



Brussels, 8.6.2023
SWD(2023) 200 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The early warning report for Sweden

Accompanying the document

Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions

identifying Member States at risk of not meeting the 2025 preparing for re-use and recycling target for municipal waste, the 2025 recycling target for packaging waste and the 2035 municipal waste landfilling reduction target

{COM(2023) 304 final} - {SWD(2023) 175 final} - {SWD(2023) 176 final} -
{SWD(2023) 180 final} - {SWD(2023) 181 final} - {SWD(2023) 182 final} -
{SWD(2023) 183 final} - {SWD(2023) 184 final} - {SWD(2023) 185 final} -
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1. Introduction

The early warning report aims to assist Member States at risk of failing to meet: (i) the 2025 target of 55% for the preparing for re-use and the recycling of their municipal waste (this target is set out in Article 11(2)(c) of Directive 2008/98/EC); and (ii) the 2025 target of 65% for the recycling of their packaging waste (this target is set out in Article 6(1)(f) of Directive 1994/62/EC). It also provides an update on how Member States are performing against the 2035 target to send no more than 10% of their municipal waste to landfill (this target is set out in Article 5(5) Directive 1999/31/EC).

This report builds on previous support provided by the Commission to help Member States comply with EU law on municipal waste management, including, where relevant, the early warning report from 2018.

The assessment underpinning the early warning report identified 18 Member States at risk of missing the 2025 preparing for re-use and recycling target for municipal waste, 10 of which are also at risk of missing the 2025 recycling target for all packaging waste.

This assessment is based on a collaborative and transparent process involving the Member States concerned, the European Environment Agency¹, and an in-depth analysis of the most recent policy developments in the Member States. This process also involved extensive consultation with the Member State authorities in charge of waste management. The possible actions identified during this process are based on existing best practices and aim to help Member States meet the 2025 targets, and as such they focus on policy measures which can be taken in the short term. These actions should be seen as complementary to those recommended in the roadmaps which were drawn up as part of preceding compliance-promotion activities and to those recommended in the Environmental Implementation Review².

2. Key findings

Based on the analysis of existing and firmly planned policies in the area of waste management, Sweden is considered to be at risk of missing the 2025 target of 55% for the preparing for re-use and the recycling of its municipal waste.

The recycling rate for municipal waste reported by Sweden was relatively stable between 2015 and 2019, although it fell slightly from its 2016 peak of 48.4% to 46.6 % in 2019. In the same period, the incineration rate increased, reaching 53% in 2019. Since 2020, Sweden has applied the new calculation rules for municipal waste recycling³, which made the rate drop to 38.3%. This means that Sweden's recycling rate for municipal waste is 16.7 percentage points below the 2025 target of 55%.

Although hardly any municipal waste is directed to landfills (the landfill rate was less than 1% in 2020), most of it is directed to incineration plants, showing a strong reliance on this treatment. The rate of waste incineration, which increased to about 60% in 2020, is over twice the EU average of 27%.

For packaging waste, Sweden reported a recycling rate of 63.6% in 2019. However, the packaging recycling rates might be lowered by the application of the new calculation rules⁴; in 2020 the recycling rate for all packaging waste decreased to 60.9%, 4.1 percentage points below the 2025 recycling target for packaging

¹ EEA and ETC/CE (2022). Early Warning Assessment Related to the 2025 Targets for Municipal and Packaging Waste (<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/country-profiles-early-warning-assessments>)

² European Commission (2022). Environmental Implementation Review 2022. COM/2022/438 final. (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=comnat%3ACOM_2022_0438_FIN).

³ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/1004.

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/665.

waste of 65%. For 2020, all reported recycling rates for specific packaging materials reached or exceeded the respective targets to be achieved by 2025, with the exception of plastic and wooden packaging.

Low recycling rates are mainly due to:

- low capture rates of paper, cardboard, plastic and biowaste in the separate collection system, and, generally, low density of the ‘bring point’ system for waste collection;
- lack of support mechanisms to ensure the separate collection of municipal waste fractions from businesses;
- the fact that waste incineration remains the predominant form of waste treatment in Sweden.

3. Key recommendations

Among the measures deemed necessary to support Sweden’s efforts to improve its performance in waste management, three main recommendations are listed below.

1. Support preparing for re-use of municipal waste and re-use systems for packaging.
2. Develop waste treatment infrastructure associated with the higher steps of the waste hierarchy to reduce reliance on incineration, including for the recycling of plastic packaging.
3. Improve separate collection services for waste fractions separated at source – in particular packaging and biowaste – to ensure high capture rates across the country.
4. Introduce support mechanisms to ensure the separate collection of recyclable municipal waste from businesses.

The table below lists some possible actions to support Sweden’s efforts to improve its performance in waste management.

4. Good practices

The following measures implemented by Sweden are considered good practices that help to improve its recycling performance.

- Landfilling bans for certain waste types – The Swedish ban on landfilling⁵ of combustible waste (introduced in 2002) and organic waste (introduced in 2005) has led to a low landfill rate, with less than 1% of municipal waste landfilled in 2021.
- Co-funding programmes for biogas plants – According to the Swedish government⁶, many biogas plants based on anaerobic digestion have been built with the support of co-funding programmes between municipalities and the private sector. These programmes lead to: (i) greater collection of food waste from businesses and households, thus providing feedstock to the digesters; and (ii) the construction of treatment facilities close to the system for collecting food waste. Biogas is used as fuel in local transport and waste collection vehicles.
- Local incentives for waste prevention – The municipality of Gothenburg introduced specific measures for reducing waste generation within the municipality’s own activities. One measure includes a target to reduce the waste generation per a full-time employee by 40% between 2020 and 2030, while others target the prevention of specific waste types such as food waste, electronic waste and single-use products⁷. This has resulted both in less waste and in lower costs for the municipality itself and for households. The measures have been carried out in cooperation with staff working within retirement homes, schools, pre-schools, offices, public-meal establishments, and apartment buildings. The work

⁵ [Förordning \(2001:512\) om deponering av avfall.](#)

⁶ [Local investments supported by the Swedish EPA.](#)

⁷ [Waste Management Plan of Gothenburg Municipality.](#)

has been successful and has inspired other municipalities to implement the same model as the one developed in Gothenburg.

OVERVIEW OF POSSIBLE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE RECYCLING PERFORMANCE

Governance

- 1) Introduce support mechanisms (such as municipal guidance for companies) to ensure the separate collection of recyclable municipal solid waste from businesses in order to increase the capture rates of fractions separated at source.
- 2) In order to achieve both high capture rates and high quality in collected waste, set mandatory objectives or indicators for separate waste collection for municipalities or other bodies (e.g. private waste operators in charge of the separate collection). This could be complemented by economic or other incentive mechanisms which would reward or penalise bodies according to their performance. Information on the performance of the local collection system could also be made available to the general public to raise awareness (e.g. on a website).

Prevention

- 3) Take measures to increase re-use and to prevent the generation of non-recyclable municipal waste.

Separate collection

- 4) Increase the capture rates of separately collected municipal waste by fully implementing high-convenience door-to-door collection for recyclable waste types. Consider swifter implementation of the legislation on mandatory separate collection of biowaste.

Waste treatment

- 5) Support preparing for re-use of municipal waste and develop waste treatment infrastructure that focuses on the higher steps of the waste hierarchy to reduce reliance on incineration, including for the recycling of plastic packaging.

Communication and awareness-raising

- 6) Maintain and strengthen awareness-raising activities specifically tailored to different target groups (e.g. households, commercial waste generators, rural and urban areas, teachers, and pupils) to increase participation in separate collection, and in particular when rolling out new separate collection services.

Extended producer responsibility and economic instruments

- 7) Use economic instruments to incentivise waste management associated with the higher steps of the waste hierarchy. This will help to make reuse, preparation for reuse and recycling economically attractive and reduce dependency on landfilling. The economic incentive should be designed and sufficiently large to be effective and steer waste management up the waste hierarchy.
- 8) Stepping up efforts to establish reuse systems for packaging will bring environmental benefits and help Member States in complying with the EU packaging recycling targets.