

Deposit Return Systems perfect for re-useable packaging but not a universal solution for one way

You may have heard about Deposit Return Systems (DRS) making a come-back. And you are probably thinking: “This is great. It’s just like when I was a kid, I used to take back my lemonade bottles to the shop and would get a few pence for my trouble”. Don’t be fooled! The majority of the Deposit Return Systems being discussed or put in place today are only an additional collection system to recycle one-way bottles. Yes. You read that right. These new schemes are just additional collection systems to recycle packaging and not systems to reuse packaging as many believe. They are being put in place to solve the plastics littering problem. Globally only 9% of all *plastic* waste ever produced has been *recycled*¹.

More recycling

Instead of using household recycling bins or bottle banks, the DRS systems will require citizens to take all the packaging they want to recycle back to the shop or supermarket. We need to make it easy for citizens to recycle their packaging. It is much more convenient for consumers to dispose of their waste via home collection systems or local bottle banks. We can improve the well-established household packaging waste collections which producers contribute to thanks to the Extended Producer Responsibility Schemes.

While a Recycling DRS might be one interesting way to solve the plastics packaging issue, it is not suitable for all materials. New Recycling DRS schemes pushed by certain commercial interests want to include glass in addition to plastic and other materials that do not have the same problems as plastics. Glass has well established household collection schemes for recycling that achieve very high recycling rates. In Europe, 76% of glass put on the market is already collected for recycling today. Glass is 100% infinitely recyclable – and re-melting recycled glass uses much less energy and saves lots of CO₂. There is a big industry demand to get all the glass back.

Consumer pays

The Recycling DRS schemes cherry pick the valuable materials from the waste collection schemes run by local authorities and which are paid for by contributions from the Extended Producer Responsibility organisations. Everywhere they are installed, DRS schemes take

¹ <https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/beat-plastic-pollution/>



value from household collections and rely on the consumers paying a large share of costs rather than the producer.

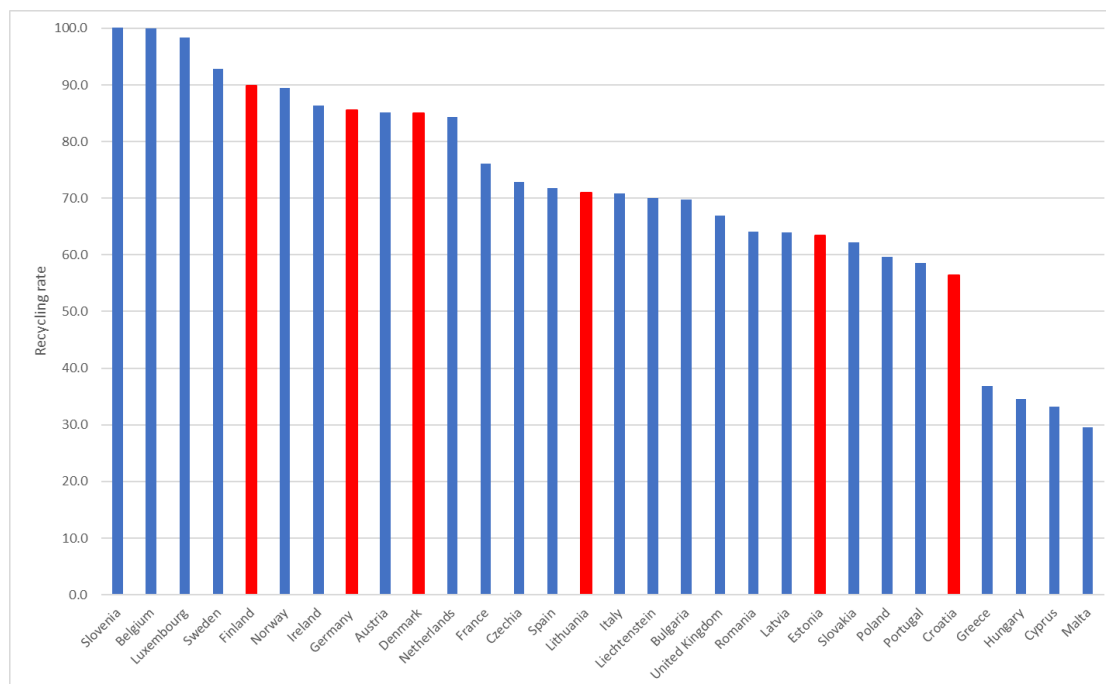
The Recycling DRS proposed by Scotland is a perfect case in hand. The Scottish public will be the main funders of the recycling scheme, through unredeemed deposits. At the capture rate of 80%, Scottish consumers will be paying £67.8 million (€80.11 million) per year which represents 84% of the Scheme's costs. Since the cost of running the Recycling DRS scheme is estimated to be £80.7 million (€95.36 million) per year, the consumers will be the main source of funding.

Few countries have DRS for recycling

FEVE commissioned a report from Oakdene Hollins to look into the impact of the introduction of DRS as an alternative collection for recycling system for one-way glass packaging and studied the 6 countries where such DRS recycling schemes include one-way glass even if only to a small extent such as Germany where less than 5% of one-way glass is collected in this way.

The international evidence shows very few countries opt for a recycling DRS and even fewer of them include glass. The four most successful glass recycling countries in Europe (Slovenia, Belgium, Luxembourg and Sweden) do not operate a recycling DRS for glass and those countries also have glass recycling rates in excess of 90% thanks to EPR systems not to DRS.

The glass packaging recycling rate across Europe (countries in red depict those operating a recycling DRS for one-way glass). Source: Eurostat



Household collections

Most products packed in glass packaging are consumed at home and not on the go. For glass, kerbside, and bring back / bottle banks are the most efficient and convenient way for citizens to dispose of their glass packaging for recycling. And the EPR schemes ensure that this is also paid for by producers.

Recycling DRS schemes only target valuable materials leaving the harder to recycle packaging behind requiring continued investment by Local Authorities in existing collection schemes with the associated increased economic and environmental costs associated with running two schemes instead of one. The two 'dual' systems have to be maintained in parallel at great cost to producers and consumers.

Recently Slovakia introduced a Recycling DRS for plastic but decided to drop the inclusion of glass and just last month France postponed its implementation of a DRS even for plastic in order to study in more detail the deleterious effect this has on local authority collection for recycling schemes.



Glass is part of many packaging reusable systems which can only operate with a DRS. This re-useable system should not be confused with DRS for recycling. For recycling, glass already has a functioning collection for recycling system that works. The recycling DRS is only a copycat scheme that adds no environmental value for glass.

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