



EURACTIV

THE NITTY-GRITTY OF RECYCLING

SPECIAL REPORT | 19 - 23 NOV. 2018
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The EU now has a whole raft of rules, both finalised and pending, geared towards increasing the effectiveness and, perhaps more importantly, profitability of recycling. But beyond the headline targets, how are countries going to stick to the rules?

In this Special Report, EURACTIV takes a closer look at the mechanisms behind recycling, and gives a broader overview of where some member states are succeeding and failing in dealing with their waste packaging.



Contents

.....

Europe's packaging headache	4
Injecting responsibility into recycling	6
Recycling's powerful waste-fighting arsenal	9
What's the point of recycling?	12
Deposit-Return Schemes for single-use packaging: an unnecessary evolution?	14

Europe's packaging headache

By Sam Morgan | EURACTIV.com



The EU as a whole is showing promise when it comes to meeting recycling targets. But some member states still send a lot of waste to landfill instead. [Shutterstock]

European Union members will have to recycle at least 70% of packaging by 2030, under new rules brokered earlier this year. But there are complex mechanisms behind the recycling curtain and not all countries are ready yet to keep up with the pace.

EU lawmakers want the continent's disparate recycling systems to be more effective and, as a result, more profitable, as there are still ambitious plans to set up an 'internal market for recycling'.

There is still plenty of attention focused on recycling, particularly its shortcomings, provoked largely by China's landmark import ban on a

whole host of waste materials, as well as the so-called Blue Planet effect.

Rules have been adapted accordingly and, in February 2018, EU capitals signed off on new targets that mean 65% of packaging will have to be recycled by 2025 and 70% by 2030.

Delve deeper and there are also specific targets for different material types, from 30% and 55% by 2030 for wood and plastic, respectively, to 75% and 85% for glass and paper.

But without a change of pace those targets could prove to be out of reach for Europe's recyclers. According to Eurostat data, the EU as a whole recycled 67% of its packaging in 2016 but there are real issues at member state level.

For example, Hungary only recycled 49.7% of its packaging, while Croatia, Estonia and Latvia barely broke 50%, meaning that model students Belgium and Denmark, which are around the 80% benchmark, are doing much of the heavy lifting.

There is a similar story when it comes to material-specific targets like plastic, where many member states are nowhere near the 2025 goal, let alone the 2030 version.

Success stories in the glass and, to a lesser extent, the metal sector mean the outlook is not totally grim for the EU's recycling aspirations but experts are in agreement that countries have

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4

to start using their resources, both material and legislative, better.

THE OPTIONS

Although EU rules impose targets on member states, they also enable the mechanisms that should allow recycling to increase in scope and effectiveness.

Systems like deposit return schemes (DRS), which add a small cost to the initial purchase of an item and refund it when it is returned to a dedicated 'reverse vending machine', are proving popular, particularly when it comes to bottles and cans.

Eight EU nations now have a DRS programme in place and experts believe that three more, including the UK and Portugal, will sign up to one soon.

But DRSs are only a 'tail-pipe' solution and, although effective in boosting recycling rates, do little to improve the actual recyclability of packaging items. They have also evolved from rewarding refillable items like glass bottles towards more throwable items.

Sustainability advocates are adamant that the EU's push for recycling should not just mean more is collected and repurposed but should also encourage people to waste less in the first place.

Extended producer responsibility schemes (EPRS), however, do contribute to the quality of products put on the market, given that they obligate manufacturers to pay for the collection, recycling and even clean-up of products.

That means producers have a vested interest in making their products as easy to recycle as possible, which has led to advancements in eco-design, although EPRS do take longer to start reaping the same sort of final rates as DRSs.

Twenty-five EU countries currently

have EPRS in place for different items, from textiles to plastics. Only Denmark, Croatia and Hungary do not have an EPRS, although the first two do have active DRSs.

Recyclers have also urged member state to make sure materials are collected separately from one another, to avoid contamination, increase quality and reduce losses all along the recycling process.

To illustrate this point, Christian-Yves Crépet of plastic association PETCORE Europe told EURACTIV that mechanical recycling plants in Europe currently have annual excess capacity of 250,000 tonnes.

SINGLE-USE DISPUTE

The European Commission's proposal on managing single-use plastic waste will also contribute to the packaging recycling debate, as a recent vote by the European Parliament confirmed that the EU is now on track to ban certain items.

Those include food packaging containers like burger boxes for which no available alternatives are currently available.

But on 16 November the European Organisation for Packaging and the Environment (EUROPEN), as well as 72 other organisations, urged the EU to ensure that the new rules safeguard the principles of the single market.

EUROPEN and its allies warned that the legislation could subvert the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD) and lead to "market fragmentation" if not worded carefully.

Although acknowledging that member states can already apply for derogations from the PPWD when it comes to lightweight plastic carrier bags, the 73 co-signatories agreed that more exemptions could have a "much more harmful effect on the internal market".

Given that the Parliament, Commission and Council are now locked into three-way talks, the joint

letter called on Parliament negotiators to defend their position that the PPWD should always have primacy.

EU sources insist that the current Council presidency holder, Austria, wants to wrap up the single-use plastic file before its stint finishes at the end of the year and a deal could be brokered by the last week of December.

INTERVIEW

Injecting responsibility into recycling

By Sam Morgan | EURACTIV.com



Under certain schemes, it is producers that foot the bill for recycling and collection efforts and, in some cases, clean-up efforts. [Shutterstock]

Collecting and recycling waste is more important than ever, since EU targets ask more and more from member states. But national capitals face a dilemma about how best to recycle more, as two distinct schemes offer two very different solutions.

EURACTIV spoke to Joachim Quoden, managing director of the Extended Producers Responsibility Alliance (EXPRA). EXPRA is an umbrella organisation for extended responsibility schemes (EPRs), which aim to ensure the recovery and recycling of packaging.

How big in scope should extended producer schemes be, in your view? Should producers cover the cost of everything from collection to even clean-up efforts or should they be more limited?

Responsibility should always be related to influence. So, where a producer can exert influence, it is fair to give them responsibility. For eco-design, collection, sorting and recycling, here the producer, through their EPR body, can have an impact. They can design products and packaging in a way that it is easier

to collect, sort and recycle. They can influence how waste management infrastructure is set up in a country. Then it is fair that they bear the costs. They can also influence (a bit) the behaviour of people in how they use products and packaging through communication and awareness campaigns.

But where the influence stops the responsibility has to stop as well, whether a consumer is using a waste bin or whether they litter the item. This depends on many circumstances

Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6

that no producer has any influence over. Did the local authority install enough bins? Are they emptied at the right times? Is there any enforcement when people do misbehave? Is the person perhaps drunk and doesn't care at all?

So to what extent are EPRs considered the main tool for changing our relationship with waste and products in general? Are they getting more popular?

One of the most successful policy tools is including those who produce a product in the discussion about how to use the product after it's used. Of course, they have to be accompanied by many other actions like Pay As You Throw, landfill bans and taxes, education programmes so that people understand what effect their behaviour can have.

In general, I think that all products are suitable for EPRs, for whatever you put on the market, the producer should be aware and thinking about what will happen to it once it has been used. This should become a standard mindset for all of us.

Textile EPRs, for example, are already being implemented in France and might be an important target for the future. If people can buy t-shirts for €1, if shops are changing their clothes every two weeks, if people buy more clothes than they need, what will we do with all the used clothes? So, I think that those putting all these clothes on the market should develop a solution for after they are used.

In the US, you can find in some states an EPR programme for used needles or unused medicine. It may be unusual for us but perhaps it is very important to think about. How about things like mattresses? Furniture? As long as we are asked by our societal model to consume more every year, we have to understand how to keep

the 'old' products within the circle. Otherwise, it will be overkill.

If a member state implements an EPR scheme for a certain item, who is ultimately responsible if that member state misses its recycling/waste reduction target? Is the relevant EPR authority responsible?

This depends on the point of view. For the EU, the member states are responsible to fulfil their EU obligations. Then the member states implement national legislation and probably oblige companies but usually also local authorities. And municipalities often oblige their residents to sort their waste in the right way. And of course, if you oblige industry in a certain country, the authorities have to monitor and to enforce the legislation, for example, to avoid free riding.

EPR systems often contract then with waste management companies, with sorters and with recyclers. So, in the end, there are a lot of responsibilities and obligations. This makes EPR systems so complex. It can only work in a perfect way if all involved stakeholders and authorities are doing their part of the work in the best way.

How much divergence is there between how EPR schemes are run across Europe?

At the moment, each member state has implemented the packaging and packaging waste directive (PPWD) in a different way. No two countries have chosen the same option. On one side, you could say that this is natural as each member state is very different from the other. Just compare Finland with Cyprus.

But, on the other side, we have learned over the last three decades a lot of lessons and in the new Waste Framework Directive there are minimum EPR requirements,

including minimum transparency rules, cost coverage, enforcement, reporting, monitoring etc.

So, I am sure that EPRs will come closer to each other, more comparable. And if they are more comparable, probably some member states will change their approach and come even closer to others. For example, the UK is now in the process of changing their certificate trading system to a more continent-style EPR system.

Can a strong case be made for harmonisation now?

Minimum requirements are the first step in this direction and I am sure that more will follow. We are discussing within EXPRA whether but even more what such a next step could look like. But of course, we will have to question our approaches; we will have to agree that other countries in certain areas are a step ahead. So, as always within the European Union, it will be a sensitive but very useful discussion.

The EU might adopt a very ambitious 90% collection target for single-use plastic bottles. The wording of the Commission proposal and the 2025 date seems to suggest that the target can only be met with deposit return schemes. Is there a danger that by being too ambitious with targets, the EU might kill off the conditions needed for EPRs to develop and thrive?

Yes, I am afraid that this is an effort to promote a special tool to reach the target via the backdoor as in principle the Commission is not allowed to promote a specific tool over another.

Especially when you take into account the justification for the 90% collection target, namely to avoid littering and marine litter, there is no need to describe the exact way how you do it. The important thing is that you establish a closed loop. And of course,

Continued on Page 8

Continued from Page 7

we should try to collect all packaging mainly via separate collection.

But if we can take out all the valuable stuff from residual waste instead of putting it in landfills or incinerators, the purpose and the goal are reached as well. So, 90% collection target is fully fine, but we should strive for it via separate collection plus any other collection and then sorting as well.

Could one argue that this is basically a technological neutrality issue, in that EU legislators are de facto giving member states only one real option to meet what will probably be a legally binding target?

Yes and it seems that the European Parliament at least has understood this issue and is proposing to align the single-use plastic proposal with the regulations of the WFD where separate collection is the usual demand made of member states but they can divert from it if it makes more sense to collect, for example, a dry fraction and to sort at a later stage.

What are the main obstacles, generally, that dissuade member states from setting up EPRs? Industry pushback? Financial concerns?

The first challenge is usually that you have to define very clearly the roles and responsibilities of each actor of an EPR system. And this means that you will have a strong discussion inside your country and strong lobbying. And so, you need a strong and focused government to lead this discussion and to make a decision. The second challenge comes later as you have to install the necessary monitoring and enforcement. Otherwise, it will not work. Some governments do not have the power to do so though.

How much of an effect do EPRs have

on the way products are designed? Are EPRs more effective in persuading manufacturers to make their products more sustainable than DRSs?

I am not aware of any DRS that is working with their companies to make packaging more sustainable. They have strict guidelines what bottles the machines are able to take but this has nothing to do with sustainability but with the technical limits of the machines. But most EPR systems are working with their clients to improve the packaging.

Is it fair to say that DRSs are a sort of 'tailpipe' solution to waste management? Should we be careful about relying on them too much?

DRS are somehow a cherry-picking solution as they concentrate only on easy packaging. Which type of packaging is collected in the developing world by the informal sector? Exactly the same type of packaging. But the challenge is the other types of packaging: all the trays, the film, the foils and so on.

And the nice thing about the EPR systems is that we offer a solution for all packaging whereas on top of a DRS you always need a second system.

DRS differ a lot on their style, their scope and especially in their performance. Of course, it is also important to understand when a specific system has been introduced. In the Scandinavian context, DRS were introduced when no one was thinking of a comprehensive EPR system.

But in countries where you have now an EPR system, it makes no sense in my opinion to introduce a DRS on top. So, we should better use all our energies and the available money to improve those EPR systems instead of adding a second system but the EPR system is still in the same condition respective even in a worse situation as suddenly the valuable materials are missing.

Recycling's powerful waste-fighting arsenal

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By Sam Morgan | EURACTIV.com



Reverse vending machines are one tool at member states' disposal that can help boost recycling rates but they too have their shortcomings. [Shutterstock]

Two of recycling's main tools are used to varying degrees across Europe and now the industry and member states are considering how best to leverage them and help create what has been touted as the "internal market for recycling".

Deposit return schemes (DRS) and extended producer responsibility schemes (EPRs) are two distinct instruments used by EU countries to make sure waste does not just end up in incinerators or landfills.

One, the DRS system, rewards consumers for returning their used products to 'reverse vending machines', often located outside supermarkets, where a small deposit levied on the original cost of the can or bottle or other item is returned.

Although consumers are not technically "in the money" by returning their empties, the principle of the system is to make sure people prioritise reclaiming their deposit over just throwing the items away.

DRS systems have had the perhaps

unexpected result of cleaning up our streets and helping people in financial difficulty earn a small amount of money too.

In Croatia for example, a DRS is in place for plastic bottles and a small micro-economy of sorts has sprung up, particularly in the capital Zagreb, where homeless people or those in search of a little extra money collect the bottles en masse.

One social NGO specialising in

Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

homelessness told EURACTIV that the system provides much-needed money for a good number of people, allowing them to at least purchase something to eat or pay for public transport.

Local sources also told EURACTIV that litter is rarely an issue on Zagreb's streets, as waste covered by the DRS is valuable enough to change behaviours. There are, admittedly, still systemic problems with local municipality services though, reflected in Croatia's low recycling rates elsewhere.

GETTING TO THE ROOT OF IT

But DRS systems have one primary goal only: to increase collection rates and make recycling as profitable as possible for recyclers. The systems have little impact on the products themselves.

That is where EPRs hold a distinct advantage over the reverse vending machines because the companies and firms that produce the products in the first place are given a vested interest in making their wares as recyclable as possible.

EPRs obligate manufacturers to cover the costs associated with collection, recycling and, more and more, clean-up efforts. That has

boosted investment in eco-design, as companies try to make their EPR bills as minimal as they can.

Twenty-five EU countries have some sort of EPR in place, covering products as diverse as textiles and plastics, while only eight countries have a DRS, although more are on the way.

Sustainability advocates insist that DRS are a complementary solution that have a role to play in our closed recycling loops but are a lower priority than factors like eco-design and changing behaviours.

Another perceived shortcoming of the DRS-only system is that there has been a shift away from a refilling mindset, where glass bottles in particular were just reused once collected, to a pure recycling tool.

Asked by EURACTIV about how governments should proceed with recycling efforts, Greenpeace chemicals expert Kevin Stairs said that "we would prefer to see a priority for DRS re-use over DRS recycling in most cases, and the producer always has the option of avoiding plastic".

Although DRS means that contaminated products are kept separate from each other, resulting in easier to recycle streams, there are concerns that they take valuable materials out of circulation and make life more difficult for consumers and

EPR schemes.

That is because in the current recycling eco-system, all that is left once reverse vending machines have had their fun is low-quality materials, many of which can either only be down-cycled into products like carpet or not recycled at all.

Sustainability expert Justine Maillot told EURACTIV that the current system should "evolve" and that this consideration of DRS should not be used as an excuse to scrap them but should "trigger the industry to find solutions to also upgrade this stream".

EPR SCOPE

Under the EU's Waste Framework Directive (WFD), there are now minimum requirements for EPRs and there are even calls for schemes to be harmonised, although experts already acknowledge that sharing of best practices could get the job done without further legislative changes.

But different stakeholders are not quite in agreement about the 'responsibility' part of EPRs and how far it should actually extend.

While anti-waste campaigners tend to believe that responsibility and therefore liability for costs should incorporate the actual clean-up of

Continued on Page 11

Continued from Page 10

waste, if it does not manage to make its way into either a recycling or waste loop, others maintain it is not that simple.

Joachim Quoden, head of EPR alliance EXPRA, told EURACTIV that “responsibility should be related to influence”, acknowledging that producers do indeed have influence over things like eco-design and waste management structures.

But he added that behavioural aspects and actual logistics, like how often bins are emptied by local authorities or whether people are even willing to dispose of waste correctly, are factors over which manufacturers cannot necessarily exert that same influence.

That is reflected in the Commission’s single-use plastics proposal, specifically when it comes to cigarette butts, one of the world’s most littered items. The EU executive has only suggested awareness-raising measures, while the Parliament wants a tangible decrease in plastic content.

Justine Maillot disagreed with Quoden’s limits though, explaining that the ‘polluter pays principle’ does not work because the costs are currently “borne by municipalities and civil society”.

She added that the true nature of

the costs needs to be established by forthcoming Commission guidelines.

Industry experts agree on the principle that producers will have to bear a certain degree of costs now that littering has reemerged as a potent public issue but warned that there cannot be across-the-board measures, as different materials are more prone to littering than others.

TECH NEUTRALITY?

One of the guiding principles of EU lawmaking is the issue of technological neutrality, in that no specific type of technology should be precluded as a solution to a problem, so long as it can fulfil the criteria of certain rules.

In the transport sector, that is particularly evident as the European Commission has been accused of forgetting its tech neutrality mantra when it comes to the promotion of electric cars and advanced biofuels over other forms of mobility.

For example, one comparison often trotted out by the Commission’s transport directorate is that manufacturers are free to develop a coal-powered car, so long as it stays within emission levels.

But the accusation has also now been levied at the EU executive in reaction to its recent proposal on curbing single-use plastic waste,

under which there is a proposed 90% collection target for plastic bottles for 2025.

While this looks admirable on paper, industry experts have warned that the timeframe and ambition of the target mean that the Commission is essentially giving member states only one option to meet it: DRS, as EPRs are inherently long-term measures.

Joachim Quoden told EURACTIV that the plan is the Commission’s attempt to impose a specific tool “by the back door” but explained that the Parliament has tried to rectify the loophole in its own amended report.

He added that he does not see any value in setting up DRS systems in countries that already have an EPR in place, instead insisting that “we should better use all our energies and the available money to improve those EPR systems”.

However, Kevin Stairs concluded that “well-organised household waste separation systems like those in Germany” could maybe hit the 90% target, adding that an EU mechanism to encourage ambitious recycling could help achieve Commission VP Frans Timmermans’ “race to the top” aspirations.

What's the point of recycling?

By Sam Morgan | EURACTIV.com



The European Commission is still yet to determine at what point in a recycling process data should be captured. [Shutterstock]

It is easy to rank EU member states by how proficient they are at recycling but the details behind the statistics are more complex. Scratch beneath the surface and there is a quasi-philosophical issue lying in wait.

Just like with any other sector subject to legislation, countries have to report on their recycling rates so that they can be checked against EU-wide circular economy targets. Sanctions can eventually be levied if there is not enough progress.

Under the old way of doing things,

member states were essentially free to declare all the waste they collected and sorted rather than what was actually fully recycled. Industry experts warned that this system had the potential to yield inflated and wildly inaccurate figures.

But things are set to change under the updated Waste Framework Directive (WFD). The text, finalised late last year, says that the measurement point where rates should be recorded is at the “recycling operation whereby waste materials are actually reprocessed into products, materials or substances”.

It is a complex calculation to impose on a multitude of different recycling schemes across Europe and a wide raft of different materials, from plastics and metals to glass and wood.

That is why the European Commission is currently working on an implementing act meant to make the WFD, as well as the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD), fully functional and a final decision is expected by March.

According to a first draft, obtained by EURACTIV, the Commission has

Continued on Page 13

Continued from Page 12

already decided where the calculation point should be set for biowaste, glass, metals, paper, plastics, wood and textiles.

Industry sources have warned though that the EU executive delegated the data-harvesting process to consultants and that there are concerns over whether the information they collected was comprehensive enough.

FEAD, the federation of Europe's waste management industry, told EURACTIV that it is regrettable that waste management operators "re not further consulted and included in the procedure".

Asked about the implementing act, a Commission spokesperson said "calculation rules are indeed important in order to improve the whole chain of waste collection and treatment and ensure that the recycling process results in secondary raw materials of high quality".

Technology has a role to play as well, in that the EU executive encourages member states to use "electronic registries" to ensure recycling is of a high quality.

CRUX OF THE MATTER

Implementing a more accurate measurement point should mean that losses throughout the recycling process are taken into account. They can occur at any point thanks to flaws in collection services, inadequate sorting processes or even someone putting a bottle in the wrong rubbish bag.

There is also the matter of "non-targeted materials", which may indeed be recyclable items but not the ones of interest to the recycler running the operation.

For example, some plastic recyclers target only one particular type of plastic, be it PET bottles or PE film used to wrap food on supermarket shelves.

Under the wording of the Commission draft though, "non-targeted materials" have been taken into account.

But difficulties arise because some materials are more prone to losses than others and are recycled in different ways, which means the Commission will have to carefully approach the legal wording of "recycling operation" before publishing its final draft.

As far as glass is concerned, European federations FERVER and FEVE, along with extended producer responsibility (EPR) alliance EXPRA, agree that a "single, harmonised, ambitious and enforceable calculation methodology for glass in all member states" should be enforced.

Their joint position also insists that "all material streams should have an equal level of ambition when reporting recycling rates, regardless of the complexity of different recycling value chains".

Under the PPWD, there are material-specific targets for each material stream that have to be met in 2025 and 2030. That is why certain sectors are urging member states to make sure they put in place separate collection systems in order to limit losses.

The head of non-ferrous metal producers and recyclers association Eurometaux, Guy Thiran, said that he hopes the "improved transparency will show where governments still need to invest into more effective collection schemes and advanced sorting technologies".

Thiran added that his association is working closely with the Commission to ensure that "the spirit" of the agreement from 2017 is respected in the implementing decisions the EU executive makes.

FEAD added that their members are hopeful that the decision will give countries the right indication to calculate "average loss rates", so that accurate data can be recorded.

All these factors, along with

mechanisms like deposit return schemes and EPRs, feed into a delicate eco-system of recycling that will have to become even more efficient and effective in order to meet increasing targets and public expectations.

In what Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans has called a "race to the top", EU heads want to make recycling as profitable as possible, encourage competition and use China's waste import ban as an opportunity to make Europe as self-sufficient as possible in dealing with what we throw away.

PROMOTED CONTENT / OPINION

DISCLAIMER: All opinions in this column reflect the views of the author(s), not of EURACTIV.COM Ltd.

Deposit-Return Schemes for single-use packaging: an unnecessary evolution?

FEVE - The European Container Glass Federation



Electrical copper wires. Raw materials in general and copper as a key, enabling material, are important parts of the circular economy, writes Dr Katia Lacasse. [Shutterstock]

content, which means that food & drink operators must be actively considering DRS as one of their preferred collection methods.

But if a DRS on single-use plastic packaging is introduced, would it also include other materials? To look into this, FEVE commissioned a study to Oakdene Hollins to assess the impact of mandatory DRS measures for single-use beverage containers on glass recycling and the evolution of the packaging market. The study analyses Eurostat data and market data purchased from Global Data on the following product categories: beer, water and soft drinks. These are the product categories commonly covered by a mandatory DRS on single-use beverage packaging.

To prevent littering and foster more recycling, some member states are considering setting mandatory deposit-return schemes (DRS) on single-use beverage packaging. For plastic packaging, there are reasons to believe this could happen:

- **Availability of recyclates:** gaps in current collection and recycling systems may drive the development of DRS to reach the proposed 90% collection target by 2025 for single-use plastic

beverage containers put forward in the Single-Use Plastics Directive;

- **Food Contact Recycling:** most plastic recycling processes for food contact are based on DRS-type collection schemes that separate single-use food contact plastics from other plastics packaging;
- **Market pull:** sectors and brands are committing to achieving 90% collection rates for single-use plastic beverage containers and setting targets on recycled

RATIONALE BEHIND DRS DIFFERS FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY

There is no single policy on deposit-return schemes:

- When the German DRS was introduced in 2003 on all single-use packaging types, refillable glass packaging had the largest market share on soft drinks, water and beer. By setting a higher fee on the mandatory

Continued on Page 15

Continued from Page 14

deposit on single-use packaging over the voluntary deposit on refillable bottles, the policy was aiming at encouraging the use of refillables.

- In Finland, mandatory DRS were introduced in a staggered approach starting with cans in 1996, extending to PET in 2008 and later to glass in 2012. This went hand in hand with policy decisions to cut down on refillable packaging, with a corresponding dramatic decline in refillables between 2004 and 2008 and an increase in single-use cans and PET. Contrary to Germany, the mandatory DRS was introduced to enable the switch from refillable glass to single-use formats, without losing the take-back culture acquired through refillables.
- The Lithuanian model is the most recent and the most representative of today's debate on DRS. Although it covers all single-use packaging types, it was largely set up to boost collection rates for single-use PET. This is the type of objective expected of DRS now, especially with regard to the Single-Use Plastics Directive.

BRING-BACK CULTURE: A LEGACY OF REFILLABLE PACKAGING TRANSFERRED TO DRS ON SINGLE-USE PACKAGING

All the Member States operating a DRS on single-use beverage packaging have one thing in common: they have all previously operated a voluntary deposit-return scheme on refillable packaging. This would indicate that consumer "bring-back" culture does not happen overnight, and years of tradition with a refillable packaging material such as glass are needed to create the mindset for the return of

single-use materials.

The study also dispels the myth that a DRS on single-use beverage packaging favours the use of refillable packaging materials. The evidence shows the exact opposite trend: where a DRS on single-use packaging has been introduced, there are no examples of refillable packaging market share increasing. Even more dramatic, in the Nordic countries, the mandatory DRS on single-use packaging effectively replaced the system for refillable packaging.

NON-REFILLABLE GLASS IN A DRS: WHAT IMPACT?

There are already many different voluntary DRS operating for refillable glass packaging. Non-refillable glass is endlessly recycled thanks to the collection for recycling systems managed by Extended Producer responsibility (EPR) schemes. Therefore, including one-way glass in a mandatory DRS on single-use packaging only diverts materials from established collection and recycling systems and creates confusion among consumers.

Yet out of the 8 EU Member States operating a mandatory DRS on single-use beverage packaging (Germany, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Croatia, the Netherlands and Estonia), only the Netherlands and Sweden have chosen to exclude glass from the scheme.

The evidence, however, shows that a DRS has no – or little – impact on glass collection and recycling rates:

- The 6 top performers on glass collection and recycling do not operate a DRS on one-way glass:
- The best performing glass DRS country is Germany, but more than 80% of the total glass recycled is collected through the established bottle bank system and not the DRS, making the EPR system far more effective.

CLOSING THE GAP ON COLLECTION AND RECYCLING: WHAT SOLUTIONS FOR GLASS?

With an EU average of 74% collection for recycling, there is still a potential for more glass collection and recycling. It will take a European framework with locally adapted solutions to continue improving these rates across the EU. The examples of Sweden and Austria, with a long history in bottle bank systems, show that it is possible to consistently excel in glass recycling without a DRS:

In Spain, which had a lower starting point than Sweden or Austria, there has been a gradual investment in bottle bank infrastructure and the more bottle banks are available, the more glass is recycled.

When designing EPR schemes for glass collection and recycling, Member States and stakeholders must ensure they are addressing the gaps and continue to invest in best practice schemes such as bottle banks, which have a proven track record. Inspired by the examples of Sweden, Austria and Spain that have been outlined in the study, the glass packaging sector will take an active role in defending Extended Producer Responsibility schemes and municipal waste management systems that make collection simple for the consumer and optimal for the recycling value chain.

Separate collection and effective recycling of glass is part of our cultural heritage in Europe. We should uphold it for the future.

More information:

- Raise the Glass Study – Executive Summary (<http://eurac.tv/9POH>)
- Raise the Glass Study – Full Version (<http://eurac.tv/9POI>)



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