



Greater resource efficiency, more jobs, fewer emissions

Good waste management by individuals, households, businesses and local authorities is helping the EU become a more resource-efficient recycling society. It also saves money. Reducing food waste, for example, could save EU households up to €500 a year. Recycling provides EU industry with valuable secondary raw materials, cutting down on the amount of material needed from the natural environment. It also presents an economic opportunity – an entire sector has been created to deal with the recycling of waste and new markets have been developed to buy and sell it. Around half a million jobs could be created in Europe if Member States recycled 70% of their waste. Improving the way waste is managed also reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Recent estimates show that across all waste streams, the reduction in CO₂ emissions could amount to between 146 and 244 megatonnes – 19-31% of the European climate reduction targets by 2020.

Without additional waste prevention policies, waste generation is expected to increase by 7% from 2008 to 2020. It is essential therefore to maximise the opportunities of good waste management. Better implementation and enforcement of waste legislation is essential, including the requirements of the new Waste Framework Directive, particularly on waste prevention. Full implementation of existing legislation would increase recycling of municipal waste from 38% in 2008 to almost 50% in 2020, while landfilling would be reduced from 40% to 30%. Compliance with EU targets on collection, recycling and landfill diversion will remain a priority and some Member States will have to make serious efforts to meet these targets. More efforts are also needed to ensure an integrated approach to waste and material management, for example by ensuring the recyclability of all products placed on the EU market.

For more details on the report on the thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste, visit <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/strategy.htm>



Moving towards a recycling society

Since 2005, the EU has made good progress towards becoming a resource-efficient 'recycling society'. That's the goal it set itself in the 2005 thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste. The latest report on the strategy reveals that overall recycling rates have improved, the amount of waste going to landfill has decreased and the use of hazardous substances, notably in electrical and electronic waste, has been reduced. A significant number of sub-standard landfill sites and incinerators have been closed or upgraded to meet European standards. Current waste policies are leading to lower environmental impacts per tonne of waste treated. However, the amount of waste we are producing is still rising, albeit at a lower rate than economic growth. As the world's population is set to grow, pressures on natural resources will increase together with global extraction of resources. This means that to meet this future demand, ambitious new policies will be needed to promote sustainable consumption and production and encourage waste prevention and recycling.



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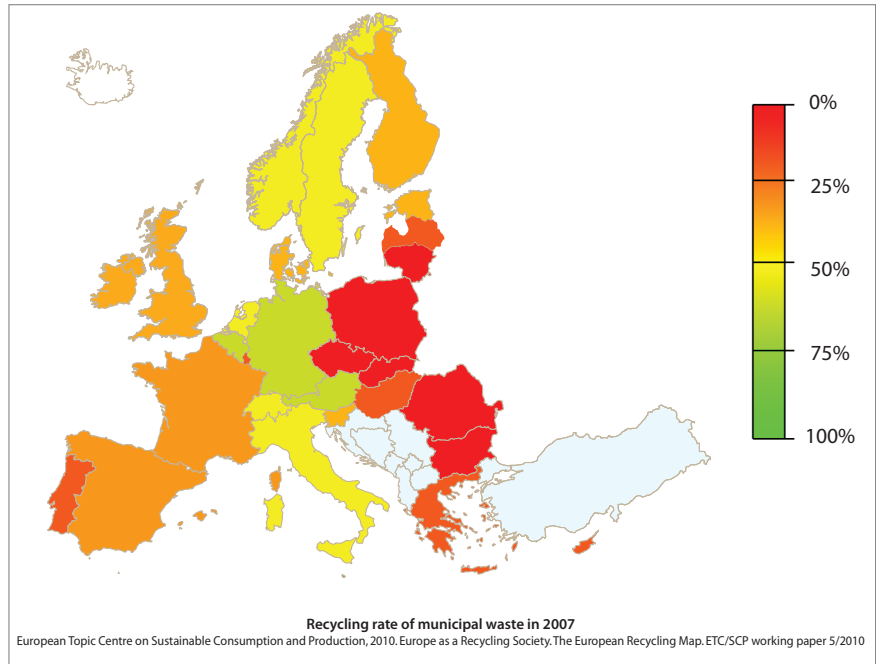


One of the main aims of EU waste policy is to prevent waste from being produced in the first place. EU citizens produce 524kg of municipal waste each every year – less than US citizens (750kg) but more than the Japanese (400kg). About two thirds of the waste generated in the EU is mineral waste. The rest comes from manufacturing (12%), households (7%) and other activities. Hazardous waste accounts for around 3% of total waste generated.

Encouraging trends but large differences between Member States

Between 1998 and 2008 recycling and composting of municipal waste increased from 19% to 38% and the amount of waste sent to landfill sites decreased from more than 50% to 40%. Despite the positive overall trend, there are significant differences in how Member States manage all their different waste streams. Recycling varies from a few percent in some EU countries up to 70% in others and while landfilling has virtually disappeared in a small number of Member States, others still landfill more than 90% of their waste.

The best performing Member States have proved that it is possible to achieve much more than the minimum European collection and recycling targets. They have introduced a combination of economic and legal measures, including banning the landfilling of certain waste streams, introducing taxes and charging schemes favouring recycling and applying the producer responsibility principle. This makes manufacturers responsible for their products throughout the product's life-cycle, including when it becomes waste.

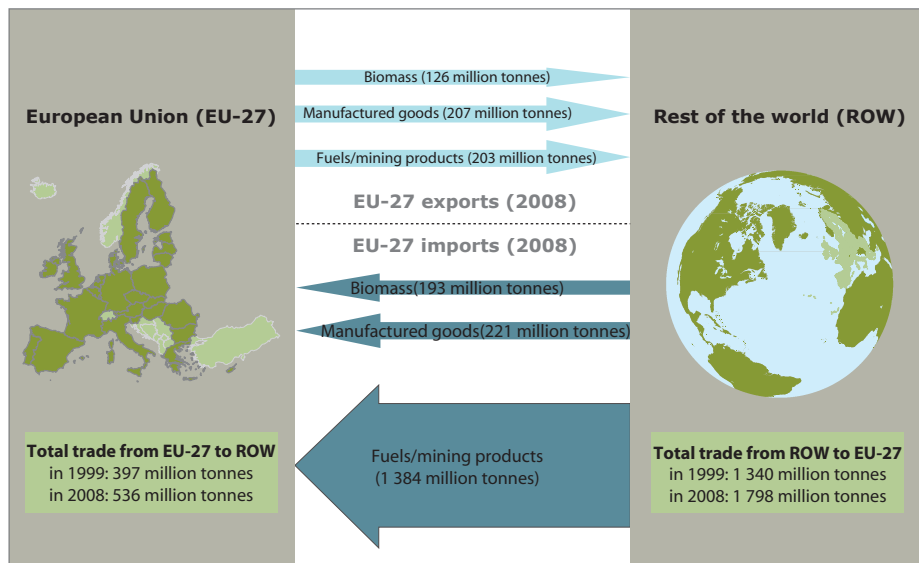


A modern approach to waste management

Since the adoption of the strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste in 2005, huge progress has been made in simplifying, modernising and ensuring full implementation of waste legislation. This includes the revision of the Waste Framework Directive, the corner stone of EU waste legislation. The new Directive introduces a binding five-step waste hierarchy where prevention is the preferred option followed by re-use, recycling and other forms of recovery, with disposal such as landfill used only as the last resort. EU policy aims to move waste management up the waste hierarchy taking into account the environmental impacts over the entire life cycle. This gives a broader view, ensuring any action has an overall benefit compared to other actions. EU legislation sets binding targets for Member States on the recovery and recycling/re-use of municipal waste, batteries, electrical and electronic waste, construction and demolition waste, end-of-life vehicles and packaging.

Increasing globalisation

The number of consumer goods and industrial supplies imported into Europe has increased significantly in recent years. In 2008, the EU imported six times more materials than it exported. This means that the negative environmental impacts of our consumption are felt in other parts of the world, where the materials and products we use are produced. At the same time, exports of waste which can be turned into valuable secondary raw materials and would reduce our raw material demand have also increased. Between 1997 and 2005 waste exports from Member States increased four-fold, in particular to Asia. This shows the growing importance of developing actions and instruments able to capture this international dimension.



The European Environment. State and Outlook 2010. Synthesis. European Environment Agency, 2010, Copenhagen.