

Waste management country profile

with a focus on municipal and packaging waste

Austria

February 2025



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Key messages

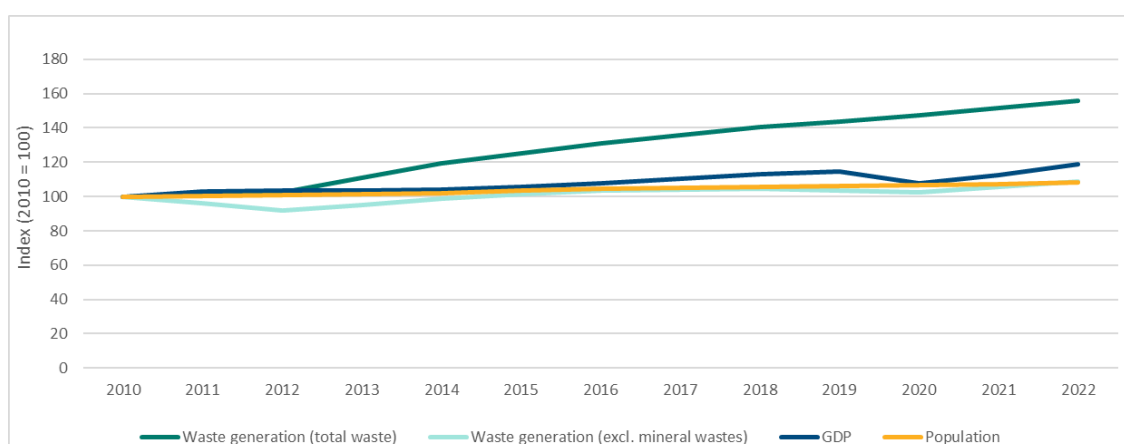
- Waste generation in Austria significantly increased over the last 12 years, mainly driven by the largest waste categories, namely soils and mineral waste from construction and demolition. There is no indication of decoupling between waste generation and economic growth.
- Austria reports a recycling rate of 63% for municipal waste and 66% for total packaging waste for 2022, above the 2025 targets of 55% and 65%, respectively. In addition, Austria managed to reduce landfill levels to a very low level of just 2% of the generated municipal waste. The new reporting rules applicable to the 2025 targets have been applied in Austria since the reference year 2020.
- With a plastic packaging recycling rate of 25% in 2022, Austria needs to speed up its progress to meet the 2025 target (50%). Austria introduced an obligation to establish a plastic packaging waste collection system and supports the establishment of sorting and recycling facilities by funding through Austria's recovery and resilience plan. The effect of this new provision remains to be seen.

Trends in waste generation and treatment

Total waste generation

Austria's total waste generation shows a significant increase from 2012 onwards (Figure 1). This trend is primarily driven by the largest waste categories, namely soils and mineral waste from construction and demolition. Excluding the major mineral waste categories results in the stabilisation of the overall waste generation. This is mainly due to opposite trends in the largest waste categories, namely mixed waste and recyclable wastes. More specifically, recyclable wastes increased while the generation of mixed waste decreased, indicating improvements in waste management. Austria's GDP showed steady growth over the considered period, but dropped in 2020, most likely due to the Covid-19 outbreak. While a longer time series is needed to confirm decoupling from GDP, waste generation appears not to have been decoupled from economic growth.

Figure 1 Generation of waste (total and excluding major mineral wastes), population and economic development, 2010-2022



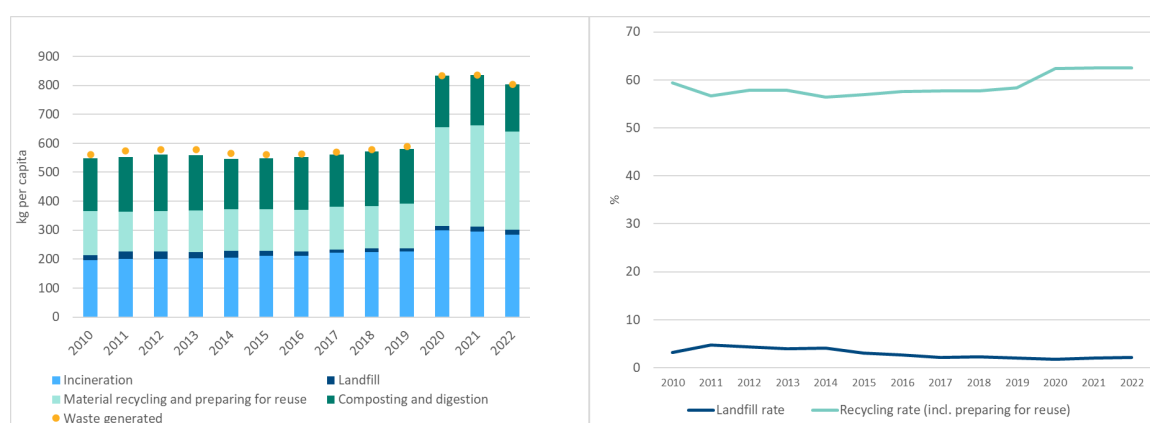
Source: Eurostat (2024a, 2024b, 2024f)

Note: Waste generation data for odd years are interpolated.

Municipal waste

Municipal waste generation in Austria remained relatively stable until 2019, but significantly increased in 2020 (Figure 2, left). The latter is due to changes in the reporting methodology, when the coverage of the reported municipal waste was extended to include waste that is similar to household waste but comes from other sources, such as services or commercial and industrial operations, resulting in a break in series. In 2022, the country generated 803 kg/cap of municipal waste, which is significantly above the (estimated) EU-27 average of 513 kg/cap ⁽¹⁾.

Figure 2 Municipal waste management (left) and rates of recycling (incl. preparing for reuse) and landfill (right), 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat (2024d)

Note: There is a break in series in 2020. As of the reference year 2020, new reporting rules apply for calculating recycled municipal waste pursuant to the targets laid down in Article 11.2(c-e) of Directive 2008/98/EC. The reporting rules have been applied since the reference year 2020 in Austria.

The recycling and landfill rates for municipal waste stagnated over the past years in Austria (Figure 2, right). Notably, the recycling rate stands at 63% in 2022, which is significantly above the (estimated) EU-27 average of 49% in the same year. The landfill rate remained very low throughout the considered period, standing at 2% in 2022. The share of waste incinerated has remained quite stable as well since 2010 and was 35% in 2022.

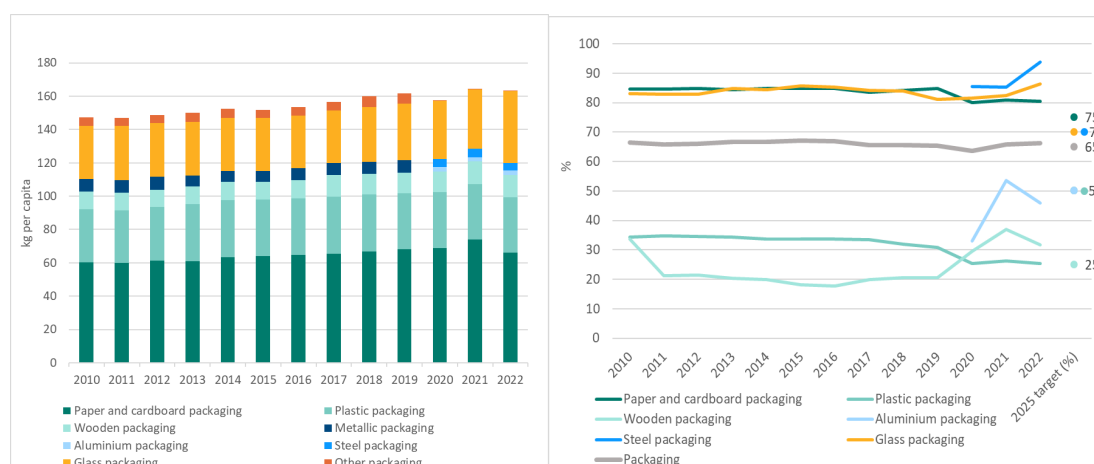
Austria has also reported data to show compliance with the preparing for reuse and recycling target of 55% for 2025, as laid down in the Waste Framework Directive. The difference between these (provisional) data, following the reporting obligation of the Waste Framework Directive, and the data shown in Figure 2 (voluntary reporting) is below 1 percentage point for the preparing for reuse and recycling rate, in both 2021 and 2022. The 2022 data according to this reporting obligation are still awaiting validation by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024c).

⁽¹⁾ The EU-27 average might be influenced by the situation that not all Member States already fully apply the rules for reporting on municipal waste as defined in the Waste Framework Directive as amended in 2018.

Packaging waste

Packaging waste generation in Austria moderately increased since 2010 (Figure 3, left). The country generated 163 kg/cap in 2022, which is significantly below the (estimated) EU-27 average of 186 kg/cap in the same year ⁽²⁾.

Figure 3 Packaging waste generation (left) and recycling rates (right), 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat (2024e)

Note: As of the reference year 2020 the rules for calculating recycled packaging waste have changed, pursuant to Article 6a, of Directive 94/62/EC. The new reporting rules have been applied since the reference year 2020 in Austria.

Austria's overall packaging waste recycling rate has stagnated since 2010, reaching 66% in 2022. Similar stable trends apply to paper and cardboard and glass packaging (Figure 3, right).

The overall packaging waste recycling rate is strongly influenced by paper and cardboard packaging as this constitutes the largest fraction combined with a high recycling rate (Figure 3, left). The recycling rate for wooden packaging increased in 2020 when the repair of wooden pallets was included. The recycling rate for plastic packaging is quite low and has been moderately decreasing since 2010 to just 25% in 2022 (Figure 3, right). As of the reference year 2020, it is mandatory to report steel and aluminium packaging separately. Since 2020, the reported recycling rate of steel packaging waste was above the 2025 target.

Policies in place to encourage waste prevention measures and to increase recycling

Legislative framework and waste management plans

The most important legal basis for waste management in Austria is the Waste Management Act (Republic of Austria, 2002), as amended in 2021 (AWG-Novelle Kreislaufwirtschaftspaket, 2021), and associated ordinances. The Federal Waste Management Plan 2023, which includes the new waste prevention programme, has been published in 2023 (BMK, 2023a). It reflects the requirements of the EU Waste Directives as amended in 2018, which was identified as one

⁽²⁾ The EU-27 average might be influenced by the situation that not all Member States already fully apply the reporting rules for packaging waste as defined in the Commission Implementing Decision 2019/665.

of the priority actions by the European Commission's Environmental Implementation Review 2022 (EC, 2022).

Waste prevention policies

Austria's National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) 2023-2028, was published in 2023 as part of the Federal Waste Management Plan (BMK, 2023c). The objectives of the NWPP are divided into seven fields of action, each with its own objectives, indicators and measures. The fields of action are construction, plastics and packaging, food, textiles, reuse and repair, households (including littering), and businesses and organisations. (EEA, 2023)

The NWPP has defined quantitative targets related to prevention in the field of food waste and regarding single-use plastics. Furthermore, it refers to waste prevention targets set in other documents, such as SDG 12: 'Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns'. The indicators for the NWPP were selected in such a way that the data is largely based on official statistics and data sources. It has to be ensured that the data are collected continuously if it is not available annually. Specific targets have also been set for each priority waste stream. (BMK, 2023c)

In recent years, numerous activities to combat food waste have been launched at a national level. The 'Food is precious!' initiative of the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, started in 2013 in close cooperation with the federal states, the municipalities, municipal waste management associations, employees, consumers and social institutions. Regional reuse and repair networks are part of Austria's waste prevention actions. (EEA, 2023)

The revision of the NWPP was based on an evaluation of the 2017 programme, as well as on an analysis of good practices of successful waste prevention in other EU Member States (Umweltbundesamt, 2023). The result of the evaluation and revision was incorporated into the current NWPP. Moreover, the waste prevention measures were developed in the course of a stakeholder process and subjected to broad public participation. The programme does not include a specific budget for implementation of the programme or for specific measures. (EEA, 2023)

Waste prevention is part of Austria's transformation towards a circular economy. Austria has developed a Circular Economy Strategy, where the reduction of resource use, consumption, waste and emissions has a special importance within the context of sustainable development and climate protection. (BMK, 2022)

According to 2021 data reported to the EEA in response to Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/19 (EEA, 2024), Austria reused:

- 28447 tonnes of textiles,
- 18148 tonnes of electrical and electronic devices, and
- 58166 tonnes of furniture.

It should be noted that these data have been reported for the first time. As the reporting process matures, it is expected that these data will strengthen but for now, caution is advised in drawing insights from the dataset. More information about the interpretation and limitations of the dataset is available (EEA, 2024).

Policies to encourage separate collection and recycling

Separate collection is regulated in several ordinances, including the Ordinance on Source Separation of Bio-waste and the Ordinance on Packaging. Paper and cardboard are mainly collected separately door-to-door, except in rural areas where it is also collected through nearby bring points. Ferrous metals, aluminium, glass, textiles, composite and plastic packaging are mainly collected via nearby bring points, but for plastic and metals packaging and beverage cartons, the system will move more towards door-to-door collection (see below). In some towns and suburbs, these fractions, except for glass and textiles, are collected co-mingled door-to-door.

Sometimes, this is combined with the collection of small wooden packaging. Residual waste and bio-waste are separately collected via door-to-door collection. All fractions are to some extent also collected via civic amenity sites. Wood waste (except for small wooden packaging), waste from electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) and other (e.g., bulky, hazardous) wastes are only collected via civic amenity sites. WEEE and batteries are also taken back at shops. (Environment Agency Austria, 2024; ETC/CE, 2022)

From 1 January 2023, the uniform collection of lightweight packaging applies due to the amendment of the Packaging Ordinance. This means that, throughout Austria, the yellow bin or yellow bag will be used for the (co-mingled) collection of all plastic packaging (e.g., yoghurt pots, plastic bags or tubes), plastic bottles, beverage cartons, and lightweight packaging made of composites, wood or textiles. In 2025, the joint collection of plastic and metal packaging will be mandatory throughout Austria. The federal states of Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg and Vienna, as well as some districts in Upper Austria, have implemented this step already in 2023. (Environment Agency Austria, 2024)

In order to incentivise sorting at source, the whole population is covered by pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) systems, as required by Austrian waste legislation and implemented by municipalities. The setting of fees falls under the competence of the relevant federal provinces. According to the Austrian authorities, the responsible institutional levels for introducing PAYT schemes are the municipalities, waste management associations, and waste management operators. Different approaches are established in the regions of Austria. (Environment Agency Austria, 2024)

Austria has Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) systems in place for packaging waste but does not yet apply advanced fee modulation. The introduction of fee modulation is currently assessed by a Ministry working group (focusing on multi-layer packaging and plastic packaging).

Finally, a deposit-refund system for single-use beverage plastic bottles (except for dairy products) and beverage cans will take effect from the beginning of 2025. (BMK, 2023b)

Policies and instruments to discourage landfilling or incineration

In 1989, Austria introduced a landfill tax, as required by the Austrian Act on the Remediation of Contaminated Sites (Republic of Austria, 1989). The tax depends on the composition of the waste and the standards of the landfill. Currently, the tax amounts to EUR 29.80 per tonne and has not changed since 2012. A tax has to be paid as well to landfill outputs of mechanical-

biological treatment (MBT) or sorting plants. Residues from incineration and co-incineration are exempted from the landfill tax. (ETC/CE, 2022)

Since 1997, there is also a landfill ban in place in Austria as stipulated in the Waste Management Act and the Ordinance on landfills. Waste with a total organic carbon (TOC) content above 5% is banned from being landfilled, except for MBT output, waste with a calorific value of max. 6 600 kJ/kg dry substance, and residues from mechanical waste treatment with a calorific value of max. 6 600 kJ/kg dry substance and a TOC of max 8%. (ETC/CE, 2022) In addition, Austria applies a tax on incineration of waste, including on the production of refused derived fuel (RDF) which has been kept stable at EUR 8 per tonne since 2012. No further tax increases are foreseen at the moment. In case the waste is exported for incineration, the same rules and procedures apply as for domestic incineration, including the production of RDF. (ETC/CE, 2022)

Prospects for meeting the targets on recycling and landfilling

In the EEA's early warning assessment, Austria was assessed to be on track to meet the 2025 targets for the recycling of municipal waste and packaging waste except for plastic packaging, and to meet the 2035 landfill target. For 2022, Austria reports a recycling rate of 63% for municipal waste and 66% for total packaging waste in 2021, which is above the targets of 55% and 65%, respectively. Austria also reported material-specific recycling rates above the 2025 targets for all packaging materials except for plastics and aluminium. The new reporting rules have been applied since the reference year 2020 for municipal waste and for packaging waste (Environment Agency Austria, 2024). The reported landfill rate for municipal waste of only 2% is also already well below the 2035 target of the Landfill Directive to reduce landfill to a maximum of 10%. Consequently, the European Commission did not issue any policy recommendations for waste management performance in its Early Warning Report published in 2023. Nevertheless, Austria needs to take additional measures to meet the 2025 recycling target for plastic packaging waste. (ETC/CE, 2022)

There is still room for improvement, and the Commission's Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) emphasised the potential to shift reusable and recyclable waste away from incineration. (EC, 2022)

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