BEMED+ PROJECT

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Beyond Plastic Med, commit to a plastic-free Mediterranean Sea

BeMed+

ASSESSMENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS CONCERNING THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF PLASTIC WASTE AND THEIR APPLICATIONS IN THE REGION OF SHKUMBINI RIVER BASIN

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About PlastiMed

The PlastiMed BeMed project is implemented by a consortium formed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as leader, the Tara Expeditions Foundation and Surfrider Foundation Europe, as partners. It offers a comprehensive study on both the sources and impacts of plastic/microplastic pollution in the Mediterranean. The objective is to better understand the origins and typology of plastics on the one hand and their dispersion and therefore their potential impact on the environment (including their journey to the sea) on the other.

About BEMED

The Beyond Plastic Med (BeMed) association is hosted by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, which in 2015 solitiated the Tara Ocean Foundation, Surfrider Foundation Europe and the MAVA Foundation to join forces and launch the initiative. In January 2019, the BeMed association was created and is now led by an extended group since the IUCN wanted to invest alongside the founding members. Its objectives are to support and network actors committed to fighting plastic pollution in the Mediterranean, to implement sustainable solutions, to promote the search for new solutions, and to mobilize actors and the general public through knowledge and sharing of good practices.

Website: www.beyondplasticmed.org

About INCA

The Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania, INCA is a non-governmental organization, established in June 2000, and registered as such by the Court of Tirana in 2004, with decision No. 1087. INCA has its office in Tirana, but operates throughout the territory of Albania. INCA's main goal is to provide its assistance in the field of professional training through training and the participation process, in the preservation of the environment, in the protection of natural values and regional development, the protection of flora and fauna, the assessment of biological diversity, the management of protected areas, raising public awareness and political decision-makers, and taking protective measures when possible and necessary for the protection of species and their critical habitats. The task of the Institute is also to integrate the conservation of nature and biodiversity with all other issues or fields of science that have an impact on natural resources in the country. The Institute will be part of the process of improving the legislation and other issues related to raising the capacities of Albanian environmental institutions, as well as European integration.

Website: https://inca-al.org/sq/

ACRONYMS

AP	Action Plan
CE (EC)	Council of European
EEA	European Environment Agency
EGD	The European Green Deal
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
E-PRTR	The European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register
EU	European Union
GAWB	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GEF	The Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GIZ	The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (English: German Development Cooperation (GIZ)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IED	The Industrial Emissions Directive
INCA	Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania
INSTAT	Albanian Statistic Institute
MARD	ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MIE	Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy
MTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PoPs	Persistent organic pollutants
R&D	Research and Development
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats
ToR	Terms of References
WB region	Western Balkan region

Table of Content

1. Introduction

This study was carried out as part of the PLASTIMED project, led by BeMed actors. The project aims to identify both the sources and impacts of plastic and microplastic pollution in the Mediterranean. The objective of the project is to define and better understand the origins and typology of plastics on the one hand and their dispersion and therefore their potential impact on the environment on the other.

The main aim of this study is to carry out an analyse on legal and institutional framework in force and under discussion in the country regarding the prevention of plastic pollution and the management of this type of waste.

It turns out that several difficulties are encountered at the level of the pre-collection, collection, cleaning, recovery and recycling chain in the country. The treatment in particular has presented many organizational and technical difficulties, causing environmental, social and economic problems. The report focuses on identifying and evaluating the main strengths and challenges of the central and local government for the management of plastic waste. The best level of governance and the most appropriate legislative and/or regulatory and/or voluntary tools to respond to the problem of plastic pollution in the Albanian pilot region is identified and evaluated.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the plastic waste management system and its restructuring in line with regional and international recommendations, we will present in this report the recommendations for all levels of the value chain and for waste recovery and treatment activities. In particular, the recommendations stress the importance of developing an adequate institutional, financial and technical framework, supported by scientific research and innovation, as well as a communication and education plan.

1.1. Background of the study

In its efforts to acquire EU membership, Albania is negotiating the extensive and demanding chapter 27 of the EU acquis on Environment and Climate Change. One centre piece of chapter 27 is the Waste Management supported by legal and institutional framework and their implementation. In following up on waste management principles, municipal waste management issues are also tackled. In accordance with the EU legal framework connected with the waste management and also with Circular Economy, it is an attempt to foresees economic activities, as they relate to production, distribution, sale and consumption, to become part of a close-loop cycle and, in doing so, reduce loss, waste and leakage of said economic activities. The Waste Directive and CE Directive oriented the process to completely stops the production of waste or lets produced waste become a valuable resource.

In the course of such a transition, Albania's waste sector has and continues to encounter numerous challenges, evident in the disparity between legislation and its implementation and enforcement. These challenges encompass a lack of public environmental awareness, environmental pollution and the transparency on actions towards the waste management in local level and especially in reducing the plastic waste. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that bridge legal, societal and economic disparities. Despite the adoption of comprehensive strategic documents and action plans by the Albanian government, their effective implementation remains a formidable challenge in the years ahead.

1.2. Objectives and study outputs

This consultancy will aim to review and evaluate the legislative and regulatory framework for waste management, mainly in relation to the prevention and management of plastic waste and their implementation in the pilot region of Albania. This analysis of the legislative framework should include a comparative analysis of the existing legislation of Albania and that of the EU, taking into account the prevention of plastic pollution. This analysis will aim to provide recommendations for completing or improving this legal/regulatory framework according to the waste management roadmap, which also includes plastic waste.

Specific tasks

The consultant is expected to assess the processes of decision-making in the project target area, and options for improvement. Specifically, the consultant will be responsible for the following:

Task 1: Preparatory and scoping work

Overview of the legislation in force and under discussion in the country regarding the prevention of plastic pollution and the management of this type of waste (feasibility check, review of existing information).

Task 2: Gathering and evaluating information

The consultant should identify and evaluate the main strengths and challenges of the central and local government for the management of plastic waste. The best level of governance and the most appropriate legislative and/or regulatory and/or voluntary tools to respond to the problem of plastic pollution in the Albanian pilot region should be identified and evaluated.

Task 3: Comparison of legal/regulatory compliance with the European framework

A comparison should be made between the current legal framework of plastic waste management and that of the EU, and the possible content of the plastic treaty being negotiated. The aim is to foresee compliance both with the requirements of Albania's accession to the EU, and with the approval and ratification of the Plastics Treaty.

All 3 tasks have to be finalized in a document titled: “legal analysis”. For that mission INCA will facilitate your connections with relevant stakeholders and provide similar studies done before. This will be helping to list the relevant legislation adopted or in negotiation related to plastic prevention in the country. We invite you to structure the document following the waste hierarchy.

2. Methodology of the study

To complete the study, the expert has followed the line of the work described from the steps below according to the objectives and the scope prescribed in ToRs for this analyse. The data required to fill and hold against the conceptual framework, and thus answer the research questions, was collected in a short time work. The methods applied varied as they were adopted to the objective of each output. The methodological approach and methods (both empirical and analytical), were:

- **An extensive desktop study and literature review**: This initial and essential step was carried out for all research modules. The material sighted including, among others, national action plans, strategy papers, scientific articles, laws and regulations, policy documents, manuals and handbooks on methods and grey literature, in the form of reports and policy briefs. The research also resulted in an initial stakeholder list which could then be further expanded upon.

- **Expert interviews** were carried out at the beginning of the study phase and included representatives of academia, private sector and government institutions.
- **Semi-structured interviews** were carried out with stakeholders active in Albania's waste sector, with a special focus given to private sector and those involved in the plastic waste streams.
- **Baseline study on waste streams** combined all the data from the interactive methods mentioned above and allowed a multi-layered analysis approach.
- **A structuring content analysis** was performed, for which all the interview data sets were made use of. With an adapted version of the SWOT analysis tool, current strengths and weaknesses (drivers) and potential future opportunities and threats (O&Ts) were identified.
- **Recommendation formulation** was based mostly on the results of the interviews and the structured content analysis. Stakeholders actively contributed to the recommendations. In a closing communication and through individual consultations, they provided valuable feedback on the recommendations.

3. Legal base on waste management

It is established time by time the legal framework to create the opportunities to have a good management policies and strategies in order to facilitate the process and establish the functional institutions on the legal framework enforcement. This legal framework is established from the EU through the main directives and provide the guide to transpose to the countries in order to be in line with the requirements and good practices exercise in EU countries and associated ones.

3.1. European legal framework

3.1.1. Plastics Strategy

The Plastics Strategy is a key element of Europe's transition towards a carbon neutral and circular economy. It will contribute to reaching the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement objectives and the EU's industrial policy objectives.

The EU's Plastics Strategy aims to transform the way plastic products are designed, produced, used, and recycled in the EU. However, they can have serious negative effects on the environment and human health.

Facts [1]

- **Almost 26 million tons of plastic waste is generated in Europe every year**
- **Around 80% of marine litter is plastic, with single-use plastic items representing 50% and fishing-related items representing 27% of the total**
- **87% of Europeans are worried about the impact of plastic products on the environment**

The EU adopted a European strategy for plastics[2] in January 2018. It is part of the EU's circular economy action plan, and builds on existing measures to reduce plastic waste. The Plastics Strategy set out its vision for a circular plastics economy, made commitments for action at EU level and recommended

[1] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/plastics_en
[2] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of regions, "A European Strategy for Plastics in a circular economy", COM(2018)28 final.

measures to relevant authorities and industry. The Plastics Strategy includes the goal of making recycling profitable for business.

In the Plastics Strategy, national and regional authorities were encouraged to put in place well-designed EPR schemes and/or deposit systems for collecting discarded fishing gear and recycling agricultural plastics.

This strategy lays the foundations to a new plastics economy, where the design and production of plastics and plastic products fully respect reuse, repair and recycling needs and more sustainable materials are developed and promoted. This will deliver greater added value and prosperity in Europe and boost innovation. It will curb plastic pollution and its adverse impact on our lives and the environment. Specifically, key players should work together to:

- improve design and support innovation to make plastics and plastic products easier to recycle;
- expand and improve the separate collection of plastic waste to ensure quality inputs to the recycling industry;
- expand and modernise the EU's sorting and recycling capacity;
- create viable markets for recycled and renewable plastics.

3.1.2. European regulatory framework on plastic waste management

Directive 94/62/EC as amended (the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive) aims to harmonise measures concerning the management of packaging and packaging waste in order, on the one hand, to prevent any impact thereof on the environment of all Member States as well as of third economies, or to reduce such impact, thereby ensuring a high level of environmental protection, and, on the other hand, to ensure the functioning of the internal market and to avoid obstacles to trade and distortion and restriction of competition within the Community. Since its amendment by Directive (EU) 2015/720, the Packaging Waste Directive contains specific provisions to reduce the use of lightweight plastic carrier bags and a definition of plastic and different types of plastic bags.

Waste reduction targets

The Waste Framework Directive, in force since July 2020, sets out rules for EU Member States (EU MS) to:

- increase the re-use and recycling of municipal waste by 55% by 2025
- set up separate collections of textiles and hazardous waste from households by 1 January 2025
- ensure bio-waste is either collected separately or recycled at source by 31 December 2023
- reach material-specific recycling targets by 2025 and 2030 for packaging

Amendment to Directive requires from EU Member States to take action to address the unsustainable consumption and use of lightweight plastic carrier bags. Such measures might include taxes or charges, reduction targets or outright bans.

The Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive requires EU MS to ensure that they have EPR schemes up and running for all packaging types by 2024. **Directive 2008/98/EC as amended (the Waste Framework Directive**) sets out a legal framework for dealing with waste and includes the definitions of waste, recycling, and recovery; end-of-waste criteria; the polluter-pays principle; the concept of waste hierarchy; and the concept of extended producer responsibility (EPR). Producers of very lightweight plastic carrier bags must comply with EPR rules. They are also required to bear the cost of awareness campaigns, waste collection and the cleaning up of litter.

Directive (EU) 2019/904 (the Single-Use Plastics Directive) was adopted on 5 June 2019 to target the 10 single-use plastic products reportedly most often found on Europe's beaches and seas. The 10 items being addressed by the Directive are: cotton bud sticks; cutlery, plates, straws and stirrers; balloons and sticks for balloons; food containers; cups for beverages; beverage containers; cigarette butts; plastic bags; packets and wrappers; and wet wipes and sanitary items.

Directive (EU) 2019/904 requires that extended producer responsibility schemes are established for certain types of packaging including takeaway food containers, packets and wrappers, plastic drinks containers and drinks cups including covers and lids. It also requires that the producers of wet wipes, balloons and tobacco products cover certain costs, including those relating to awareness raising measures and cleaning up litter. For other single-use plastic products, the EU is focusing on limiting their use through

- reducing consumption through awareness-raising measures
- introducing design requirements, such as a requirement to connect caps to bottles
- introducing labelling requirements to inform consumers about the plastic content of products, disposal options that are to be avoided, and harm done to nature if the products are littered in the environment
- introducing waste management and clean-up obligations for producers, including Extended Producer Responsibility schemes

Specific targets include

- a 77% separate collection target for plastic bottles by 2025 – increasing to 90% by 2029
- incorporating 25% of recycled plastic in PET beverage bottles from 2025, and 30% in all plastic beverage bottles from 2030

On 31 May 2021 the Commission published guidelines on the interpretation and implementation of the Single-Use Plastics Directive[3] .

The Industrial Emissions Directive (IED)[4] is the main piece of EU legislation addressing industrial pollution. The Commission has proposed to update the directive to support industries in their efforts towards the EU's 2050 zero pollution ambition, notably by supporting circular economy techniques and investments. In 2022, the Commission adopted proposals to revise the IED and the E-PRTR. The proposals aim to improve the Directive by increasing the focus on energy, water and material efficiency and reuse, in addition to promoting the use of safer, less toxic, or non-toxic chemicals in industrial processes.

The revision of IED provides a framework for the operation of EU industrial installations that is in line with the European Green Deal and the Zero-pollution action plan.

3.1.3. Circular economy

A circular economy[5] is defined as an economy 'where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste is minimised'.

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_2709
[4] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/industrial-emissions-and-safety/industrial-emissions-directive_en
[5] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy, COM(2015)614 final, p.1.

The circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible. In this way, the life cycle of products is extended. In practice, it implies reducing waste to a minimum. When a product reaches the end of its life, its materials are kept within the economy wherever possible thanks to recycling. These can be productively used again and again, thereby creating further value.

The circular economy will

- enable a healthier planet and reduce pollution
- reduce pressure on natural resources such as water and land use
- reduce emissions to help the EU become the first climate-neutral continent
- create new business opportunities and local quality jobs
- enable more resilient value chains

Decoupling economic growth from resource use and shifting to circular systems in production and consumption is key to achieving EU climate neutrality by 2050. Circular economy action plan adopted in 2020 features over 35 action points. Measures that will be introduced under the new action plan aim to

- make sustainable products the norm in the EU
- empower consumers and public buyers
- focus on the sectors that use most resources and where the potential for circularity is high such as: electronics and ICT, batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food, water and nutrients
- ensure less waste
- make circularity work for people, regions, and cities
- lead global efforts on circular economy

The EU is taking action to **tackle plastic pollution and marine litter** to accelerate the transition to a circular and resource-efficient plastics economy. Specific rules and targets apply to certain areas, including single-use plastics, plastic packaging, microplastics, and soon bio-based, biodegradable, and compostable plastics.

There, it identified plastics as a key priority and committed itself to 'prepare a strategy addressing the challenges posed by plastics throughout the value chain and taking into account their entire life-cycle'. In 2017, the Commission confirmed it would focus on plastics production and use and work towards the goal of ensuring that all plastic packaging is recyclable by 2030. The EU's Plastics Strategy, as part of the circular economy action plan, outlines specific actions in more detail.

Achieving a climate neutral and circular economy requires the full **mobilisation of industry**.

Under the 2020 circular economy action plan, the Commission is working on:

- mandatory requirements for recycled content and waste reduction for key products
- a new policy framework on biobased, biodegradable, and compostable plastics to clarify where these plastics can bring genuine environmental benefits
- measures to address the presence of microplastics unintentionally released into the environment, with the aim of reducing plastic litter

Secondary raw materials

The EU wants to create a well-functioning market for secondary raw materials.

In November 2023, the Council and Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the act. The new rules set an objective of at least 25% of the EU's annual critical raw materials consumption coming from domestic recycling.

A toxic-free environment

Since 2020, the EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability aims to help ensure chemicals are safe for both human health and the environment.

On 24 October 2022, under the circular economy action plan, the EU adopted a revision of the regulation on persistent organic pollutants (PoPs), harmful chemicals that may be found in waste from consumer products (e.g. waterproof textiles, plastics, and electronic equipment). The new rules aim to reduce concentration limit values for the presence of PoPs in waste, which is crucial to the circular economy, where waste will be increasingly used as a secondary raw material.[6]

In June 2023, the Council of the EU adopted its negotiating position on the revision of the classification, labelling and packaging of chemicals regulation proposed by the Commission. The measures proposed include specific rules for refillable chemical products which will help reduce packaging waste.[7]

3.1.4. Monitoring of Circular economy

The European Commission has set up a monitoring framework to keep track of progress towards a circular economy. This framework provides a holistic view as it:

- measures direct and indirect benefits of 'becoming circular';
- values the contribution of a circular economy in living well within the limits of the planet; and
- addresses energy and material supply risks.

It consists of 5 thematic sections with a total of 11 statistical indicators, some of which have additional sub-indicators. In some cases, there are policy targets which should be achieved in the future, and the indicators monitor progress towards these targets. The current monitoring framework is a revision of the original framework which was set up in 2018. The indicators were selected to capture the main elements of a circular economy. The 11 indicators, for which data is available in database[8], are divided into the following 5 thematic areas:

Thematic area 1: Production and consumption

- material consumption
- green public procurement
- waste generation

Thematic area 2: Waste management

- overall recycling rates
- recycling rates for specific waste streams

[6] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/24/council-formally-adopts-further-restrictions-to-forever-chemicals-in-waste/#:~:text=Council%20of%20the%20EU%20Press%20release%2024%20October,waste.%20Persistent%20organic%20pollutants%20are%20particularly%20harmful%20substances.

[7] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/30/council-adopts-position-on-the-regulation-for-classification-labelling-and-packaging-of-chemical-substances/

[8] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/circular-economy/information-data#Production%20and%20consumption

Thematic area 3: Secondary raw materials

- contribution of recycled materials to raw materials demand
- trade of recyclable raw materials between EU Member States and with the rest of the world

Thematic area 4: Competitiveness and innovation

- private investments, jobs and gross value added
- innovation

Thematic area 5: Global sustainability and resilience

- global sustainability from circular economy
- resilience from circular economy

3.1.5. Waste management

All Western Balkan[9] economies have adopted legal frameworks for municipal waste management by approximating or being inspired by EU waste legislation, and the EU Waste Framework Directive in particular. However, for most Western Balkan economies, further alignment and harmonisation with this directive is needed. Implementing the legal frameworks is challenging because of a lack of staff, insufficient cross-institutional cooperation, budget deficiencies and poor enforcement mechanisms.

Key issues:

- Growing amounts of municipal waste and improper waste management lead to environmental pollution in the Western Balkan economies. Most municipal waste is still sent to landfills.
- Data on waste generation and management are largely insufficient, although many initiatives are in place to improve data quality.
- There is an urgent need to set up and invest in separate collection systems and recycling infrastructure, and seize the opportunity to recover valuable resources.
- Targets for municipal waste, mainly for recycling but also for collection and reducing landfilling, are set in waste legislation, strategies, and programmes. Economies in the region generally strive to approximate their waste targets with those set by the EU. In some cases, this results in targets that appear ambitious compared with the current situation and the capacity for change. The measures implemented with the aim of reaching the targets are generally weak, especially for recycling targets.
- Key challenges include a lack of financial resources and staff, insufficient cross-institutional cooperation, and poor enforcement of waste legislation. Illegal, substandard, and informal activities hinder the proper funding and functioning of the legal infrastructure and its gradual improvement. The region would benefit from fees that are better structured to cover the full waste collection and management costs and more effective enforcement.
- Waste legislation, including targets, is increasingly being adapted to or inspired by EU directives.

One option to improve waste management is to introduce extended producer responsibility (EPR) systems, as they create opportunities for additional funding for the separate collection of end-of-life products and their proper management through the polluter-pays principle. The introduction of

[9] Briefing no. 06/2022 Title: Municipal waste management in the Western Balkan
EN HTML: TH-AM-22-006-EN-Q - ISBN: 978-92-9480-468-6 - ISSN: 2467-3196 - doi: 10.2800/132793
EN PDF: TH-AM-22-006-EN-N - ISBN: 978-92-9480-469-3 - ISSN: 2467-3196 - doi: 10.2800/58266

extended producer responsibility schemes in the region could provide additional funding for improving waste management, if they are designed, governed, and implemented well.

EPR systems for packaging have been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia also have an EPR system in place for waste electrical and electronic equipment, while Kosovo* and Montenegro plan to implement such systems in 2022 and 2024, respectively. Albania has started to prepare a draft law creating the basis for an EPR system.

However, to deliver good results, good governance of EPR systems is required. Challenges remain regarding the effectiveness of the EPR systems currently in place, especially in relation to how fees are defined, collected, and used.

In all Western Balkan economies, except for Montenegro, most municipal waste is disposed of in non-sanitary landfills, some of which are operated by municipalities and others are illegal, according to information provided by the authorities. These sites are often poorly engineered, managed and operated, posing serious threats to human health and the environment. Waste is usually not pre-treated, and, although illegal, the open burning of waste still happens, for example in Albania, Kosovo* and North Macedonia.

Except for Albania, there are currently no waste incineration plants in the Western Balkans. However, a waste incineration plant started operation in Serbia in 2022; North Macedonia is planning the construction of a waste-to-energy plant; and preliminary studies are considering this possibility in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is an urgent need to introduce and extend separate collection systems and improve recycling infrastructure, and to prevent waste from being disposed of in (illegal) landfills. Cooperation across the region and with regional industries might help to build both an economically viable recycling sector and demand for recyclables, thus creating a regional circular economy.

3.1.6. Plastic management

Plastic production[10], consumption, and waste is expanding exponentially, affecting marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems and contributing to greenhouse gas (GHG) and hazardous chemical emissions with consequent implications for human health, economies, and social well-being around the world.

Global Plastics Outlook ECONOMIC DRIVERS, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND POLICY OPTIONS[11]

The Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Programme tackles plastic pollution using a circular economy approach. Packaging, particularly single-use related to the food and beverage sector, will be the priority since it is the main source of plastic waste in developing economies.

Interventions[12] will cross the entire plastic value chain—from production to consumption to disposal. Such a holistic approach leverages the interlinkages across the processes and sectors contributing to plastic pollution. As plastic pollution efforts tend to focus on waste collection, recycling and clean-ups, the GEF will prioritise actions early in the plastic value chain, i.e., production and consumption. By aligning with existing waste management efforts, the programme will address the full value chain.

[10] Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Program, 2022, www.thegef.org
[11] Global Plastics Outlook ECONOMIC DRIVERS, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND POLICY OPTIONS, OECD 2022 https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en.
[12] GEF_IP_PlasticPollution_2022_10_12_0.pdf

The programme emphasizes upstream measures to reduce plastic production and consumption, the engagement of the private sector, and single-use packaging in the food and beverage sectors. It has several objectives:

- Eliminate production and use of problematic and unnecessary plastic products (e.g., single-use plastic packaging) and phase out plastic products containing chemicals of concern, using green chemistry to create sustainable materials.
- Innovate for circularity through increased reusability, recyclability, and composability of products; innovate better reuse, refill, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling business models, including service as product; reengineer products towards materials made from recycled materials, which are recyclable and are ocean-safe if they leak into the ocean; and promote innovative solutions such as reusable to-go food container programmes.
- Ensure products are reused or recycled by shifting consumer behaviour, by improving waste collection and recycling, and by fostering markets for recycled material.
- Create cross-cutting enabling conditions by strengthening coordination along the plastic value chain, sharing best practices, and establishing transparent means of monitoring and evaluation.

3.1.7. Green Deal

The European Green Deal (EGD)[13] set the blueprint for this transformational change. All 27 EU Member States committed to turning the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050. To get there, they pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. To build a Healthy Planet for All, the European Green Deal calls for the EU to better monitor, report, prevent and remedy air, water, soil and consumer products pollution, among other things.

The main goals of the EGD are a net carbon neutral European Union by 2050 and a decoupling of economic growth and resource use. The EGD is not a law, but a general policy strategy, outlining the ambitions and goals in different policy sectors. For its implementation, existing regulations and standards will be revised over the next few years and new laws and directives will be developed and implemented. There are eight key areas that make up the Green Deal:

1) Increasing the EU's climate ambition for 2030 and 2050
2) Supplying clean, affordable, secure energy
3) Mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy
4) Building and renovating in an energy and resource efficient way
5) A zero-pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment
6) Preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity
7) Farm to Fork: a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system
8) Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility

The European Green Deal is not a single strategy that provides the solution for Europe's many environmental and climate related challenges. Rather, it presents a collection of targets, intentions and objectives that will be implemented over the next ten years. It provides the overarching framework for the necessary green transition.

[13] commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en

3.1.8. Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

A New Growth Strategy for the Western Balkans leaps from a traditional economic model to a sustainable economy in line with the European Green Deal. In line with the EU ambition to become climate-neutral by 2050, the region has also committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, and to aligning with the European Green Deal's key elements by endorsing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) at the Summit in Sofia in 2020, and subsequently the GAWB Action Plan, at the Brdo Summit in October 2021.

The RCC[14] has coordinated the process of drafting the GAWB Declaration and Action Plan based on intense consultations with all stakeholders to identify concrete steps, supporting organisations and structures, and an indicative timeframe for each measure to be implemented.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The main goal is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and align with the European Green Deal's key elements.

- Objectives
- Cleaning energy sources & protecting the climate
- Moving to a circular economy
- Depolluting air, water, and soil
- Building sustainable agriculture & food systems
- Protecting biodiversity and ecosystems

The GAWB Action Plan envisages 58 actions and 7 roadmaps for implementation that are focused on: climate policy, sustainable energy, sustainable mobility, circular economy, depollution, sustainable agriculture and food supply, and protection of nature and biodiversity. Among others, the Plan envisions the adoption of the 2030 Energy and Climate Policy targets to include carbon pricing, coal phase-out plans, pollution control, nature, and biodiversity protection, regional integration, and an indicative timeframe for harmonisation with the EU Emissions Trading System as of 2024.

3.2. Albanian legislation on waste management and the plastic waste

3.2.1. Facts & figures about problem of (plastic) packaging waste pollution

Albania has no extended producer responsibility (EPR) system in place. The amount of packaging put on the market is not reported. These data are expected to be collected once Albania adopts the expected new Law on EPR in year 2024 once the obligation for the importers and producers to report data will be enforced.

According to the Albanian Statistics (INSTAT), Albania managed about 1.1M tons of municipal waste, of which paper and cardboard represent about 8% of total waste managed in Albania and plastics amount for about 9%. However, these data remain obsolete due to a lack of a proper data measuring and reporting system in Albania.

Albania lacks any separate collection systems. Currently there are only seven small scale plastic collection schemes at seven municipalities in the country, while the amount of dirty material collected by waste pickers is reported to be about 18%, mostly plastics.

[14]https://www.rcc.int/priority_areas/61/green-agenda-for-the-western-balkans

Albania has recently adopted a new Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan for the period 2020-2035 to align with the fundamental policy requirements of the EU in the waste management sector. This strategic framework aims to ensure comprehensive municipal waste collection services for all residents across Albania.

Moreover, the strategy defines measures for separate waste collection and sets ambitious targets for recycling and recovery of various waste streams, including plastic waste.

3.2.2. Albania's path to EU membership

After its initial identification as potential candidate for European Union (EU) membership, during the Thessaloniki European Council Summit in 2003, the EU remains fully committed to Albania's EU accession. After opening accession negotiations with Albania (and North Macedonia) in 2020, last year's Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations kicked off further screening processes on the part of the EU Commission (EEAS, 2022) (Please find a tabular overview of Albania's path towards EU membership in the text below). These are preparatory and analytical examinations of the so-called EU acquis, a collection of common rights and obligations to be implemented by its member states which forms the basis of the accession negotiations (EUR-Lex, 2023). Albania is now in the process of implementing the necessary reforms to negotiate.

Presently, the acquis comprises 35 chapters, with chapter 27 specifically devoted to Environment and Climate Change. This particular chapter is considered to be among the most comprehensive and challenging to implement (SANE27, 2023b) since it is intersectoral and involves a series of ministries and agencies within the context of the transposition and implementation of 79 Directives and Regulations15. For Albania, all reporting obligations, policy planning, strategy formulation and implementation monitoring is coordinated by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) as the leading institution (GIZ & MTE, 2020). The MTE Deputy Minister chairs the Inter-Institutional Working Group for chapter 27 (IIWG27), (SANE27, 2023b). The preparational effort for the negotiation of chapter 27 is foreseen to span over the next four to five years (SANE27, 2023b). As can be seen in the table below, Albania has advanced significantly in the transposition of the laws required by the EU acquis. A challenge for the coming years will be the implementation and enforcement of these laws, whilst producing the necessary high-quality data to back the achieved progress16.

Table 1 - List of Eu legal acts transposited in Albanian legal framework

Name of EU Legal Act	Competent authority	Level of transposition	Level of implementation
2008/98/EC Waste Framework	MTE	62%	Partially
86/278/EEC Sewage Sludge	MARD	100%	Initial stage
2006/66/EC Batteries	MTE	92%	Initial stage
94/62/EC Packaging	MTE	66%	Initial stage
96/59/EC PCB/PCT	MTE	87%	Initial stage

[15] "Regulations have binding legal force throughout every [EU] Member State and enter into force on a set date in all the Member States. Directives lay down certain results that must be achieved but each Member State is free to decide how to transpose directives into national laws" (USDA, 2023).

[16] Other, non-waste management related arrangements in Chapter 27 comprise air quality, water quality, nature protection, industrial pollution control and risk management, chemicals, noise and climate change as well as horizontal issues

Name of EU Legal Act	Competent authority	Level of transposition	Level of implementation
2000/53/EC ELVs	MTE	82%	Partially
2011/65/EU RoHS(recast)	MTE	7%	Not implemented
2012/19/EU WEEE	MTE	60%	Initial stage
1999/31/EC Landfill	MIE / MTE	83%	Initial stage
EC/1013/2006 Shipment of Waste	MTE	12%	Initial stage
2006/21/EC Mining Waste	MIE	52%	Partially
1257/2013/EU Ship Recycle	MTE / MIE	1%	Not implemented
2019/904/EU Plastic Reduction	MTE	8%	Initial stage
Source: SANE27, 2023a (unpublished)			

Ongoing Albanian political efforts and broad support for EU accession across the Albanian society (Rama, 2021), in combination with an EU self-interest in expansion (Alemanno, 2023), make the successful negotiation of chapter 27 rather likely. A more detailed timeline and negotiations milestones cannot be foreseen at this moment.

Table 2 - Albania's path to EU membership

2003	Albania is identified as potential candidate for EU membership during the Thessaloniki European Council summit
2009	Submission of formal application by Albania
2010	EU Commission assesses that before accession negotiations can be opened, Albania still has to achieve a necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria
2012	The Commission recommends that Albania be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform and revision of the parliamentary rules of procedures
2014	Albania is awarded candidate status by the EU
2018	The Commission issues an unconditional recommendation to open accession negotiations
2019	The European Council sets out path towards opening accession negotiations depending on progress made in key areas such as the judiciary or the fight against corruption and organized crime
2020	The European Council endorses the General Affairs Council's decision to open accession negotiations with Albania
2022	The Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations is held with Albania. The Commission starts the screening process
2023	To review the progress of EU-Albania relations, the two parties meet in the EU-Albania Stabilization and Association council. The last of so far 12 meetings was held on 16 March 2023

	Two screening meetings on cluster 4 “Green Agenda & sustainable connectivity” (including chapter 27) were held in March and September 2023

3.2.3. National institutional and legal framework

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment, being a policy-making institution, has progressed in drafting and approving the legal framework in the field of waste in accordance with EU directives and regulations. One of the challenges arising from the legislation is its full implementation. The lack of applicability also comes as a fact of overlapping the powers of central and local institutions. There are also cases when some tasks are not covered by any of the institutions. The list of laws and by-laws passed on waste is long. To be mentioned are:

- Law no. 10431, dated 09.06.2011 "On environmental protection", amended.
- Law no. 10463, dated 22.09.2011 "On the integrated management of waste", amended.
- Law no. 8094/1996 "On public waste disposal" provides the legal basis through which municipalities can contract the service to third parties with management contracts that can last up to 5 years.
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 99, dated 18.02.2005 "On the approval of the Albanian waste classification catalogue", amended.
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 177, dated 06.03.2012 "On packaging and their waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 178, dated 06.03.2012 "On waste incineration".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 452, dated 11.07.2012 "On waste landfills".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 705, dated 10.10.2012 „For vehicle waste at the end of life".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 765, dated 07.11.2012 "For adoption of rules for differentiated collection and treatment used oils".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 866, dated 4.12.2012 "On batteries, accumulators and their waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 957, dated 19.12.2012 "On waste from electrical and electronic equipment".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 117, dated 13.02.2013 "On the criteria based on which it is determined when certain types of scrap metal cease to be waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 967, dated 25.10.2013 "On the establishment of the working group for the Integrated Waste Management Committee".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 798, dated 29.09.2010 "For approval of the regulation "for the administration of hospital waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 229, dated 23.04.2014 "On the approval of the rules for the transfer of non-hazardous waste and the information that must be included in the transfer document".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 371, dated 11.06.2014 "On the approval of the rules for the delivery of hazardous waste and the document of their delivery".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 418, dated 25.06.2014 "On the differentiated collection of waste at source".

- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 608, dated 17.09.2014 "For determining the necessary measures for the collection and treatment of bio-waste, as well as the criteria and deadlines for their reduction".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 641, dated 01.10.2014 "On the adoption of rules for the export of waste and the transit of non-hazardous waste and inert waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 127, dated 11.02.2015 "Requirements for the use of polluted water sludge in agriculture".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 387, dated 06.05.2015 "On the rules for controlling the disposal of PCBs/PCTs, the decontamination or disposal of equipment containing PCBs/PCTs and/or the disposal of PCB waste /used PCTs".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 575, dated 24.06.2015 "On the approval of requirements for the management of inert waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 687, dated 29.7.2015 "On the approval of the rules for keeping, updating and publishing waste statistics".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 1104, dated 28.12.2015 "On the approval of requirements for the prevention of the discharge of waste, created by ships and surpluses from cargo, at sea".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 652, dated 14.09.2016 "On the rules and criteria for the management of waste from used tires".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 232, dated 26.4.2018 "On some changes and additions to decision no. 177, dated 6.3.2012, of the Council of Ministers, "On packaging and their waste".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 319, dated 31.5.2018 "On the approval of measures for the costs of integrated waste management".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 389, dated 27.6.2018 "On some changes and additions to decision no. 452, dated 11.7.2012, of the Council of Ministers, "On waste landfills".
- Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 660, dated 31.10.2018 "On the approval of requirements for the management of metal waste".

These acts deal with specific aspects of the implementation of the law on integrated waste management, charge the actors of the central and local government as well as the public with responsibility, set objectives and determine the deadlines for their fulfillment. However, they are characterized by a common feature: the impossibility of being implemented due to the lack of financial support for any act, responsibility or objective that they define. On the other hand, in terms of objectives, the deadlines set in these acts have been exceeded in many cases. For this reason, they must be revised, updated, related to the time limits and the revision of the target level of the indicators according to the objectives.

3.2.4. Strategic policy document

In Albania during the last years, the amount of waste generation has increased, while the way of their management has room for improvement. The implementation of the Strategic Policy Document will require a substantial institutional reorganization, to clarify the structures responsible for the drafting and implementation of legislation for integrated waste management, as well as institutional tasks, to achieve the objectives of reduction, reuse and recycling.

Waste management is carried out in all urban areas and less so in rural areas. The waste is mainly dumped in places designated by the Local Self-Government Units, but there are quantities that are also dumped in unauthorized places, along the roads and near settlements. The waste management service is performed through contracting by the Local Self-Government Units of private enterprises or through their companies and these contracts are usually with a duration of 3-5 years.

The collection infrastructure is weak, as the number of containers is often insufficient. The collection equipment (containers and trucks) is not according to European standards and needs constant renewal. The recycling industry is one of the most important players in waste management. Recycling itself is perhaps the most essential element and the most well-known form of waste reduction that takes place through a chain of processes including separation at source, separate collection, selection and processing, which leads to the reduction of a significant amount of waste that is landfilled.

Recycling has progressed compared to a few years ago, as companies have been set up that collect metals, plastics, paper and glass and recycle them. The collection and management of other waste streams has also begun. To be mentioned are hospital waste, batteries, oils, electrical and electronic equipment. Efforts to separate waste at source have been frequent but without positive results. This is due to the complete lack of infrastructure as well as public awareness. Regarding the preparation of the legal framework in the field of waste, a compatibility with EU directives and regulations is observed, but its full applicability still remains a challenge. Also, integrated waste management requires financial instruments that will make it possible to achieve the objectives of the strategic document. Financial instruments include:

- Medium-term budget planning at the central level.
- Granting a fund dedicated to the environment, based on the number of the population that is given each year to Local Self-Government Units.

The implementation of the Strategy will require a large financial commitment of the government at the national and local level to treat waste management as a strategic sector. An important role is also played by the private sector, which will be the main supporter regarding financing to improve the waste management system.

3.3. Planning hierarchy

The implementation of the integrated waste management system should be directed through four levels of planning instruments.

1. STRATEGIC POLICY DOCUMENT AND NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

The waste strategic policy document, which is the highest level of planning, is an action document for the future, it is the cornerstone, where strategies and plans are established, relationships are regulated and resources are directed.

This document serves: *Policymakers* to guide decision-making towards good waste management; *Administration* for drafting development strategies, plans and programs; *Government* for the creation and improvement of responsible institutions; *Finance* for the orientation of budgets; *Implementers* to understand the direction and purpose of their work; *Public participation* for awareness and assessment of the impact on the environment from waste, to ensure the sustainable development of the environment for future generations. The policy should provide guidance and direction for a given period of time.

2. NATIONAL SECTORAL PLAN FOR SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

The National Sectoral Plan for solid waste management represents the document of the second level of planning for waste management which defines the planning framework related to investments in infrastructure at the national level and that of the Waste Management Areas.

National Sectoral Plan for solid waste management should be oriented towards:

- Identification and definition of methodology and technology for future waste treatment investments for the integrated waste management system including equipment for waste collection, composting, recycling, incineration for energy recovery and disposal on the basis of Waste Management Areas;
- Determination of costs and fees related to waste disposal in treatment plants and waste transfer stations;
- An objective, verifiable and transparent system of waste management infrastructure investment priorities that is built on the basis of needs and impacts assessment.

3. REGIONAL/ZONAL PLANS

The implementation of the Strategic Policy Document and the National Sectoral Plan for solid waste management requires the drafting of Regional/Zonal Plans for each Waste Management Area. These Plans must be based on Feasibility Studies which are drawn up by the responsible ministry on the basis of European principles and standards for environmental protection as well as the best existing knowledge.

4. LOCAL PLANS

Each local government unit or group of local government units draws up the local plan of integrated waste management for the territory under its jurisdiction, in accordance with the national plan and the regional plan of integrated waste management.

4. Status quo of local waste management system

Municipal waste management is a responsibility of the municipalities in Albania set by the organic law on self-government and the framework law on integrated waste management. Based on legislation municipalities are responsible for adopting waste management plans which should be aligned with the regional and national plans and transpose all legal requirements into measures.

According to INSTAT, in the year 2020, the reported municipal waste generation in Albania amounted to approximately 1.17 million tons, slightly lower than the 1.20 million tons generated in 2019.

According to the National Waste Management Strategy, an average of 0.9 kg/day/inhabitant of urban waste is estimated to be generated in Albania, with variations ranging from 0.4 kg/day/inhabitant in rural areas to 1.2 kg/day/inhabitant in urban areas. These estimates are based on expert judgment and some pilot assessments conducted in the country, as there is a lack of comprehensive measurements. Although the strategy does not provide an official forecast, it is generally agreed that there may not be a significant increase in waste generation in the coming years, this mainly related to a significant decrease of the population. The figures indicate a considerable fluctuation in the amount of managed urban waste over the years, making it challenging to project future waste generation accurately.

The above-mentioned yearly report of INSTAT shows that approximately 86.9% of the population in Albania has access to waste management services. Notably, the population coverage has shown significant growth when compared to the reported figure of 68.9% in 2017. This improvement in coverage can be attributed to the increased investments made by municipalities in waste collection infrastructure. The trend of investing in waste management infrastructure continues, with the objective of further expanding coverage and enhancing the overall system.

The same report for 2020 indicated that about 80.2% of the total amount of municipal waste was deposited in landfills and dump sites, marking an increase of 2.2%, compared to the previous year. In recent times, the majority of municipalities in the country have either adopted or are in the process of developing local waste management plans. However, the adoption of these plans is accompanied by challenges and complexities, primarily stemming from the absence of approved regional waste management plans and waste zones plans. This lack of regional plans adds to the delays and uncertainties in the process.

The current practices of waste management face several issues which are related to tradition, infrastructure, governance of the sector, financing, and especially public awareness. Systems for collecting and removing waste are both inadequate and inefficient.

This inefficiency results in ineffective waste management practices. Additionally, without reliable information, it becomes challenging to make informed decisions about waste collection and disposal choices. This lack of information hinders the ability to implement effective waste management strategies. Furthermore, there is a lack of established practices and protocols for handling waste in an environmentally responsible manner.

Additionally, the insufficient financial and technical resources allocated to waste management pose a significant challenge. Without adequate resources, it becomes difficult to improve waste management infrastructure and implement effective waste treatment methods.

Finally, there is a need for increased public awareness regarding the detrimental effects of poor waste management. Generally, there is a lack of understanding among the public about the damage caused by improper waste disposal. Raising awareness about these issues is crucial for garnering support and promoting positive changes in waste management practices.

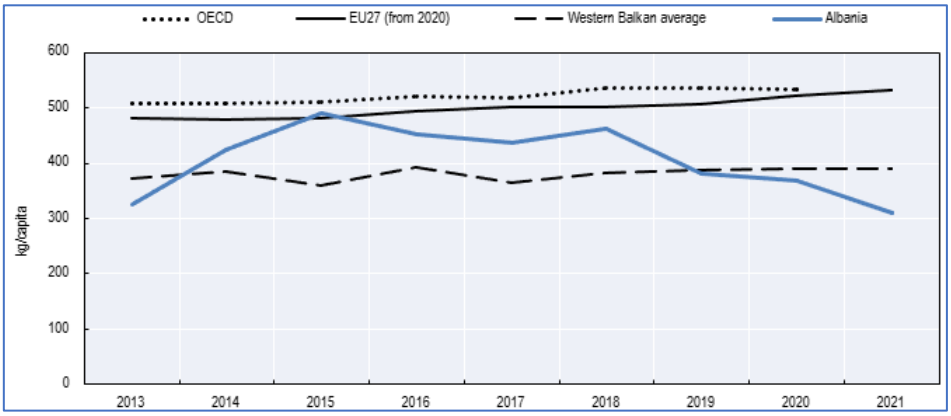
4.1. Waste management in local level in Albania

Albania's level of municipal waste generation is in the midfield compared to its neighbouring economies, with a slight decreasing trend over recent years (Figure 2.10). Municipal waste dropped from 1.4 million tonnes in 2015 (corresponding to 491 kg/capita) to 0.9 million tonnes in 2021 (corresponding to 311 kg/capita) (Eurostat, 2021). However, this decrease is attributed to the improvement in waste reporting over years and thus cannot point to a reducing trend per se (EEA, 2021). Nevertheless, the data are still not considered of high quality as there are no exact statistics for waste generation.

Data and reports are instead based on municipalities' and recycling companies' estimations, except for the few municipalities that take their waste to a sanitary landfill or incinerator equipped with weighing devices (EEA, 2021]). There are some ongoing efforts to improve waste statistics. Between 2020 and 2022, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment conducted a waste data collection and weighting exercise in all 61 municipalities (National Environmental Agency, 2022) with the aim of increasing awareness of waste quantities and reducing discrepancies between estimated and weighted waste. The waste data obtained through this weighing exercise in Albania for 2022 indicate a notable amount

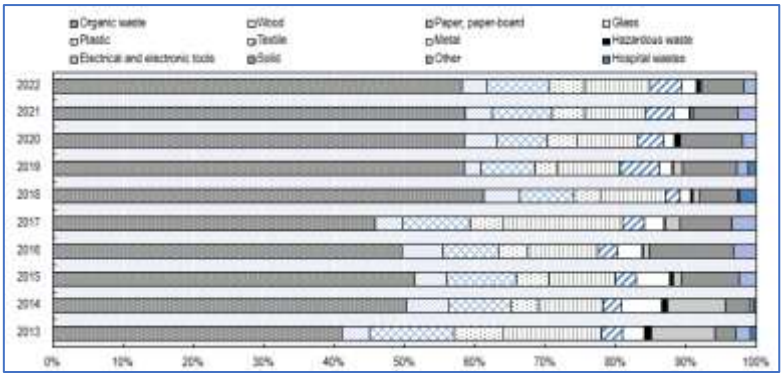
of waste per municipality and a substantial per capita waste generation. However, given that data for all municipalities were only collected for one year and technical structures vary considerably at the local level, they significantly differ from the administrative data. Data are expected to converge more closely in the future if these practices are continued and professionalised.

Figure 1 - Municipal waste generation, 2013-2021



Sources: Eurostat (2021); data for OECD only available until 2020 (OECD, 2022[73]). Stat Link 2https://stat.link/x19kz4

Figure 2 - Waste by compound in Albania, 2013-2022



Source: INSTAT (2023). StatLink 2https://stat.link/tvz6h1

Around 89% of the population was served by waste collection services in Albania in 2022, mainly in urban areas (INSTAT, 2022), well short of the EU average of 98% (Eurostat, 2023). Waste collection and treatment services are funded through waste management fees paid by households and private companies, but current amounts remain low and insufficient to ensure proper collection equipment (containers and trucks) (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2020). While waste management fees have increased in certain municipalities, leading to an improved waste service, the most vulnerable social groups have not received any kind of special treatment in terms of fees.

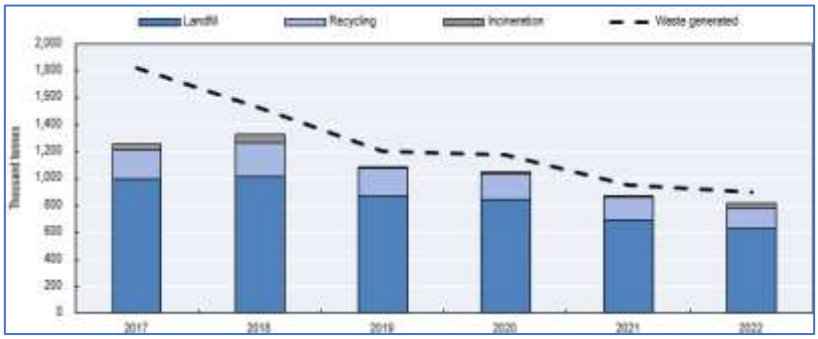
Municipal waste management remains a challenge in Albania. Municipal waste separation at source and relevant infrastructure is almost non-existent, despite a legal obligation. The main method of managing municipal waste was disposal to landfill in 2022 (over 70%), significantly above the share in the European Union (23%) (Eurostat, 2021). A few pilot projects are, nevertheless, underway to introduce separate collection in some Albanian cities (in particular for paper and cardboard, aluminium, plastics, and bio-waste). Moreover, the government reported that three composting plants have recently been established (Cerrik, Roskovec and Belsh) and three material recovery facilities

(Saranda, Himara and Prrenjas) are operating across Albania, with ten additional plants to be opened in the next four years.

Although higher than in other regional economies, recycling rates of municipal waste in Albania are low (17% in 2022) compared to the EU average (49% in 2021) (Eurostat, 2021). Five recycling plants are operational in the Bushat, Korca and Vlora landfills, and plans are ongoing for the plants to be established at the remaining landfills. While collection for recycling is conducted at sanitary landfills and at the incinerator plant in Elbasan by staff employed to do so, the majority of recyclable waste is still collected by informal waste pickers from dumpsites and bins and sold to the recycling industry (OECD, 2021). The following processes then take place:

- paper and cardboard are sorted in small quantities at the three paper mills (Tirana, Fier and Durres)
- glass bottles are sterilised and reused by beverage companies
- the majority of aluminium cans are exported to neighbouring economies and a small share is
- directed to a private Albanian smelter
- steel and scrap are sent to the Elbasan metallurgical plant (EEA, 2021).

Figure 3 - Municipal waste generation and treatment in Albania, 2017-2022Sources: INSTAT (2023)



Sources: INSTAT (2023). Stat Link 2https://stat.link/nhmqcu

There are more than 30 private recycling companies in Albania (part of the Association of Recyclers of Albania) in charge of these processes. The industry's investment market value is estimated to reach around EUR 230 million. These companies' combined processing capacity is about 500 000 tonnes/year, which is more than enough to process all recyclable waste generated in the economy. Nevertheless, due to the lack of raw material, the companies have reported to be working at around 25% of their production capacity, recycling around 10% of the total municipal waste generated (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2020).

Moreover, the first incineration plant in Albania started operating in 2019 in Elbasan, which treated around 2% of municipal waste for energy purposes in 2021 (incineration data prior to 2019 are related to illegal burning of waste at landfills) (EEA, 2021). The construction of two additional waste incinerators in Fier and Tirana, as part of the government's plans to replace the estimated 199 large uncontrolled dumpsites and various small sites still in operation by 2028, 20 have not yet been completed. Nevertheless, recent investments in waste incineration plants should not come at the expense of Albania's recycling industry and should not diverge the country from aligning with the EU acquis waste hierarchy principle, recycling targets and a circular model (European Commission, 2022). In addition to the new incinerator plants, a new sanitary landfill is in the planning stage in Vlora and

ten illegal landfills are in the process of being approved for remediation to be used while sanitary landfills are constructed (EEA, 2021). Few data are available on the quantity and management of industrial waste. Key industrial waste generators in Albania include the oil industry, cement production, and steel and mining (EEA, 2018).

Mining waste is estimated to amount to more than 45 million tonnes (Thanas, Bode and Mati, 2022) and in 2022, around 12% of total waste managed by municipalities came from industrial production (INSTAT, 2023). Industrial waste is also largely disposed in waste landfills or unmanaged. These sites pose a serious threat to the environment, as industrial waste products have particularly dangerous properties, causing pollution in water, soil and crops.

4.2. Motivations for the selection of plastics

Plastics in Albania are assessed as a priority area with high policy relevance. Albania will need to implement national obligations and targets related to plastics. Namely, its National Plan for Integrated Waste Management (2020-2035) foresees specific targets for the recovery of plastic packaging waste generated (10% by 2025, 12% by 2030 and 22.5% by 2035). Albania will also need to align its regulatory framework with the European Union's (EU) plastics legislation, in line with its EU accession negotiations.

EU plastics legislation contains a number of obligations and targets, including minimum recycling targets for plastic packaging materials, a separate collection target and minimum recycled plastic content for plastic bottles, as well as a ban on certain single-use plastic products. While Albania's waste law has been amended to ban the production, import and sale of certain categories of single-use plastic bags, more alignment with EU legislation will be needed. A task force has been established to ensure the enforcement of the ban and impose penalties for non-compliance.

In addition, on a regional level, this topic is an important element of the circular economy pillar of the Green Agenda of the Western Balkans and the related Action Plan until 2030. In this context, Albania, together with the five other Western Balkans economies, issued a joint statement on prevention of plastic pollution, including marine litter, at the Berlin Process Summit 2023 (Berlin Process Summit, 2023). On a global level, there is also an ongoing negotiation for an internationally legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution that has attracted the attention of global leaders.

Waste data in Albania are still not considered of high quality, in particular when it comes to specific waste streams. According to the available estimates, plastic waste constitutes a relatively small share of generated waste (around 9.2%). Moreover, while comprehensive estimates of the number of recycled plastics are lacking, overall recycling rates are very low in Albania (17%) and the majority of plastics is collected for recycling by the informal sector.

Albania is also one of the economies with large proportions of mismanaged waste, contributing to a high leakage of (often untreated) plastic waste into the Adriatic-Ionian basin, amounting to 20 kg per person per year (World Bank, 2020), with litter from fishing and shipping in the Adriatic Sea further compounding the problem. This may result in plastic pollution and leakage from mismanaged plastic waste, which have important negative environmental implications and may harm nature and ecosystems, including marine ecosystems and human health.

Throughout their life cycle, plastics also have a significant carbon footprint, contributing to 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2019 throughout their whole life cycle (OECD, 2022).

Albania has only recently started working on policy instruments in this domain. Further efforts are needed to fulfil its ambition to meet the relevant national and EU targets and obligations. The circularity and decarbonisation potential and strategic importance of plastics, especially plastic packaging, is, therefore, very high in Albania. Plastics are also a strategic material to several economic sectors, in spite of their lower economic importance. The most important applications of plastics in Albania are packaging, textile, construction and fishing. Plastics' usage, in particular single-use plastic products, is also exacerbated by the growing tourism sector.

4.3. Awareness for (plastic) waste pollution and climate change

Awareness raising campaign and activities on waste prevention, clean environment, climate change and various aspects of environmental protection have intensified in the last years in Albania. Campaign is delivered by several stakeholders, including MTE and its agencies, different cooperation and development programs including GIZ programs in waste management and marine litter prevention and several civil society organizations.

Education about climate change, waste prevention and 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) strategies is already in the school curricula in Albania. Children learn about these issues and ways to engage in society. The most prominent campaign in plastic reduction was launched by the MTE on carrying single-use plastic bags. This campaign was widely supported by the donor community and civil society. The replacement of the shopping bags with textile ones brought from home was the key message delivered and free textile bags were given to citizens at various events. Redesigning the bag, making it very fashionable to wear in the city was highly promoted by many actors including businesses which produced special models of these bags.

The National Environmental Agency regularly organizes nation-wide campaigns to raise awareness of the public and to educate local institutions with regard to waste management services. These campaigns are organized in a door-to-door meetings educating citizens, businesses and visitors on the importance of reducing plastic waste, especially single-use plastic items, and to facilitate recycling through raising public awareness on sorting and separate collection. Most of the municipalities annually organize 'Let's do It' public awareness campaigns promoting responsible environmental behaviour and waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

The MTE has recently launched a campaign to separate paper and cardboard in schools of Tirana which will be implemented in collaboration with the Municipality of Tirana and the Albanian Recyclers Association.

5. Identification of stakeholders

The frame for identification of stakeholders was laid down in correlation with the Marine Strategy and strategy for plastic and waste management with the focus on plastic pollution.

Consultations are important and implemented during the process of development of the Action Plan. The purpose of the consultation process is to gather data from stakeholders and target groups required to implement the Regional Action Plan for implementation of the Joint Statement on Preventing Plastic Pollution, including Marine Litter (AP) of the Western Balkan region and to define optimum public policy measures.

The goal of the stakeholder selection is to propose a comprehensive list of potential economy-specific stakeholders to be involved in development of the Action Plan.

5.1. Criteria for the identification of stakeholders

Stakeholder involvement is about building and maintaining constructive relationships with all institutions, bodies and their representatives, corporate sector, academia, and NGOs which are on behalf of the government engaged in development of the Action Plan and also in different strategies /programmes, such as strategies for circular economy, climate change mitigation, air protection, sustainable development, protection of biodiversity, etc.

Due to the complexity of marine protection and pollution associated with plastic waste, and their cross relations with plastic producers, key groups of stakeholders have been identified, as priority, including aggregates based on their type, roles, and responsibilities. Each group of stakeholders presented below has a certain capability to impact the successful analysis in development of AP from various perspectives and with diverse levels of knowledge and experience, gaining a potential role therein. These are:

- Ministries as bodies that formulate policies and lead the decision-making processes at the economy-level, each responsible for its area of action. The role of ministries is essential from the point of view of marine protection, plastic production and management of plastic waste. As key creators of public policies at the economy-level, the relevant ministries are those that formulate development directions in the field of environmental protection, nature protection, industry development, economy, entrepreneurship, tourism etc.
- Governmental institutions and regulatory bodies specialised and responsible for various fields. They represent the backbone of leading changes and coordination, implementation, and monitoring of certain government policies. In this case, such institutions are mainly governmental agencies such as but not only: the agency responsible for environmental data management, agency in charge of nature protection, etc.
- City administrations and local governments as the local authorities of the concerned and affected environment, responsible for management of marine and in-land river ports, and usually for municipal waste management facilities, mainly landfills.
- Corporate sector as the group of public and private companies, private businesses, SMEs, as well as their associations presenting the major players as they are producers and possible collectors and operators of plastic waste which would have wide impact on future socio-economic development.
- Business and professional organisations as the stakeholders that gather specialised professionals or interest groups, possessing thematic expertise and skills valuable in the plastic process (included chambers of commerce, operators, recyclers).
- Academia and local school administrations as educational institutions to lead regional reskilling and retraining activities (included all universities).
- Non-governmental organisations as the stakeholders of great importance.
- Financing institutions as the enablers of funding opportunities, securing sustainable resources.
- Other relevant stakeholders.

6. SWOT analysis for the plastic legal & institutional framework in Albania

Focusing on addressing the plastic waste management issues, it is important to make the SWOT analysis to understand what are the main obstacles and how&who could address these issues in proper way in order to obtain e system which is sustainable for management of plastic waste and reducing their producing, using or recycling.

In national level the analyse is based on the logical framework, figure 4:

Figure 4 - SWOT analyze in national level

Strengthen	Weakness
✍ Legal framework is established in line with the EU Directives ✍ Institutional is planned to be according to the legal requirement on enforcing it ✍ The planning framework is established and supported by the financial resources from the internal and outsources ✍ The plastic waste is under the consideration from all central level institutions	✍ Inadequate policy and support to create the plastic landfill or depossitory place ✍ Insufficent rules on waste management on separation and collection of plastic waste ✍ No incentives for environemntal management system and cleaner production ✍ No recognitation of role of the informal sector ✍ Lack of institutional capacity (lack of resources, lack of database and record keeping, lack of partnership) ✍ Lack of public cooperation ✍ Lack of financial resources
Opportunities	**Threats**
✍ Increase of the employment rates (creating jobs) ✍ Improve the country's economy (recyclable material market could be developed) ✍ Reduce waste borne diseas (by reducing the landfills spaces) ✍ Energy generation ✍ Recycling innovation could be growing and developing ✍ Less plastic pollution in ocean & sea life	✍ Global financial challenges ✍ Uncertainity in government policies ✍ Inconsistency of environmental management ✍ Social, cultural & behavioral adaptation

From the table where it is identified the issues for the SWOT analyse, it is mentioned that the establishment of a legal framework in alignment with EU Directives is a significant strength. It ensures

that the country's laws are up to date with European standards, which can facilitate transnational cooperation and potentially attract funding. The institutional planning that is underway to enforce the legal requirements demonstrates a proactive approach to environmental governance and having a planning framework that is financially supported both internally and externally indicates a commitment to sustainability and the potential for long-term project viability. The fact that plastic waste is being considered by all central level institutions shows a comprehensive understanding of the issue at the highest levels of governance. But in the other side the inadequate policy and support for creating plastic landfills or depositories highlight a gap in the waste management infrastructure and this is accompanied by insufficient rules on the separation and collection of plastic waste that may lead to inefficiencies and environmental harm. The absence of incentives for environmental management systems and cleaner production could slow progress towards sustainability and no recognition of the informal sector's role could mean missing out on valuable contributions from this part of society. Also, a lack of institutional capacity, public cooperation, and financial resources are significant barriers that could hinder the implementation of environmental strategies.

Even the situation has pros and cons in its development there is an opportunity to increase employment rates by creating jobs in the waste management and recycling sectors and improving the country's economy through the development of a recyclable material market is a promising prospect. Well management of waste that will bring reducing waste-borne diseases by minimizing landfill spaces can have a positive impact on public health and could provide energy generation from waste and recycling innovation that are areas with potential for growth and development. There's a chance to significantly reduce plastic pollution in oceans and improve sea life, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services.

In this development the global financial challenges could impact funding and investment in environmental projects and the uncertainty in government policies and inconsistency in environmental management could create a volatile environment for project planning and execution. Also, the need for social, cultural, and behavioural adaptation presents a challenge in changing public attitudes and behaviours towards waste management and recycling.

This analysis suggests that while there are clear strengths and opportunities for improving environmental management and tackling plastic waste, there are also significant weaknesses and threats that need to be addressed. Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and robust policy development will be crucial in overcoming these challenges and leveraging the opportunities for a more sustainable future.

In municipality level the analyse is based on the logical framework, figure 5:

Figure 5 - SWOT analyze in municipality level

Strengthen	Weakness
✍ The legal framework is established and is in function ✍ Enviromental willing to fulfill the obligation from the local government responsibilities ✍ Benefits from the waste management scheme as a source of revenue	✍ Inadequate policy and support to create the plastic landfill or depossitory place ✍ Insufficent rules on waste management on separation and collection of plastic waste ✍ No incentives for environemntal management system and cleaner production

↘ Low management costs ↘ Participation of the private sector	↘ No recognitation of role of the informal sector ↘ Lack of institutional capacity (lack of resources, lack of database and record keeping, lack of partnership) ↘ Lack of public cooperation ↘ Lack of financial resources (no investment for waste management infrustructure ↘ Lack of collection costs
Opportunities	**Threats**
↘ Increase of the employment rates (creating jobs) ↘ Improve the municipality's economy (recyclable material market could be developed from the local government) ↘ Reduce waste borne diseas (by reducing the landfills spaces) ↘ Fundrising scheme ↘ Recycling innovation could be growing and developing ↘ Less plastic pollution in municipality territory ↘ Collaboration with local recyclable companies to establish a recycle scheme for plastic issues	↘ Uncertainity in government policies ↘ Inconsistency of environmental management ↘ Social, cultural & behavioral adaptation ↘ Lack of technical skills for managing hazardous waste, ↘ insufficient infrastructure development for recycling and recovery, ↘ lack of awareness of the rules and regulations

Based on the issues identified on the table of SWOT analyze it is evident that the established legal framework that is operational is a solid foundation for environmental governance. It provides clarity and structure for the local government's responsibilities and actions. The environmental willingness to fulfill obligations indicates a proactive and committed local government, which is crucial for successful policy implementation. The waste management scheme as a source of revenue demonstrates a sustainable approach to environmental challenges, turning what is often seen as a liability into an asset. Low management costs and the participation of the private sector are indicative of efficient operations and beneficial partnerships that can drive innovation and investment.

The beneficiaries from the legal and institutional support faced with the inadequate policy and support for creating a plastic landfill or depository place that is a significant gap that needs to be addressed to prevent environmental degradation. Also, insufficient rules on waste management, particularly regarding the separation and collection of plastic waste, can lead to ineffective recycling and increased pollution. The absence of incentives for environmental management systems and cleaner production may hinder progress towards more sustainable practices and the lack of recognition of the informal

sector's role in waste management overlooks a potential resource that could contribute to more comprehensive waste solutions. Institutional capacity is stretched thin, with a lack of resources, database and record keeping, and partnerships, which can impede the execution of environmental policies.

The situation on local level mentioned that there is a significant opportunity to increase employment rates by creating jobs in the waste management sector, which can also contribute to social welfare and the potential to improve the municipality's economy through the development of a recyclable material market is promising and can lead to a more circular economy. The well management of the waste will provide reducing waste-borne diseases by minimizing landfill spaces can have a substantial positive impact on public health and the environment. Fundraising schemes and recycling innovation present opportunities for growth, development, and less plastic pollution in the municipality's territory. Collaboration with local recyclable companies can establish a robust recycling scheme, enhancing the effectiveness of plastic waste management.

The development of the good waste management in local level faced with the threats like uncertainty in government policies and inconsistency of environmental management can create a challenging environment for planning and investment and also the social, cultural, and behavioural adaptation is necessary for the success of environmental policies but can be difficult to achieve. The lack of technical skills for managing hazardous waste and insufficient infrastructure development for recycling and recovery are critical areas that require attention and improvement. This situation is accompanied with a lack of awareness of the rules and regulations can lead to non-compliance and undermine the effectiveness of environmental policies.

In conclusion, while the local government has established a strong legal and operational framework for environmental management, there are clear areas where improvements are needed. Addressing the weaknesses and threats identified will be essential to capitalize on the opportunities and strengthen the municipality's approach to waste management and environmental sustainability. Strategic investments, capacity building, and public engagement will be key factors in achieving these goals.

7. Key proposed policy recommendations

The proposed policy recommendations are structured around the plastics life cycle but also include some cross-cutting measures that can be applied across the plastics life cycle. Proposed measures are grouped as following:

- ✓ measures to close the plastics loop at the end-of-life phase and increase plastics recycling;
- ✓ measures focused on longer use and more reuse of plastics to shift demand from single-use plastics to alternatives and facilitate reuse and repair;
- ✓ measures targeting design and production to curb virgin plastics use and facilitate recycling
- ✓ cross-cutting measures to support a transition to a more circular plastics use.

1. Closing the plastics loop through increased recycling and better waste management

As explained in previous description, Albania faces several challenges with waste management, including municipal waste management. Better waste management and increased recycling in general are crucial to closing the plastics loop and to ensuring that there is a sufficient amount of recycled

plastics material available for substituting virgin plastics more upstream in the value chain. This can be achieved through multiple and complementing policy measures aimed at the end-of-life phase of plastics products.

In the short term, Albania will need to improve municipal waste management in general. A mix of policy instruments is needed to achieve better (plastic) waste management. Legislation needs to provide clear definitions and obligations for private actors and municipalities as well as a monitoring and enforcement systems to monitor compliance. Awareness-raising instruments are needed to educate plastic waste generators, including households, on how to separate and dispose of waste. Economic instruments are complementary tools that provide economic incentives for private actors to improve their environmental performance and help them achieve their obligations in a cost-effective manner.

Albania should focus on two key areas of improvement in the short term. First, separate collection of plastic (and other packaging) waste must be improved, as it is a crucial pre-condition for plastic waste recycling and the generation of high-quality secondary material. This will also require that adequate plastic waste collection and treatment infrastructure be in place across the country to cope with the increased amount of separately collected plastic waste in an environmentally sound manner. Municipal waste separation at source and relevant infrastructure is currently almost non-existent in Albania, despite a legal obligation to do so. The main method of managing municipal waste remains disposal to landfills – with around 60% of waste disposed of at illegal landfills (EEA, 2021).

The collection of plastic waste for recycling is mainly carried out by the informal sector. A few pilot projects are, nevertheless, underway to introduce separate collection in some Albanian cities, including for plastics. To improve the infrastructure for the separate collection of plastic waste, Albania will need to ensure a regular collection of this waste, the provision of properly sized containers, and an appropriate distance to the waste infrastructure or a “door-to-door” collection. It will also require education of and incentives for households to separate their plastic waste (e.g., through household waste charges).

Citizen co-operation is crucial for the successful separate collection of plastic waste (and other packaging waste) in municipalities. Separate waste collection at source contributes to better waste management, but it does not necessarily reduce the amount of waste produced. It does, however, allow municipalities to reach goals that are higher up in the waste hierarchy, shifting away from landfill and incineration. Efforts to promote separate waste collection should, therefore, be integrated with actions that reduce the generation of waste itself. Second, Albania must implement an EPR take-back scheme for packaging, including plastic packaging, to shift the waste management costs to producers and importers of plastic products (under the polluter-pays principle)2. An EPR scheme for packaging waste is planned to be introduced in Albania in the upcoming period, following the development of the Law on EPR, planned to be adopted at the beginning of 2024.

In the medium term, Albania could consider introducing a deposit-refund system (DRS) for plastic bottles to increase the quantity and quality of their separate collection. DRS combine a charge on the sale of a product (deposit) which is reimbursed upon the return of the product or its packaging through an approved collection facility. This provides an incentive for consumers to bring back empty packaging, which can then be reused or recycled. High rates of return for reuse or recycling can be achieved because the refund provides consumers with an economic incentive to return items through the appropriate channels.

The main drawback of the system is its high implementation cost, which makes it economically unviable to implement for a large range of products. DRS for plastic bottles have been implemented across OECD countries and would be a good starting point for Albania, as single-use plastics products for food consumption, including bottles, are among the top items ending up in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea (World Bank, 2020).

2. Shifting demand from single-use plastics to alternatives and more reuse

During the use phase, governments may influence consumers and the type of plastic products they purchase through several policy instruments. For Albania, two key policy recommendations are proposed, one for the short term and the other for the medium term to shift purchasing away from single-use plastic products to alternatives, such as reusable plastic products and products with recycled plastic content.

In the short term, Albania should introduce taxes and/or bans on certain single-use plastic products. Notably, Albania has already introduced a ban on light single-use plastic bags. Building on this, it may consider extending such a ban to additional single-use plastic products, in line with EU legislation.

The recent boom in the tourism sector also underscores the importance of measures to mitigate the leakage of single-use plastic items associated with recreational activities, including, for example, plastic cups, containers, straws and beverage bottles. Such measures have been introduced across the European Union, also as a response to the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive. A tax is levied on the sale of products or groups of products increasing their price, and if passed on to consumers, can discourage them from buying those products. While product taxes have been primarily applied to certain plastic bags (e.g., Ireland), bans apply to a wider range of single-use plastic items. Both product taxes and bans have proved to be effective in reducing the use of single-use plastic bags. While taxes on plastic bags allow for some flexibility in the degree to which consumers (and indirectly producers) change their behaviour, a ban can achieve a reduction in the use of single-use plastic bags more rapidly. However, a ban may lead to a less cost-effective solution, as firms may incur higher compliance costs than if a tax was introduced. Well-designed taxes should lead to the use of more durable and more sustainable alternatives and level the playing field between primary and secondary plastics (OECD, 2023).

In the medium term, Albania needs to use green public procurement to favour reusable plastic products and products with recycled plastic content. The purchasing power of public authorities can be used to steer greater supply and use of sustainable products and services. The demand for sustainable plastic products can be improved by introducing, for example, mandatory criteria (e.g. recycled content) on the purchase of plastic products. These criteria can include the use of secondary materials, recycled content, or reusability and recyclability of the plastic product, among others. There are a few international best practice examples on green public procurement criteria for plastics that could guide Albania. The municipality of Lolland in Denmark, for example, has introduced recycling and recyclability criteria for packaging in its tender for cleaning services. In Sweden, green public procurement criteria related to plastics are applied in the procurement of office IT equipment. In Belgium and Germany, bans on certain single-use products have been introduced. For example, the city of Hamburg banned the use of plastic coffee capsules, single-use bottles, utensils and plates in government buildings (Watkins et al., 2019). Japan also uses green public procurement criteria on plastic products, where the higher the recycled content share in an evaluated good, the higher the

evaluation score for that good. For instance, stationery products should contain at least 40% recycled plastics in terms of weight.

Also in the long term, to address the plastic product design and production in general, Albania will need to support and scale up innovation into more recyclable plastic materials, plastics recycling technologies and processes (to the extent possible) as well as plastics reuse and reduction.

Innovation (and R&D) can be promoted at every stage of the plastics life cycle, from the introduction of new materials in the production phase to new technologies for plastic waste sorting or recycling. Certain plastic products are made up of different types of plastic, which make them difficult to recycle. Providing funding for new recycling technologies is, therefore, crucial to improve plastic waste management and produce secondary plastic material that can be used as recycled content in products. R&D programmes can also focus on technologies to reduce microplastics emissions. Microplastics are highly relevant for the textiles industry as they often occur during use, such as from releases of microfibers when garments are washed. Innovation and R&D could be supported in Albania through already established programmes for scientific research activities through the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation and financing schemes offered by the Albanian Investment Development Agency and the Innovation Fund.

3. Curbing virgin plastics use through design and production-related measures

Decisions taken at the design and manufacturing stage can restrain plastic demand and enhance circularity by increasing the durability and reparability of plastic products as well as by using recycled plastic or alternative materials in production. This stage forms the basis for the consumption and end-of-life treatment stage, as product design determines the way a plastic product is produced, and from which materials, how it is consumed and disposed of as well as whether it can be repaired, reused and remanufactured. These stages also include the sourcing of materials that are used to manufacture a product, as well as the production process itself. A number of policy instruments can help make product design and production of plastic products in Albania more circular. As these instruments are more challenging to implement, they are thus proposed to be introduced only in the medium to long term in Albania.

In the medium term, Albania should introduce eco-modulated fees for plastic packaging within the EPR take-back scheme for packaging that should be implemented in the short term.

To boost the use of recycled plastics, in the long-term Albania will need to implement minimum plastics recycled content requirements for specific plastic waste streams, for example plastic packaging. Minimum recycled content mandates typically take the form of a regulatory requirement for producers of a certain type of product to use a minimum percentage of recycled material in their production. This could, for example, be a requirement to use a certain percentage minimum recycled content in the manufacture of plastic bottles.

To incentivise the use of secondary and recyclable plastics further and beyond the minimum recycled content requirements, Albania may consider taxes on virgin and non-recycled plastics in the long term. Taxes on plastics can be imposed at different points in the value chain, ranging from taxing polymers to taxing finished products containing plastics.

Also in the long term, to address the plastic product design and production in general, Albania will need to support and scale up innovation into more recyclable plastic materials, plastics recycling

technologies and processes (to the extent possible) as well as plastics reuse and reduction. Innovation (and R&D) can be promoted at every stage of the plastics life cycle, from the introduction of new materials in the production phase to new technologies for plastic waste sorting or recycling. Certain plastic products are made up of different types of plastic, which make them difficult to recycle. Providing funding for new recycling technologies is, therefore, crucial to improve plastic waste management and produce secondary plastic material that can be used as recycled content in products. R&D programmes can also focus on technologies to reduce microplastics emissions. Microplastics are highly relevant for the textiles industry as they often occur during use, such as from releases of microfibers when garments are washed. Innovation and R&D could be supported in Albania through already established programmes for scientific research activities through the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation and financing schemes offered by the Albanian Investment Development Agency and the Innovation Fund.

4. Cross-cutting measures

To support a transition to a more circular use of plastics, Albania should also implement two cross-cutting measures in the short and medium term.

First, in the short term, Albania will need to work on raising awareness and educating businesses, public authorities and households on plastic waste prevention, circular design and littering.

Knowledge and capacity building includes a better understanding of the environmental impact of plastic waste generation, the benefits of reusing plastic products and favouring repair over buying new products, among others. Businesses need to be aware of circular economy solutions and the benefits these can bring. They should also understand the use and application of new circular business models (e.g., sharing schemes, reuse and repair centres). Consumers are more likely to comply with waste management regulation and respond to incentives if they have information on how to properly sort waste and a better understanding of how sorted waste is used for recycling.

Information campaigns play an important role in ensuring the proper disposal of plastic waste, particularly because of the variety of polymers (OECD,2023[2]). Some awareness-raising activities have been conducted in Albania, such as the 2019 EU campaign “Plastic leaves no space for life” about plastic pollution and alternatives to single-use plastics. Moreover, the awareness-raising campaign on waste management recently undertaken by the National Environmental Agency aims to reduce the generation of plastic waste, especially single-use plastic items and targets both citizens and public authorities.

Municipalities also organise the “Let’s do it” public awareness campaigns promoting waste reduction, reuse and recycling for all waste streams, including plastics. Awareness-raising and education can be improved by further developing information and training materials, designing campaigns, and sharing best practices through catalogues or online platforms. This is often carried out in co-operation with civil society organisations.

Albania could also aim at mainstreaming the circular economy into education programmes in schools, vocational education and training, and higher education. It is recommended to develop circular modules for different levels of the education system (schools, vocational education and training, and higher education), and to support voluntary activities by students and schools.

Second, in the medium term, Albania could develop a strategy to curb plastic pollution, including marine plastic litter. Albania is involved in the Western Balkans regional co-operation programme on preventing of plastic pollution, including marine litter. To support the programme’s objectives, Albania

could develop a national strategy on plastic pollution, with a focus on marine litter, that would outline key strategic objectives and possibly targets as well as measures to achieve them.

One aim of such a strategy could be to prevent litter from entering the marine and coastal environment, and to support its removal, so as to bring environmental, economic and social benefits. Some of the measures could focus on improving waste prevention, waste collection and management in coastal areas in general, promoting effective wastewater treatment and storm water management, raising awareness, supporting removal and remediation activity, and strengthening stakeholder engagement (OECD, 2019).

Better waste management systems allow plastic waste to be captured before it impacts the environment. This strategy would be also relevant to the tourism sector, as Albania is an important seaside tourist destination. In this regard, Croatian plastic waste reduction initiatives can offer good practice examples on the development of strategic documents and the implementation of measures to curb plastic pollution in important tourist destinations. Albania could also support businesses in the tourism sector in implementing systems for plastic waste reduction and minimisation in their business operations and strategies.

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