

Circular Cities Beyond Plastics

EDITORIAL



FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION: CIRCULAR CITIES ACROSS LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.

By Laverne Walker, AMEP Programme Management Officer

As the Circular Cities Beyond Plastics Project continues across Latin America and the Caribbean, it is helping countries put the Cartagena Convention and its LBS Protocol into action by reducing pollution from land-based sources, including plastic waste.

At the heart of this work is collaboration. By working with governments, cities, communities, academia, the private sector, and implementing partners, the project supports practical solutions that reduce plastic pollution, strengthen resilience, and promote more sustainable ways of producing and consuming.

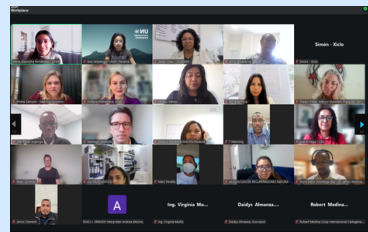
This newsletter shares some of that progress, highlighting stories from the ground, key milestones, and partnerships across the region. By sharing experiences and connecting people, we hope to inspire action and build momentum toward cleaner seas and more sustainable, circular cities across the Caribbean.

PARTNER VOICE

PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

A recent **Mid-Term Review** conducted by independent evaluator Sherry Heileman highlighted the project's strong regional relevance and the successful creation of the Inter-city Network, which is fostering collaboration among cities across Latin America and the Caribbean.

The review also identified implementation challenges, which affected progress during the first three years. It also provided recommendations to help address these constraints and strengthen implementation. Despite these challenges, governments, technical partners, and private sector stakeholders remain actively engaged in advancing solutions to reduce plastic leakage into the ocean and strengthen sustainable waste management systems in participating cities.



“TO STRENGTHEN IMPACT AND ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY, THE REVIEW RECOMMENDS REINFORCING PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAPACITY, ADAPTING ACTIVITIES TO LOCAL REALITIES, ACCELERATING IMPLEMENTATION, AND EXTENDING THE PROJECT TIMELINE THROUGH 2028”.

WHAT'S NEW

Q21
2026

Panama Launches Study to Identify and Reduce Unnecessary Plastics



A baseline study was launched in Panama that aims to identify unnecessary plastics and promote sustainable alternatives in key economic sectors. The initiative is being carried out by the Basel Convention Regional Centre at the University of Panama, together with ANCON and the Ministry of Environment (MiAmbiente).

The study will assess the use of single-use and low-recyclability plastics in sectors such as tourism, logistics, commerce, and fisheries, while identifying practical alternatives for their reduction, elimination, or substitution.

Results, delivered by the end of May 2026, will help shape the project's circular economy strategy and support policies and sector agreements to reduce plastic pollution and protect waterways and the Caribbean Sea.

Welcome back Alejandra Gamez as part of the Project Management Team

Q2
2026

Alejandra G3mez rejoins the Circular Cities project as part of the PMU-Project Management Unit, bringing more than 14 years of experience in circular economy, sustainability, waste management, and international cooperation projects across Latin America and the Caribbean.

She has collaborated with organizations including the United Nations Environment Programme and the Global Environment Facility on initiatives focused on plastic pollution and environmental governance.

With extensive experience working alongside governments, the private sector, academia, and multilateral organizations, Alejandra will lead the project toward successful implementation, strengthening partnerships and accelerating circular economy solutions in participating cities.

Q2
2026

Marta Castro, New Project Gender Consultant



Marta Castro has joined the Circular Cities Project as the Gender Consultant supporting Component 4.

Marta is an internationally experienced human rights lawyer specializing in gender justice, forced displacement, and environmental protection. She has worked with organizations such as Amnesty International and UN Human Rights Office in Colombia, bringing extensive expertise in gender analysis, inclusive research, and social sustainability.

In her role, Marta will lead the development of the project's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy, design and adapt GESI surveys, prepare a GESI Guidance Note for use across all countries, and support each city through virtual sessions to interpret and apply findings. Her work will strengthen the integration of gender, ethnic groups, and minorities across our circular economy initiatives.

CIRCULAR CITIES IN ACTION

INTERCITY NETWORK CONNECTS CITIES TO ACCELERATE PLASTICS CIRCULARITY

The Intercity Network on Plastic Circular Economy continues to strengthen collaboration among cities across Latin America and the Caribbean, creating a shared regional platform to accelerate the transition toward a circular economy for plastics.

With founding cities including Barranquilla, Cartagena, Kingston, Montego Bay, Panama City, and Colón, the Network is rapidly expanding to engage additional cities across the region, including Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Mexico City, Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Quito, Puerto Montt, and Puerto Varas, **reaching a total of 14 participating cities**. In May 2025, Barranquilla was selected as the Network's first Presidency, leading coordination efforts during its inaugural year with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention.

A key milestone for the Network this year has been the launch of the webinar series "Accelerating the Circular Economy for Plastics in Cities", designed to promote technical knowledge exchange and showcase practical solutions for building more circular and resilient cities. The series has covered topics such as tourism, innovation in plastic waste management, regulatory frameworks, and plastic monitoring mechanisms. More than 140 participants have attended the first four sessions, including representatives from participating cities and key stakeholders involved in the Circular Cities Beyond Plastic project.

Another major milestone was the First Meeting of the Intercity Network on Plastic Circular Economy, held on May 20–21, 2026, in Panama City. The meeting brought together representatives from member and partner cities across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) to strengthen regional collaboration in addressing plastic pollution, including marine litter and plastic leakage into coastal and marine ecosystems. During the meeting, participants reviewed progress achieved to date, discussed priorities under the 2025–2026 Activity Plan, and reinforced coordination among cities and key stakeholders.

Key outcomes included strengthened cooperation among Network members, agreement on priority actions to advance circular solutions for plastic management, enhanced technical and policy alignment among participating cities, and a clear roadmap for scaling regional impact and collaboration in the years ahead.



“The Intercity Network demonstrates that, through the exchange of experiences, knowledge generation, and capacity building, cities can join forces to tackle plastic pollution and advance toward more circular and sustainable solutions.”

María Alejandra Fernández, UNEP LACO Project Coordinator



INSIDE THE PROJECT

GEF CIRCULAR CITIES BEYOND PLASTICS THIRD PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE (PSC) MEETING, SECOND INTERCITY NETWORK & FIRST INDUSTRY ROUND TABLE

COLLABORATION TURNS AMBITION INTO ACTION FOR CIRCULAR CITIES ACROSS LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

From May 18–22, Panama City became a hub for regional collaboration, demonstrating what is possible when cities, countries, and sectors come together around a shared purpose.



Through the Circular Cities Beyond Plastics Project, leaders from governments, international organizations, private sector actors, recyclers, NGOs, and environmental experts from Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa convened to accelerate solutions to plastic pollution and advance circular economy systems across the region.

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting marked a key milestone in assessing progress across Colombia, Panama, and Jamaica, while providing an opportunity to align the next phase of implementation with local implementing partners—INVEMAR, ANCON, and the Ministry of Water Management and Climate Change, respectively—as well as national government representatives and representatives from the six participating cities. During the meeting, partners reviewed implementation progress, discussed the findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation, and agreed on updated priorities, workplans, budgets, and governance arrangements to strengthen project delivery and impact. The PSC concluded with the adoption of strategic decisions that will guide the next phase of implementation and reinforce regional coordination toward reducing marine plastic pollution and advancing circular economy solutions.

Beyond formal decision-making, the week created a broader ecosystem for collaboration and exchange.

The Intercity Network on Plastics Circular Economy Meeting brought together cities including Barranquilla, Cartagena, Kingston, Montego Bay, Panama City, Colón, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Mexico City, Playa del Carmen, Tulum, Quito, Puerto Montt, and Puerto Varas. City representatives shared practical experiences on advancing circularity in different urban contexts, ranging from policy design and waste management systems to innovation pilots and stakeholder coordination. These exchanges highlighted both shared challenges and emerging solutions, reinforcing the critical role of cities as testing grounds for scalable circular economy models.

INSIDE THE PROJECT

A standout moment of the week was the Art of Stakeholder Engagement Workshop, led by Dominic Stucker and Guillem Vallbona from the Collective Leadership Institute. The session focused on strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration, trust-building, and systems thinking, equipping participants with practical tools to move from fragmented efforts to more coordinated, inclusive, and action-oriented approaches. The workshop underscored a central message: circular economy transformation depends not only on technical solutions, but on how well actors collaborate across sectors and interests.

The agenda also included deep dives into private sector engagement, communications, gender mainstreaming, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, ensuring that implementation is not only ambitious, but also inclusive, measurable, and resilient.

A key highlight of the week was the field visit with recyclers in Panama City. Participants engaged directly with actors working across the recycling value chain, gaining a grounded understanding of daily realities, operational challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The visit served as a powerful reminder of the essential role that recyclers—both formal and informal—play in keeping plastics in circulation and preventing leakage into the environment and marine ecosystems.

Across all sessions, one message stood out clearly: momentum is building, and collaboration is delivering results. The level of coordination between cities, national governments, implementing partners, and local stakeholders reflects a growing regional commitment to tackling plastic pollution through systemic, practical, and inclusive solutions.



As the #CircularCitiesBeyondPlastics project advances into its next phase, partners remain focused on turning this momentum into tangible, long-term impact, strengthening circular systems, empowering cities, and supporting communities in building cleaner urban environments and healthier oceans.

NEXT EDITION: AUG/26