European Commission - Press release

Circular economy: Commission takes action to reduce waste from single-use plastics

Brussels, 29 September 2022

The Commission is today taking legal steps against 11 Member States, calling on them to step up the implementation of the Single-Use Plastics Directive in order to reduce the impact of certain plastic products on the environment and on human health. Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, France, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Finland - have not communicated to the Commission the measures necessary to ensure the full transposition of the Directive.

Single-use plastic products are accumulating in our seas, oceans and on our beaches. They are more likely to end up in our seas than reusable options because they are used only once, or for a short period of time, before being thrown away. While plastics are a convenient, useful and valuable material, littered plastics cause environmental damage and negatively impact our economy. More than 80% of marine litter items are plastics, causing damage to the environment, in particular direct harm to marine life and birds, and when dissolved to microplastics can also enter the human food chain. Negative impact of the littered plastics on the economy is seen in sectors such as tourism, fisheries and shipping.

Under the European Green Deal, the Commission has proposed policies and actions towards a circular economy, where plastics are used in a more sustainable way, re-used and recycled, diminishing waste and pollution, and reducing cleaning costs. The Single-Use Plastics Directive is an essential element of the Commission’s Plastics Strategy and the Circular Economy Action Plan as it stimulates the production and use of sustainable alternatives that avoid marine litter. The Directive also contributes to the zero-pollution ambition for the EU benefiting public health, the environment and climate neutrality. It aims at reducing plastic litter at sea by at least 50% by 2030.

Enforcing the Single-Use Plastics Directive

The Directive entered into force on 3 July 2019 and Member States had two years to transpose the legislation into national law, so that the obligations under the Directive start being implemented on the ground. However, not all Member States transposed the Directive by the set deadline.

If a Member State fails to introduce measures that would fully incorporate into national law the provisions of an EU directive by its transposition deadline, citizens cannot reap the benefits and rights stemming from it.

In January 2022, the Commission launched infringement procedures and sent, as a first step, letters of formal notice to 16 Member States that had not yet fully transposed the Single-Use Plastics Directive in national law. Out of these 16 cases, one case (Spain) has been closed during the July infringements package, and four other cases are being closed today (Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovakia) because the necessary measures have been taken. Two cases are pending the analysis of measures transmitted (Czechia and Malta). However, complete transposition measures are still missing for Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Finland and the Commission therefore decided to issue reasoned opinions to those countries. The Member States concerned have now two months to respond and take the necessary measures. Otherwise, the Commission may decide to refer the cases to the Court of Justice of the European Union with a proposal to impose financial sanctions.

In addition, Denmark and France had initially indicated that their transposition was complete, but after analysis, the Commission found that some provisions were missing. The Commission has therefore also decided to send letters of formal notice to those two Member States. Denmark and France now have two months to reply and remedy the situation, otherwise the Commission may decide to issue a reasoned opinion.

Background

Today’s enforcement action by the Commission aims to protect citizens and the environment from plastic pollution whilst fostering growth and innovation. It supports the transition to a more
sustainable and circular economy, and helps place Europe's businesses and consumers ahead as a world leader in producing and using sustainable alternatives that avoid marine litter and oceans pollution, tackling a problem with global implications.

**Key measures** that Member States must take under the Single-Use Plastics Directive are to:

- **Prevent single-use plastic products from being placed on the market when sustainable alternatives are easily available and affordable.** This applies to the ten single-use plastic waste items most often found on Europe's beaches: cotton bud sticks, cutlery, plates, straws and stirrers, balloons and sticks for balloons, food containers, cups for beverages, beverage containers, cigarette butts, plastic bags, packets and wrappers, wet wipes and sanitary items. Together with fishing gear, they account for 70% of all marine litter in the EU.

- **Reduce the consumption of food containers**, as well as cups for beverages and promote re-usable alternatives.

- Establish **Extended Producer Responsibility Schemes** for single-use plastic products. This will ensure that producers cover the costs of waste collection, data gathering and reporting and cleaning up the litter resulting from those products.

- **Collect 90%** of single-use plastic **beverage bottles by 2029**, for example through deposit refund schemes. In addition, product design requirements apply: beverage bottles will need to contain minimum amounts of recycled plastic, and the caps and lids of beverage containers must remain attached to their bodies.

- Introduce **labelling requirements** for single-use cups, sanitary products and tobacco products. To avoid the negative impact of littering, the public must be informed about the presence of plastic in the product and be advised on proper disposal.

- Producers of **fishing gear** containing plastics will be required to cover the costs of waste collection from port reception facilities and its transport and treatment. They will also cover the costs of awareness-raising measures.

**Specific targets set by the Directive:**

- 77% of plastic bottles should be collected separately by 2025 – increasing to 90% by 2029.

- 25% of recycled plastic should be incorporated in PET beverage bottles from 2025, and 30% in all plastic beverage bottles from 2030.

Enshrined in the EU treaties, the infringement procedure provides that the Commission may take legal action against Member States who fail to ensure the timely and accurate transposition of Directives into their national legislation.

Environmental rules are established to avoid harmful effects on human health and the environment and reflect the latest health and technical evidence. Poor implementation of environmental law and policies has environmental, economic and social costs for society, and creates an unequal playing field for economic operators.

For More Information

Infringement procedure

Enforcing EU Environmental Law: Benefits and Achievements

Interactive EU environmental infringement cases map

Study to assess the benefits delivered through the enforcement of EU environmental legislation

Study: The costs of not implementing EU environmental law

On the key decisions in the September 2022 infringements package, see [MEMO](https://www.e.europa.eu).