

# **Trade-related notifications on Plastics and non-plastic substitutes**

The role of trade measures in the future instrument: key messages for negotiators

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# The distinction between plastic substitutes and plastic alternatives

Plastics substitutes are natural materials that have similar properties to plastics, while plastic alternatives include bioplastics or biodegradable plastics.

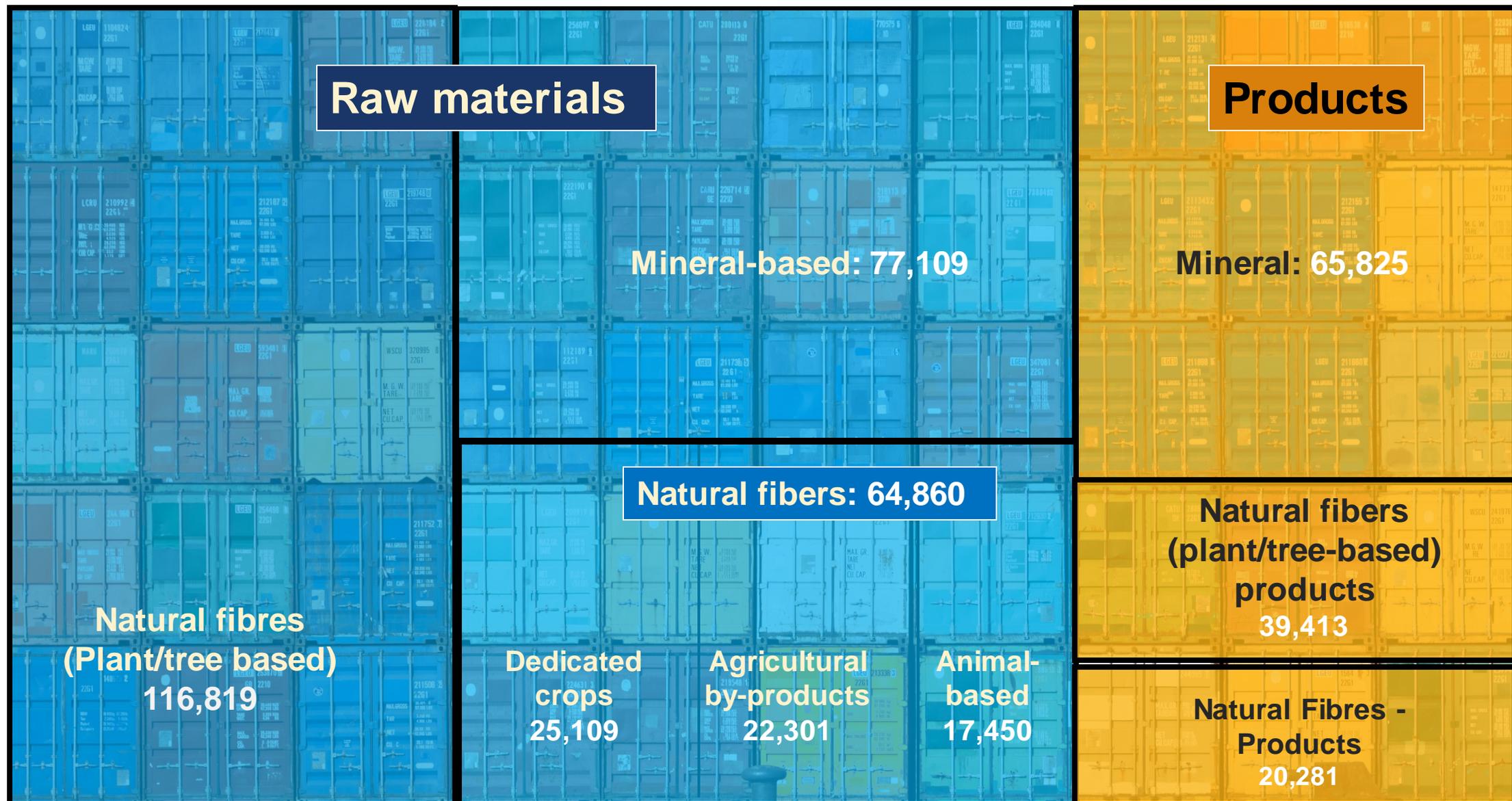
Plastic substitutes	VS	Plastic alternatives
Mineral, plant, marine or animal	ORIGIN	Bioplastics or Biodegradable plastics
Recyclable, reusable, biodegradable, compostable, or erodable	PROPERTIES	Recyclable, biodegradable, or compostable (end of life)
Should have lower environmental impact along their life cycle	IMPACT	Should have lower GHG lifecycle emissions when compared to plastics
Should not be hazardous for human, animal or plant life	SAFETY	Should not be hazardous for human, animal or plant life
<b>Non-plastics</b>		<b>Better plastics</b>

Source: UNCTAD Vivas Eugui & Pacini (2022). UNCTAD, based on presentation on plastic substitutes HS codes, Life-cycle analysis and tariffs considerations. WTO Dialogue on Plastics.



# Trade value of plastics substitutes

Export represented \$388 billion, approximately 2/3 represents exports of raw materials (\$258 billion)



**Raw materials**

**Products**

**Mineral-based: 77,109**

**Mineral: 65,825**

**Natural fibers: 64,860**

**Natural fibres  
(Plant/tree based)  
116,819**

**Natural fibers  
(plant/tree-based)  
products  
39,413**

**Dedicated  
crops  
25,109**

**Agricultural  
by-products  
22,301**

**Animal-  
based  
17,450**

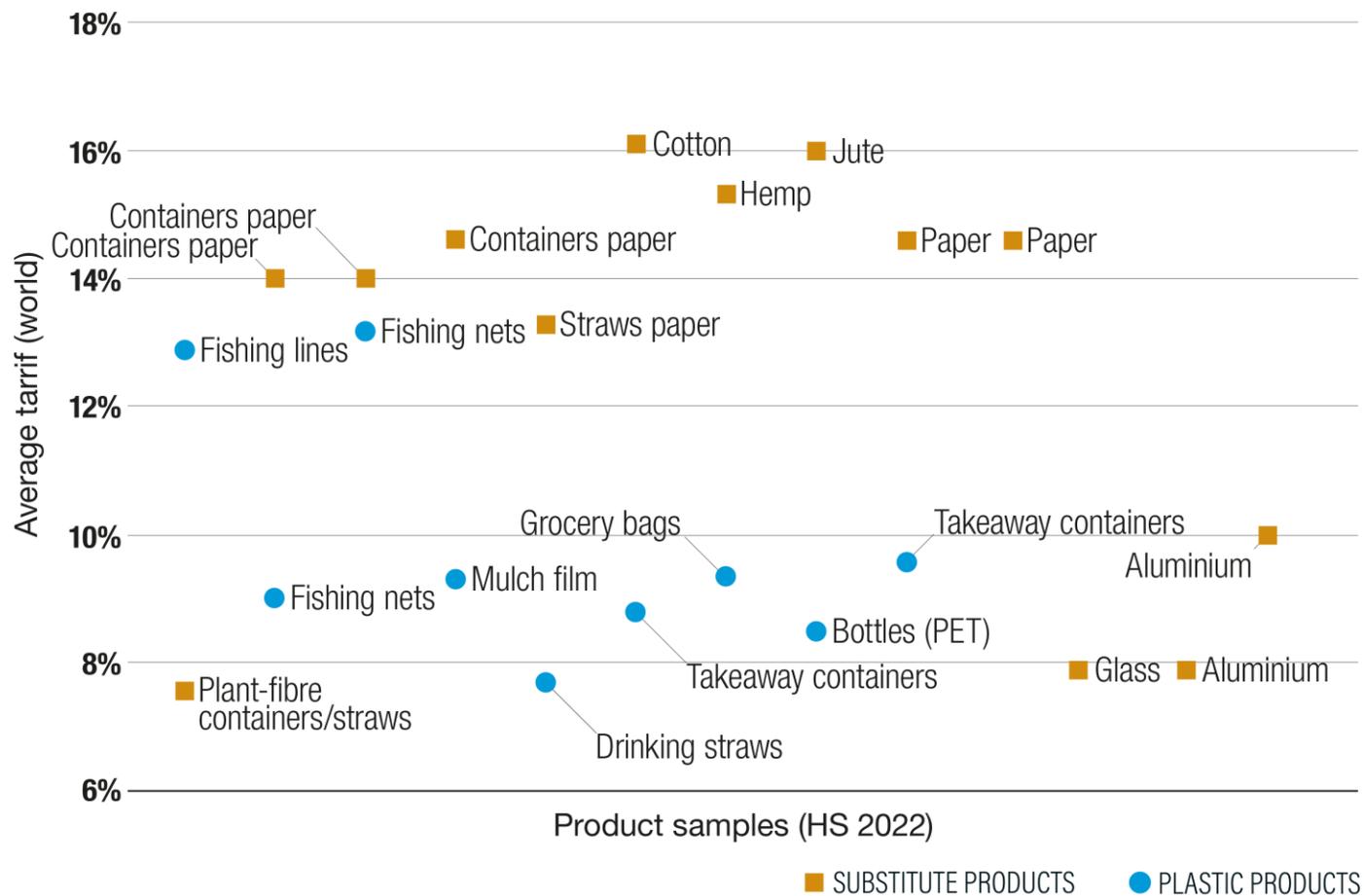
**Natural Fibres -  
Products  
20,281**



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# Average import tariffs on plastic products vs material substitutes

Substitutes often face higher import tariffs than their plastic equivalents.



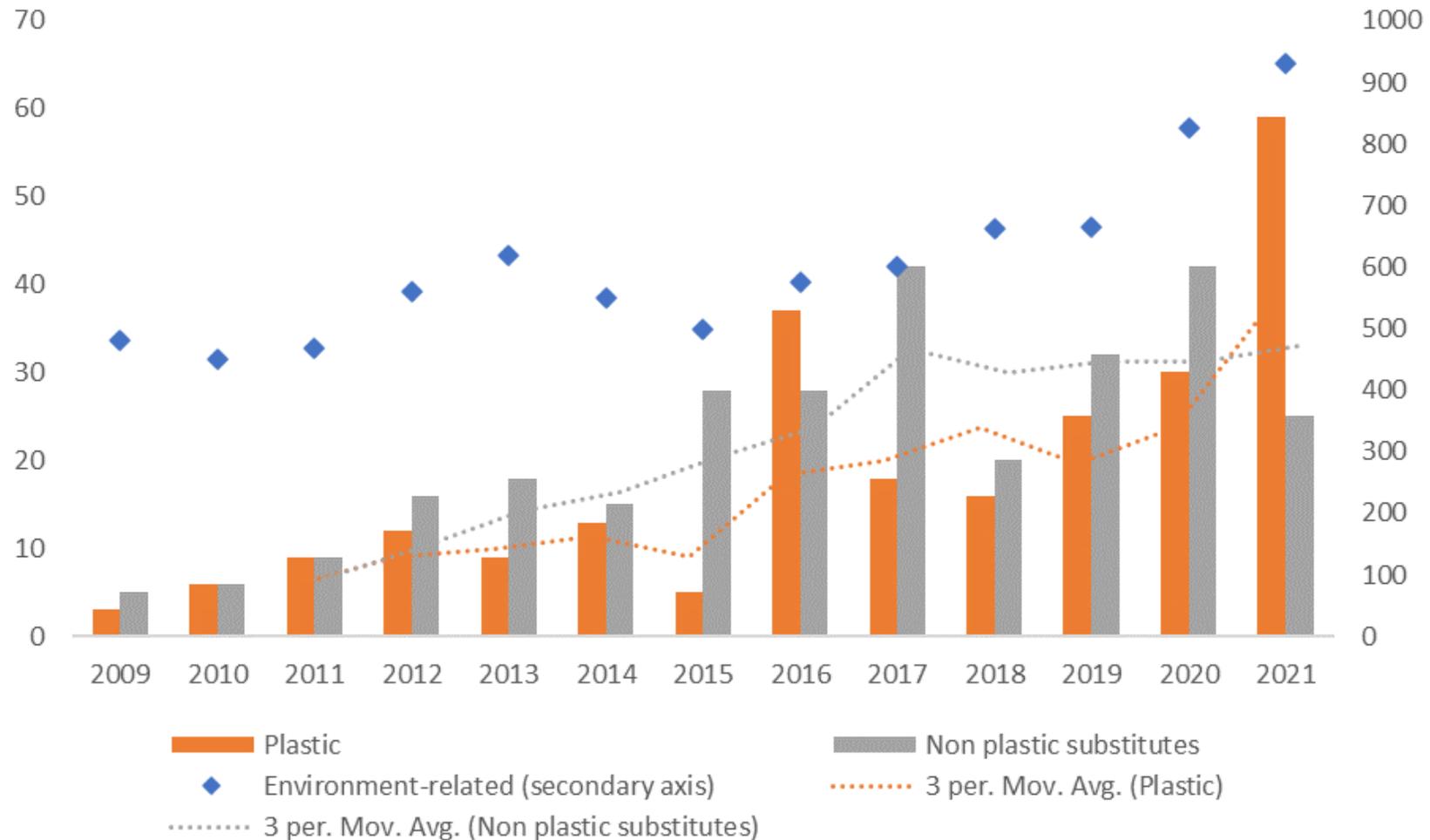
Important to promote more policy coherence in tariff schedules vis-à-vis potential control measures and incentives

Source: UNCTAD, based on OEC data 2020 and HS 2022 codes.

Note: Aluminium, paper, container paper and fishing nets are repeated because of different items represented in different HS codes.

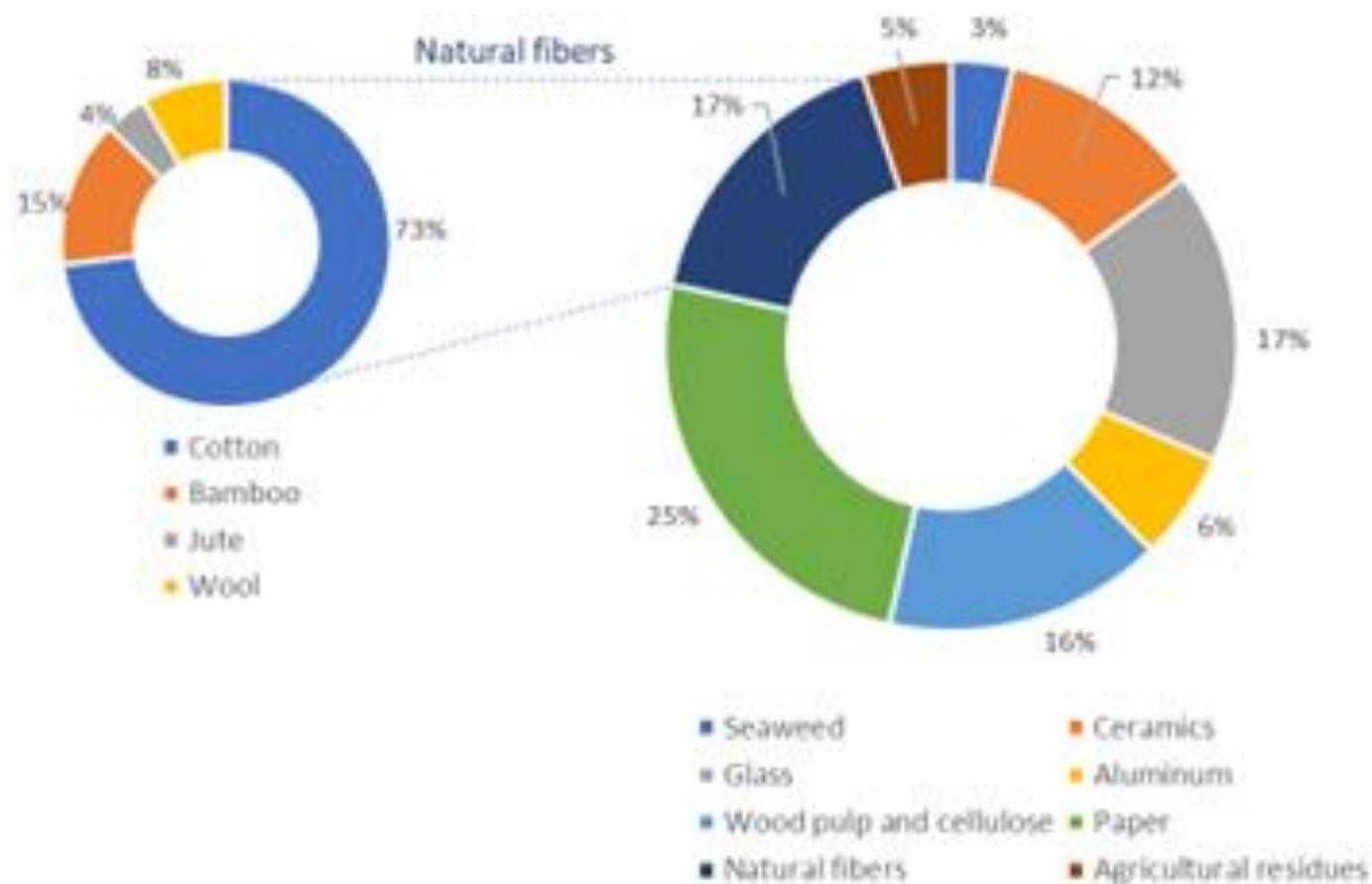


# Trade-related policy measures on non-plastic substitutes, plastic and environment-related (2009-21)



Source: UNCTAD analysis on data WTO Environmental Database 2023

## Trade-related policy measures on non-plastic substitutes, by commodity/type of material (2009-21)



**Source:** UNCTAD analysis on data WTO Environmental Database 2023

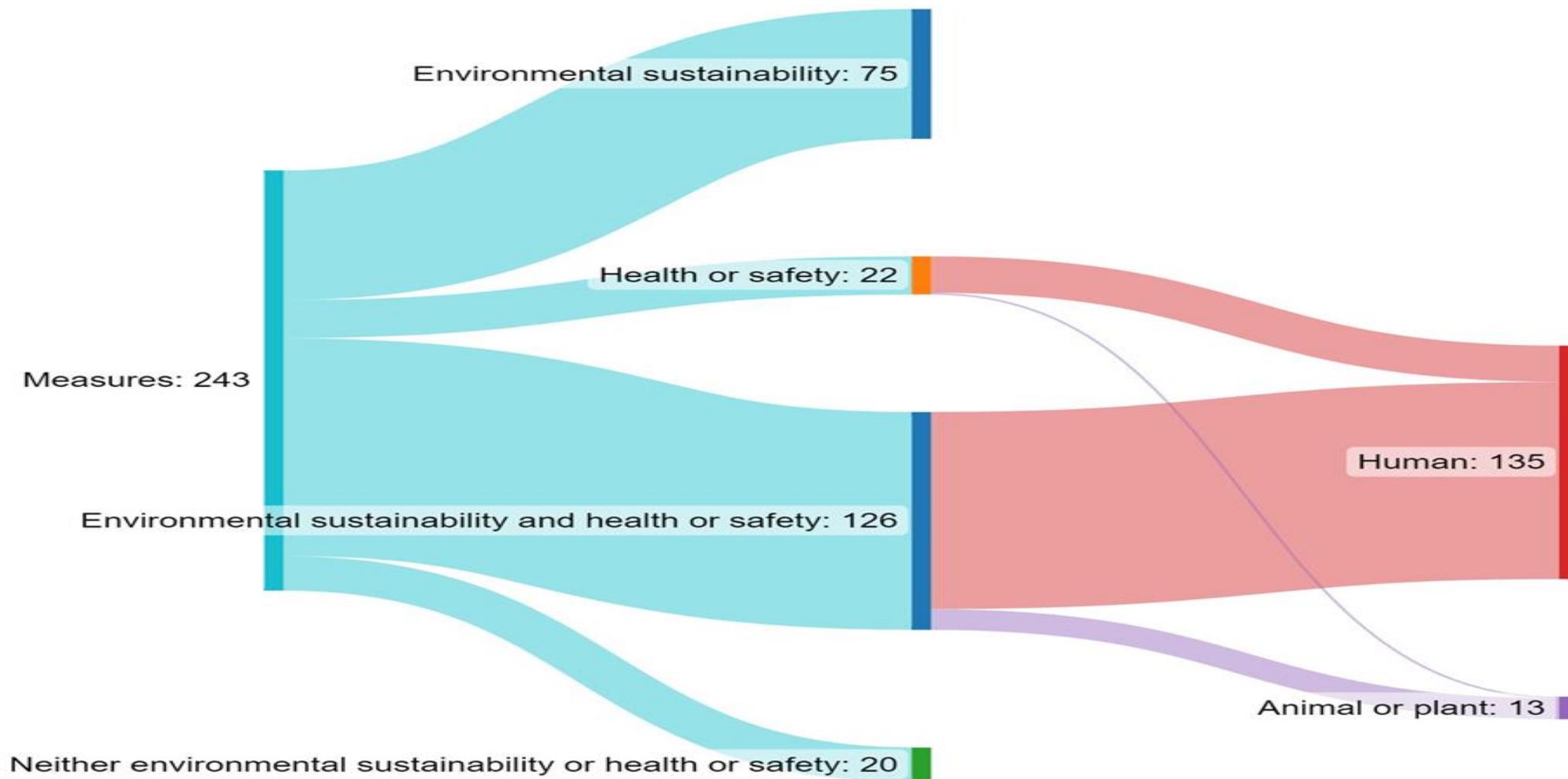
**Note:** Notifications cover in some instances more than one material substitute and may be double counted

## Harmonized types of measures on non-plastic substitutes, by development status of notifying member (2009-21)

Type of measures	Developed	Developing	LDCs	Total	Developed	Developing	LDCs	Total
<b>Environmental requirements / command-and-control</b>								
Technical regulation or specifications	32	78	30	140	43%	60%	77%	58%
Conformity assessment procedures		16	9	25	0%	12%	23%	10%
Import licences	7	11		18	9%	8%	0%	7%
Ban/Prohibition	5	8		13	7%	6%	0%	5%
Export licences	5	3		8	7%	2%	0%	3%
Risk assessment	1	2		3	1%	2%	0%	1%
Regulation affecting movement or transit	2	1		3	3%	1%	0%	1%
Other environmental requirements		1		1	0%	1%	0%	0%
<b>Price and market based measures</b>					<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Countervailing measure / investigation	5			5	7%	0%	0%	2%
Safeguard measure / investigation		3		3	0%	2%	0%	1%
Import quotas	1	1		2	1%	1%	0%	1%
Export quotas		1		1	0%	1%	0%	0%
<b>Support measures</b>					<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Tax concessions	7	3		10	9%	2%	0%	4%
Grants and direct payments	8	1		9	11%	1%	0%	4%
Non-monetary support		1		1	0%	1%	0%	0%
Loans and financing	1			1	1%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: UNCTAD analysis on data WTO Environmental Database 2023

# Objectives of non-plastic substitute measures notified to WTO (2009-21)



Source: UNCTAD analysis on data WTO Environmental Database 2023

# Some key messages

- Non-plastic substitutes are one of the several responses to plastic pollution (about 17% of plastic pollution may be addressed by substitution, (Pew 2019))
- Non-plastic substitutes have the capacity to supply markets once (conventional) plastics production and trade is reduced
  - Substitutes today are equivalent to 1/3 of global plastics trade.
- Both plastic and non-plastic materials and by-products are incrementally being regulated in trade by Members:
  - for plastic a 28% annual growth in WTO notifications
  - For non-plastic substitutes a 13% annual growth in WTO notifications
- **Paper, wood pulp, natural fibers and ceramics** are the most regulated plastic products
- Most regulations applicable to non-plastic substitutes are of a **technical nature** and developing countries are now regulating non-plastic substitutes more than developed ones
- Regulations tend to focus on **human health and environmental sustainability** more than any other criteria for non-plastic substitutes

# Thank you Merci

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