Waste management country profile

with a focus on municipal and packaging waste

Latvia

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European Environment Agency

Key messages

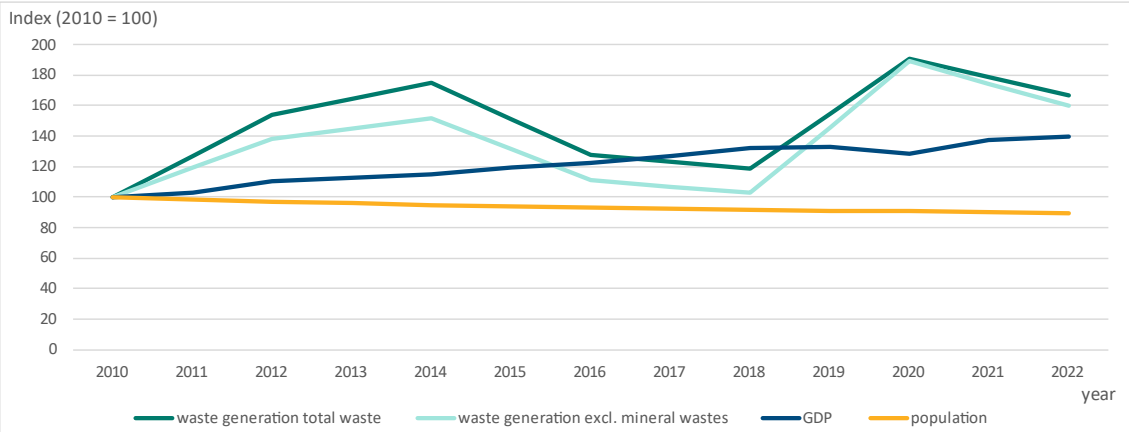
- Waste generation has fluctuated heavily in the past 12 years with an overall significant increase. No conclusions on the decoupling of waste generation from economic development can be drawn from the available data.
- Latvia is considered to be at risk of missing the 2025 targets for preparing for reuse and recycling of both municipal and total packaging waste, however, most recent data show considerable progress in increasing the recycling rate. Latvia has to speed up its progress towards reaching the 2035 target to reduce landfilling.
- In the past 10 years, Latvia has made progress in improving its municipal and packaging waste recycling rates and decreasing the landfill rate. When waste generation has increased, it has been directed towards recycling. However, the absolute volumes of municipal waste sent to landfill have remained fairly stable although the share of landfilled waste has declined.
- Latvia still needs to improve the separate collection system, especially for bio-waste. The recently strongly increased landfill tax can be expected to help disincentivising landfilling if implemented well but its actual effect remains to be seen.

Trends in waste generation and treatment

Total waste generation

The total amount of waste generated in Latvia increased strongly between 2010 and 2014, decreased until 2018, and has significantly increased since (Figure 1). This trend is primarily driven by the largest waste categories, namely household and similar wastes, and sorting residues (which are part of the mixed ordinary wastes category). When excluding major mineral wastes, waste generation shows a similar trend, as mineral wastes are not dominating waste generation in Latvia. Latvia's GDP is quite steady with a small increasing trend but dropped slightly in 2019, most likely due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Population is slightly declining and would not have a strong impact on waste generation trends. Due to the strong variations in waste generation, no clear indications of decoupling between economic growth and waste generation can be seen.

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



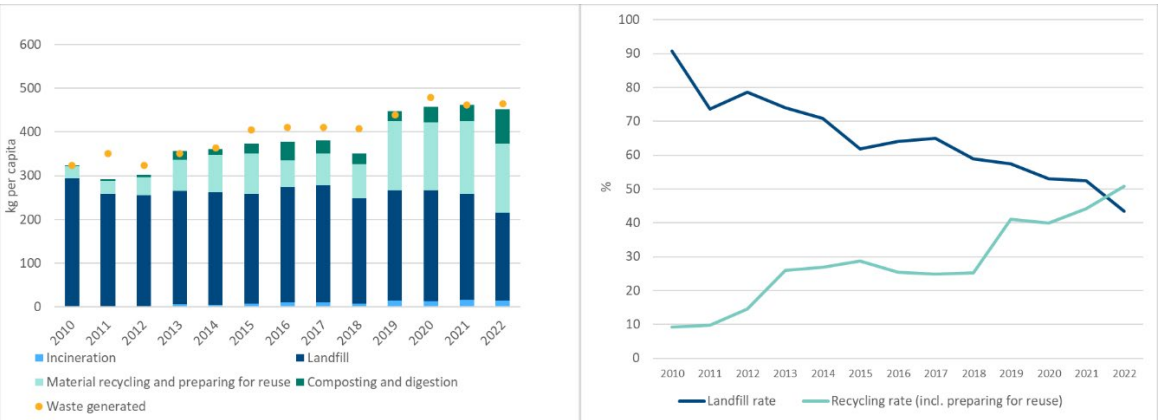
Source: Eurostat (2024b, 2024a, 2024f)

Note: Waste generation data for odd years are interpolated.

Municipal waste

Latvia's municipal waste generation has increased over the past decade with drops in 2011-2012 and 2018 (Figure 2, left). In 2022, the country generated 464 kg/cap of municipal waste, which is significantly below the (estimated) EU-27 average of 513 kg/cap. Latvia has a recycling rate of 51%, which is very close to the (estimated) EU-27 average of 49%. The preparing for reuse and recycling rate has increased strongly from 9% in 2010 to 51% in 2022 (Figure 2, right). This increase is mainly related to increasing amounts going to material recycling; as of 2019, waste exported for recycling has been included in the statistics for recycled waste, which led to a strong increase in the recycling rate (ETC/CE, 2022).

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



Source: Eurostat (2024d)

Note: In 2019, there was a change in reporting methodology for waste exported for recycling. 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. Latvia applied the new calculation rules from 2020 onwards.

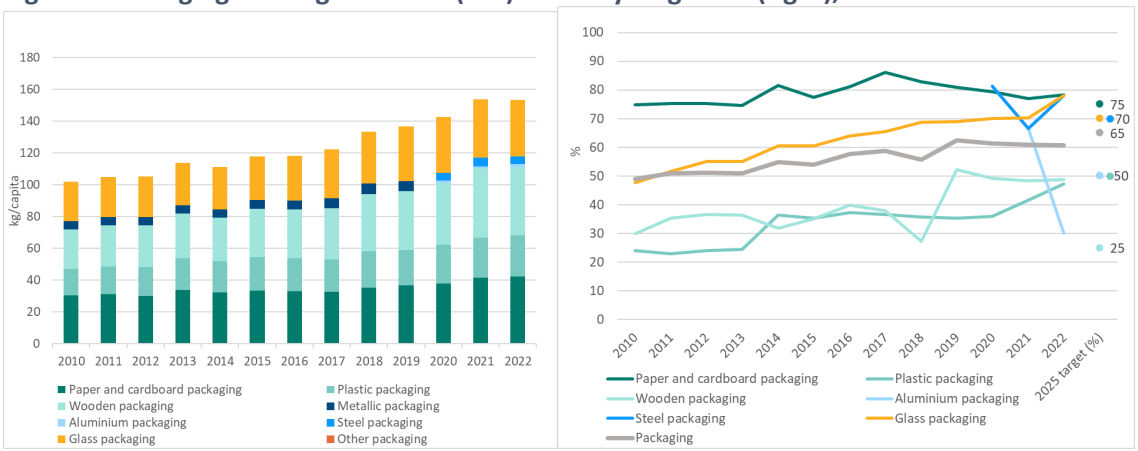
The landfill rate decreased steadily since 2010 (Figure 2, right), but in 2022, 44% of Latvia's municipal waste was still landfilled, while incineration plays a minor role (Figure 2, left).

The data shown in Figure 2 differ from the data reported by the Latvian authorities to show compliance with the preparing for reuse and recycling target of 55% for 2025, as laid down in the Waste Framework Directive. Latvia reported a preparing for reuse and recycling rate in response to the target that was 5-10 percentage points below the (voluntary) data shown in Figure 2 for the reference year 2021, and no validated data for the reference year 2022 are available yet (Eurostat, 2024c).

Packaging waste

Latvia's packaging waste generation significantly increased since 2010. The country generated 153 kg/cap in 2022, which is significantly below the (estimated) EU-27 average of 186 kg/cap in the same year ([1]).

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. Latvia has applied the new calculation rules from 2020 onwards.

The overall recycling rate for packaging waste has increased since 2010 (Figure 3, right), reaching 61% in 2022. The recycling rate is mainly driven by paper and cardboard, wooden, and glass packaging waste recycling, as these are the largest packaging waste fractions. Paper and cardboard and glass packaging waste recycling rates were at the same high level of 78%. The recycling rate for plastic packaging has increased from 24% in 2010 to 47% in 2022, but has stagnated since 2020. For the reference year 2020 and onwards, it is mandatory to report steel and aluminium packaging separately. The recycling rate of steel packaging waste exceeded the 2025 target while the recycling rate for aluminium packaging waste dropped in 2022 below the target (to 30%).

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

Legislative framework and waste management plans

Overall, the Latvian waste legislation follows the EU waste legislation. The main acts and regulations regarding municipal waste and packaging waste include the Waste Management Law, the Natural Resource Tax Law, the Law on Pollution, the Environmental Protection Law, and the Packaging Law. The Latvian National Waste Management Plan (NWMP) 2021-2028 was adopted in 2021. The NWMP covers the entire territory and is supplemented by municipal waste management plans. It covers all waste streams, with dedicated chapters covering targeted waste streams, and includes a waste prevention programme.

([1]) 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.

Waste prevention policies

Latvia´s current National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) covers the years 2021 to 2028 and is integrated into the country´s National Waste Management Plan (NWMP) 2021-2028 (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, 2021). The NWMP has four main objectives: preventing waste generation, ensuring the rational use of waste as a resource, reducing the hazardousness of waste, and decreasing the amount of waste disposed (EEA, 2023).

Priority waste streams for waste prevention are food waste, household waste, hazardous waste, electrical and electronic equipment (EEE), textiles, furniture, packaging, building materials, and construction products. Latvia has three quantitative targets for waste prevention, to be met by 2028 (EEA, 2023):

- To diminish the amount of waste generated in households to 400 kg/cap from 459 kg/cap in 2021;
- To reduce the total amount of municipal (household) waste generated to less than 650000 t/year; and
- To decrease the total hazardous waste generated from 111180 tonnes in 2021 to less than 50000 tonnes .

To reduce food waste, various measures are proposed, including the promotion of food donations, public awareness campaigns, and investments in research and development. Guidelines for food donation, targeting both households and the production sector, will be developed in 2024 and 2025, respectively. The initiatives aim to address food waste by engaging multiple stakeholders, creating awareness, encouraging responsible production and consumption practices, and implementing monitoring systems for tracking progress (EEA, 2023).

In 2020, Latvia developed a strategy towards a circular economy, called ‘Action plan for the transition to a circular economy 2020-2027’ (Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, 2020). The action plan aims to provide a policy framework for ensuring the transition towards a circular economy, by contributing to responsible and sustainable planning, utilisation, and production and consumption of resources, and by integrating it into all policies on lifecycle stages and resource flows. (EEA, 2022)

Since Latvia’s NWPP is integrated into the NWMP, the funding also follows this approach, and no specific budget is assigned to the implementation of the waste prevention measures. The funding comes from investments by economic operators, waste producers and operators, as well as waste management fees and EU funds.

The NWPP 2013-2020 includes a set of quantitative indicators for the evaluation of the programme. Informative reports on the implementation of the National Waste Management Plan (NWMP) have been published for the periods 2013-2015, 2016-2018, 2019-2020 (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia, 2016, 2020, 2022), and a report for the period 2021-2023 will be prepared by the end of 2024 (LEGMC, 2024).

According to 2021 data reported to the EEA according to Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/19 (EEA, 2024), Latvia reused:

- 13469 tonnes of textiles,
- 20495 tonnes of electrical and electronic devices, and
- 71107 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

Latvia has not implemented a pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) system on a national basis. PAYT is currently only implemented in one municipality in Latvia (Jūrmala, as of 1 March 2018). Several municipalities have already assessed the potential of introducing PAYT and concluded that it would be too expensive to introduce PAYT in cities and towns with a majority of multi-apartment buildings. Also, the system in Jūrmala is considered too expensive in relation to the limited results in separately collected waste. On the other hand, in rural areas with mainly single-family houses, it is considered possible. (ETC/CE, 2022)

Bring-point collection is the predominant collection system in Latvia for all recyclables, as well as for residual waste. Except for food waste, all separate waste fractions are collected via bring points and civic amenity sites. There is also door-to-door co-mingled collection of recyclables in some rural areas, where the population density is too low for the arrangement of bring points. Waste from electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) is collected both at civic amenity sites and through take-back schemes at retailers. Bio-waste is only collected separately in a few municipalities. Municipalities located near Rīga were obliged to introduce separate collection systems for bio-waste by the end of 2020 (ETC/CE, 2022). According to Latvian regulations (Republic of Latvia, 2021), the implementation of a separate collection of bio-waste had to be finished by 31 December 2023. The results of a survey of municipalities show that in general, residents are provided with separate collection of bio-waste, but not yet sufficiently, and local governments continue to work on this issue. Municipalities also support citizens in home composting by providing home-composting containers. In order to incentivise citizens to sort bio-waste at source, municipalities are also obliged to reduce the fees for collecting bio-waste to 60% of the fees applied to mixed municipal waste. (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, 2024)

Separate collection is mandatory for waste collected from all household and non-household sources. In Latvia, currently, the collection does not distinguish between packaging waste and non-packaging waste. However, the container openings at bring points are designed to best fit packaging waste, with the aim to focus the collection on packaging waste. (ETC/CE, 2022)

In Latvia, there is an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system in place, covering packaging waste from both household and non-household sources for all packaging materials. However, Latvia has no advanced fee modulation, i.e., fee modulation beyond the broad material categories such as higher fees for difficult-to-recycle plastic types or combinations of materials. Latvia applies packaging taxes for all packaging fractions. Producers are exempted from paying the packaging tax when they join a producer responsibility organisation (ETC/CE, 2022). There is also a newly established deposit-return system for plastic, aluminium and glass beverage packaging, which was expanded to cover additional types of beverage packaging in

2023 (Republic of Latvia, 2020). The system provides approximately 1410 collection points, supplemented by 442 points in the HoReCa sector ([2]). (LEGMC, 2024)

In Latvia, the service level for residual waste collection is similar to that of recyclable waste fractions, so the lack of door-to-door collection should not present a barrier to recycling. However, due to the lack of a PAYT, there are no economic incentives for waste sorting by households and businesses. To support separate collection, the European Commission's Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) 2022 recommended improving and extending separate collection of waste (EC, 2022).

Policies and instruments to discourage landfilling or incineration

Latvia has introduced an escalator to increase the landfill tax for municipal waste from EUR 25 per tonne in 2017, to EUR 65 per tonne in 2021, EUR 95 per tonne in 2023 and EUR 110 per tonne in 2024. It will further increase to EUR 120 per tonne in 2025 and EUR 130 per tonne in 2026 as laid down in the Natural Resources Tax Law (Republic of Latvia, 2005). The tax also covers the outputs of Mechanical biological treatment (MBT) plants that are landfilled. The tax is considerably higher than the EU-27 average. Latvia is further planning to introduce a landfill ban for municipal waste suitable for preparation for reuse, recycling or recovery as of 2030. Latvia has an incineration tax of EUR 15 per tonne as of 2021, and currently, there are no plans to review the tax (ETC/CE, 2022).

According to the Natural Resources Tax Law, 60% of the resource tax revenue from waste disposal is paid to the basic state budget and 40% to the basic budget of the local municipality in whose territory the waste disposal takes place. The funds of the municipality's basic budget derived from the payment of the natural resources tax shall be used only to finance activities and projects related to environmental protection, and the taxes paid into the state's basic budget are used for environmental protection measures via the Latvian Environmental Protection Fund. (LEGMC, 2024)

Prospects for meeting the targets on recycling and landfilling

Latvia is considered to be at risk of missing the 2025 targets for the preparing for reuse and recycling of both its municipal (55%) and total packaging wastes (65%). Further, Latvia also has to speed up its progress towards reaching the 2035 target to reduce landfilling to 10% of the generated municipal waste. Consequently, the European Commission issued a number of policy recommendations to improve Latvia's waste management performance (EC, 2023):

- Support preparing for reuse of municipal waste and reuse systems for packaging.
- Improve performance in the separate collection of waste, as a large share of the population lacks access to high-convenience collection services (especially for bio-waste). The combination of different collection modes with different collection areas (according to types of housing) and different types of waste streams should be taken into consideration when seeking to improve performance in this area.
- Prioritise projects higher up in the waste hierarchy. It should channel the available funding into extending the treatment capacity for bio-waste and supporting home composting.

([2]) https://depozitapunkts.lv/en

- Implement a pay-as-you-throw system to further incentivise the public to separate waste at source.

During the last decade, Latvia has made considerable progress in diverting waste from landfilling to recycling, improving its municipal waste preparing for reuse and recycling rate. However, significantly more efforts are required to further reduce landfilling. The EIR 2022 priority actions recommended, among others, setting mandatory recycling targets for municipalities, using measures to tackle non-compliance and thus ensuring better performance throughout the country (EC, 2022).

To improve the recycling rates and further divert waste from landfilling, Latvia has a quite high landfill tax which will be further increased annually until 2026. Moreover, separate collection of bio-waste has been implemented in most municipalities, and the deposit-refund scheme for beverage packaging has been expanded recently.

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