

#ZeroWasteCities

Starting Scenarios to become a Zero Waste City

Scenario 2: Stepping-up the existing system to go towards zero waste

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 50,000 - 100,000 inhabitants, medium-sized municipality
- Between 100-200 inhabitants per km²: low density

Waste management context

- Average EU municipal waste generation, between 400 - 550 kilograms of waste per inhabitants per year;
- Medium separate collection rate, between 30% and 50%, including medium capture rates for most dry recyclables through commingled collection. Bio-waste collection remains low and not efficient;
- Medium reliance on incineration over landfill;
- Almost no waste prevention measures are in operation locally. Some are starting to appear yet in a non-coordinated way.

What are the main policies to focus on?

1. Develop an efficient bio-waste separate collection and recycling scheme

As the bio-waste collection system is already in place but non efficient enough, the key to unlock sorting and recycling in the city is to maximise collection of bio-waste. Through this, collection frequency for residual waste will decrease and the quality of dry recyclables will increase. As the system already is in place, it is now important to ensure all citizens are well informed about how the system works through communication and/or in-person training.

Financial incentives such as a Pay-as-you-throw system can also be implemented. Additionally, collection of bio-waste should be analysed to ensure the choice of the best system. As density is medium, part of the city could be covered through decentralised composting with home or community composting while denser areas will have to be covered by a door-to-door separate collection scheme and then sent to a composting plant as the quantity collected should not require capital-intensive investments.

To go further, read:

- [The case study on Capannori](#)
- [The case study on Newport](#)

2. Expand and optimise the whole waste management system:

The city is now at a turning point where most of the collection system is already in place yet delivering results that are not satisfactory. In order to take-off and achieve a high collection rate, the city should step-up the collection system for dry recyclables. With an efficient bio-waste collection, dry recyclables collection should already improve. However, the whole system needs to be rethought. For dry recyclables, the collection system should be analysed and transition towards single-stream collection when relevant. When not possible, commingled or bring points strategy should be assessed through citizen's survey to ensure the most practical setting is chosen. Collection frequency should also be reviewed to match a system supposedly collecting most of the recyclables. That means decreasing residual waste collection while increasing dry recyclables and bio-waste collection.

To go further, read:

- [The case study on Gipuzkoa](#)

3. Involve citizens through public communications or financial incentives:

To go a step beyond an average waste collection system and actively working towards zero waste, an involvement of the population is needed. This can be done through active communication giving the population the right information. Announcement of a zero waste goal or in-person workshops are also a way to make the population feel like it is part of the project. Furthermore, financial incentives can be extremely efficient in stimulating the population.

To increase sorting practices, the introduction of a pay-as-you-throw scheme offers the opportunity for the inhabitants to pay less through better practices. Subsidies to support community composting or the purchase of a home-composter can also be considered for less dense areas.

To go further, read:

→ [The case study on Parma](#)

4. Support and develop waste prevention programs:

As some waste prevention programs are already starting, maybe through initiatives to reduce food waste in schools, restaurants or through zero waste shops, the city should act as a catalyser to promote those initiatives. It can act as a model and adopt green public procurement criteria and promote free tap water as well as food waste prevention programs in public canteens. The city can also go beyond by requiring zero waste practices to be adopted during public events. Zero waste competition for citizens or businesses with potential grants and/or support can also create an environment where cities' stakeholders are inspired to promote zero waste.

To go further, read:

→ [The case study on Roubaix](#)

→ [The case study on Bruges](#)

Conclusion:

In this situation, the city is at a cross road as it has the collection infrastructure. Yet, this latter can clearly be optimised and complemented with innovative waste prevention measures throughout the city. Adopting the zero waste path at this point should allow for quick results regarding collection and recycling and, if complemented with an ambitious prevention, should allow the city to avoid a lock-in effect by resorting to incineration as a way to treat residual waste.

This publication is part of a three-part series.

→ [**Read the other scenarios.**](#)

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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.



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