



PRESS RELEASE

E-waste grows 8% in two years with just 20% recycled – though more countries are adopting e-waste management policies

New United Nations report provides a comprehensive overview of global e-waste challenge

Geneva, 13 December 2017 – A new assessment on global electronic waste (e-waste), policies and statistics, *The Global E-Waste Monitor 2017*, is being released today by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technology – together the United Nations University (UNU) and the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA). The report seeks to increase global awareness and draw attention to the growing world issue of e-waste, which includes discarded products with a battery or plug including mobile phones, laptops, televisions, refrigerators and electrical toys.

The assessment shows that in 2016, 44.7 million metric tonnes of e-waste were generated, up 3.3 million metric tonnes (8 per cent) from 2014. In 2016, only about 20 per cent – or 8.9 million metric tonnes – of all e-waste was recycled. Experts foresee a further 17 per cent increase – to 52.2 million metric tonnes of e-waste by 2021.

The assessment also highlights the significant and growing risk to the environment and human health due to increasing levels of e-waste and its improper and unsafe treatment and disposal through burning or in dumpsites.

The assessment also notes positive news – that there is now a growing number of countries adopting e-waste legislation. Currently 66 per cent of the world population, living in 67 countries, is covered by national e-waste management laws, a significant increase from 44 per cent in 2014.

National e-waste policies and legislation play an important role as they set standards, guidelines and obligations to govern the actions of stakeholders who are associated with e-waste.

“Environmental protection is one of the three pillars of sustainable development and ITU is at the forefront of advocating for the safe disposal of waste generated by information and communication technologies. E-waste management is an urgent issue in today’s digitally dependent world, where use of electronic devices is ever increasing – and is included in ITU’s Connect 2020 Agenda targets,” said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao. “The Global E-waste Monitor serves as a valuable resource for governments developing their necessary management strategies, standards and policies to reduce the adverse health and

environmental effects of e-waste – and will help ITU members to realize this Connect 2020 target.”

“With 53.6 per cent of global households now having Internet access, information and communications technologies are improving peoples’ lives and empowering them to enhance their social and economic well-being,” said Brahim Sanou, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau. “The Global E-Waste Monitor represents an important step in identifying solutions for e-waste. Better e-waste data will help evaluate developments over time, set and assess targets, and contribute to developing national policies. National e-waste policies will help minimize e-waste production, prevent illegal dumping and improper treatment of e-waste, promote recycling, and create jobs in the refurbishment and recycling sector.”

The assessment also reports that low recycling rates can have a negative economic impact, as e-waste contains rich deposits of gold, silver, copper, platinum, palladium and other high value recoverable materials. It estimates that the value of recoverable materials contained in e-waste generated during 2016 was US \$55 billion, which is more than the Gross Domestic Product of most countries in the world.

“The world’s e-waste problem continues to grow. Improved measurement of e-waste is essential to set and monitor targets, and identify policies,” said Jakob Rhyner, Vice-Rector of the United Nations University. “National data should be internationally comparable, frequently updated, published and interpreted. Existing global and regional estimates based on production and trade statistics do not adequately cover the health and environmental risks of unsafe treatment and disposal through incineration or landfilling.”

“We live in a time of transition to a more digital world, where automation, sensors and artificial intelligence are transforming industry and society,” said Antonis Mavropoulos, President of the International Solid Waste association (ISWA). “E-waste is the most emblematic by-product of this transition and finding the proper solutions for e-waste management is a measure of our ability to utilize the technological advances to stimulate a sustainable future and to make the circular economy a reality. We need to be able to measure and collect data and statistics on e-waste, locally and globally, in a uniform way. This report represents a significant effort in the right direction and ISWA will continue to support it as a very important first step towards the global response required.”

Earlier this year ITU, UNU and ISWA joined forces and launched the “Global Partnership for E-waste Statistics”. Its objective is to help countries produce e-waste statistics and to build a global e-waste database to track developments over time.

This partnership further aims to map recycling opportunities from e-waste, pollutants and e-waste related health effects, along with building national and regional capacities to help countries produce reliable and comparable e-waste statistics that can identify best practices of global e-waste management. Ultimately, its work will contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 11.6 and 12.5 by monitoring relevant waste streams and tracking the ITU Connect 2020 target 3.2 on e-waste.

Note to Editors:

Media Kit available at: http://bit.ly/E-waste_MediaKit

The Global E-waste Monitor 2017 is being released in Bonn, Geneva, Tokyo and New York

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About ITU

ITU is the leading United Nations agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), driving innovation in ICTs together with 193 Member States and a membership of nearly 800 private sector entities and academic institutions. Established over 150 years ago in 1865, ITU is the intergovernmental body responsible for coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, improving communication infrastructure in the developing world, and establishing the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems. From broadband networks to cutting-edge wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, oceanographic and satellite-based earth monitoring as well as converging fixed-mobile phone, Internet and broadcasting technologies, ITU is committed to connecting the world. www.itu.int

About United Nations University

UNU is an autonomous organ of the UN General Assembly dedicated to generating and transferring knowledge and strengthening capacities relevant to global issues of human security, development, and welfare. The University operates through a worldwide network of research and training centres and programmes, coordinated by UNU Centre in Tokyo.

The Bonn (Germany) based Sustainable Cycles (SCYCLE) Programme hosted by UNU's Vice Rectorate in Europe is providing world-class research and action on e-waste. SCYCLE aims to enable societies to reduce the environmental burden caused by the production, consumption and disposal of ubiquitous goods. www.unu.edu

About International Solid Waste Association

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ISWA promotes the worldwide exchange of information and experience on all aspects of waste management. It fosters the adoption of acceptable systems of professional waste management, and technological development and the improvement of practices to protect human health and the environment and to conserve materials and energy resources. www.iswa.org