

WHAT ROLE FOR THE TREATMENT OF NON-RECYCLABLE WASTE IN THE EU TAXONOMY?

In light of the adoption of the EU Taxonomy by the European Parliament, ESWET invites the future Platform on Sustainable Finance to define technical criteria for Waste-to-Energy that take into account its role within the waste hierarchy, its complementarity with recycling and its impact in landfill diversion.

ESWET welcomes the adoption of the Framework to facilitate sustainable investment, the so-called EU Taxonomy, as a decisive step towards climate-neutrality and a greener Europe.

Based on experts' recommendations, the Commission will now define technical screening criteria to determine whether a given activity is "taxonomy-aligned". The Technical Expert Group (TEG) on sustainable finance, facing divergent opinions and time constraint, recommended bringing Waste-to-Energy for further consideration to its successor, the Platform on Sustainable Finance.

ESWET invites the Commission and the future Platform to define technical criteria for Waste-to-Energy, using a comprehensive approach where its role within the waste hierarchy, its complementarity with recycling¹ and its impact in landfill diversion would be rightfully considered.

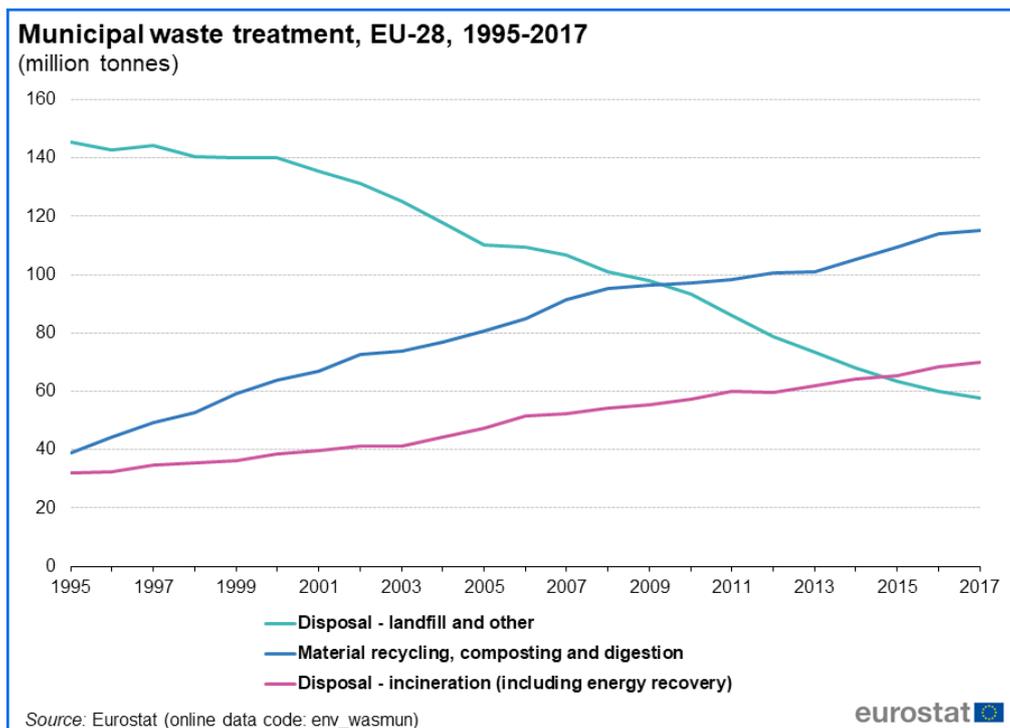
The missions of Waste-to-Energy in the waste management chain

- **Waste-to-Energy safely treats waste that cannot be recycled**, taking pollutants out of the eco-cycle.
- **It provides a substitute to fossil fuel**, as waste is used to generate energy which is then converted into electricity and heat;
- **It prevents the carbon-intensive extraction of virgin raw materials**, thanks to mineral and metal recovery;
- **It diverts non-recyclable waste from landfills**, preventing methane emissions while it ensures that the waste is still used a resource instead of being dumped and, quite literally, wasted.

¹ Communication COM(2017)34 on 'the role of waste-to-energy in the circular economy', Section 5 <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/waste-to-energy.pdf>

A history of success in landfill diversion

The potential of landfill diversion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should not be underestimated: between 1995 and 2017, while the total amount of municipal waste treated increased by 13%, the amount of landfilled waste fell by 60% and greenhouse gas emissions from waste dropped by 42% according to EEA estimates².



Today, the EU is not done with the landfill issue as several Member States landfill more than 70% of their municipal waste³. Despite welcome public initiatives to prevent waste generation and to boost recycling, non-recyclable waste will not disappear either⁴ and is likely to end up in landfills.

Investments in non-recyclable waste capacity are needed

The lack of capacity of ultimate non-recyclable waste is even stressed by the recycling industry⁵ and estimates⁶ show that further investment in non-recyclable waste treatment capacity will be crucial in the future.

In this context, Waste-to-Energy makes sure that non-recyclable waste is safely treated and still used as a resource instead of being dumped in landfills where

² Greenhouse gas emissions from waste, Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200123-1>

³ Eurostat data: municipal waste by waste management operations <https://bit.ly/37JbU9W>

⁴ The Zero Waste utopia and the role of Waste-to-Energy <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0734242X20918453>

⁵ EuRIC Statement on issues stemming from the lack of capacity for ultimate residual waste <https://www.euric-aisbl.eu/position-papers/item/300-statement-on-issues-stemming-from-the-lack-of-capacity-for-ultimate-residual-waste>

⁶ CEWEP Circular Economy Calculation Tool <https://www.cewep.eu/circular-economy-calculator/>

the organic fraction would emit methane, a greenhouse gas that is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.

Waste-to-Energy is also a provider of secondary raw materials by recovering significant amounts of ferrous and non-ferrous metals from incineration bottom ash. This material recovery is not trivial as it prevents further carbon-intensive extraction and participates in securing supply of raw materials, in line with the European Industrial Strategy⁷.

And, of course, the technology not only destroys the waste but also uses it to recover energy turned into electricity and heat sent to district heating networks, like Paris' district heating where almost 50% of the heat is provided by Waste-to-Energy plants.

The treatment of non-recyclable waste is key to a green transition

The green transition in the waste management sector cannot be achieved without a comprehensive approach considering the complementarity of the different levels of the waste hierarchy. In particular, treatment of residual non-recyclable waste should not be overlooked.

Thus, ESWET invites the Commission and the future Platform on Sustainable Finance to define technical screening criteria taking into account **Waste-to-Energy's contribution to the circular economy and climate change mitigation** as well as the investments required to complete landfill diversion of non-recyclable waste and the resulting decarbonisation.

⁷ A new Industrial Strategy for Europe, page 3. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-eu-industrial-strategy-march-2020_en.pdf



EUROPEAN SUPPLIERS OF WASTE-TO-ENERGY TECHNOLOGY

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ESWET is a European association representing the European suppliers of Waste-to-Energy technologies, committed to foster the development and dissemination of Waste-to-Energy at the European level. ESWET also seeks to raise the awareness of the positive implications of the technology in terms of better waste management, energy and for the environment.