



## Waste Advisory Group

### Discussion Note – EU Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Recycling Targets

**Time, Date:** Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023

#### Municipal Solid Waste

Municipal waste or Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) is the waste we produce in households, and similar waste produced by businesses. Typically, this waste is collected at kerbside and back door, or brought directly to bring banks or civic amenity sites. MSW only amounts to approximately 10% of the waste generated in the EU, but it is complex to manage because it is comprised of a number of streams such as general waste, mixed dry recycling, and organic waste, and it has a large number of producers. Statistical information on municipal waste, and other waste streams in Ireland, is available at [National Waste Statistics | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/national-waste-statistics)

The management of MSW in Ireland has evolved significantly since the Waste Management Act was introduced in 1996. A number of factors have contributed to this evolution, including changes in international markets and European legislation, changing practices within the waste industry and major institutional reform (including the introduction of Local Authority shared services, the establishment of the Office of Environmental Enforcement within the EPA and the introduction of EPR schemes and the role of environmental NGOs.

Ireland has made good progress to date on meeting our various EU waste targets, please see [Progress to EU Targets | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/progress-to-eu-targets). However, we need to do better, and we must continue to make significant improvements in waste prevention and recycling rates in order to meet the new Waste Framework Directive targets for 2025, 2030, and 2035 of 55%, 60% & 65% respectively. The MSW recycling rate has remained stubbornly static in recent years with the 2020 recycling rate of 41% being unchanged from that recorded for 2016, meaning there is still a lot of work to be done if we are to achieve the

2025 target of 55%. In addition, the Landfill Directive has been amended to require that by 2035 no more than 10% of MSW goes to landfill. The landfill rate for 2020 was 16%.

Contamination of bins continues to be a problem, with EPA waste characterisation figures from 2018 indicating that 20% of the material in household recycling bins should not be there, and 70% of the material in general waste bins from the commercial sector should be in recycling or organic bins, please see [Waste Characterisation | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/publications/default.aspx?category=2). This represents a massive loss of resource value, an unnecessary high cost to households and businesses whose waste charges would be lower through proper segregation and undermines investment in indigenous treatment capacity.

Improvements in these areas could also yield significant results for our environment. The EPA has estimated that correct use of the three household bins could reduce the volume of the general waste bin by a third, and that municipal recycling (including organic waste for composting and anaerobic digestion through the organic bin) rate could increase by 50% (from 40%).

Recent changes to the requirements for waste collection from commercial premises, combined with the impending introduction of a waste recovery levy and expansion of household bio-waste collections are being introduced by the Department to address this urgent need to improve our waste prevention and minimisation practices.

## The Challenge

The recent publication of the EU Commission Report 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, has served as a timely reminder of the challenges we still face to meet these targets.

The report notes that Ireland is on track to meet the 2025 recycling target for all packaging waste and is considered likely to meet the 2035 target for the landfilling of municipal waste. However, we are deemed to be at risk of missing the 2025 target for the preparing for re-use and recycling of municipal waste.

Further detail on this report can be found at [Commission recommends actions to boost recycling \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/comm-reports/2025-reports) while the Factsheet and Country Report for Ireland can be found at [Environmental Implementation Review \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/comm-reports/2025-reports)