

A man and a woman are shown in a rural setting, sorting through a large, dark-colored compost bin. The woman, wearing glasses and a textured cardigan, is leaning over the bin, which is filled with organic waste. The man, wearing a dark jacket, stands beside her, looking down at the contents. In the background, there are several stone buildings with tiled roofs, typical of a village or small town. The entire image has a blue tint.

# Guide for Zero Waste Municipalities

A GUIDE ON HOW TO ESTABLISH, IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR A ZERO WASTE PROGRAMME WITHIN YOUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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# INTRODUCTION

Europe is transitioning from a linear to a circular model of resource management, and the implementation of this change takes place at a local level. Ambitious European Union legislation is today in place regarding waste and recycling, whilst the introduction of the EU's Green Deal and Circular Economy Action Plan 2.0 will provide further requirements and incentives for member states to transition towards a circular economy.

These developments will require local authorities to accelerate and change gears in the coming years so that prevention and reuse policies are designed and implemented effectively, the separate collection of high quality recyclable materials is the norm, whilst lowering waste generation levels facilitate the phasing out of disposing waste into landfills and incinerators, with increased emphasis placed on the positive impact this will have on achieving the EU's target of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050.

With the revision of key EU waste legislation in 2018, such as the [Directive on Waste](#) (2008/98/EC) and [Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste](#) (1994/62/EC), there is a growing number of local municipalities who want to begin their journey towards zero waste as means of reaching EU requirements. As they are often those with the competencies and powers to oversee waste management, European cities have a pivotal role to play in leading the transition towards a zero waste future.

New and updated legislation from the EU, combined with growing recognition from citizens on the need for change, together provides a unique opportunity for cities to utilise the opportunities that the circular economy provides, in helping to boost the local economy whilst protecting our environment. Cities and municipalities should be at the forefront of the growing zero waste movement by exploring new models of consumption, designing closed-loop resource systems, piloting waste prevention methods and by bringing communities together in the implementation of these policies.

Together with the [Zero Waste Masterplan](#), this document has been created by Zero Waste Europe as a tool to help guide its members to engage with and support local municipalities who want to run a zero waste programme.

The guide has been designed in order to:

1. Ensure a common understanding of the zero waste concept, definition and hierarchy - helping to avoid greenwashing and a distorted interpretation of the zero waste vision.
2. Create a common approach for zero waste municipalities across Europe to adopt and follow best practice examples.
3. Recognise the importance of citizen engagement and to ensure that local communities are given meaningful access and the ability to participate in the decision making process throughout the programme.



## 1

# Laying the groundwork

## AWARENESS RAISING

In some cases, you will find that municipalities come to you first to signal their interest in beginning their journey towards Zero Waste.

However in most cases, you will often need to make contact with municipalities and local officials first to introduce the concept of zero waste and the benefits of implementing such policies would bring to the community.

Some of the key things to highlight during your first contact with a municipality include:

- The work and expertise that exists within your organisation, the impact you have had locally or nationally and why you are contacting this specific municipality;
- Leading examples of municipalities across Europe who have committed to becoming zero waste, as well as examples of best practices in specific areas of waste prevention (all of which can be found on the Zero Waste Europe Cities website).
- The benefits that starting a zero waste programme can have for the municipality and the local area. You can highlight the overall benefits that zero waste brings to municipalities, such as compliance with EU legislation, lower waste management costs and increasing the number of local and sustainable jobs. However, you will have the most impact when you combine this with your local knowledge, to give specific examples of benefits this would bring E.G *"I know the current gate fee for incineration is XX amount. By reducing the volume of waste sent to incineration by adopting a zero waste strategy, you could save XX amount each year.."*

## TOP TIPS

- ★ **Build relationships with officials throughout your municipality:** these people will become your allies and partners, so you will need to build positive relationships if you are going to be able to work efficiently with the municipality. Saying hello to them at events, setting up meetings, sharing useful documents - small things that go a long way in helping to create a positive relationship which will be crucial to a successful programme.
- ★ **Speak their language:** certain definitions and approaches within zero waste will differ depending on the local context. Therefore, it is good to ensure that you have researched various documents and decisions made by the municipality to make sure you understand the language they use, which you can then put to good use when meeting with local officials yourself.
- ★ **Understand the needs of the municipality:** put yourself in the position of a local municipality officer to try to understand what motivates the decisions they make. This way, you will be in a better position to be able to tailor your style and approach to ensure the effectiveness of your work.

## Getting started

### INTRODUCING THE PROGRAMME TO A MUNICIPALITY

Following your initial contact, it is crucial at this stage to try and create an opportunity to present the framework of a local zero waste municipality programme to officials in person, through organising a meeting, event or workshop.

In order to optimize your work and save costs, we advise that you invite as many local municipalities as possible to save you having to organise several different events. Ideally, you want to bring together municipalities who share some important characteristics, such as their geography, economic development (E.G mean income of residents) and local environmental factors, such as organising an event specifically for municipalities which have high levels of tourism at peak times during the year and therefore face unique challenges to waste prevention.

This event or workshop should be intended for representatives of the local municipality and waste management company or contractors. The purpose is to introduce and propose a zero waste programme to local officials, ensuring that they understand what a zero waste municipality is and the requirements for committing to this goal. Most importantly, this includes highlighting the fact that becoming a municipality on the road to zero waste is just a first step in their journey, that progress needs to be constantly monitored, adapted and possibly changed through constant engagement with the community.

It is important to remember to tailor and adapt your event format and style to meet the needs of the participants / audience. The aim at this stage is to gain interest in zero waste from the municipality and ensure they have a good understanding about what this will mean for the community, in terms of actions that are municipality-led and the opportunities this will open up for them.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ Showcase successful best practices from other municipalities across Europe, particularly those with similar characteristics and history to your municipality, helping to provide a framework for how they can begin their own journey towards zero waste. Lots of case studies and technical publications can be found on the **Zero Waste Europe website**.
- ★ Keep the messaging positive and focused on the benefits this will bring to the local community. Have two or three policy changes in mind which could be easily implemented to help frame the discussions in a practical, action-oriented manner.
- ★ Identify upcoming public or media moments which you could use to amplify your message with the municipality, as **Zero Waste Lviv did when launching their “Plastic Bag Free” Awareness Campaign** with the local council, which finished on the 3rd of July, International Plastic Bag Free Day.

## FORMAL REGISTRATION

Once a municipality decides to begin their zero waste journey, they will need to register their details with the local zero waste group or the national zero waste Alliance, supported by the Zero Waste Europe Cities programme. Registration must include receiving the contact details of the responsible individuals, as well as the input of key data regarding waste reduction targets and the signing of a formal letter with Zero Waste Europe, who provide the templates for both.

## ZERO WASTE BOARD

At this stage of the process, it is compulsory that a formal stakeholder engagement mechanism is established, what we call a zero waste advisory board, which should support the coordination of the zero waste plan. The board should include relevant officials from the municipality, waste management company, as well as from the broader community through the local zero waste group, other NGOs, local businesses and more.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ **Try to receive contact details for two or three individuals at each organisation** to ensure the delivery of the programme will not be disrupted should one individual's circumstances change.
- ★ **Create clearly defined objectives, roles and responsibilities for members of the Zero Waste Board/Committee** so that each representative is aware of what is expected from them in this role.
- ★ **In Svilengrad, Bulgaria, a local Zero Waste Advisory Council was established** which consisted of a diverse group of active local citizens, including restaurant and hotel owners, non-governmental organisations, Roma youth, members of the local parliament, municipality officials, senior citizens, teachers, doctors and more.

## ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

During the design phase of a local zero waste plan, it is imperative for municipalities to conduct a thorough assessment and measurement of the current levels of several waste generation and prevention policies. The assessment of the situation at the point of departure gives municipalities and the local zero waste group a baseline picture about the effectiveness of resource management in the municipality.

Having this data available is absolutely crucial to the legitimacy and validity of the programme, providing the necessary foundation to build future targets and objectives that will be at the heart of the municipality's transition towards zero waste.

In order to ensure that this baseline assessment features the necessary criteria to measure progress towards Zero Waste, it is highly recommended that municipalities use the zero waste [toolkit and Masterplan](#) created by Zero Waste Europe, which provides a useful assessment tool for municipalities. This assessment should provide a thorough overview of the current levels of municipal waste that is generated, recycled, composted or disposed of, be that through landfilled, incineration or mechanical biological treatment (MBT). The main source of the data should primarily be municipal waste, but municipalities should also be encouraged to collect data on other waste generated in the area.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ **Utilise a broad range of community stakeholders in this process** to assist the local municipality and waste management companies. This will not only help provide a better quality of data, but will also set a positive precedent for meaningful community engagement.
- ★ **Try to collect data on as many waste prevention measures as possible**, such as the number of reuse centres and plastic-free shops in the community. This will help embed thinking and action on waste prevention from the outset and therefore a tool you can continue to come back to with the municipality to advocate for policies and strategies that prevent waste from being generated.
- ★ In just 3 months, the city of [Sălacea in Romania](#) saw vast improvements in waste reduction and prevention by adopting an effective separate collection system, after an initial assessment of the situation together with our member Zero Waste Romania that identified the urgent need of such a system.

## 3

## Creating a zero waste plan

### COMMUNITY WORKSHOP ON THE ZERO WASTE PLAN

Once you have the baseline data available for your local area, then it is highly recommended that the municipality or zero waste advisory board organises a workshop or event for the community to share these findings. Whilst this workshop is not mandatory, there are numerous benefits of bringing community members and relevant stakeholders together at this stage to examine the data and discuss potential actions to reduce residual waste.

During the event/workshop, the local municipality or relevant authority should present the current data on waste generation and recycling rates, before creating an opportunity for stakeholders to feedback and discuss various methods and policies which could be introduced to improve the situation. Stakeholders that should be in attendance include officials from the municipality and waste management companies, as well as NGOs, broader civil society groups, local businesses and public institutions, as well as residents.

### TOP TIPS

- ★ **Create an open, participatory event where all stakeholders can meaningfully engage** by ensuring that there is sufficient time within the agenda and structure of the event/workshop for community feedback. The strength of the plans and actions that will outline the municipality's journey towards zero waste will only increase if a broad range of groups have had the opportunity to share their ideas and expertise into this process.
- ★ **Keep the ambition high** for what goals and objectives the municipality wants to set, but also ensure that they remain achievable, addressing the biggest issues preventing the community from reducing its waste.
- ★ Until 2003, Sardinia had one of the lowest waste management levels in Europe with a separate collection rate of only 3.8%.

Today Sardinia is at the forefront of Italy and Europe, with a separate collection rate of 60% in 2016 and is aiming to reach 80% by 2022. **The case of Sardinia illustrates the importance of setting the right policies in place from the outset**, including widespread separate collection of biowaste and door-to-door collection, increasing the tax on disposal and a system of economic incentives for municipalities.

## FINALISING THE MEASURES AND GOALS

Based on the baseline data collected when assessing the current situation, together with the community event/workshop held previously, now is the time that the municipality should select which goals and measures it will aim to deliver on.

Ranging from kerbside separate collection rates to the introduction of a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) scheme to economic incentives for reuse policies, such as deposit return schemes, there are a wide variety of actions that the municipality can introduce which could be included in its plan for becoming zero waste. However, it is compulsory that the municipality meets the requirements set out in the **Zero Waste Commitment**.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ **Connect to the bigger picture** - whilst it's crucial to adapt the zero waste plan to your local context and needs, it is important to remind your municipality about specific waste prevention and recycling targets that have been set by either your national government or the European Union, if a member. **Like in the case of the Barcelona region**, this can often inspire action.
- ★ Use the Zero Waste Masterplan as a guide here with your municipality. **The case of Parma provides a key example of how the Masterplan can take a city from a traditional waste management plan to zero waste.** In 2011 the Italian city had seemingly stagnated with a separate collection rate of 48%, but by 2015 they had reached 72% with no extra costs to the municipality whilst also creating new jobs.

## 4

## Engaging local stakeholders

### **PUBLICALLY PRESENTING THE ZERO WASTE PLAN TO LOCAL RESIDENTS AND MEDIA**

Once a plan has been agreed and the targets have been set, the next crucial step for a municipality to take it is to present the brand new Zero Waste plan to the local community. This should be done through an event, or series of events, in the local area to be held in partnership with an awareness raising campaign online to ensure that local residents understand the changes that will be enacted. For example, regarding changes in the collection of materials and introduction of new reuse centres.

The public presentation of the zero waste plan is critical for ensuring that local residents are included in the decisions that will affect their lives from the start of the programme. As well as informing residents about waste management and the upcoming changes to the system, the public presentation and educational activities should also provide an opportunity for individual members of the public to feedback their thoughts. The local municipality must provide local residents with clear guidelines on how they may participate and how their ideas and suggestions will be fed back into the review of the zero waste plan.

Access to both the information and the opportunity to be consulted should be made available online as well, to ensure there is an option to participate for those who cannot attend or access the public meeting. It is crucial to the success of the municipality's zero waste agenda that local residents feel part of the solution, that their voices are being heard and that decisions are being made that reflect the best interests of the community.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ Zero waste not only reduces residual waste and ensures the values of materials and resources are kept in society, it also provides a system that helps create social cohesion and integration. **The local municipality and Zero Waste Board/Steering Group should ensure that this vision is communicated with local residents and captured throughout the zero waste plan.** This could be done for example through increasing the opportunities for meaningful public participation, or by generating new jobs for managing waste and recycling which will be open for community members, which subsequently results in greater levels of investment remaining within the community.
- ★ **Think about how residents get their information and adapt your plans to this,** helping you understand which communication platforms are most popular in your local community. In some cases it might be Facebook or other social media platforms, whilst in others it might be via the local radio or town hall meetings. A successful plan to engage with the local community will ensure that information is shared across a variety of communication platforms, reaching as many local residents as possible.
- ★ **The case of Bruges and the creation of the Bruges Food Lab,** where contribution from relevant stakeholders was collected, shows that a collective approach is often the key to an efficient plan for a city.

## Formalising the commitment

### ZERO WASTE PLAN ADOPTED BY THE LOCAL JURISDICTIONAL AUTHORITY

After the public consultation, once local residents have had an opportunity to learn about and feedback on the zero waste plan, the next steps for the municipality should be to send this plan to the local council or highest authority for formal approval. At the very least, the plan should contain the specific actions as required in the “Zero Waste Commitment” but if all the steps have been followed as outlined above, it is hoped that the local municipality will have an ambitious plan set in place that goes beyond minimum national or European Union targets.

Once adopted at the local council, the zero waste plan needs to also be confirmed by the local Zero Waste group/alliance and by the Cities team at Zero Waste Europe. This is to ensure that the plan meets our commitments and targets expected of a “zero waste municipality.” Therefore, only after a municipality has received confirmation from Zero Waste Europe and its local member that they may declare themselves formally as municipality on the road to zero waste, and welcomed into the Zero Waste Europe’s Cities programme.

The municipality will then be added to the network of Zero Waste Europe, including recognition on the website and online map of zero waste cities.. Once in the network, the municipality might be asked to share the lessons they have learnt through this process and some of their best practices with a wider audience, through Zero Waste Europe’s webinar series or an official case study. Officials at the municipality will also have access to the [library](#) of resources created by Zero Waste Europe and opportunities to participate in Zero Waste Europe’s Academy trainings.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ **Use the case studies and resources made available by Zero Waste Europe** to help advocate for greater levels of action and progress towards zero waste with your municipality. They cover a wide range of topics from our members across Europe, including how to collect organic waste more efficiently, removing single-use plastics from the local economy and effective WEEE recycling.

## 6

## Continuing to work together

### MONITORING AND REPORTING

At the end of each year since adopting the zero waste plan, it is highly recommended that the municipality collects the relevant data to create a report on the progress it has made towards achieving their goals and objectives outlined in the plan. This should be presented formally to the local zero waste group and/or the Zero Waste Board/Steering Committee, providing an opportunity to develop understanding of the successes and failures of the past 12 months. The report should combine past reporting with information on the planned actions for the next year, so that stakeholders remain informed and can feedback their thoughts on the planned zero waste actions.

In conjunction with this, the municipality should also be conducting regular awareness raising and information sharing events for the community, both offline and online. These events can be used to either report back on progress that has been made since the adoption of the zero waste plan, or to consult stakeholders on a specific measure, such as the design of a local DRS or EPR system.

It's imperative that members of the community, ranging from local residents to businesses, continue to be updated and engaged in the programme if they are to feel part of the common effort to transition towards zero waste. To ensure continued compliance with the zero waste plan, the Steering Board/Advisory Board should also have continued access to the data in order to set up a comprehensive monitoring system. Evaluating compliance can sometimes seem daunting, but decisions regarding progress towards the plan can be simplified into two specific areas:

1. Whether a municipality is making progress towards its **formal commitments**, for example if it has set a date to implement a management programme for organic waste.
2. Whether a municipality is making progress towards specific targets and indicators that have been outlined within their zero waste plan, such as X number of public events held throughout the year.

One example of a system used to effectively monitor a municipality's progress towards its zero waste commitments is through using three colour cards, signalling progress towards either the entire zero waste plan as a whole or for individual goals/targets:

- **GREEN CARD: All ok!** A green card signifies that the municipality is either fully complying with the agreed plan or is making good progress on a specific target. Where there is a green card, the local zero waste group should work with the municipality to understand the reasons behind this success and see if this can be replicated in other areas of the municipality's zero waste plan.
- **YELLOW CARD: Caution!** A yellow card means that the municipality is either not following some of the goals and actions in the plan or is not making the expected progress it had planned for a specific target. This card is used as a warning for the municipality to make the necessary steps to correct the situation. If a municipality begins to stop fulfilling or meeting the formal commitments, then it is automatically a yellow card. Meetings and discussions should be organised to examine what the barriers are that are preventing the plan or a specific target being achieved.
- **RED CARD: Off track!** A red card means that the municipality is failing to implement its own plan and has refused opportunities to take the necessary moves to make progress and continue to meet the zero waste commitments. This can result in the municipality being formally removed from Zero Waste Europe's list of zero waste municipalities.

## SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES OF MONITORING SYSTEMS

- Zero Waste Italy have been running a **highly effective monitoring system to continue to validate and classify municipalities' commitments** to being Zero Waste.
- In Slovenia, our member Ekologi brez meja (Ecologists Without Borders) run an **extremely successful monitoring and compliance programme** using a colour system to rate progress made by municipalities.

## TOP TIPS

- ★ If you are struggling to work with the municipality to regularly monitor progress towards the zero waste plan, then it might be useful to **start by measuring just specific sections (E.G. just separate collection rates) or specific events and meetings organised by the municipality.** Through successfully collecting the data, analysing this and presenting it in these smaller case-by-case scenarios, you will begin to build trust and recognition from the municipality on the need and value for greater compliance across the entire plan.
- ★ **Bring the community with you in this process** - everyone has a role to play in the transition to zero waste. Businesses, schools and hospitals should all feature centrally in a community's plan to reach zero waste, so try to meet, discuss and partner with them to help the municipality achieve its Zero Waste plan.

# CONCLUSION

This guide is intended to act as a supporting tool for Zero Waste Europe members to assist and support their work with local municipalities to raise the awareness and adoption of zero waste policies, encouraging more municipalities to implement ambitious zero waste strategies.

This document has been created to provide a framework from which members and municipalities could follow in the design and implementation of a zero waste strategy. For members, the information in this guide can be supplemented further through the tools and resources available on the [Zero Waste Europe Academy webpage](#).

The vision and aim of Zero Waste Europe's Cities programme is to accelerate the transition towards zero waste at the city and community level, with the implementation of the latest EU legislation and impactful zero waste strategies based on citizen-centered models, leading to a substantial decrease in waste generation through an increase in the recycling, reusing and repairing of materials.

With over 400 municipalities having committed and working towards zero waste already, there is clear momentum building. However, there remain significant legislative, social and cultural challenges in place that are slowing down Europe's transition to a zero waste future.

We hope that this guide can be a useful, informative and inspiring tool for those groups and municipalities who want to go zero waste but are unsure as to how, or to those who want to increase the efficiency and impact of existing waste reduction and prevention policies.



For further information or questions, feel free to get in touch with us anytime at [cities@zerowasteurope.eu](mailto:cities@zerowasteurope.eu)

Visit the [Zero Waste Europe](#) and [Zero Waste Cities](#) websites to find out more information about zero waste and how to implement successful waste prevention & reduction policies at the local level.



## Zero Waste Cities

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