

A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy

Main messages relevant for recyclers

The **key challenges** linked to plastics are outlined in the first part of the document, among them:

- The potential for recycling plastic waste remain largely unexploited.
- Landfilling (31%) and incineration (39%) remains high for plastic waste.
- Demand for recycled plastics accounts for only 6% of plastics demand across Europe.

It has to be mentioned that the Commission acknowledges the **environmental benefits of plastics recycling, especially in terms of CO2 benefits** (avoided emissions linked to recycling), using as a source the tool developed by FEDEREC and ADEME.



The broad **vision** for a circular plastics economy is then outlined, and notably:

- By 2030 all plastics packaging is reusable or can be recycled in a cost-effective manner.
- By 2030, sorting and recycling capacity has increased fourfold (x4) compared to 2015, creating 200 000 new jobs across Europe.
- Exports of poorly sorted plastic waste has been phased out.
- The market for recycled and innovative plastics is established, with clear growth perspectives as more products incorporate plastic content.

To turn this vision into a reality, four levers of action are identified:

1. Improving the economics and quality of plastics recycling

❖ **By encouraging design for recyclability :**

>For the plastic **packaging** : there will be a review of the current legislation to ensure that by 2030 all plastics packaging placed on the EU market is reusable or easily recycled. *(N.B:This is the main announcement of the Strategy).*

>For plastics from the **automotive and electronic sector**, the issue of the lack of information on the substances of concern within these is identified as an obstacle that will be addressed by the action on the Interface between the Chemicals, Products and Waste legislations.

>Product requirements will be developed under the **Ecodesign Directive** : here the Commission mentions the example of the Ecodesign Regulation on electronic displays for which some action has already been taken.

❖ **By boosting the demand for recycled plastics**

>The Commission designates the **lack of quality standards** for sorted and recycled plastics as a reason for the absence of a functioning market for recycled plastics: the idea to remedy this is to prepare **EU wide quality standards**, which will have to be prepared by the **European Committee for Standardisation**.

>Another issue identified is **the resistance to change** among product manufacturers. The example of successful commercial partnerships between producers and plastics recyclers in the automotive sector is mentioned as good practice. The **EU wide pledging campaign** is the first solution put forward by the Commission (see Annex III) : private and public actors are expected to come forward with substantive pledges by June 2018, and the Commission expects that this will ensure that by 2025, 10 million tonnes of recycled plastics will be incorporated in new products.

It is expected also that the Commission will come forward with **concrete proposals to promote the use of recycled plastics** during, e.g. the revision of the **ELV Directive**.

❖ **By improving and harmonising separate collection and sorting**

EPR schemes and deposit systems are identified as a solution to this challenge. The Commission will issue **new guidelines** on separate collection and sorting of waste. The review of the waste legislation will also be a way to ensure that the existing obligations are implemented in a better way.

2. Curbing plastic waste and littering

This section is less relevant for recyclers but it has to be mentioned however that REACH restrictions of the use of **microplastics and oxo-plastics** in products will be developed.

3. Driving innovation and investments towards circular solutions

>To allow better sorting and traceability of materials, **digital watermarking** is quoted as a possible innovation.

>Additional **100 millions €** will be allocated to **H2020 projects** on: developing smarter and more recyclable plastics / making recycling processes more efficient / tracing and removing hazardous substances and contaminants from recycled plastics.

> The need to **modernise and scale up recycling plants** is identified. The measures presented in section 1 are designed to boost investor's confidence, but on top of this, the Commission lists other levers:

- ⇒ Well designed **EPR schemes**, to help improve the efficiency of the recycling processes, encourage design for recycling and promote dialogue between the actors. The Commission will notably issue a **guidance on the eco-modulation of fees**.
- ⇒ A potential **private led fund to finance investment** in innovative solutions that could support the uptake of recycled plastic.
- ⇒ Encourage Member States to support the objectives of the strategy when deciding on taxation measures and public procurement. The **internalisation of the environmental costs of landfilling and incineration** through high or gradually rising fees or taxes to improve the economics of recycling.

4. Harnessing global action

>The decision of China to ban the import of plastic waste is expected to create **opportunities** for EU recyclers.

> The Commission will promote the development of **international standards** to boost industry confidence in the quality of recyclable or recycled plastics.

>Ensuring that plastics sent abroad for recycling are handled and processed under conditions similar to those applicable in the EU under **rules for waste shipments**.

>Supporting the action on waste management under the **Basel Convention**.

>Developing **EU certification scheme for recycling plants**.

The detailed list of the measures to be taken by the EU, Member States or the Industry is available in the Annex that was published along with the Communication on the Plastics Strategy and can be found [here](#).

Through its Member Recycling Federations from 20 EU and EFTA countries, EuRIC represents today over:

- ✓ 5,500 companies generating an aggregated annual turnover of about 95 billion €, including large companies and SMEs, involved in the recycling and trade of various resource streams;
- ✓ 300,000 local jobs which cannot be outsourced to third EU countries;
- ✓ An average of 150 million tons of waste recycled per year (paper, metals, glass and beyond).

Recyclers play a key role in a circular economy. By turning wastes into resources, recycling is the link which reintroduces recycled materials into the value chains again and again.