

EuRIC Briefing on key issues related to the revision of the waste directives ahead of the vote in ENVI Committee

Key messages

The European Recycling Industries Confederation (EuRIC)* is a natural supporter of the circular economy but is highly concerned by certain proposed amendments to the directives on waste which will substantially hamper recycling, instead of fostering it, and would consequently harm the transition towards a circular economy. To boost recycling, guarantee competitive and thus innovative recycling markets, EuRIC calls for:

- A definition of **municipal waste** which preserves the quantity criterion and excludes from its scope other streams generated by economic activities, which are already collected and recycled at high levels;
- **Measuring recycling targets at the point where waste is turned into new resources able to substitute virgin materials;**
- **A calculation method which favours measuring recycling rates at the output of sorting, the most reliable and traceable method to measure recycling rates. Recall that recycling targets cannot be measured at the input into “final recycling”, defined by reference to a “production process”, because at this stage it is impossible to trace back the origin of the waste stream(s) for which targets have been set.**

1. Definition of municipal waste

To foster innovative and competitive recycling markets, the definition of municipal waste must:

- ✓ Remain “**neutral** with regard to the public or private status of the operator managing waste” as stated in recital 6 [of the proposal to amend the Waste Framework Directive (WFD)] which should be included in the definition of municipal waste (article 3) to make it legally binding and ensure it is uniformly applied across the EU at implementation stage.

Supported amendments (AM): 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415

- ✓ Preserve the **quantity** criterion which is the only objective and measurable criterion. The quantity criterion is needed to clearly distinguish between municipal waste on one hand, and commercial and industrial waste on the other.

Supported AM: 384, 391, 392, 397

- ✓ **Exclude mixed waste from small businesses, office buildings and public buildings** from the scope of municipal waste which should remain open to competition for the best interest of society as **i) taxpayers’ money** should not finance the cost of collecting waste mostly generated by economic activities and whose volumes largely exceeds the ones from a household and **ii) competition among operators** (be them public or private) is a key element enabling the well-functioning of waste management and recycling markets for streams stemming from economic activities.

Supported AM: 404, 405, 407

Against AM: 373, 386, 398, 402, 403

2. Definition of sorting

Sorting needs to be clearly defined by reference to its very objective which is to separate wastes into different material streams, such as paper, metals, plastics, bio-waste, etc.

Supported AM: 497

3. Point of measurement for recycling targets

➤ Definition of “final recycling”

By referring to a “production process” which in practice uses both virgin and recycled materials, the definition of final recycling solely proposed for the purpose of measuring recycling targets, confuses recycling and manufacturing, which are two distinct steps in value chains consequently regulated by different legislations at EU and national levels. EuRIC supports:

- i. **The deletion of the definition of “final recycling”,** the most consistent option;

Supported AM: 463, 464

- ii. Or as a second best option, **the amendment of the definition of “final recycling” by**
 - ✓ Deleting the reference to “a production process” to align it with the definition of recycling (which is a recovery – not a production – process);
 - ✓ Deleting the qualification of sorting as being a “mechanical” process as sorting can be mechanical, automated or manual.

Supported AM: 51

➤ Point of measurement for recycling targets

Setting the rules to measure real recycling rates is instrumental to ensure that only waste turned into new raw materials is counted as recycled, whilst avoiding the inclusion of waste incinerated or landfilled into recycling targets.

- ✓ **Fit for purpose rules to measure recycling rates**

Recycling rates must be measured at:

- i) The output of a **sorting facility** or
- ii) The input into a **final recycling facility**, which in accordance with the definition of recycling in the WFD, reprocesses waste into products, materials or substances.

Among the two options proposed in the Commission’s proposal, the one based on the output of sorting is by far the most reliable, sustainable and pragmatic for the different types of waste streams. At that point, the origin of the waste material can still be traced ensuring that reliable data can be collected and reported in order to provide a true picture about the attainment of recycling targets.

Supported AM: 1093, 1121, 1122, 1123, 1125, 1131

- ✓ **Impossibility to accurately measure recycling rates at the input of final recycling defined by reference to a production process**

Recycling rates are defined by waste streams. The WFD set targets for “municipal waste” while daughter directives set targets for sectorial streams (WEEE, ELVs, etc.). Recycling targets cannot be measured at the input of a production process simply because at this downstream stage of the value chain:

- ✓ Raw materials used in a production process are bought on the basis of their price, quantity and quality, not of their origin.
- ✓ They have already been sorted/processed in treatment facilities which makes it impossible in most cases to identify the original waste stream (municipal, commercial or industrial, etc.).

Consequently, measuring recycling targets at the input of a production process runs against the objective of accurate statistics across the EU.

Through its Member Recycling Federations from 20 EU and EFTA countries, EuRIC represents today across Europe 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 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.