

Waste management country profile

with a focus on municipal and packaging waste

Malta

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Key messages

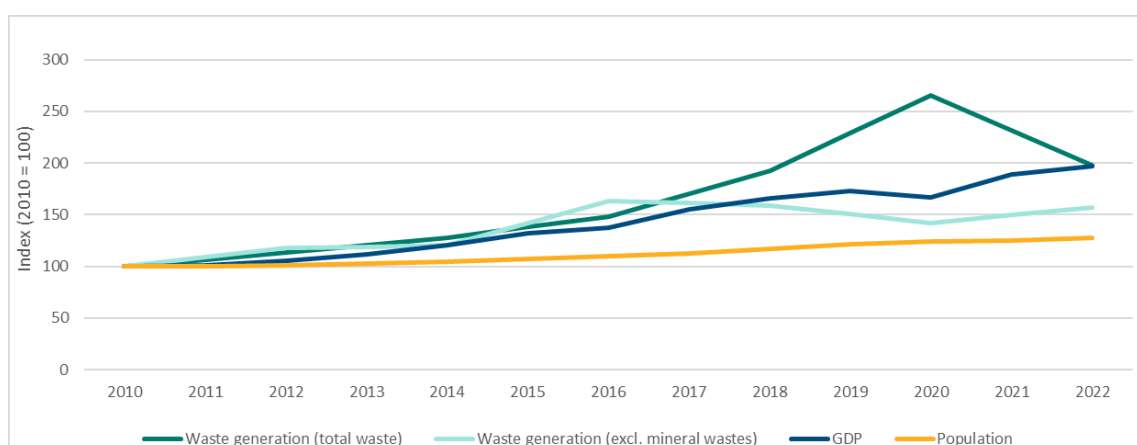
- The total amount of waste generated in Malta has doubled over the last 12 years and there are no indications of decoupling waste generation from economic growth.
- Malta was considered to be at risk of not meeting the 2025 targets for the preparing for reuse and recycling of municipal waste and for the recycling of packaging waste, as well as the 2035 landfill target.
- Since the last Early Warning report, Malta has not made progress in improving its recycling rates of municipal waste and packaging waste and in reducing landfilling of municipal waste.
- Several actions have been recently put in place by Malta to improve waste management, however, since most of such measures are being implemented as from 2023, this has not yet resulted in measurable effects.

Trends in waste generation and treatment

Total waste generation

The total amount of waste generated in Malta has doubled over the last 12 years (Figure 1), and it seems that both economic growth and population growth could have triggered this development. This trend is primarily driven by the largest waste category, namely mineral waste from construction and demolition. Excluding such mineral waste categories would therefore result in a significantly smaller increase of generated waste over the past years. The trend of waste generation excluding mineral wastes is driven by mixed ordinary waste, except in 2016. This peak was a result of end-of-life oil rigs exported for recycling in that year (ERA, 2024). Ferrous metal wastes were also the main driver of the increase in total waste excluding major mineral wastes in 2022. Malta's GDP showed steady growth until 2019 but dropped in 2020, most likely due to the Covid-19 outbreak. There are no clear indications of the decoupling of waste generation from economic growth.

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



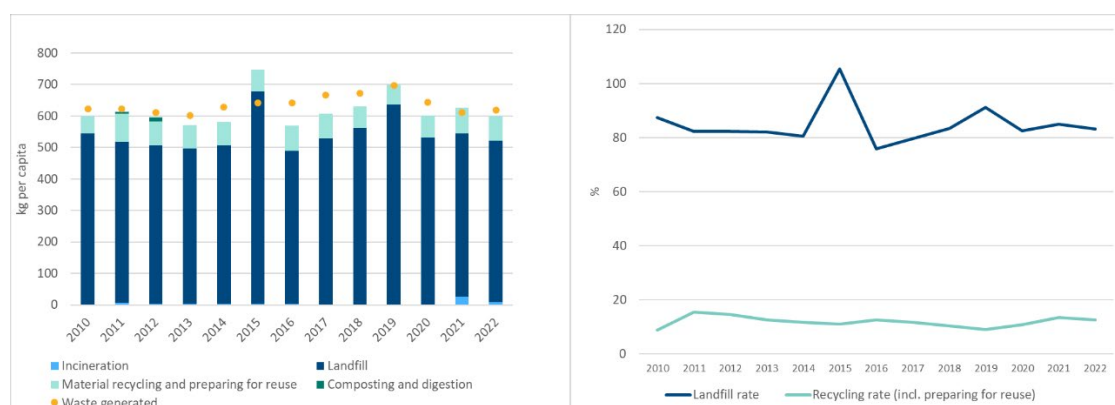
Source: Eurostat (2024b, 2024c, 2024g)

Note: Waste generation data for odd years are interpolated.

Municipal waste

Municipal waste generation in Malta has stagnated over the past years (Figure 2, left). In 2022, the country generated 618 kg/cap of municipal waste, which is significantly above the (estimated) EU-27 average of 513 kg/cap in the same year.

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



Source: Eurostat (2024e)

Note: As of the reference year 2020, new reporting rules apply for calculating recycled municipal waste pursuant to the targets laid down in Article 11.2(c-e) of Directive 2008/98/EC. Despite Malta's efforts to implement the new reporting rules, Malta is finding it particularly challenging to obtain accurate data on the actual amount of waste entering the recycling process due to its reliance on exporting waste for recycling (ERA, 2024).

Malta has shown very low rates of preparing for reuse and recycling of municipal waste over the past years (Figure 2, right). In 2022, the municipal waste preparing for reuse and recycling rate was 13%, which is significantly below the (estimated) EU-27 average of 49% in the same year. This recycling rate is entirely driven by material recycling as bio-waste is usually not recycled. Instead, treated bio-waste is used for landscaping and landfill remediation (Wasteserv, 2022) and is consequently reported as landfilled.

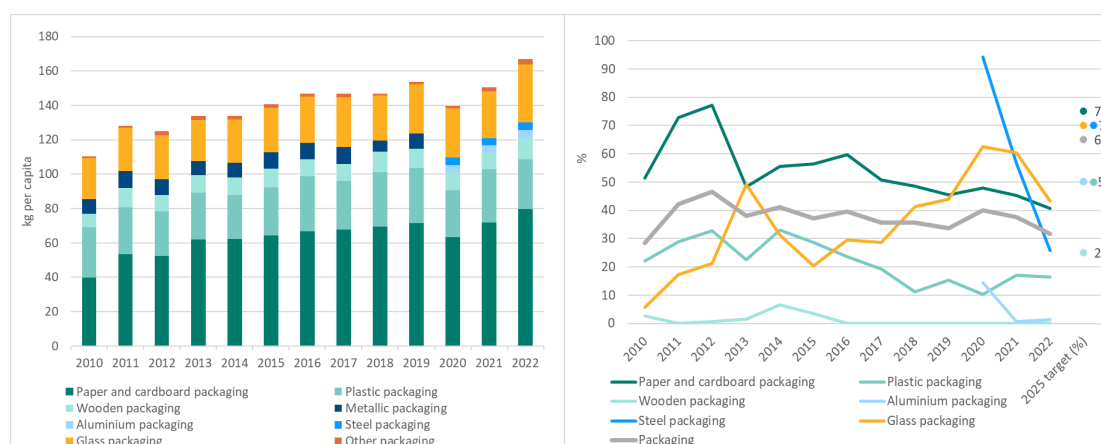
Malta has also reported data to show compliance with the preparing for reuse and recycling target of 55% for 2025, as laid down in the Waste Framework Directive. The difference between these data, following the reporting obligation of the Waste Framework Directive, and the data shown in Figure 2 (voluntary reporting) is below 1 percentage point for the preparing for reuse and recycling rate both in 2021 and 2022. The 2022 data according to this reporting obligation are still awaiting validation by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024d).

Incineration of municipal waste plays a minor role in Malta, only 1.3% of the generated municipal waste was incinerated in 2022. Landfilling is the dominant treatment method in Malta and the landfilling rate remained relatively stable (Figure 2, right).

Packaging waste

Malta's packaging waste generation increased between 2010 and 2022 (Figure 3, left). In 2022, the country generated 167 kg/cap of packaging waste, which is slightly below the (estimated) EU-27 average of 186 kg/cap in the same year ⁽¹⁾.

Figure 3 Packaging waste generation (left) and recycling rates (right), 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat (2024f)

Note: As of the reference year 2020 the rules for calculating recycled packaging waste have changed, pursuant to Article 6a of Directive 94/62/EC. Malta has applied the new reporting rules since the reference year 2020 (Eurostat, 2024a). However, despite Malta's efforts to implement the new reporting rules, Malta is finding it particularly challenging to obtain accurate data on the actual amount of waste entering the recycling process due to its reliance on exporting waste for recycling (ERA, 2024).

Malta's overall packaging waste recycling rate has fluctuated over the years, standing at 32% in 2022. These annual fluctuations are influenced by the fact that Malta relies on exports for recycling, and it keeps sorted waste in temporary storage until there is enough to export (Eurostat, 2024a). The overall packaging waste recycling rate is mainly driven by paper and cardboard packaging waste as this fraction constitutes the largest fraction of all packaging waste generated. However, the recycling rate for paper and cardboard has decreased over the past years, which has been countered by the significant increase in glass packaging waste recycling (Figure 3, right). For the reference year 2020 and onwards, it is mandatory to report steel and aluminium packaging separately. In 2022, the recycling rates of both fractions were below the 2025 target.

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

Legislative framework and waste management plans

The main legislations in Malta related to municipal and packaging waste are the Waste Regulations (last amended in 2023), the Waste Management (Packaging and Packaging Waste)

⁽¹⁾ The EU-27 average might be influenced by the situation that not all Member States already fully apply the reporting rules for packaging waste as defined in the Commission Implementing Decision 2019/665.

Regulations (last amended in 2022) (ETC/CE, 2022), and the Beverage Containers Recycling Regulations (last amended in 2022). The National Waste Management Plan (NWMP) of Malta, Long term Waste Management Plan 2021-2030 (MECP, 2021), includes the new waste prevention programme (NWPP) and was published in September 2021. The plan refers to the entire territory of Malta, and there are no regional plans.

Waste prevention policies

Malta's National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) is integrated into the long-term waste management plan (2021-2030) and the objectives are (MECP, 2021):

- Promote resource efficiency and reduce waste generation across sectors.
- Create circular opportunities with repair services and secondary markets.
- Provide economic incentives to encourage waste prevention and reuse initiatives.

The priority waste streams for prevention are food waste, packaging waste, non-packaging waste, paper, single-use plastics, textile waste, waste electric and electronic equipment (WEEE), and construction and demolition waste (EEA, 2023). Quantitative targets connected to waste prevention are not specified (EEA, 2023).

Strategies associated with waste prevention include the national strategy towards a circular economy and the construction and demolition waste strategy (EEA, 2023). Waste prevention measures for priority waste streams will be addressed through a variety of strategies, including public awareness campaigns, the introduction of economic incentives, new legislative measures to support waste reduction efforts, and various other tools aimed at encouraging waste prevention (MECP, 2021).

Malta has initiated several waste prevention activities, such as textile upcycling events, repair cafés, and food waste prevention campaigns (EEA, 2023). Examples of initiatives implemented are the 'Don't Waste Waste' campaign to promote the reduction of food waste and the 'Saving Our Blue' campaign to raise awareness about litter of single-use plastics in the water (MECP, 2021). Another initiative was the installation of ballot bins for the disposal of cigarette butts on several local beaches, with the aim to reduce the amount of littered single-use plastics (in cigarette butts) and their impact on the environment. In addition, Malta inaugurated [four reuse centers](#) at selected civic amenity sites operated by WasteServ Malta, which offer a number of items assessed as fit for reuse to citizens, such as books, ceramics, faucets, toys, musical instruments and home décor accessories (ERA, 2024).

Information on the evaluation of the previous NWPP and how those results were integrated into the current NWPP is briefly highlighted in the NWMP. The current program will undergo evaluations at its midpoint and at its end. The evaluation will consider the type of policy instruments used, the stakeholders involved, and the measurability of the outcomes (EEA, 2023).

According to 2021 data reported to the EEA in response to Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/19 (EEA, 2024), Malta reused:

- 250 tonnes of textiles,
- 379 tonnes of electrical and electronic equipment,
- 2485 tonnes of furniture, and

- 642 tonnes of construction materials.

It should be noted that these data have been reported for the first time. As the reporting process matures, it is expected that these data will strengthen but for now, caution is advised in drawing insights from the dataset. More information about the interpretation and limitations of the dataset is available (EEA, 2024).

Policies to encourage separate collection and recycling

Malta has a high coverage of door-to-door separate collection complemented by low-density recycling points and civic amenity sites. Door-to-door collection systems and recycling points are targeted to collect municipal packaging waste mainly but other recyclables are captured by the system as well. For recyclable packaging, there is a co-mingled door-to-door collection system for paper and cardboard, metal, plastic, and composite packaging once a week. Door-to-door collection of glass also takes place twice a month (ERA, 2024). Even though bio-waste has been separately collected door-to-door since 2018 (EC, 2022) and garden waste can be delivered at civic amenity sites, the treatment of organic waste in Malta does not qualify as recycling. Textiles can be delivered at low-density bring points and at civic amenity sites. (ETC/CE, 2022)

Malta has taken numerous measures to improve separate collection and recycling in line with the recommendations drawn by the European Commission in the Early Warning Report for Malta. Owing to the fact that such measures have been implemented since the beginning of 2023, their beneficial effect is not yet observed in the data reported to Eurostat. (ERA, 2024)

In November 2022, Malta launched a nationwide deposit-return system for certain beverage containers made of PET, aluminium, steel and glass in line with the Beverage Containers Recycling Regulations (BCRS), [S.L. 549.134](#). The scheme, in line with the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) principle (and therefore the polluter-pays principle), is fully financed by the obliged industry (i.e. producers of the targeted beverage containers). Its overarching objective is to increase the separate collection and recycling of such containers within a closed-loop system, thereby producing high-quality, food-grade sorted materials. To this end, the above-mentioned Regulations establish ambitious collection and recycling targets. The containers collected through this scheme are sorted at a dedicated facility, which only deals with beverage containers and which started operating in 2022. Data for 2023 indicate that 78% of the beverage containers placed on the market were collected through the deposit-return system, whilst the recycling rate was 74% relative to the total amount of containers placed on the market. (ERA, 2024)

Furthermore, and in order to foster the establishment of economies of scale, thus making waste collection cost-effective, waste collection is organised at the Regional level as of 1 January 2023, rather than at the Local Council level ⁽²⁾. To improve the separate collection of waste, the implementation of the regionalisation reform was coupled with the introduction of a new harmonised collection schedule for all Local Councils in Malta, as opposed to the previous, fragmented scenario where collection schedules were set at the Local Council level. The new collection schedule is characterised by three collection rounds per week for bio-waste and reduced collection rounds for mixed residual waste. (ERA, 2024)

⁽²⁾ In Malta, there exist 6 Regional Councils and 68 Local Councils.

While the separate collection system is mainly targeted at households, in April 2023 the separation of recyclable waste (including bio-waste) became mandatory for every person in Malta, thus also including businesses, as per regulation 12A of the amended Waste Regulations, [S.L. 549.63](#). In order to augment the beneficial effect due to the introduction of said legal obligation, Malta launched in May 2023 a [nationwide campaign to raise awareness](#) on the new obligation to separate waste at source as well as on how to properly sort waste. In order to reach out to all foreign residents and tourists, guidelines on waste separation, information on the new harmonised collection schedule, and other educational materials are provided in different languages. (ERA, 2024)

Currently, according to the Waste Management Plan 2021-2030, Malta is exploring the introduction of a pay-as-you-throw system. Meanwhile, complementing legislative initiatives have already been implemented, such as mandatory waste separation at source and the established differentiated gate fees for waste deposited at public waste management facilities. (ERA, 2024)

In Malta, besides the BCRS scheme mentioned above, there is an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system in place, covering packaging waste from both household and non-household sources for all packaging materials. There is no advanced fee modulation in place, i.e. fee modulation within the broad material categories such as higher fees for difficult-to-recycle plastic types or combinations of materials.

The national Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulations, S.L. 549.43, were amended in December 2022 also to implement the regionalisation reform in the management of municipal packaging waste. Accordingly, as of 1 January 2023, the six Regional Councils in Malta are responsible for setting up systems for the door-to-door collection of municipal packaging waste, for attaining the recycling targets for such packaging waste, and for reporting data to the competent authority. Regional Councils are also obliged to make information on their recycling performances, the selection procedures for waste operators, and the costs charged to producer responsibility organisations (PROs) publicly available. The amendments to S.L. 549.43 also introduced new obligations on fee modulation to promote reuse, as well as exemptions for producers placing refillable gas cylinders on the market from participating in a PRO if they prove that they have a reuse system in place and report data to the competent authority. (ERA, 2024)

In addition to the above-mentioned reuse systems, a voluntary deposit-return system for reuse exists for glass bottles from local wineries. Producer responsibility organisations (PROs) also offer a specific collection service to producers putting transport packaging on the market. (ETC/CE, 2022) There is no packaging tax in place. (ETC/CE, 2022)

Policies and instruments to discourage landfilling or incineration

Malta has neither a landfill tax nor a tax on incineration (ETC/CE, 2022), as it opted to establish differentiated gate fees for waste deposited at public waste management facilities through targeted amendments to the Deposit of Wastes and Rubble (Fees) Regulations ([S.L.549.07](#)) ⁽³⁾, enacted in October 2022. Notably, this economic instrument disincentivises landfilling over treatment options higher up the waste hierarchy, as the landfill gate fee for mixed waste deposited for landfilling is being progressively increased from EUR 40 per tonne in 2023 to EUR

⁽³⁾ <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2022/242/eng>

120 per tonne in 2027. On the other hand, the gate fee for dry recyclables separated at source stands at EUR 0.50 per tonne, whilst the one for bio-waste is EUR 20 per tonne. Through the implementation of this instrument, Malta has partially initiated the implementation of a form of a pay-as-you-throw system on the mixed residual fraction for those commercial establishments making use of a private collector. (ERA, 2024)

Prospects for meeting the targets on recycling and landfilling

According to the EEA's early warning assessment (ETC/CE, 2022), Malta is at risk of not meeting the 2025 targets for preparing for reuse and recycling of 55% of its municipal waste and for the recycling of 65% of its packaging waste. Malta is also at risk of not meeting the 2035 target to reduce the amount of municipal waste landfilled to 10% or less of the total amount of municipal waste generated (ETC/CE, 2022). Consequently, the European Commission issued a number of policy recommendations to improve Malta's waste management performance (EC, 2023):

- Support preparing for reuse of municipal waste and reuse systems for packaging.
- Further invest in infrastructure for separate collection, sorting, and recycling.
- Implement a pay-as-you-throw system for both businesses and households.
- Ensure that compost and digestate from bio-waste treatment plants are used for land improvement and fertilising.

Besides the numerous measures already outlined in the previous sections to implement such recommendations, these efforts are further supported by new infrastructures to enhance recycling capabilities, such as the Multi-Material Recovery Facility (inaugurated in June 2023) and the Material Recovery Facility (inaugurated in March 2023). Continuing these efforts into 2024, a new automated glass sorting line also started operating in June 2024, leading to an increased operational capacity and better glass output material (ERA, 2024). At the heart of the government's long-term vision is the ambitious ECOHIVE complex, allowing Malta to move away from its historical reliance on landfilling. The government expects that building a waste-to-energy plant will divert over 190000 tonnes of non-recyclable waste from landfills. In addition, the project envisages the development of a new Organic Processing Plant. This plant is expected to process 74000 tonnes of organic waste, transforming it into high-quality compost and renewable energy in the coming years. Furthermore, as part of the ECOHIVE initiative, a Skip Management Facility will also be constructed and is expected to divert 47000 tonnes of bulky waste from landfilling. Such materials will be processed separately with the aim of increasing the value of materials for export. (ERA, 2024)

In the past decade, and since the publication of the early warning report (EC, 2023), Malta has not made progress on improving its recycling rates of municipal waste and total packaging waste. Landfilling remains the dominant treatment method for municipal waste. Insufficient infrastructure for waste recycling and limited use of compost for land improvement and fertilising are identified as key factors for this weak performance (EC, 2023, 2022). Recently, several actions have been put in place by Malta to improve waste management, however, since most of such measures are being implemented as of 2023, this has not yet resulted in measurable effects. Malta is investing heavily in new waste management infrastructure, and investments are expected to considerably improve its performance in the near future (ERA, 2024).

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