

ECO REVOLUTION: EU STRATEGIES FOR PLASTICS IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

“Plastic pollution-free world is not a choice but a commitment to life - a commitment to the next generation.”



Summary:

The presence of plastics in the Circular Economy poses a multifaced problem that hinders the effective implementation of EU policies that foster circular practices, directly contradicting its objectives to prevent and mitigate such problems. Despite the existence of comprehensive policies, including the EU Circular Economy Package (CEP) which aims to reduce waste and protect the environment by recycling 70% of packaging waste by 2030, the enforcement and effectiveness of these measures remain inconsistent across EU member states. This lack of uniformity in enforcement practices, combined with gaps in monitoring, reporting, and sanctions, creates a pressing problem that requires urgent attention.

Almost 26 million tonnes of plastic waste is generated in Europe every year	Around 80% of marine litter is plastic	87% of Europeans are worried about the impact of plastic products on the environment
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Introduction:

Plastic is defined as “A material consisting of a polymer, to which additives or other substances may have been added, and which can function as a main structural component of final products, with the exception of natural polymers that have not been chemically modified” as per the Directive 2019/904 Article 3(1).

In recent years, the global discourse on environmental sustainability has been underscored by the important need to highlight plastic waste's adverse impact. The issue of plastics within the Circular Economy framework is a complex challenge that requires thorough examination, especially in the context of European Union (EU) policies. The Circular Economy, a model designed to minimize waste and promote sustainability, faces a substantial dilemma regarding the presence of plastics. The European Union has been at the forefront of global efforts to establish a Circular Economy. Key policies, such as the EU Circular Economy Package (CEP), which was introduced in 2018, lay out ambitious targets and initiatives addressing plastic pollution. The CEP aims to reduce plastic waste, protect the environment, and achieve a recycling rate of 70% for packaging waste by 2030, as highlighted by the European Environment Agency (EEA). This underscores the EU’s commitment to addressing the substantial environmental impact of plastic.

The concern of plastics on environmental sustainability is still ongoing, the research made by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in 2021 proved that, worldwide, over 11 million metric tons of plastic enter the oceans each year, causing huge damage to the marine ecosystem, and affecting human health through microplastic contamination.

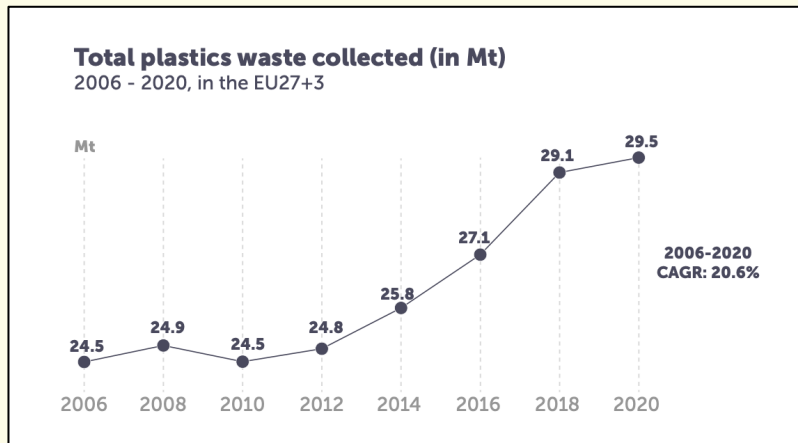


Figure 1

Source: *The circular economy for plastics (2022)*

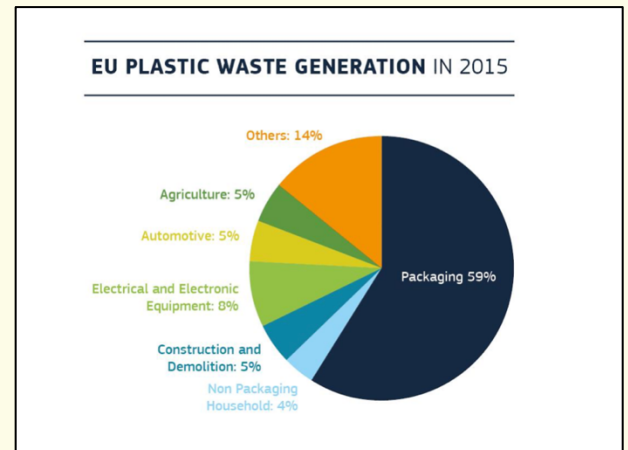


Figure 2

Source: *Eunomia (2022)*

Why avoid using plastics?

1	The environmental impact of plastics is significant due to their non-biodegradable nature, as most plastics take thousands of years to decompose, leading a long-lasting environmental pollution. In addition, plastics break down into smaller particles known as microplastics, which contaminate soil, water, and air, thereby posing a threat to ecosystems and wildlife.
2	Plastics have a huge effect on marine animals as they can become entangled in plastic debris, leading to injury or death.
3	Some plastics contain harmful chemicals, such as bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates which affect human health by leaching into food, water, and the environment which can cause severe health issues.
4	Plastics are primarily made from fossil fuels, contributing to the depletion of non-renewable resources, and increasing carbon emissions during production.

Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive:

EU has set rules on packaging and packaging waste which deal with the increasing quantities of package waste that affect the environment. Although implementing these rules has been considered a success, the amount of packaging waste in the EU is still increasing, and too many of our finite resources are being wasted without being recirculated into the economy. Among other rules, by the end of 2024, EU countries should ensure that producer responsibility schemes are established for all packaging. The Directive also sets specific targets for recycling packaging materials as indicated in figure 3.

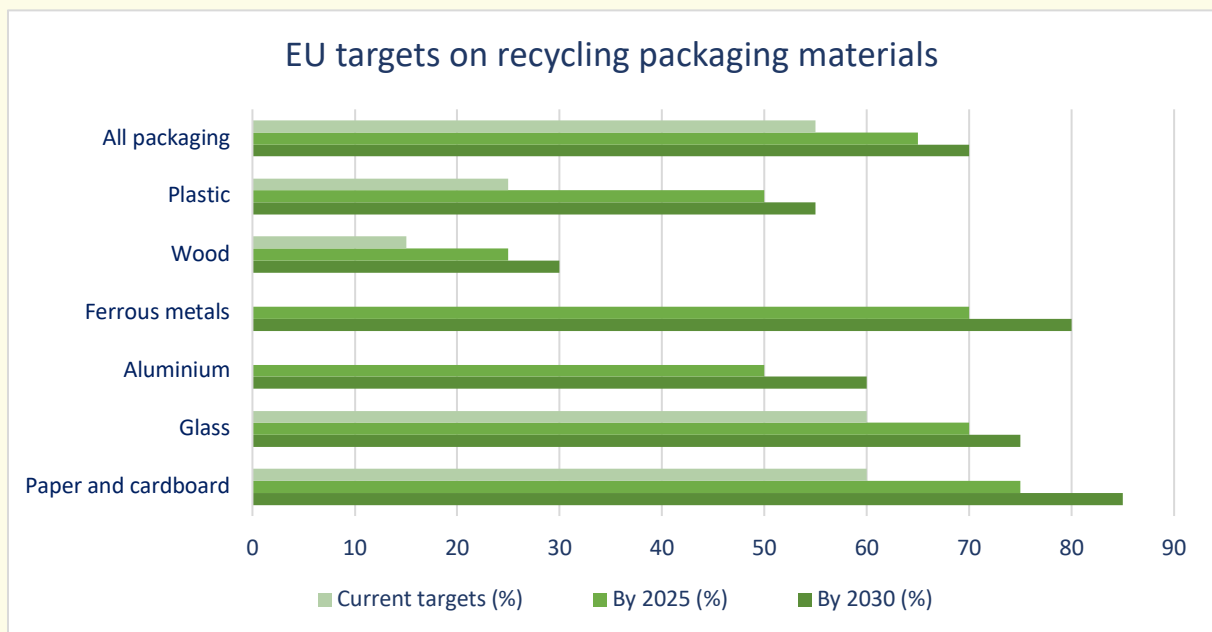


Figure 3

Source: Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (2022)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, addressing the challenge of plastics in the Circular Economy requires a more consistent implementation of EU policies. To achieve the goals of waste reduction and environmental protection, immediate and collaborative actions are necessary to foster a more effective Circular Economy across the EU member states.

Recommendations:

1	Promoting environmentally friendly solutions by supporting research on environmental alternatives to plastic. Encouraging the development of environmentally friendly solutions contributes to providing more sustainable and effective options.
2	Promoting recycling by expanding and improving recycling facilities, and encouraging recycling practices among individuals and institutions. This proactive approach not only reduces the consumption of plastic but also mitigates its environmental impact.
3	Support systems that allow for the reuse of containers and packaging. Implement refill stations or packaging return programs to minimize single-use plastic consumption.

Acknowledgment:

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References:

The circular economy for plastics. (n.d.) Available at: https://dein-kunststoff.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PlasticsEurope-CircularityReport-2022_compressed.pdf

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