WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING IN ROMANIA

15+1 recommendations for modern, effective and sustainable waste collection and management
Supported by:

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based on a decision of the German Bundestag

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Waste collection and management in Romania are hot topics intensely debated by political decision makers and companies in the context of the current ambitious recycling targets and of the sanctions applied in case of failure to achieve them.

As an EU member state, Romania must adhere to the common environmental targets and policies. The EU Directives (2008/98/EC) have already been implemented in the Romanian laws.

From the beginning of 2019, local public authorities are required to implement the PAYT (“pay as you throw”) system and provide people with separate collection containers for wet and dry waste.

The project was initiated by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and funded by the “Environmental Protection -made in Germany” export initiative.
Target group
The project primarily targeted the local public authorities of the 41 counties and of Bucharest, which are required to adapt their integrated waste management plans, as well as the Romanian and German companies interested in developing bilateral relations in the field of environmental infrastructure.

Project objectives
This project is aimed at supporting Romania’s transition to a viable circular economy by providing specific information, consulting and German points of contact in the field of environmental technologies and services.

KEY SPEAKERS

Armida Hemeling
President of RETech for Southeast Europe and CEO of Goduni International

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City Manager, Municipality of Cluj-Napoca

Dr. Radu Merica
CEO of RER Group

Răzvan Gheorghiu
Executive Director, ADIS Iași

Farkas Imre
Vice Mayor, Municipality of Timișoara

Roxana Puia
PR Manager, Environ Association
THREE REGIONAL WORKSHOPS AND A CONFERENCE

First workshop: 27 September 2018, Iași
The event was attended by 30 participants, including representatives of local authorities and companies from Iași, Botoșani, Neamț and Suceava.

Second workshop: 6 November 2018, Cluj
The event was attended by 40 representatives of local authorities, companies, nongovernmental organizations and universities from the counties of Alba, Bihor, Cluj, Harghita, Maramureș, Mureș, and Satu Mare.

Third workshop: 19 February 2019, Timișoara
The event was attended by over 40 representatives of local authorities, waste management companies and universities from the counties of Arad, Bihor, Cluj, Dolj, Hunedoara, Timiș, and Vâlcea. After the workshop, the participants were invited to take a guided tour to the non-hazardous waste deposit at Ghizela.

Conference: 27 June 2019, Bucharest
“Offer respect and you will be respected. Provide citizens with the infrastructure they need for collection, communicate and train, inform people about the sanctions applicable in case of non-compliance and only afterwards apply sanctions.”

Mitru Leșe, Mayor of Târgu Lăpuș

“In Romania, we need data to be updated more frequently, as currently, for instance, the latest statistical data on waste management available on the website of the National Environment Agency are from three years ago.”

Dr. Radu Merica, CEO of RER Group

“Enabling a capacity building program, both nationally and locally, is very important and this requires, first of all, energy recovery audits and a waste balance either national or local.”

Armida Hemeling, President of RETech for Southeast Europe and CEO of Goduni International

“The first step towards the achievement of the recycling targets would be the adopting of waste collection containers by municipalities and the institutions subordinated to municipalities, considering that this would be an initial example offered to citizens, followed by campaigns in line with the legal obligations stipulated by Emergency Ordinance No. 5/2015.”

Roxana Puia, PR Manager, Environ Association
Only around 25% of the population of Romania collect packaging waste separately in households.

260 kg/capita Municipal waste collected by 2020 Romania should recover 10% of municipal waste for energy generation, which requires significant advancements in the selective collection of wet waste and investments to expand the separation capacity.

Only 12% of the waste generated in Romania is recovered, while the rest is either stored in landfills or disposed improperly; the informal sector plays an important role (collecting 30-35% of recyclable waste).

In 2015, the productivity of resources was one of the lowest in EU, only around EUR 0.31/kg compared to the EU average of EUR 2/kg.

3/4 of all municipal waste are household waste accounts.

Over 50% of it is biodegradable.

13.3% was the recycling rate in 2016, way below the 50% target set for 2020. (According to Eurostat)

Waste producers and local authorities are required to achieve by the end of 2020 a level of readiness for reuse and recycling of household waste (at least for paper, metal, plastic and glass) of minimum 50% of the total mass.
CHALLENGES AND ISSUES DISCUSSED

The management of municipal waste in Romania is based on putting into service 32 Integrated Waste Management Systems (SMIDs). Funds worth over € 1 billion were allocated through Priority Axis 2 for their development and for the rehabilitation of contaminated sites. This system faces several issues identified within our regional workshops.

Systemic issues

- Delays in the implementation of projects: the requirement to have all documents approved by all territorial administrative units involved in each project, amendments to the public procurement regulations with an impact on the contract awarding documentation etc.
- The need to update the data included in the funding application, especially for operation contracts and sizing equipments: revaluation of contracts as a consequence of population and waste quantity overestimates.
- Delays in the public tendering process, in particular as a result of objections
- The obligation to close non-compliant landfills before completion of the final landfills in certain counties generated the need to transport waste to other counties (costs, time).

Intricate and unharmonized legislation, unclear enforcement rules

- Overregulation and contradictory provisions and the lack of clear technical rules
- OUG 74/2018 on amending and supplementing Law No. 211/2011 raises several challenges for local authorities, which are required to conclude cooperation agreements or protocols with EPRO* in order to report on the traceability of packaging waste for the purpose of achievement of annual recycling targets by producers; however, local authorities are not technically and operationally ready to supply quantities to the recycling industry
- Pay as you throw: Local public authorities should have implemented the “pay as you throw” system from the beginning of 2019 and provide people with separate containers for wet and dry waste collection, but obtained a 6-month time extension
- The lack of an end-of-waste certification standard for both construction waste and compost
- Although it does have some initiatives to support transition to a circular economy, with particular emphasis on waste, Romania has not adopted yet a national policy concerning the program for a circular economy

*EPRO: Organizations that implement the obligations related to extended producer responsibility
Obscure technology and insufficient infrastructure

- The need to upgrade certain waste sorting plants and mechanical and biological treatment systems (e.g. the lack of RDF systems).
- Waste management companies need to resize their collection capacities, equipment and fleets to collect 4 to 5 fractions, with apartment buildings posing the biggest challenge.

Educating and raising the awareness of population and economic operators

- Non-compliant collection and unauthorized disposal of waste, particularly WEEE and construction & demolition waste
- Unreasonable financial expectations (incentives) for collection by fractions
- The perceived risk of incurring fines and sanctions for offences is low
PROPOSALS AND SOLUTIONS*

1. Revision of sanitation regulations by local authorities, taking into account the current situation in the relevant region/locality (e.g. population, quantities, collection frequency needed, etc.) as well as the specific local features (e.g. a city in the plain vs. a small mountain village) and, based on such regulations, signing delegation agreements to be monitored against specific performance indicators.

2. Properly estimating and making available to population the necessary collection infrastructure.

3. Replicating the good practices from other countries or from foreign or Romanian cities that achieved good results.
   
   In Târgu Lăpuș, separate collection has been done with six fractions since 2009, reaching a rate of almost 60%, while the recycling rate is nearly 30%.
   
   To implement a waste management system locally, mayor Mitru Leșe accessed EU funds, conducted exchanges of experience with local authorities from Germany and attended industry fairs (e.g. IFAT, world’s leading trade fair for water, sewage, waste and raw materials management, hosted every 2 years in Munich).

4. Making more transparent public statistics provided by the National Environment Protection Agency and the Ministry of the Environment and updating them more frequently on the websites of institutions (at least annually) to enable all stakeholders refer to the performance indicators and adjust the measures required to achieve the targets.

5. Waste collection by categories/fractions on different days.

*Aspects, results and/or ideas discussed by Romanian specialists who attended the three regional workshops in Iași, Cluj and Timișoara.*
6. Defining technical and methodological standards and characteristics into legislation or implementing a national end-of-waste certification standard for biodegradable or construction waste with support from a multidisciplinary working group (including certification bodies, industry experts, the Ministry of the Environment, Environmental Agencies, the Association of Cement Manufacturers, laboratories, etc.), which would considerably boost the recycling rate.

7. Technological upgrade of the existing capacities in order to achieve the local and national goals (e.g. automatic vs. manual sorting plants, bio plants), which requires operational changes at local and national level and audits to identify the actual flows and potential of achieving the targets.

8. Introducing and developing adequate capacities to recover RDF for energy generation and securing the involvement of cement industry companies.

9. Avoiding underground collection systems, which facilitate non-compliant disposal by population; trying to regulate the operation of these systems; choosing the yellow bag instead of the yellow bin for recyclable dry waste: various other types of waste can be hidden in bins, while the yellow bag is transparent and improper content can be quickly identified.

Improving certification, licensing and law enforcement in this industry

Ensuring the capacities required to achieve the targets
10. Conducting extensive national promotion campaigns to inform the public on the obligation to collect recyclable waste at source and raise awareness with regard to the whole waste collection and processing cycle.

11. Practical workshops and local campaigns in universities, schools, kindergartens and parks and among economic operators to educate the public with regard to separate collection and recycling, as well as with regard to the sanctions applicable to offenders.

12. Organizing open days at sorting plants or waste deposits during the “Alternative School-Week” for pupils (to see the sorting process directly).

13. Development of local waste collection guidelines (different for households and economic operators)/sanitation regulations to provide information on obligations, proper collection, collection frequency and schedule, and door-to-door distribution of the guidelines.

14. Better surveillance in illegal waste disposal areas and public areas.

15. Sanctions in the form of fines and securing the involvement of local police to identify breaches of the city sanitation regulations.

The Municipality of Aiud planned to expand selective waste collection in the localities in its jurisdiction, but the collection points were relatively far. Yellow bags for selective collection were distributed to households in two localities to avoid forcing people travel long distances. Because offences had been detected, over 50 surveillance cameras were installed. Moreover, the environment protection department of the local police is open to receiving complaints and reports via less usual channels, e.g. Facebook.

15+1. Rapid implementation of PAYT – volume-based payment – as a key economic tool to discourage the generation of large amounts of waste.
This brochure is developed within the Romanian-German cooperation project “Waste Management and Recycling in Romania”, supported and funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

The “Environmental Protection-made in Germany” export initiative launched in 2016 is aimed at disseminating environmental technologies to other countries in order to actually contribute to sustainable development and improvement of the quality of life in countries where it implements projects. The importance of sustainable technologies should also facilitate the transfer of environmental technologies and know-how from Germany.

Thus, the “Environmental Protection-made in Germany” export initiative facilitates the access of German companies to Romania or the local development of their business, contributing to the improvement of Romanians’ perception regarding the German expertise in waste management and recycling.
Especially during the last years, the Chamber has focused its efforts on sustainable development and is permanently engaged in drawing the attention of the local and national Romanian authorities to this topic. The experience and global market knowledge of the personnel represent a solid basis for gaining new competences and abilities. Therefore, topics such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, environment and sustainable buildings are now easy to handle in a professional manner. The close relationship with the mentioned sectors in Romania, cultivated over the years through participation at fairs, the creation of market studies and organization of own econet events, conferences, workshops, business trips to Romania and Germany, but also the working groups the Chamber hosts, convey a better market understanding and position us as a serious business partner. For almost ten years, AHK Romania is the main starting point in the field of sustainable development, offering a bilateral platform for know-how and experience exchange by means of its GreenTech initiative, econet romania.
For additional information on this project or about AHK Romania’s Green Tech Initiative

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