

## Waste Shipments and Waste Trafficking

### Why in News?

India, Turkey, Indonesia raise concerns over EU's regulation on waste shipments at the WTO Committee on goods.

### What is a waste shipment?

- **Waste** - It is any *unwanted or unuseful material*.
- These are objects that have been discarded since these materials aren't functioning anymore.
- Economic growth and globalisation have led to a worldwide increase of waste transport across borders, by road, rail and boat.
- **Waste shipment** - Waste exports and imports are called waste shipments.
- Waste shipments must follow rules called waste shipment controls.
- **Waste shipment controls** - Rules for importing and exporting waste apply in
  - The country where the shipment starts
  - The country where the shipment ends
  - Any country the waste passes through on its intended journey (known as 'transit countries')
- **Significance** - *Exporting countries can sell their trash for money.*
- *Importing countries profit more* from this waste material through recycling and up cycling.
- It also *enhances international ties*.
- Many wealthy countries transfer their recyclable waste to other countries because it is less expensive, helps them meet their recycling targets, and reduces local landfill.
- It contributes to the *preservation of the Earth's natural equilibrium*.

### What are the new EU regulation on waste shipments?

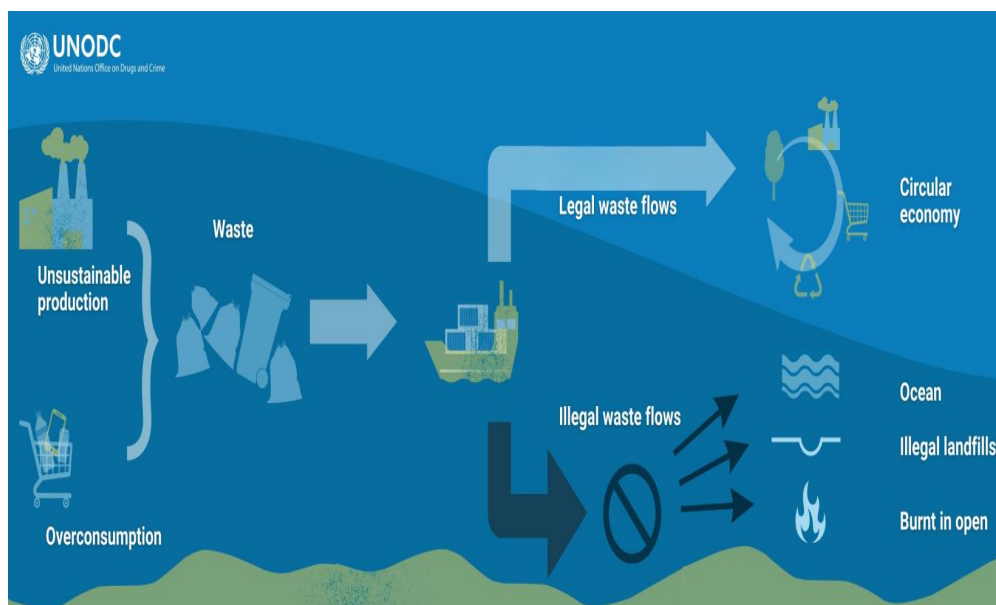
- **Waste exports from the EU to non-EU countries** - It have increased by 72% since 2004, amounting to 35 million tons per year in 2023, per the EU.
- **Importing countries** - *Turkey was the largest recipient* importing a volume of 12.4 million tonnes.
- *India was the second-largest destination* for waste exported from the EU in 2022, receiving 3.5 million tonnes of waste from the bloc, per EU data.
- **New regulations** - Exports of EU waste to non-OECD countries will *only be allowed* if these countries inform the European Commission that
  - They are *willing to import waste*
  - They demonstrate that they have the *ability to manage it in a sustainable manner*
- These new requirements will apply from May 21 2027.
- **Objective** - To ensure that countries importing EU waste are able to show that their

regulations lead to a similar level of environmental protection.

- It has provisions would ensure that the conditions under which the waste imported by other countries were broadly equivalent to those in the bloc.

## What is waste trafficking?

- **Waste trafficking** - It is *the illegal trade of waste* which is widely considered a high-profit, low-risk crime worth billions of dollars per year.
- **Trafficked waste** - It includes *plastic, e-waste, metal, and paper*, with mixed materials, *textiles, vehicle parts, industrial and medical* waste.
- **Flow of wastes** - Illegal waste typically flows *from higher-income countries* in Europe, North America and Asia to middle and lower-income countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa.
- **Vulnerable regions** - The *ASEAN region* has been a prominent destination for illegal waste shipments in the past years.
- *Malaysia, Indonesia, Viet Nam and Thailand* in particular have faced challenges due to increased waste imports.



- **Impact on importing nations** - Upon arrival at destination, take-back or repatriation procedures are a major challenge as shipments often cannot be traced to their countries of origin.
- Abandoned or unclaimed containers at ports exacerbate the issue, further complicating enforcement and investigation efforts.
- **Environmental and health hazard** - Most waste ends up in illegal landfills, the ocean, or burnt in the open which can affect human health and damage ecosystems.

*India faces environmental and safety concerns as around 8.8 lakh million tonnes of waste tyres, mainly from developed countries, are dumped, burnt, or retreated for resale in the aftermarket.*

- **Hinders economic development** - It deters development, intensifying economic

disparities, or hurting people's livelihoods.

- **Undermine transition to circular economy** - Waste trafficking can prevent waste from being re-used or re-purposed leaving the demand for raw materials unchanged.

*The circular economy promotes the share, repair, reuse, recycling, and reduction of materials.*

### What are the challenges in controlling waste trafficking?

- It is *hard to detect, investigate, and prosecute*.
- **A cyber-enabled crime** - *E-commerce platforms and social media* can help facilitate illegal waste trade transactions.
- **Lower penalties** - Penalties are *not as high* as those for the trafficking of other illicit goods like drugs, thus making it an attractive business for criminals.
- They are *usually unproportioned to the damage caused*.
- **Different definitions of waste** - *Different countries have different interpretations* of legal definitions of waste, leading to varying levels of enforcement.
- **Inconsistent waste regulations** - They are *complicated and inconsistent across borders*.
- Criminal actors exploit these loopholes to conduct their illicit activities.
- **Corruptions** - Common tactics include false declarations, a lack of or incorrect notifications to circumvent regulations and avoid controls, along with missing or inadequate licenses or documents.

### What are measures taken to control waste trafficking?

- **Global initiatives** - The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) developed a Legislative Guide on Waste Trafficking.
- It is to support States in enacting or strengthening domestic legislation to prevent and combat waste trafficking.
- **UNODC Unwaste project** - It is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented in cooperation with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).
- It aims to fight waste trafficking between the EU and Southeast Asia by supporting the transition towards a circular economy.
- **Mapping waste trafficking** - A first-ever mapping of waste trafficking trends from Europe to Southeast Asia has been published *by the UNODC and the UNEP*.
- **Basel convention** - It controls the *transboundary Movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal*, which was adopted in 1989.
- It *aims to reduce hazardous waste generation* and the promotion of environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes, wherever the place of disposal.

### What lies ahead?

- Pursue good environmental governance and robust environmental rule of law.
- Promote Projects such as Unwaste in tackling issues through a multi-sector, multi-disciplinary approach.
- There should be transparency on how a country could be listed as an eligible one for

exports.

- Hindrances should be minimised for countries that want to obtain waste for reuse as raw materials and excessive administrative and certification requirements should be avoided.

## References

1. [The Hindu Business Line| EU Regulation on Waste Shipments](#)
2. [UNODC| Waste Trafficking](#)

