

Driving Sustainability Through Waste Management Practices and Reverse Logistics in El Salvador

by UNHCR

Case Study

The need

UNHCR recognized the urgent need to improve waste management practices within its operations, not only to reduce environmental impact but also to align with circular economy principles. Beyond recycling, the organization sought to implement reverse logistics—a system for returning used materials and equipment back into the supply chain for reuse, refurbishment, or responsible disposal. This approach supports sustainability goals while enhancing operational efficiency and accountability.



Credit: UNHCR.

The initiative & process

To address this need, UNHCR partnered with a certified local recycling company. The process included:

- A site visit to verify the recycler’s methodology, municipal permits, waste, and reverse logistics handling practices.
- Conducting the first waste collection which resulted in the recycling of:



8 Kg of cardboard



295 Kg of paper



20 Kg of metals



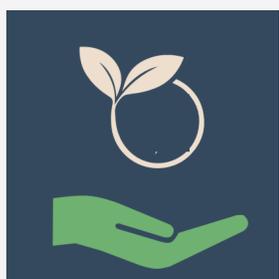
149 Kg of electronic waste

- Establishing a follow-up system where the recycler provides photographic evidence and payment receipts within 15 days.
- Submitting a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for internal approval, with plans to share it with staff.
- Coordinating with the provider to offer future training sessions to raise awareness and build capacity.

The benefits

This initiative has led to:

- 254kg of CO2 emissions & 472kg of waste avoided through responsible recycling.
- Enhanced transparency and accountability in waste handling.
- Increased staff awareness and engagement in sustainability practices.
- A replicable model for other UN agencies, especially as the operation transitions to the UN House.



Circular approach to manage resources



253 Kg of CO2 & 472 Kg avoided

NOTE: This guide was used to estimate the avoided CO2 emissions.

The challenges

Key challenges include:

- Ensuring continuity of the initiative during operational transitions.
- Expanding the model across other UN entities.
- Maintaining consistent staff engagement and training.



Credit: UNHCR.

Collaboration with WREC: A Turning Point

The WREC Coalition was proud to support UNHCR as its initiative gained momentum, following an open dialogue during the Global Info Session on Driving Cost Efficiency & Savings Through Reverse Logistics. Recognizing the potential impact, WREC provided technical advice and hands-on support throughout the planning and implementation phases.

WREC contribution included:

- Step-by-step guidance to identify opportunities, stakeholders, and implementation phases.
- Technical review and refinement of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for local context.
- Facilitating peer exchange with WFP Venezuela to share best practices and lessons learned.

This collaboration transformed an idea into a fully operational waste management and reverse logistics system, proving that sustainability can thrive even in complex humanitarian contexts.

Do you need support too? Reach out to the WREC Coalition (Global.WREC@wfp.org) to explore how we can help embed sustainability in your operations.