



Institute<sup>for</sup>  
European  
Environmental  
Policy

# The case of illegal e-waste shipments from the EU to China

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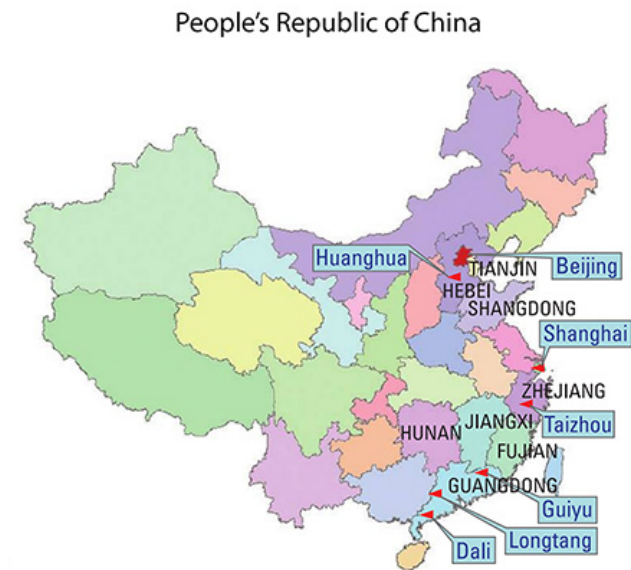
EFFACE Final Conference: Priorities and Opportunities for further EU Action



European Union Action to  
**Fight Environmental Crime**

# Introduction

- Rise of **illegal activities** despite extensive regulatory framework
  - According to the EU Waste Shipment Regulation shipments may be illegal for one or more reasons
- Significant increase in cross-border transport of e-waste
  - **China** represents the largest downstream destination for e-waste exported from North America and Europe
- Illegal e-waste shipments have detrimental impacts on:
  - Environment
  - Human health
  - Economic activities
- Case study research method:
  - Extensive **literature review**
  - Semi-structured **interviews**



Source: Ni and Zeng 2009. "Law Enforcement and Global Collaboration are the Keys to Containing E-waste Tsunami in China"

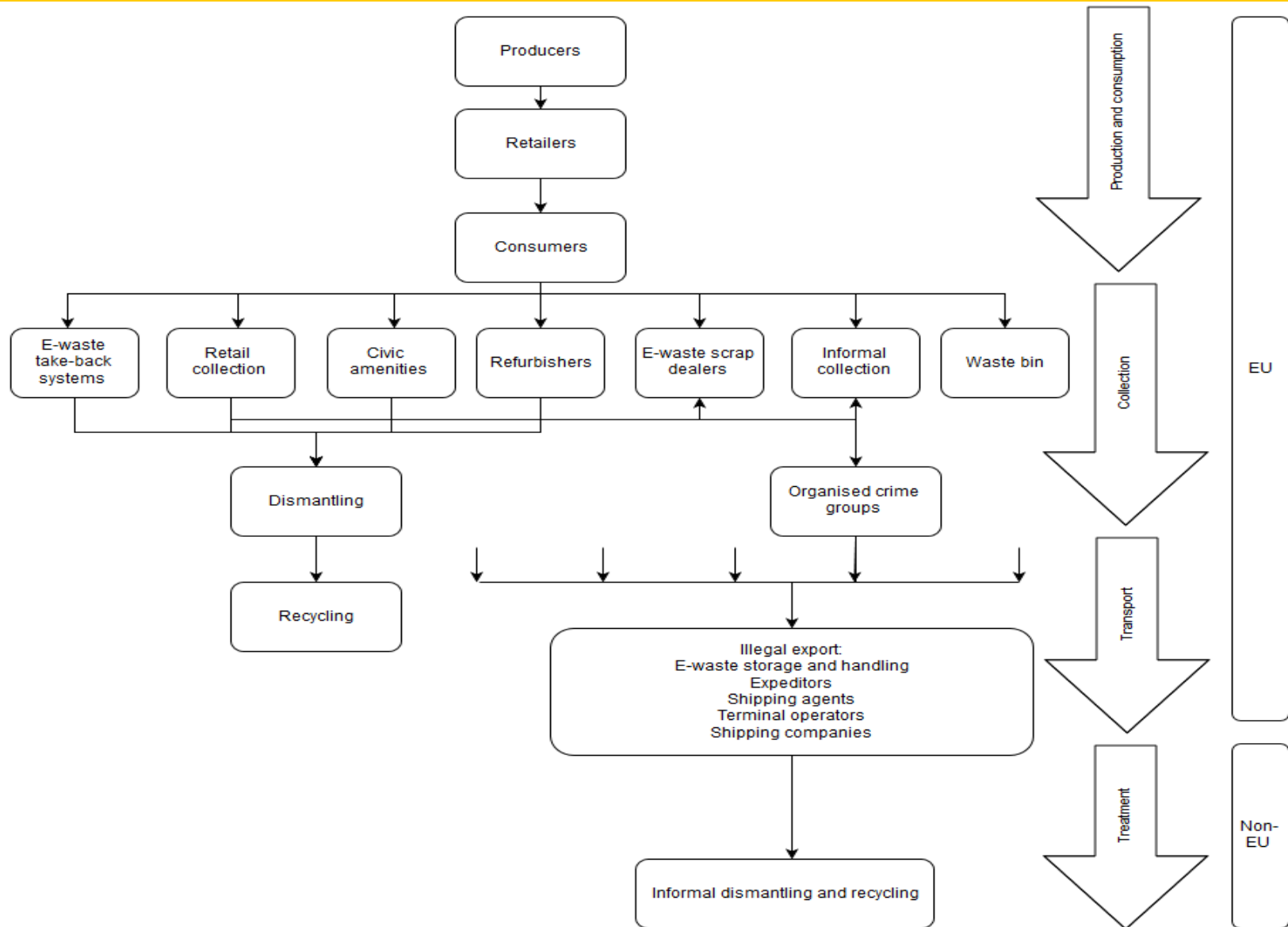
# Extent of illegal activity

- Various aspects:
  - Domestically generated WEEE in the EU
  - Legally exported WEEE from EU
  - The illegal share of WEEE shipments from EU
  - Amount of e-waste imported to China from the EU
- Problems with **data availability** and **reliability**
- Our estimates:

Year	E-waste generated in the EU	E-waste exported from the EU	E-waste imported into China from the EU
2005	7.01 mn tonnes <sup>(a)</sup>	1.89 mn tonnes <sup>(a)</sup>	0.74 mn tonnes <sup>(a)</sup>
2012	9.91 mn tonnes <sup>(b)</sup>	2.98 mn tonnes <sup>(c)</sup>	1.16 mn tonnes <sup>(c)</sup>

Sources: (a) Zoeteman et al., 2009; (b) StEP, 2015; (c) Geeraerts et al. 2015b.

# Key stakeholders



# Motivations and drivers behind the illegal export

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Three set of factors identified:

## 1. Push factors

- Historical development of the e-waste problem
- EU legislation led to higher environmental standards
- Poor enforcement

## 2. Pull factors

- Economic gains
- China's growing appliance manufacturing sector

## 3. Facilitating factors

- Low transportation costs
- Nature of e-waste
- WEEE collection points not adequately protected

# Key impacts

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## **Negative impacts in China**

- Environmental impacts: soil, groundwater contamination, air pollution etc.
- Human health impacts: respiratory problems, reproductive problems, injuries
- Social impacts: child and woman workers, no social benefits, low wages etc.
- Economic impacts: economic loss to formal recycling industry

## **Negative impacts in the EU**

- Economic impacts: economic loss to recycling industry and job losses
- Social impacts: negative impacts of organised crime activities

**Positive financial impacts in China** for actors involved in the illegal activities

**Positive financial impacts in the EU** for actors involved in the illegal activities

# Legal framework

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- At the international level:
  - The Basel Convention
  - The Basel Ban Amendment
- In the European Union:
  - The EU Waste Shipment Regulation **bans the export of e-waste from the EU to non-OECD countries**
  - The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive
- In China:
  - In 2000, the Chinese government introduced an **official ban on importing e-waste** into China (*Notification of the Import of the Seventh Category of Solid Waste No. 19/2000*)

# Effectiveness of legislation and its enforcement

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- Relatively long **enforcement chain** – what are the weakest points in the EU?
  - Differences in implementation and interpretation at MS level
  - Particular problems with prosecution: level of penalties and lack of exchange of information among public prosecutors
- Recent **amendments to the WSR and the WEEE Directive** – do these amendments address the weakest points of the enforcement change?
  - Improvement to inspection and enforcement on the ground
  - Willingness of individual MS to implement the amendments is crucial
- Two-fold problem in China:
  - Countering the **informal e-waste recycling** in China
  - Countering **illegal e-waste imports** into China



# Policy recommendations - Enforcement

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- Need for necessary resources - substantial and permanent **budgets** and sufficient **staff**
- Need for more **integrated approach** towards enforcement and **enhanced cooperation** at national and EU level
- Need for more improved quality of inspections and more frequent use of **intelligence-led enforcement**
- Need for further improved and harmonised **prosecution** in the EU

# Policy recommendations – Beyond enforcement

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- Need for more targeted focus on **prevention and reduction of e-waste**
- Need for **improved collection** of e-waste, including enhanced security at collection points
- Need for **improved reuse** of used electrical and electronic equipment
- Need for more **targeted awareness raising** for consumers



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# Thank you for your attention!

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