

Chapter 4

Availability of International E-waste Statistics

INTERNATIONAL
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SENDING
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At the international level, monitoring of e-waste quantities is essential to track developments, set and monitor targets, and identify policies. Statistics should be collected at the international level and organised for comparison to ensure that data is frequently updated, published, and interpreted. Despite growing international interest, very little official statistics can be used to date. Only 41 countries in the world collect statistics on e-waste.

Measuring e-waste is an important step towards addressing the e-waste challenge. Statistics help to evaluate developments over time, set and assess targets, and identify best practices of policies. Better e-waste data will help to minimize its generation, prevent illegal dumping and emissions, promote recycling, and create jobs in the reuse, refurbishment, and recycling sectors.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN specialized agency for information and communication technologies, set a target in the Connect 2020 agenda to reduce the volume of redundant e-waste by 50% by 2020. Through the Connect 2020 Agenda, ITU Member States committed to work towards the shared vision of "an information society, empowered by the interconnected world, where telecommunication/ ICT enables and accelerates socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable growth and development for everyone." All stakeholders were invited to contribute with their initiatives, experience, qualifications, and expertise to successfully implement the Connect 2020 Agenda.

In 2015, the Partnership for Measuring ICT for Development (Baldé et al., 2015a)⁵ published a

Illustration 4.1: Response to pilot questionnaires carried out by OECD, UNECE, and UNSD.

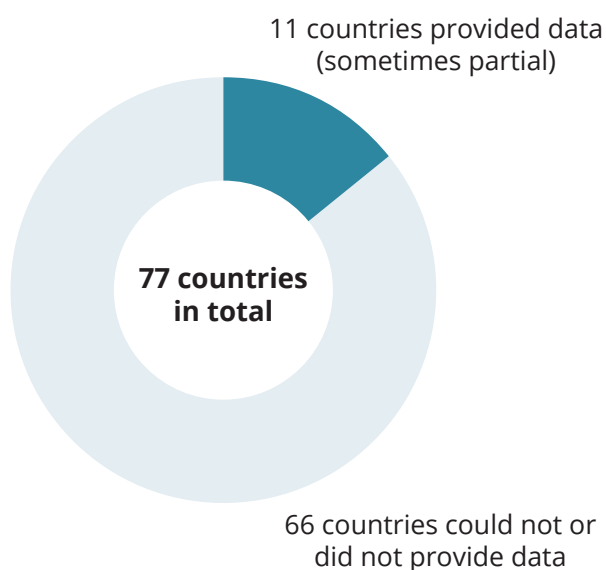


Illustration 4.2: Why e-waste statistics are needed

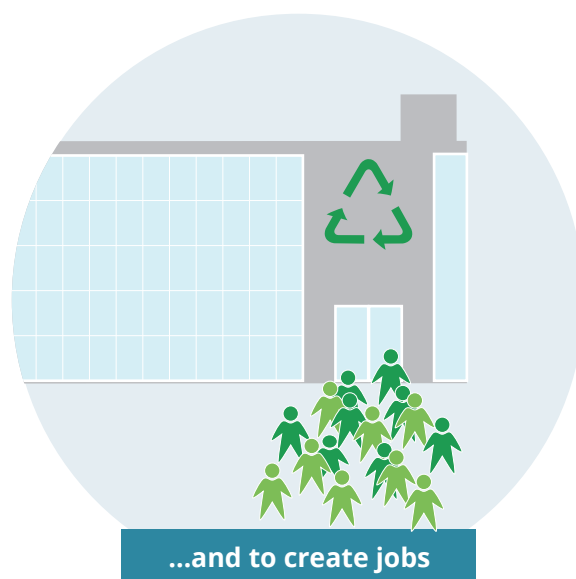
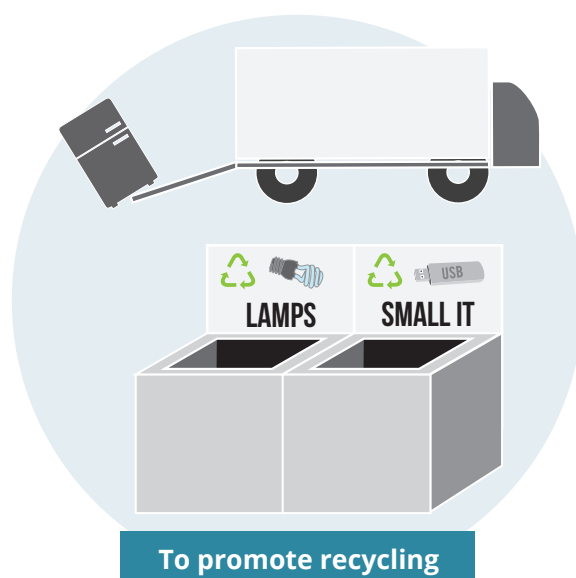


document of guidelines on e-waste statistics. These guidelines identified a set of indicators to track e-waste that included methodologies and classifications. The guidelines benefitted from the broader input of the Partnership for Measuring ICT for Development and other environment statistics experts.

So far, only 41 countries in the world collect international statistics on e-waste. Currently, only Europe has regular and harmonized statistics on e-waste. This includes the EU countries, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. In order to improve regional coverage of e-waste statistics, the UNU has done policy work and joined forces with various international agencies

that have contact with Member States throughout the world. Upon the request of UNU to improve the regional data coverage, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators, CIS countries) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, Working Party on Environmental Information, non-EU OECD Member States) sent out a pilot questionnaire in 2015. In 2017, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD, Environment Statistics Section) sent out a pilot questionnaire to 40 countries. The results of the OECD, UNSD, and UNECE pilot questionnaire were used to compile the global totals on e-waste collection and recycling in this report.

Illustration 4.3: What better e-waste data is used for





Since February 2016, UNECE runs the Secretariat of the Task Force on Waste Statistics, which was established under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians. The main objective of the Task Force is to develop a conceptual framework on waste statistics, which should be the future basis for a systematic production of statistics on waste, and to help solve the most important conceptual problems that currently exist in waste data collections. This framework will also provide the foundation for further integration of important emerging issues, such as e-waste, into official statistics.



In 2017, following the request of UNU, UNSD conducted a pilot questionnaire on e-waste statistics. UNSD selected a sample of 40 countries based on their communications with UNSD for the regular biennial UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics, and their English language proficiency, since the pilot was only administered in English. Given the fact that an assessment of the data provided by countries to UNSD via this pilot in 2017 is still pending, variables on e-waste are to be considered included in the regular biennial UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics. If data becomes available in the near future, they will be disseminated on UNSD's website.



E-waste and its management are integrated in the OECD programme of work on waste, material resources, and circular economy. They are covered in several OECD guidance documents, including on Extended Producer Responsibility, Environmentally Sound Management of Waste, and Strategic Waste Prevention. Data on e-waste has also long been covered in the OECD questionnaire on the state of the environment, although in a basic way (i.e. only the generation of e-waste). They are used in the OECD country Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) when an in-depth evaluation of waste and materials management is carried out. Questionnaires were sent to the OECD countries other than those covered by EU. Although the response rate to the 2015 ad-hoc data request sent to the WPEI in partnership with UNU was low and comparability across countries weak, the data compiled helped fill some gaps and was used in recent EPRs. However, further efforts are required to produce data of better quality, aligned with standardized definitions and concepts, and with a better understanding of recovery operations. To support the further development of e-waste statistics, the OECD intends to regularly update and validate related data with its member countries in cooperation with the global e-waste statistics partnership.

To address continuity and improve the quality of global data on e-waste statistics, the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations University, and the International Solid Waste Association have joined forces to create the Global E-waste Statistics Partnership. Its main objective is to improve, collect, analyse, and publish worldwide e-waste statistics. Statistics on e-waste and other important types of waste (such as food waste, textiles waste, etc.) should gradually become part of official statistics. This initiative endeavours to coordinate its work closely with other ongoing work in the area of e-waste statistics, and to work closely with other partners. It will make an important contribution to addressing the global e-waste challenges by raising awareness, encouraging more

governments to track e-waste, and by carrying out workshops to build national and regional capacity.

The long-term goal is to establish an organizational structure to ensure that there is a sustainable mechanism within the UN that collects and validates statistics on used electronics/e-waste collection and recycling, and the import and export of used electronics. To this end, and to help facilitate data collection at the national level, UNU is currently developing a tool kit that countries can use to collect and share information about used electronic imports and exports, which will be the basis for statistical capacity-building workshops.