

Mixed waste sorting is key to meeting the EU's Circular Economy Objectives

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Reloop and Zero Waste Europe have published today a new study by Eunomia Research and Consulting which shows that applying sorting systems to mixed waste (MWS) prior to thermal treatment and landfilling can significantly support Europe's climate objectives and contribute to achieving ambitious plastics and municipal waste recycling targets.

The most important contribution from MWS would be the reduction in GHG emissions associated with waste, as it is an effective method for ensuring that energy-intensive materials are not lost to landfill and energy recovery, but can be recycled and displace the need for virgin materials.

The report Mixed Waste Sorting to meet the EU's Circular Economy Objectives studied whether, and to what extent, the EU recycling targets can be met through improved recyclability of packaging and increased separate collections of municipal waste—and, if not, what measures could be taken to achieve them.

The study, which has examined the role MWS could play in three EU countries with high recycling performance - Germany, Belgium, and Sweden - concluded that, in addition to separate collection and improved recyclability of plastic packaging, a full roll-out of effective MWS is likely to be necessary to ensure that recycling targets are consistently met and to ensure progress towards the EU's wider carbon emissions reduction goals.

MWS could save between 10.2 and 23.2 MtCO₂e/annum, depending on the success of separate collection improvements. This would mean savings of up to 21% on the total 2020 EU waste sector emissions. This increases to saving 28 MtCO₂e/annum, equivalent to 25% of EU waste sector emissions, if more ambitious MWS with greater sorting efficiencies is rolled out.

The introduction of mandatory MWS would also help to ensure that plastic and paper packaging recycling targets for 2030 will be consistently met, and contribute between 2.9 and 8.2 percentage points to the municipal waste recycling targets (depending on the level of ambition in MWS and the success of separate collection improvements)

In the three countries examined, the addition of mixed waste sorting prior to thermal treatment and landfilling is projected to raise recycling rates in 2030 from 50% to 62% in Germany; from 53% to 65% in Belgium; and from ~44% to ~58% in Sweden.

According to Janek Vähk, ZWE's Climate, Energy, and Air Pollution Programme Coordinator: *"It's clear that MSW is an essential solution to achieve climate targets. In*

addition to separate collection, its complementary role needs to be recognised by EU policies.”

Clarissa Morawski, CEO, Reloop said: *“Only when all member states introduce measures to effectively sort recyclables from mixed waste prior to thermal treatment and landfilling across the EU, will there be any degree of confidence that plastic and paper packaging recycling targets will be consistently met and circularity of resources maximized.”*

Andy Grant, Technical Director at Eunomia Research & Consulting said: *“The EU is already leading the way on the circular economy transition and the addition of mixed waste sorting systems alongside separate collection systems and improved packaging recyclability will continue to support this by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving recycling rates.”*

In the context of the ongoing revision of key EU policies -Waste Framework Directive (WFD), Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) and Renewable Energy Directive (RED), as well as upcoming revisions to the EU-ETS, ZWE and Reloop suggest the following actions to enable a quick transition towards greater circularity:

- Either through the IED or the WFD (or both), mandate the use of mixed waste sorting systems of a defined quality to remove recyclable materials prior to incineration;
- Define ‘treatment of waste prior to landfilling’ in the Landfill Directive to require sorting of mixed waste with sorting defined through the process set out in the WFD;
- Require that in the case of use of mixed wastes for renewable energy generation, the operators are required to apply mixed waste sorting systems which meet relevant performance criteria, aimed at removing materials so that the non-renewable share of energy generated from mixed waste is minimised;
- Remove the R1 formula in Annex II of the WFD so that municipal waste incineration is no longer able to be classified as ‘recovery’;
- Include incineration facilities within the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) by 2028 as a means to encourage progress in the quality of sorting systems for removing plastics from the mixed waste remaining after separate collection.
- Ban incineration and disposal of recyclable /reusable materials through the revision of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWR) of the WFD (or both).

ENDS

How I can learn more (for press only)



Reloop and Zero Waste Europe invite you to join the conference *Mixed Waste Sorting: The next frontier for managing residual waste for maximum circularity* aiming to bring together regional

and national governments, MWS operators, recyclers, experts, and technology providers from countries across Europe to offer their expertise on the introduction of MSW as an additional tool for the recovery and re-circulation of Europe's valuable resources. The conference will take place on **21 March, 2023 in Brussels from 9 AM to 4:30 PM.**

Please register [here](#).

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Who is Reloop

Reloop is an international non-profit organisation that works at the centre of policy-making with governments, industry stakeholders, and NGOs. Our vision and mission are ambitious and focused on building a world free of waste, where our natural resources remain resources. Reloop's policy positions and recommendations are always based on data-driven research, real-world case studies and experience, best-in-class principles, and the collective expertise of our team. For more information, please visit: www.reloopplatform.org

Who is Zero Waste Europe

Zero Waste Europe is the European network of communities, local leaders, businesses, experts, and change agents working towards the same vision: phasing out waste from our society. We empower communities to redesign their relationship with resources, to adopt smarter lifestyles and sustainable consumption patterns, and to think circular. For more information, please visit: <https://zerowasteurope.eu/>

Who is Eunomia

Eunomia is a leading international consultancy on data-driven circular economy, natural economy and carbon economy policy, programs and systems. We are appointed advisors to many types of private, public and third sector organisations. For more information about Eunomia, please visit: www.eunomia.co.uk