



Factsheet 09 | How can citizens be incentivised to separate packaging waste at source?

This factsheet addresses the need to obtain the support and co-operation of citizens when it comes to segregating waste. It covers issues such as the information that should be provided, raising awareness, and the incentive mechanisms that can be used to encourage citizens to separate packaging waste, as well as discussing the best collection methods, the role of deposit refund systems and how to run sustainable public campaigns to raise awareness.

Transitioning to a sustainable system for managing packaging waste depends on participation of the population. This is particularly true of segregating waste, which is key to increasing recycling. It is therefore essential to ensure citizens are fully informed about how and why they should separate their waste, especially in countries with no prior experience of waste segregation at consumer level.

Depending on the way the individual EPR scheme is set up, and on the institutional framework in the country concerned, **providing information to the population can be the responsibility of the PRO and/or of municipal authorities or other public bodies.** To help institutionalise this responsibility, it is a good idea to enshrine it in the regulatory framework for the scheme and to assign a budget for it, funded by the PRO through the EPR fees.

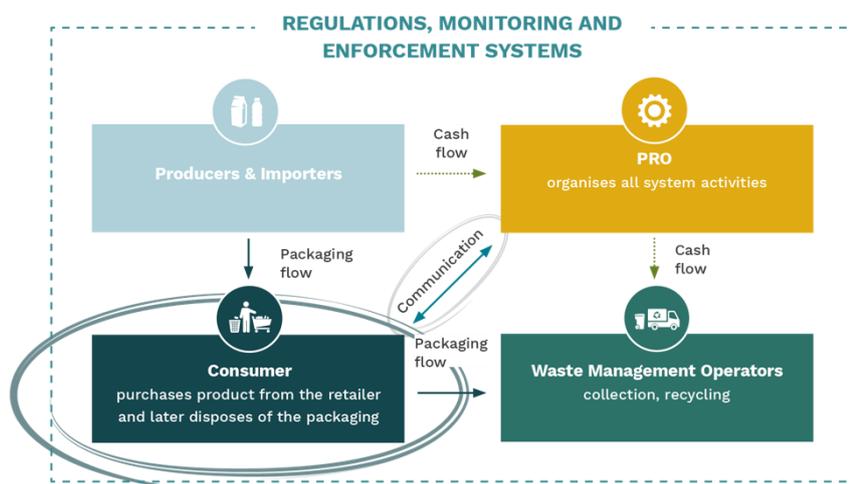


Figure 1: Consumers in an EPR scheme

In addition to running awareness campaigns, citizens can also be incentivised to separate their waste on an organisational, financial, cognitive and/or emotional level. It is important to create a

culture of collective civic responsibility in which consumers feel obliged to carry out their civic duties without expecting any reward for doing so.

There are a number of tools/strategies for encouraging people to sort their waste, such as:

- Making the collection system convenient and easy to use.
- Good communications (providing information and being transparent, making sure the measures people are being asked to take are credible).
- Educating the various different target groups about the scheme.
- Monitoring (during collection).
- Reducing the amount and associated fee for residual waste management through segregating packaging from residual waste (for example, making collections of sorted packaging waste free of charge on the basis that the costs are covered through the EPR fees).
- Penalties (for littering or not segregating waste properly).
- Financial or non-cash incentives.

Waste collection systems for household packaging waste

The exact nature of the waste collection system will have an effect on how people use it. Kerbside collection systems and systems based on central collection points each have their own advantages and disadvantages, as do ‘hybrid’ systems featuring elements of both. The table below sets out how these systems can affect consumers’ behaviour:

Table 1: Kerbside collection systems vs central collection systems

Criteria	Kerbside	Central collection*
Distance for consumers and available space in flats and in front of buildings	Short distance (+) Requires enough space in front of flats and buildings to install waste bins, which must be accessible to waste collection vehicles (-)	Distances are longer. Some people may need to use private transport to reach the collection points (-/+) Requires less space, as collection points are installed in a smaller number of specially selected locations on streets and in public spaces (+) If the collection points are located along the main traffic/commuter routes, it becomes easier to integrate waste disposal into daily routines. (+)
Disposal of packaging at household level	Separation at source directly into the waste bins, which are then collected (+)	Waste has to be stored in the house between visits to collection points, which takes up space (-)
Monitoring	Easier to identify people not segregating their waste properly (+)	Waste is disposed of anonymously, which can have a negative effect on behaviour (-)
Costs	A more expensive option, as having bins outside houses means more containers and more collection points for the collection vehicles (-)	Less expensive. Centralised collection points mean fewer stops for collection vehicles (+)

* Includes waste banks as a specific form of centralised collection system.

> See Factsheet 06

When it comes to incentivising consumers to sort their waste, the following factors are key:

- **Bins and containers must be easy to access.** Citizens will be reluctant to bring their waste to a central collection point if it is difficult to get to.
- **Waste separation should be simple, with clear labelling.** Especially when operating in countries with no experience of waste segregation, clear labelling is crucial to avoid segregation errors and potential contamination of recyclable waste.
- **Separated waste must not be mixed with residual waste after collection.** Nothing reduces citizens' motivation to sort their waste more than seeing recyclable waste being disposed of together with residual waste after collection, rather than being recycled. This is a particular risk when the system fails to identify enough recovery and recycling options, or struggles to market recycled waste.
- **There must be enough containers for residual waste.** Providing bins for recycling is important, but ensuring there are enough bins for residual waste is just as crucial. Otherwise there is a high risk that citizens will dispose of non-recyclables in the recycling bins – thus contaminating the recyclable waste – or will simply dump waste in the surrounding area.



Figure 2: The French 'Triman' is printed on packaging to remind consumers to sort their waste (© Citeo)

Another way of incentivising consumers to separate packaging waste is **using deposit refund systems (DRS)**. > See Factsheet 10 In a DRS, a set deposit is added to the purchase price of a packaged good (e.g. a drink in a PET bottle). Once the product has been consumed, the consumer can claim the deposit (or a voucher for the same amount) by returning the empty packaging. This payment acts as an incentive to bring the packaging back to take-back stations, instead of disposing of it as waste.

Deposit refunds are not the only way of incentivising consumers to return empty packaging. Rewards can be anything that motivates the buyers to return the empty packaging. A wide range of examples can be found in countries all over the world. For instance, in Turkey, consumers can use their empty PET drinks bottles to buy tickets for public transport, while in various parts of Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, children can exchange recyclables for school equipment. Such incentives tend to be most effective among households with relatively low incomes. There is also one clear disadvantage of such systems, which is that they can encourage citizens to think they should be paid for recycling their waste instead of paying waste management fees themselves.

Consumer awareness: communication and education

Sustainable waste management also depends on **changing consumers' attitudes towards waste**, and particularly on creating a sense of civic collective responsibility for it. Making sure people are informed about both the benefits of proper waste management and the adverse effects of failure to manage it effectively is key to promoting this change. Increasing awareness of the effect waste can have on health and the environment is also crucial in preventing mismanagement of waste. For a waste management system to thrive, every level of society, from local communities to schools and universities, businesses, different organisations and governments, has to buy into it, and work together to build a culture that will help it to become established.



Photo 1: Waste separation in schools in Zarqa, Jordan
(© cyclos 2019)

Consumer awareness starts at an individual level. There are number of different ways of raising awareness, which should ideally be used in combination with each other. Examples include:

- Guidelines and signage
- Printed media
- Digital media
- New technology, such as apps on smartphones
- Environmental education programmes in schools
- Events and campaigns
- Environmentally-friendly labelling schemes
- Marketing
- Product fees on packaging

Awareness-raising schemes should be also promoted by people and institutions outside of the government with the potential to impact consumer behaviour, including, for example, religious authorities or local village leaders/chiefs.

School and nursery education for long-term impact

One of the most powerful tools for education and raising awareness is **environmental education programmes in schools**, as children pick up habits faster than adults. Children can also play an active part in raising awareness of waste-related issues by transferring their knowledge to their parents, close family, and community. What children are taught as youngsters stays with them for life, and they will pass that knowledge on to future generations.

Schools can become a main driver of change. The first step is to **develop programmes for teaching children about waste**, how it should be managed, the negative consequences of not handling it properly, and best practices to deal with waste. Integrating issues around waste management into



a range of different subjects, such as science, citizenship classes, etc., helps pupils to link mismanagement of waste with the effects it has on health and the environment. Educating children about waste management can also raise awareness of the fact that waste is ubiquitous in society and that, if properly managed, it can become a valuable resource, helping us to make new products and bringing various economic and social benefits. It can also provide new jobs and rewarding careers in the environmental and waste management sectors.

In addition to teaching children about waste management in school, workshops, events, and other awareness-raising campaigns are also essential for educating them about waste management. **Engaging children in activities that combine theoretical and practical knowledge** enhances their critical thinking and analytical and problem-solving skills, which in turn help them to make informed decisions on waste issues.

Key readings and other sources



[PREVENT Waste Alliance \(2021\).](#)

[Video series:](#)

[EPR Explained! \(09\) Citizens](#)

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PREVENT Waste Alliance
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn
Germany
Tel. +49 61 96 79-0
Fax +49 61 96 79-11 15

info@giz.de
contact@prevent-waste.net
www.giz.de
<https://prevent-waste.net/en/epr-toolbox/>

cyclos GmbH
Westerbreite 7
49084 Osnabrück
Germany
<https://cyclos.de>

Authors:

Agnes Bünemann, Jana Brinkmann, Dr. Stephan Löhle and Sabine Bartnik.

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