

#ZeroWasteCities

Starting Scenarios to become a Zero Waste City

Scenario 1: Starting from scratch to quickly improve waste management

Introduction

Adopting and implementing a local zero waste strategy allows municipalities to save resources, create jobs and concretely go down the path of circularity. However, the diversity of situations in Europe does not allow for each city to follow general guidelines and, depending on where they're already at, the priority policies needed to achieve zero waste differ regularly.

Therefore, this publication is part of a series of scenarios written by Zero Waste Europe to give guidance to specific contexts commonly found across Europe. We do not aim to be comprehensive, nor to define a specific context precisely matching one municipality. Instead we want to identify just some of the realities we see municipalities face on a daily basis, and provide adapted paths towards becoming zero waste.

Baseline scenario

Geographical context

- Between 1 and 50,000 inhabitants: small-sized municipality
- Between 1 and 100 inhabitants per km²: very low density

Waste management context

- Low waste generation between 280 and 400 kilograms of waste per inhabitants per year;
- Separate collection rate between 10% and 30%, with little to no collection of organics and only collection for dry recyclables;
- Collection of biowaste between 0 and 20% - almost nonexistent and most of it happening through home composting;
- High reliance on disposal, mostly through landfilling. Low disposal fees;
- Little waste prevention measures in operation locally.

What are the main policies to focus on?

1. Introduce sufficient separate collection infrastructure:

Based on the already existing system and complementing the bio-waste collection scheme, separate collection should evolve to at least collect separately paper/cardboard, commingled plastic, metal and drinking cartons, as well as organics of course.

If properly implemented this should lead to a decrease in residual waste generation and therefore the need to collect residual waste as frequently, as well as greatly improving the quality of the collected recyclables by reducing contamination rates. This should be carefully implemented through a coherent communication to citizens and collection/bring points for residents to bring items which can be recycled or reused but not collected from the household, such as bulky or hazardous waste. To have the biggest impact, this system should be coupled with economic incentives such as a Pay-as-you-throw scheme, to incentivize and reward those who generate the least waste

To go further, read:

- [The case study on Salacea](#)
- [The case study on Vrhnika](#)

2. Implement a separate bio-waste collection scheme:

With a low density and a small-sized population, inexpensive measures can be taken to implement a decentralised bio-waste scheme. This happens through the education of citizens to composting but also through technical support with the distribution of home-composting boxes and the setup and maintenance of community composting. The system can also be further complemented with a door-to-door bio-waste collection scheme if a significant part of the population lives in dense areas within the municipality.

To go further, read:

- [The case study on Pontevedra](#)

3. Adopt flexibility regarding the treatment of sorted and residual waste:

A specific focus should be done on the contracts with the treatment facilities supposed to take care of the collected waste. Those contracts should be made within a strategy prioritising waste prevention and recycling over disposal hence avoiding the lock-in effect that can be created after a contract for an incineration plant. When it comes to landfilling, it should be first ensured that residual is properly bio-stabilised prior to landfill in order to minimize the environmental impact. Additionally, it is also needed to ensure that the separately collected dry recyclables (paper, plastic, metal) will be properly treated and recycled through a transparent contract with the private company taking care of the process.

To go further, read:

- [The case study on Prelog](#)
- [Zero Waste Europe's policy briefing on what MRBT is and how it can be an effective tool to transitionally manage dwindling residual waste totals](#)

4. Start implementing and promoting waste prevention programs

The next step to go zero waste is to reduce the quantity of generated waste. At the beginning, a residual waste analysis should help with analysing what are the most problematic items. Based on the results and on what can be achieved by the city, simple steps can be taken at the beginning of the zero waste journey. Among others, a zero waste green public procurement guidelines can be adopted to develop water fountains in the city if the water quality allows it or the ban of single-use plastic in public services.

To go further, read:

- [The case study on Roubaix](#)

Conclusion

In this situation, transition towards zero waste can start extremely quickly. A lot of practical cases show that with the right strategy and political will, positive changes regarding separate collection and prevention can be witnessed after a few months. Starting with bio-waste with decentralised options like community or home-composting is the key factor as this will quickly decrease the quantity of residual waste.

This publication is part of a three-part series.

- [**Read the other scenarios.**](#)

AUTHORS:

Pierre Condamine

Waste Policy Officer, Zero Waste Europe

Jack McQuibban

Cities and Communities Programme Coordinator, Zero Waste Europe

EDITOR

Theresa Bonnici

Communications Officer, Zero Waste Europe

For more information please visit: zerowastecities.eu



Zero Waste Europe is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts and change agents working towards the elimination of waste in our society. We empower communities to redesign their relationship with resources, and to adopt smarter lifestyles and sustainable consumption patterns in line with a circular economy.



Zero Waste Europe gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the European Union. The sole responsibility for the content of this event materials lies with Zero Waste Europe. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the funder mentioned above. The funder cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.