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The early warning report for Slovakia

Accompanying the document

Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions

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

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1. Introduction

The early warning report aims to assist Member States at risk of failing to meet: (i) the 2025 target of 55% for the preparing for re-use and the recycling of their municipal waste (this target is set out in Article 11(2)(c) of Directive 2008/98/EC); and (ii) the 2025 target of 65% for the recycling of their packaging waste (this target is set out in Article 6(1)(f) of Directive 1994/62/EC). It also provides an update on how Member States are performing against the 2035 target to send no more than 10% of their municipal waste to landfill (this target is set out in Article 5(5) Directive 1999/31/EC).

This report builds on previous support provided by the Commission to help Member States comply with EU law on municipal waste management, including, where relevant, the early warning report from 2018¹.

This assessment is based on a collaborative and transparent process involving the Member States concerned, the European Environment Agency², and an in-depth analysis of the most recent policy developments in the Member States. This process also involved extensive consultation with the Member State authorities in charge of waste management. The possible actions identified during this process are based on existing best practices and aim to help Member States meet the 2025 targets, and as such they focus on policy measures which can be taken in the short term. These actions should be seen as complementary to those recommended in the roadmaps which were drawn up as part of preceding compliance-promotion activities and to those recommended in the Environmental Implementation Review³.

2. Key findings

Based on the analysis of collected data and existing policies in the area of waste management, Slovakia is considered to be at risk of missing the 2025 target of 55% for the preparation for re-use and the recycling of its municipal waste. While Slovakia has reported levels above the 2025 target to recycle 65% of its packaging waste, data quality issues have raised concerns about its actual performance. The distance between Slovakia's current landfilling rate and its 2035 target to landfill no more than 10% of its municipal waste is also of concern.

Municipal waste generation in Slovakia in 2020 (421 kg/person per year) was below the EU average (505 kg/person per year). In particular, packaging waste generated in 2018 was also well below the EU average (105 kg/person vs 174 kg/person). This low figure may be an indication that significant quantities of packaging placed on the market, the amount of which is used for generated packaging waste, are not reported.

The recycling rate for municipal waste in Slovakia has increased by almost 20 percentage points in the last 5 years and reached 42.2% in 2020. However, this increase appears to be more driven by changes in statistical reporting than by improved recycling performance. Despite a significant decrease in the landfilling rate in the period 2016-2020 (from 65.4% to 49.7 %), Slovakia continues to rely heavily on landfilling (49.7% of waste was landfilled in 2020, more than twice the EU average).

Slovakia's excessively low capture rate of biowaste (only 36% of generated biowaste was captured in 2020) is considered a key factor in limiting the country's current performance in waste management. Slovakia does not have enough capacity to treat all its biowaste, especially given plans to separately collect a greater share

¹ An early-warning report was issued for Slovakia in 2018 (SWD(2018) 421 final). In total, 19 recommendations were drafted within the assessment. According to the Slovak authorities, 6 of the report's recommendations are considered implemented, 8 partially implemented, and 5 not implemented.

² EEA and ETC/CE (2022). Early Warning Assessment Related to the 2025 Targets for Municipal and Packaging Waste (<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/country-profiles-early-warning-assessments>)

³ European Commission (2022). Environmental Implementation Review 2022. COM/2022/438 final. (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=comnat%3ACOM_2022_0438_FIN)

of biowaste as of 2023. The country also still has no legally binding national quality standards for compost and no quality management system for compost produced from separately collected biowaste.

In 2019, the recycling rate for all packaging waste reached 67.5%, which was above the 2025 target of 65%. However, there are data quality issues with regard to packaging waste. For instance, there is a notable discrepancy between the relatively low recycling rate for municipal waste and the very high recycling rates for packaging waste. The datasets on municipal waste and packaging waste appear inconsistent, given that a large share of packaging waste is generated by households and is thus part of municipal waste. In addition, the upcoming application of new calculation rules⁴ for packaging waste recycling might result in a lower recycling rate. In 2020 the recycling rate for all packaging waste increased to 70.8%; however, the new calculation rules were not applied.

Significant improvements are needed to bring waste management in Slovakia in line with the EU waste hierarchy. Some of the main challenges facing waste management in the country include:

- the lack of economic incentives for householders to separate their recyclable waste at source (in two thirds of all municipalities in Slovakia, management fees for collected waste cover only a fraction of the actual costs of collecting the waste);
- inefficient and fragmented collection and treatment of municipal waste which does not benefit from economies of scale (this is in part due to the great number of municipalities in Slovakia; around 3 000 in total);
- data quality issues related to the reporting and calculation of national recycling rates, in particular for packaging waste.

3. Key recommendations

Among the measures deemed necessary to support Slovakia's efforts to improve its performance in waste management, three main recommendations are listed below.

1. Support preparing for re-use of municipal waste and re-use systems for packaging
2. Further reduce the dependency on landfilling by increasing landfill taxes, addressing the issue of illegal landfilling, and supporting the separate collection and treatment of biowaste.
3. Further implement and expand the pay-as-you-throw system for both businesses and households.
4. Improve the system for managing the quality of data on packaging waste in order to build coherent and verifiable data sets.

The table below lists further actions recommended to support Slovakia's efforts to improve its performance in waste management.

4. Good practice

The following measure implemented by Slovakia is considered an example of good practice that helps to improve its recycling performance.

- Study to improve packaging data quality – The Slovak Environment Agency, which is responsible for reporting data to Eurostat, has submitted a project proposal under Eurostat's grant call on 'Statistics for the European Green Deal'. Under the proposed project, a thorough analysis of available databases would be conducted, comparing existing data and estimating the share of 'free riders' among plastic packaging producers. This study is expected to significantly improve the quality of Slovakia's packaging data.

⁴ Commission Implementing Decision 2019/665.

OVERVIEW OF POSSIBLE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Governance

- 1) Set mandatory objectives or indicators for separate waste collection at the level of the bodies in charge of collecting municipal waste (e.g. municipalities) in order to monitor, enforce and achieve higher capture rates. This could be complemented with a system of financial rewards and penalties dependant on the performance on such targets. Information on the performance of municipalities could also be made available to the general public to raise awareness (e.g. by publishing on a website).
- 2) Address data-quality issues, especially those related to waste generated from packaging placed on the market and associated recycled quantities. Fully apply the criteria provided in the document *Guidance for the compilation and reporting of data on packaging and packaging waste according to Decision 2005/270/EC*. Carry out independent, third-party audits of data compiled by producers and producer-responsibility organisations.
- 3) Close and rehabilitate substandard landfills and take action against illegal landfills and fly tipping. Increase the enforcement capacity in order to inspect, check and discourage uncontrolled dumping.

Prevention

- 4) Take measures to increase re-use and to prevent the generation of non-recyclable municipal waste.
- 5) Promote and support sustainable consumption models. Slovakia's waste prevention programme could be complemented with specific mandatory measures, such as eco-design criteria, to make products more durable. It should allocate sufficient budget to the implementation of the waste prevention measures. Slovakia should also foster coordination between the central and the local government to achieve the EU's waste prevention objectives.

Separate collection

- 6) Develop, enforce and monitor minimum national service standards for separate waste collection (including of biowaste). This could include specifying, for example: (i) the type and volume of containers; (ii) the minimum and maximum frequency of collections; and (iii) the types of vehicle that may be used for collections. These standards should take into account the type of housing stock, climate, seasonality, etc. It should ensure that the necessary infrastructure for separate collection is put in place.

Waste treatment

- 7) Support preparing for re-use of municipal waste and develop waste treatment infrastructure associated with the higher steps of the waste hierarchy. Firm plans and concrete actions are needed, such as supporting home composting and increasing the efficiency of treatment capacity for biowaste in order to fully cover generated biowaste. This should be accompanied by the introduction of national quality standards to produce high-quality compost/digestate. The standards could be developed in dialogue with the farming community.

Communication and awareness raising

- 8) Maintain and strengthen awareness-raising activities specifically tailored to different target groups (e.g. households, commercial waste generators, schoolteachers, and students) to increase participation in the separate collection of waste. A set of national communication materials should be developed that: (i) are addressed to the general public, farmers, and pupils for use at local level; (ii) have clear and consistent messages; and (iii) have a particular focus on biowaste, home composting and the sound management of waste (e.g. sorting).

Extended producer responsibility and economic instruments

- 9)** Expand the application of the pay-as-you-throw system for both businesses and households to attain higher capture rates for recyclable fractions and reduce residual waste. Local authorities could be supported through guidance on how to design the incentive mechanisms.
- 10)** Use economic instruments (e.g. raising landfill taxes to a sufficiently high level; they currently range between EUR 11 and EUR 33 per tonne of municipal waste) to incentivise waste management associated with the higher steps of the waste hierarchy. This will help to make reuse, preparation for reuse and recycling economically attractive and reduce dependency on landfilling. The economic incentive should be designed and sufficiently large to be effective and steer waste management up the waste hierarchy. Landfill taxes that increase over time in correlation to specific targets are considered the most effective.
- 11)** Stepping up efforts to establish reuse systems for packaging will bring environmental benefits and help Member States in complying with the EU packaging recycling targets.