

WASTE POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Opening questions for the reader before reading:

- Do you think policies on waste affect our everyday lives? If yes, how?
- Do you know what waste policies/legislation are relevant in your municipality?
- Do you know what waste policies/legislation are relevant in your country?
- Do you know the relevant European waste policies and legislation?
- How do the different levels (local, regional, national, European) of policy-making connect to one another?
- What is the process of national and local level policy making in your country?

WHAT ARE WASTE POLICIES FOR?

The term policy is defined as the deliberate action, or set of actions, instigated by an institution, organisation or individual. As Zero Waste Ambassadors, we engage with policies on a daily basis within our work. Policies most notably come from government institutions, ranging from the European to local level, but they also importantly come from businesses – for example, their policy on how much recycled material they include in a certain product design.

For the majority of this chapter, we will refer to policy as **public policy** – the actions and decisions taken by publicly elected officials and public institutions related to how waste management and prevention systems are enacted.



Knowledge about how public policy on waste and resources is created is invaluable for Zero Waste Ambassadors and organisations working on this topic. **They set the framework for action** from which all other stakeholders must work within. Knowing how these policies get designed and then put into force, how these policies affect local waste management systems and how different levels of policy-making interact with one another will bring so many benefits to Zero Waste Ambassadors and help you achieve your goals.

Imagine this task:

You are a zero waste activist and want more people to start using reusable takeaway cups.

What would be your action plan?

How many people could you affect with it?

Many of the starting activists would try to convince their friends and acquaintances to bring their own mugs to cafes and tell people about the pollution caused by single-use cups, but this type of action doesn't reach many people. While it is still important to raise awareness about the issue and support individual action, more effective action in the long term would be to influence the regulatory system around takeaway drinks.

To showcase this, let us use one recent example from Germany. As we will discuss later in this chapter, the EU legislation on reuse currently is not as strong as it should be. Activists in Germany have been pushing hard for several years to get legislation that will support reuse business models, such as a national [Deposit Return Scheme](#) for beer bottles. Legislation passed at the federal level in Germany in the early 2020s, part of the country's transposition of the [EU Single-Use Plastics \(SUP\) Directive](#), made it a requirement for businesses over 80 m² and with more than 5 employees to offer reusable options for cutlery and food/beverage containers that will be consumed immediately. Many local groups started using this new federal law to support their cities and local businesses to enact this law, as well as going a step further by removing the single-use option as well.

This one short example shows how the different levers of policy-making interact (for better or worse) with one another, and they all must be considered when working on local zero waste strategies.

Being an effective Zero Waste Ambassador requires:

- a strong understanding of **how policies are made** and
- an ability to **effectively advocate** on behalf of zero waste strategies.

We are going to tackle these two interlinked but complex topics, policy and advocacy, together in this chapter due to the fact they are complementary to one another.

The EU has set an ambitious framework for waste and the circular economy. However, the details of how waste is managed and who is responsible for the numerous policies associated with the circular economy differ greatly from country to country, in and outside of the EU. Therefore, understanding the policy landscape is absolutely critical for any Zero Waste Ambassador who wishes to suggest realistic but also ambitious policy changes to their local municipality.

For Zero Waste Ambassadors living in EU Member States, there is a guiding framework set at the European level for collection, recycling, pre-treatment of waste and increasingly, on reuse and prevention.

KEY EU WASTE POLICIES

A key revision of the main EU legislation on waste was approved in May 2018 and it aimed at taking Europe towards a circular economy. These revised pieces of legislation include:

[Directive on Waste](#) (2008/98/EC) (also known as the Waste Framework Directive)

[Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste](#) (1994/62/EC)

[Directive on the Landfill of Waste](#) (1999/31/EC)



Key elements of the revised Waste Framework Directive include:

- A common EU target for recycling 65% of municipal waste by 2035.
- A common EU target for recycling 70% of packaging waste by 2030.
- Recycling targets for specific packaging materials (see table on the next page)
- A binding target to reduce landfill to a maximum of 10% of municipal waste by 2035 (see table on the next page)

Overview of new required goals for EU Member States in the field of waste management

	2025	2030	2035
Minimum recycling & preparation for reuse of municipal waste	55%	60%	65%
Maximum landfilling of municipal waste			10%
Minimum recycling of packaging waste	65%	70%	–
Plastic	50%	55%	–
Wood	25%	30%	–
Ferrous metals	70%	80%	–
Aluminium	50%	60%	–
Glass	70%	75%	–
Paper and cardboard	75%	85%	–

- Separate collection obligations extended to include hazardous household waste (by end of 2022), biowaste (by end of 2023), textiles (by end of 2025).
- Minimum requirements for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes to improve their governance and cost efficiency.
- Reinforcement of prevention objectives in particular, requiring Member States to take specific measures to tackle food waste and marine litter as a contribution to achieve EU commitments to the UN's SDGs.

The Waste Framework Directive and the Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste will also be reviewed and likely amended in 2023. This will mean new targets, definitions and requirements for the collection, recycling and preparation for reuse of materials by local municipalities.

The current European Commission (as of 2022) introduced [a second Circular Economy Action Plan](#) when it first took office in 2019, building on the first action plan that was introduced in 2015. Therefore, the “circular economy” is a relatively new term and package of legislation for EU Member States. Nonetheless, with the second Circular Economy Action Plan from the EU, we should expect more directives in the future that aim to tackle issues ranging from greenwashing to the reuse of textiles, [eco-design](#), reuse and the definition of recycling – all of which will have a huge impact on local zero waste strategies within the EU.

Furthermore, 2019 marked the adoption of a landmark piece of legislation to stem the flow of plastics into our environment and oceans by the EU. [The Single-Use Plastics \(SUP\) Directive](#), a key component of the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy (2018), aimed to prevent and tackle plastic waste by, among other things, phasing out unnecessary single-use plastics, introducing economic incentives to reduce consumption and help the transition to reusable systems, and establishing high collection rates and **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes**.

EPR schemes are a policy instrument available to governments. They apply the 'polluter pays principle' by placing the responsibility of a product's entire life-cycle – from designing environment friendly and low-impact products to managing their end-of-life – onto the producers themselves. Their design and implementation (and subsequent performance) differ greatly from country to country within Europe, but the general principle remains the same – the producers of materials which are placed onto the market should be responsible (financially) for ensuring they are properly managed.



Most common product types covered by EPR schemes include (plastic) packaging, WEEE (Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment), tyres, mattresses and more, but again this differs on a country-by-country basis.

For a deeper dive into the SUP Directive, check out [this briefing](#) by the Rethink Plastic Alliance.

For Zero Waste Ambassadors from non-EU countries, whether your municipality and national government has to follow these rules largely depends on the agreement between the country and the EU. Those willing to join the EU will sooner or later be bound by these directives, but, for as long as negotiations on environmental issues have not started, a country isn't formally compelled to follow the legislation, which is the case of most candidate countries. Countries like Switzerland are bound to EU directives to a certain extent, particularly with regards to [single market](#) rules. In the case of the UK, the Brexit deal has separated UK and EU legislation and now the UK is creating its own framework for waste and the circular economy.

NATIONAL LEVEL POLICY

It's important to know the specific relationship for policy-making, reporting and data collection between the local – regional – national levels of government within your country.

For those working within EU Member States, the targets listed above are applied and are the immediate responsibility of national governments to achieve. In most cases, waste policies are delegated from national to the local or regional level of government, where the responsibility for having the capacity, choosing the methods and finding the funding to achieve the EU goals listed above become a key issue in actually meeting these targets.

We as Zero Waste Ambassadors should not only know what the relevant EU policies are, but also what important circular economy related policies remain within the jurisdiction of national governments.

Possible differences between countries:

- Municipalities have full competency over waste management.
- Collection is a local authority competency but fee charging may be a regional-level competency.
- Decisions over what can be collected, how much is charged for it and how the waste is treated sit fully at the national level.

Each country, sometimes also specific subregions within the country, will have public bodies responsible for the collection of data on waste related indicators. Examples of national waste authorities and their data collection:

[England](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)

[Germany](#)

[Wales](#)

[Italy](#)

[Portugal](#)

[Scotland](#)

[Spain](#)

[Croatia](#)



This of course is not an exhaustive list of statistical sites, but rather a list to showcase just a small sample of examples of governmental bodies responsible for collecting data on waste.

Additional reading and key links:

[Eurostat municipal waste data](#)

[Eurostat recycling data](#)

[Eurostat biowaste data](#)

[The map from Seas at Risk](#) – best plastic prevention policies from across Europe

[Achieving the EU's Waste Targets: Zero Waste Cities showcasing how to go above and beyond what is required](#)

[Unfolding the Single-Use Plastics Directive](#) – a comprehensive briefing outlining what's in the SUP Directive, including specific goals and requirements of EU Member States



Why do calculation methods matter?

Something important for all Zero Waste Ambassadors to acknowledge – Eurostat data, whilst it is the most comprehensive overview of waste data across the EU and its close neighbours (hence why it is included in this handbook), cannot be seen as 100% verifiable or accurate. This is not in any fault due to the work of Eurostat. Varying degrees of quality data collection and different calculation methodologies exist at the member state level, which means they are hard to compare with each other. As Zero Waste Ambassadors, we should be advocating for harmonised data collection across the EU, in all Member States, which can be replicated by other European countries. This would include matching and adopting the new EU calculation methodology for recycling, as well as the key indicators used to measure waste, such as what is outlined in the [Zero Waste Cities Certification](#) framework.

New measurement and calculation rules have been introduced by the EU for Member States in recent years which will likely reduce the actual recycling figures.



Why would the harmonised calculation rules reduce some national recycling figures?

What does the *Waste data basics* chapter say about this?

Previously, Member States could include all the recyclable materials that were collected at a sorting facility and via collection methods in their reporting. Yet in most cases, a small percentage of these materials are too contaminated and too low quality to be considered for recycling. They end up being discarded and sent for landfill or incineration – meaning they make the statistics look better than the reality.

The new EU recycling methodology will now only count what officially goes into the recycling process. This methodology will be required to be put into use for the next round of EU targets, so 2025 at the latest, meaning the first results will likely be available in early/mid 2027 (the normal delay for reporting such figures).

Why isn't there more EU policy on reuse and prevention?

Ultimately, as Zero Waste Ambassadors we should always be prioritising and advocating for policies that prevent resources from becoming waste. Recycling is not enough to get us out of the crisis we face today – more action is needed to embed reusable products, materials and systems into our everyday lives.

As discussed in the *Zero Waste Cities model* and *Zero waste basics* chapters, local municipalities commonly have the responsibility for the collection and disposal of municipal solid waste. Quite often, local authorities can also decide the structure of the waste fee that citizens pay, creating systems that discourage waste generation.

Yet as we move up the waste hierarchy to focus more on reuse, repair and redesign, the role of local municipalities becomes slightly more opaque, as a range of other actors and legislative factors come into play. These actors include businesses such as restaurants, hotels, bars etc, whilst the legislative picture looks different for reuse and prevention, as it requires broader action at the regional, national and European levels to have a significant impact outside of just a city's borders.

Examples of waste prevention initiatives relevant to local authorities:

- Deposit Return Schemes for several product categories (beverage containers to food packaging)
- Repair and reuse centres for bulky and electronic items
- Packaging free shops
- Washing and delivery of reusable nappies
- Foodsharing platforms and apps
- Flea-markets where second-hand items of all kinds can be sold, but textiles are most common

Deposit Return Schemes and the limitations of city-wide prevention policies

For example, let us take a look at one key reuse policy – Deposit Return Schemes (DRS). DRS place a small deposit on the price of a product or item, that can be returned back to the consumer when they return the reusable product or item to another participating service provider. For example, you buy your favourite bottle of beer as part of your weekly shop, and pay an additional 10 cent to the price of the beer. When you go back to the supermarket for your next weekly shop, you either return the beer bottle to the cashier or drop it into a machine that identifies the bottle and collects it. Both options give you your 10 cent deposit back.

It's relatively simple and such policies are increasing in countries across Europe. However, this one example of DRS is being noted here as such schemes also show the limitations that city-wide initiatives can have. To have a big impact and provide citizens with clarity on where the DRS apply, these systems should be applied either regionally or nationally. A



Image from [We Choose Reuse](#) campaign

national DRS is important as it should also set harmonised design criteria for reusable products. For the example of beer bottles, in a national DRS, the system should uphold certain design and manufacturing requirements that all beer manufacturers must follow. This allows the bottles to be easily cleaned and prepared for reuse, whilst also creating a level playing field for all those involved in the DRS for beer bottles in this example – ranging from the producers of beers to the shops selling the bottles.

Whereas if the DRS is applied in one city but not its neighbour, manufacturers will not have the confidence they need to transition over to the system, whilst citizens cannot be sure where the deposit can and cannot be accepted.

One important note – this is not to say at all that DRS should not be tried and pursued by cities. In situations where national legislation does not mandate for DRS or other reusable pooling models, cities can play very important roles in piloting and implementing city-wide reuse initiatives.

Companies such as [Recup](#), [reCIRCLE](#) and many more are expanding rapidly in Europe, as they work with cities to install pooling systems for reusable coffee cups and takeaway food containers. Companies such as [Uzaje](#) in France are installing centralised cleaning infrastructure to help the expansion of reusable packaging by providing businesses with a safe and easy method for preparing products for their reuse.

When advocating for DRS within an EU member state, it's important to know that the Single-Use Plastics Directive sets targets for the collection of plastic beverage bottles of 77% by 2025 and 90% by 2029. This target **cannot be achieved via standard separate collection models alone**, and therefore requires DRS, as these systems are proven to achieve such impressive results. Once a DRS has been established within a city and is working well for such items such as glass bottles or aluminium cans, we as Zero Waste Ambassadors should use this to show municipalities where DRS could also work for other product types, such as e-commerce packaging, to truly help catalyse action towards a circular economy.

Of course, DRS are just one of several different tools/policies that can help prevent waste. There is a broad range of policies available that differ depending on the target material/product for prevention. For example, repair cafes and reuse centres – where citizens can bring products or materials, ranging from bikes to furniture and electronics, that are repaired and prepared for resale – are commonplace in Zero Waste Cities. Increasingly, businesses are also using digital technology to scale up reuse systems, such as [eReuse](#) in Catalonia which uses blockchain to create an open-source map of electronic products that have been repaired and reused in the region.

What to ask of cities on reuse and prevention?

What would you ask, based on what you have read so far?

Thinking of the activist who wanted to reduce use of single-use cups in the city, what kind of policies could he/she propose for the municipality (and the national government)?



Due to the increased number of actors needed to be involved in citywide prevention policies, some municipalities will be hesitant to take ambitious action or will not see it as a priority. In many cases, you as Zero Waste Ambassador may have a strong relationship with city officials working on waste management but for the topic of reuse and repair, the relevant city official with such competencies in their job will sit in a different team or department.

Nonetheless, there are still many initiatives and actions that municipalities can take which can have a significant and quick impact on waste generation locally. [ZWE's briefing](#) on how municipalities can create effective reuse strategies outlines **4 main priority areas:**

- Establish reuse and prevention targets.
- Adopt environmental and social public procurement criteria that prioritise reuse.
- Invest in and create quality collection points.
- Create a reuse culture locally with the community.

This section is by no means exhaustive in the slightest. The topic of reuse and prevention is huge, with huge volumes of resources already dedicated to these topics and many more will continue to be in the future, as we urgently push the solutions we need to transition towards a circular economy.

However, the purpose of this section is to introduce some of the details that we most commonly face when advocating for reuse and prevention at the local level. Zero Waste Ambassadors should focus on two main spheres when working with their local authorities to prevent waste:

- What is in the municipality's **direct** sphere of control – e.g. making reusable items mandatory in all public events, spaces, buildings and embedding prevention criteria within public procurement tenders. 
- What is in the municipality's **indirect** sphere of control – e.g. supporting the growth of packaging-free shops, local enterprises which operate reuse models, connecting local businesses with existing reuse companies (to name just a few!). 

EU waste policies and targets are the most ambitious in the world. However, at the local level we have seen significantly **better achievements thanks to strategic action taken with the help of Zero Waste Ambassadors such as you**. All of these examples have one thing in common: prioritising waste reduction and reuse. Since policies and targets are not yet very illustrative on how to achieve this, it is perhaps the hardest and most rewarding advocacy part in the ambassador's work. Collaboration and sharing best practices is crucial for this.

Additional reading:

[Local guidance on creating reuse strategies](#) – a briefing outlining 4 main policies for municipalities to adopt to help create a local reuse culture.



[Reducing food waste at the local level](#) – a briefing outlining several steps that municipalities should adopt to prevent the volume of food waste they generate.

[DRS Manifesto](#) – a short briefing outlining how DRS should be established.

[ReLoop's DRS factsheets](#) – a set of very useful documents outlining the key factors and benefits of DRS.

[Reusable vs single-use packaging: a review of environmental impact](#) – a comparison of reuse vs single-use packaging and their environmental impacts, which showcases the benefits of reusable packaging.

[The story of ReWine](#) – a case study on establishing reuse system for wine in Catalonia.

[The story of Halle 2](#) – a case study on Munich's reuse and repair hub.

[RREUSE's factsheet on why reuse targets matter and what they should be](#) – a briefing outlining why targets on reuse are so important and guidance for you on what they should be.

ADVOCACY

Of course, knowing the policy landscape is just one part of being an effective Zero Waste Ambassador. To perfectly supplement this knowledge, developing our **advocacy** skills, in order to be confident communicators of zero waste policies and messages, is also critically important to achieve meaningful change.

The term "advocacy" includes a wide range of activities that all intend to influence public policy. **Advocacy** can include:

- Conducting research.
- Educating the public through awareness campaigns.
- Meeting with politicians.
- Organising social media campaigns.



Advocacy tactics and activities are the most important way a Zero Waste Ambassador can help push for **systemic change**. Often, advocacy and lobbying are used interchangeably, yet lobbying is more associated with specific efforts to influence pieces of legislation, whilst advocacy encompasses a much broader range of educational and awareness-raising activities.

The best advocacy campaigns and initiatives are those which have a clear goal, know the system and how to work it to their advantage. Therefore, planning and preparation is absolutely critical when conducting advocacy activities. There are several important steps to follow to plan your advocacy:

Understand

- You must understand your issue first. You need to define what success looks like, what the causes of the problem you're trying to solve are. You need to know who you require on your side to achieve success and who may oppose what you are trying to do.
- **PEST** (political, economic, social and technological) and **SWOT** (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis tools are very helpful at this stage, as well as problem trees to help you dig deeper into the root causes of the problem.

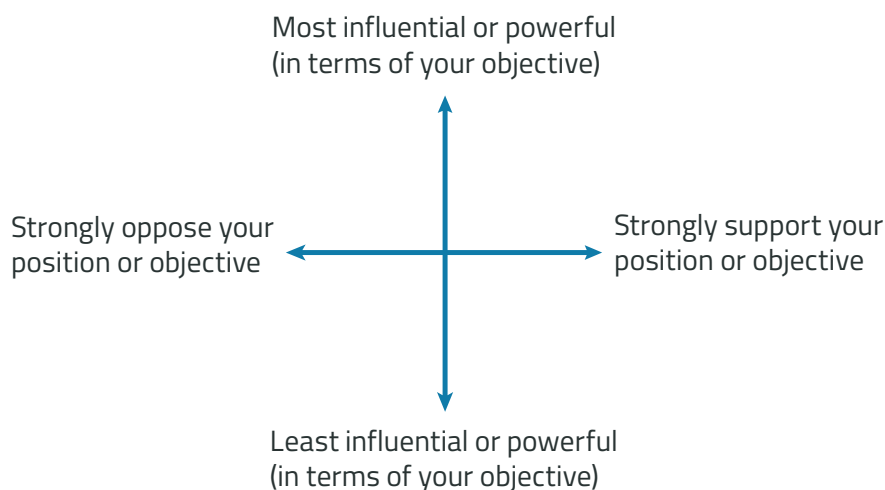


Plan

- You need to break down and identify different steps on the way to achieving your overarching goal. Identifying what needs to happen each year, month or week, for example, will really help paint the full picture of how you can achieve your success and what you need to do by when.
- You should also be able to identify the key targets and plan your key messages – what are you going to say to get people to act and who do you need to be saying these things to.
- Identifying key stakeholders by mapping them on the chart below where the two axis are their willingness to engage and power to change things, is a very useful tool to help during this process. Just identifying the key stakeholders is not enough though. On top of this, consider what power they have to bring about change, how willing they are to act in support of your goals and start to detail the specific activities that each stakeholder could take to help your mission.¹



An example of the power mapping chart, which can be seen in more detail [here](#):



¹ A good additional resource especially on power mapping: Burfield, E. (2018). *Regulatory Hacking: A Playbook for Startups*.

Act

- This just involves implementing the planned actions you identified previously, as well as evaluating your impact throughout the process, being open to changing plans, tactics or messaging where needed, if it will help increase your impact.
- The “act” phase can involve several different “actions” – meeting with policy-makers, campaigning in public, capacity building of volunteers, collecting petition signatures, sharing digital content in a targeted way, engaging with the media etc. Anything that will help get the people who you want to act do so in the way that you want them to, which may be individuals sorting their waste better at home or a politician proposing new wording to a key piece of legislation.



Advocacy may seem daunting to some, or it may come naturally to you, but either way it is a fundamental and necessary part of our work as Zero Waste Ambassadors. However, there are several different tools out there to help make your advocacy work as impactful as possible, helping to really specify what your objectives are, how you will reach your objectives and who you will need to help you in this process. Furthermore, a large part of advocacy is the ability to communicate – either in written or oral format. Communication skills can be worked on and developed, but **being a confident communicator often comes from having prepared sufficiently.** Knowing your key messages, who your audience is, what their motivations are and what you clearly want them to do after reading/listening to your communications are all critical to effective advocacy. However, it’s good to always know and be comforted by the fact that plans very rarely ever go as they were 100% designed to. They can fail or exceed your expectations. Having a plan will help assess the outcome, good or bad, and will provide you with invaluable guidance on where to go next. For more information about effective communication, check the *Communication and storytelling* chapter. There you will also find more information on how the power mapping chart can be further used.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Before reading the answers, think to yourself: **how would you answer them?**

1. Where should I go to find out the relevant policies on waste and the circular economy for my community?
2. What are the best examples of policies that help zero waste?
3. Why shouldn't we just ban all problematic materials?

1. Where should I go to find out the relevant policies on waste and the circular economy for my community?

This will differ depending on the region and country you live in. Eurostat provides the best overview of the European picture. Then for the national level, or even regional level within a country, you should research who is responsible for waste management and where they publicise the data they collect. Each municipality you work with should know who they must report their waste data figures to.

2. What are the best examples of policies that help zero waste?

Any policy that follows the framework of a Zero Waste City is beneficial and should be encouraged by all Zero Waste Ambassadors. These range from the introduction of separate collection systems to PAYT systems and targets on the volume of material reused per year. Whilst some of these policies are designed and implemented at the local level, national and regional policies are key to help enable municipalities to take ambitious action. For example, national laws that mandate the separate collection of organics, [as was the case in Slovenia in the 2000s](#), or the recent [French national law compelling supermarkets to donate leftover food waste](#).

3. Why shouldn't we just ban all problematic materials?

In theory, this would work and we could single-handedly prevent all of our most problematic materials from entering the market. In reality though, we must create a transitional strategy away from our current economic models. Businesses and citizens must be supported and guided to switch to reusable, safer materials during their everyday lives. Of course, we advocate for bans but these bans must be accompanied by alternative solutions and an ambitious but realistic timeline that allows all the relevant stakeholders to sufficiently adapt before the ban is enforced.

Ending questions for the reader to reflect upon:

- What parts in this chapter were most confusing or difficult for you to understand? Why do you think it was so?
- Who are the main actors that you need to work with within your community on waste prevention policies?
- Why do you think policy-making feels scary or boring to some people? And why do some people find it fascinating?
- What skills do you already possess that makes you a good advocate? What do you feel you can improve on?
- What tools and methods do you have to help you with your advocacy?
- What do you want to take with you from this chapter?
- If and what next steps do you want to take in your work regarding this topic?
- What do you want to know more about?