



BOOSTING RECYCLING

THROUGH AMBITION AND STANDARDISATION

The amount of waste generated per person in the EU amounted to 481 kg in 2013. The share of this waste that is recycled or composted has steadily increased from 18% in 1995 to 43% by 2013 [1]. This would not have been possible without legally-binding targets.

Recycling remains only the third-best option in the waste treatment hierarchy – preventing waste and preparing it to reuse are paramount, and should be the focus of a circular economy. However, the benefits of recycling compared to

disposing and extracting new virgin resources for products are huge. They include reducing impacts on human health and environment and providing more job opportunities. Grasping this full potential requires recycled material to be of highest quality to be re-injected in the economy.

Boosting recycling relies on setting ambitious targets, and making sure countries across the EU consistently use the right methodology to record recycling rates.

WHAT IS THE SITUATION?

The EU's 43% recycling rate in 2013 hides a more complex picture: recycling rates vary widely between Member States. In some countries the rate is over 60%, while it stands at less than 20% in others [2]. According to the existing 2008 Waste Framework Directive, all countries must achieve at least a 50% recycling rate for Municipal Solid Waste by 2020. However, this figure is also currently undermined by national governments being able to pick and choose between four different calculation methodologies.

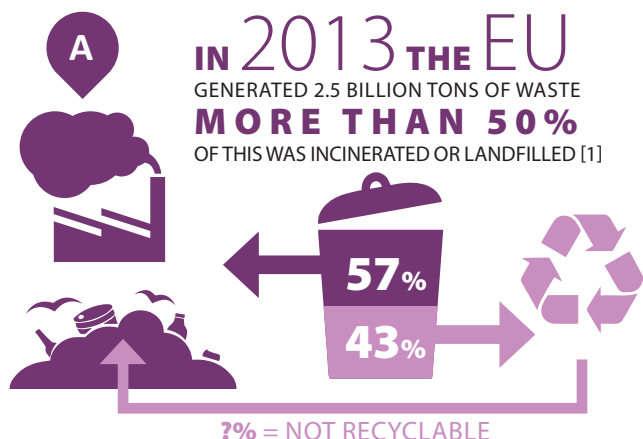
For example, some Member States report recycling rates based on only plastic, paper, metal and glass – and only for household waste. More comprehensive calculations, based on all waste across whole municipalities such as those conducted by Eurostat show these to

be artificially high. For example, the 43% recycling rate claimed by Lithuania is twice as high as the rate calculated by the more thorough Eurostat methodology [3].

Crucial also is the level of ambition of the targets. All reports, including the European Commission's own impact assessment [4], show that the higher the target, the better the outcomes for our economy, job creation and mitigating climate change.

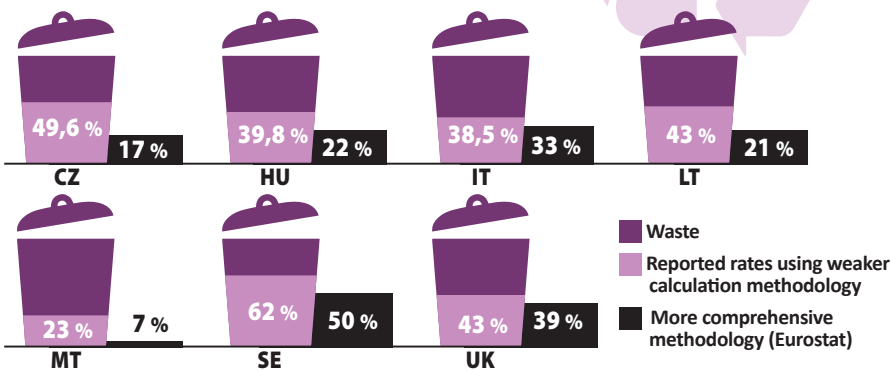
All things considered, there is a need for setting ambitious recycling targets, associated with quality standards and based on a consistent, comprehensive methodology such as the one performed by Eurostat.

FACTS AND FIGURES

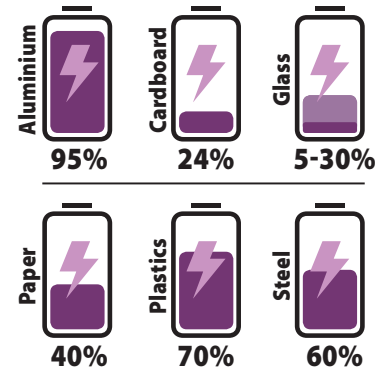


C THE EFFECT OF USING DIFFERENT METHODOLOGIES FOR RECYCLING RATE REPORTING

Countries can artificially boost their recycling rates using weak methodologies [6]



D Recycling materials saves huge amounts of energy compared to extracting virgin resources [7]



CASE STUDIES

It is possible to boost very low recycling rates to ambitious levels above the EU average in a decade.

In under ten years Ljubljana has become a frontrunner in recycling, sitting at 20% above the overall EU recycling rate and 10% above the bloc's 2020 targets [8]. In 2004 it had no proper separate collection in place, and its waste management operator SNAGA is now committed to halving the amount of residuals and increasing separate collection to 78% by 2025. On average 61% of waste is separated at source, while only 121kg of non-recyclable waste is generated per inhabitant per year. EU-wide averages are 42% and 285kg respectively. All this would have been impossible without ambitious targets.

Measurements matter – France monitors real recycling.

True recycling means what is actually recycled and re-injected into the economy, without any residues. At the moment, EU Member States only have to report what is sent to recycling, instead of what comes out of it. Some Member States even report what is collected and sent to sorting plants, even if a proportion of this is removed at the sorting stage and sent to landfill or incinerated.

The difference between these ways of measuring recycling is large. In France, which monitors the difference between waste collected and waste that is fed into the recycling process, it was found that a third of the waste was lost during the sorting process in 2012. France also monitors what is actually recycled and re-injected in the economy – without the residues from the recycling process [9].



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain high recycling targets for all, making sure the EU and more advanced Member States effectively support the less advanced ones. The higher the level of ambition, the higher the economic and environmental benefits across the board
- Define a unique harmonised calculation and reporting method at EU level to ensure proper monitoring and comparability between Member States
- Ensure this methodology means a true representation of what recycling is – with the goal of cutting waste. For example, the residues of sorting plants which are sent to landfill and incineration should not be counted. Instead what should be measured is the output of recycling processes – the truly recycled material that is re-injected into the economy
- Define European quality standards for what can be accounted as legal recycling achievement as close as possible to virgin materials
- Recycling must take place in installations certified to operate according to best available technologies (BREFs standards) defined at EU level, including recycling operations performed outside Europe
- Account for the environmental benefits of recycling, particularly CO₂ savings in the EU Emissions Trading System
- Consider economic incentives and tax rebates for products that integrate recycled content – particularly high-quality recycled plastics

FOR MORE INFORMATION

European Commission - <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/>
 ACR+ <http://www.acrplus.org/index.php/en/>
 Friends of the Earth Europe - <https://www.foeeurope.org/materials-and-waste>

