (e.g. World Bank), rather than ratification counts alone.
- **Support implementation through finance and technical assistance:** Access to finance, technology transfer and capacity building accelerate implementation for less-ready markets, expanding the regulated coalition faster, and increase economies of scale for all parties.
- **Enable continuous strengthening through adaptive governance:** Procedures allowing the governing body to make decisions, including on annexes and amendments, without unanimity, enabling the regime to evolve as science, technology and alternatives mature and participation (and total market size of parties) grows.

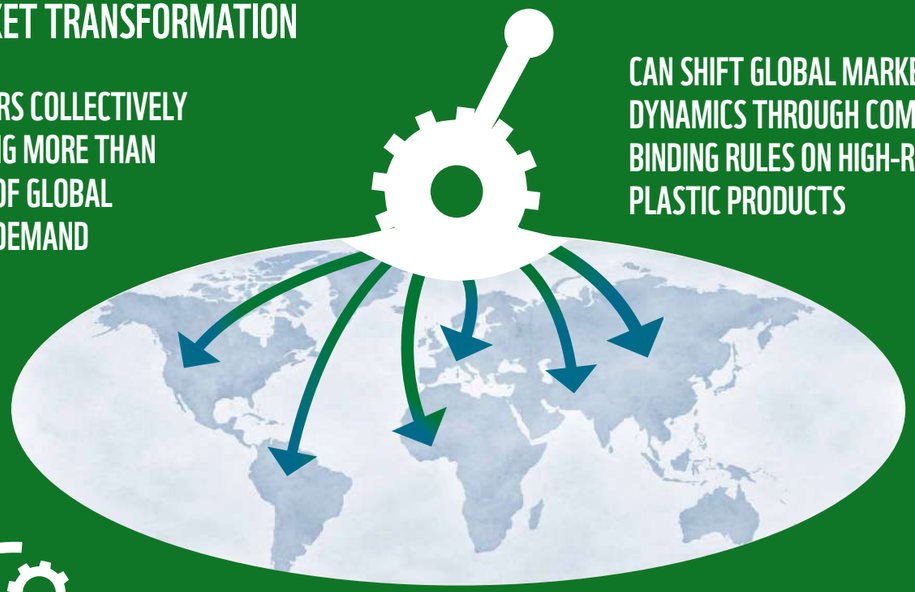
Source: Quantis (a BCG company) for WWF International. Demand thresholds based on Bradford (2020), UNEP, EU, UNDP, and Quantis-BCG analysis. Coalition demand shares estimated using World Bank What a Waste 3.0 (2026) and Houssini et al. (2025). Supply data: PlasticsEurope / NexantECA.

CREATING TIPPING POINTS

FOR MARKET TRANSFORMATION

FIRST MOVERS COLLECTIVELY COMMANDING MORE THAN **20%** OF GLOBAL DEMAND

CAN SHIFT GLOBAL MARKET DYNAMICS THROUGH COMMON BINDING RULES ON HIGH-RISK PLASTIC PRODUCTS



INFLUENCE UPSTREAM BEHAVIOURS

PHASE OUT AVOIDABLE HIGH-RISK PLASTIC PRODUCTS PRODUCT:
Due to decreasing market demand and access for plastic products that pose high risks of pollution and have viable alternatives

INVEST IN & COMPLY WITH DESIGN AND SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Due to increasing market incentives for innovation, responsible design and effective systems that prevent leakage and pollution

TRANSFORM VALUE CHAINS

RAW MATERIAL PRODUCERS	PLASTIC PRODUCERS	PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS	BRANDS & RETAILERS	CONSUMERS
Shift investments towards compliant, lower-risk materials	Adapt production to meet market access requirements	Design and produce products that meet treaty requirements	Source and sell compliant, lower-risk products	Access to safer, more sustainable products

THE IMPACT

- Stronger economic incentives aligned with treaty goals
- Reduced leakage and pollution at scale
- A growing market that rewards sustainability and responsibility

CALL TO ACTION

Willing and aligned countries must use the collective power of their markets to lead the transition needed to end plastic pollution. Together, they hold significant political alignment and collective market power that could launch the global transition away from high-risk plastic products, set the rules for a non-toxic circular economy, and make participation increasingly attractive for others.

Through the Nice Wake Up Call, the High Ambition Coalition and negotiating positions aligned with WWF's Treaty Must-Haves, over 130 countries have already demonstrated support for common binding rules on phase-outs and design requirements for high-risk plastic products, robust implementation support and mechanisms to strengthen the treaty over time. Together, they represent 20–41% of global plastic demand—more than enough in the case of many high-risk plastic products, to make common binding treaty rules commercially viable and generate wider market effects.

The task now is to use that power. Willing countries should coordinate their markets through common binding rules and create the economic signal that industry, investors and other governments cannot ignore. Three reasons make early action the strategically rational choice for willing states:

- **First-mover advantage:** Countries that move first will help set up the rules for high-risk plastic products, shape access to finance and transition support, and determine appropriate timelines or necessary adjustments for implementation—rather than remaining locked in by business-as-usual approaches that are proven ineffective and more costly than coordinated actions.
- **The cost of inaction:** Every year without coordinated binding measures deepens ecological damage, locks in plastic-dependent infrastructure, and advances the business-as-usual trajectory. Each delay increases the additional costs and burdens that the world cannot afford.
- **Broader participation by others becomes likely once the first movers act:** Coordinated market rules can shift industry behaviour beyond participating countries, lower the cost of compliant solutions, and strengthen incentives for additional countries to join over time.

Businesses themselves are also making the case for harmonised rules and ready to act. Through the Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty, more than 330 businesses, financial institutions and NGOs have jointly called for harmonised regulations across the plastics lifecycle. Their Economic Rationale Study in 2025 points to clear cost-saving, job-creation and incentive-boosting benefits of harmonisation.

Willing countries should pursue all available routes to adopt common binding rules for their market. The absence of consensus must not set the pace of progress, and the lowest common denominator must not define the standard of action. Multiple complementary pathways should be used together to accelerate the adoption of common binding rules, coupled with transition support, among willing countries:

- **Securing INC decisions** on an ambitious treaty text that reflects the views of and is backed by the majority of states;
- **Exploring a modular treaty architecture** that allows willing parties to move faster on specific, binding rules, while other countries can choose to join those modules over time;
- **Dedicated, transparent and inclusive process among willing countries,** which can inform the basis of a majority-backed treaty text, or the modular treaty design that allows willing parties to move faster on binding common rules, while incentivising participation by other countries over time.

The most important point across these different paths is: the negotiations and the new instrument should enable and drive forward the boldest global actions to end plastic pollution possible, rather than holding them back. This report confirms that it is entirely achievable, when countries supportive of binding common rules on high-risk plastic products are willing to move first.

WWF calls on countries that have consistently championed binding treaty measures to use their political alignment and collective market leverage, and prove that ambition can advance against deadlocks. Willing countries must get the treaty across the finish line and adopt effective, binding common rules for high-risk plastic products, supported by robust implementation assistance, while providing the foundation and flexibility for wider participation by other countries over time.

THE WILLING COUNTRIES ALREADY HAVE THE POWER TO ACT. BY USING THEIR COLLECTIVE DEMAND AND MARKET-ACCESS LEVERAGE, AND PAIRING THEM WITH ROBUST IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT, THEY CAN LAUNCH THE GLOBAL TRANSITION AWAY FROM MANY HIGH-RISK PLASTIC PRODUCTS, DEMONSTRATE WORKABLE APPROACHES, SHIFT MARKET INCENTIVES, AND MAKE PARTICIPATION MORE PRACTICAL AND ATTRACTIVE FOR OTHERS. THE WORLD CANNOT AFFORD A WEAKENED TREATY OR CONTINUED PARALYSIS. THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW.

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