

WASTE RECYCLING

DESCRIPTION:

In order to reap the full benefits of industrial symbiosis, there is a need for waste legislation that provides clear and harmonized definitions and allows for a proper accounting of recycling activities. In concrete terms, the definition of “waste and by-products” poses many challenges from a regulatory point of view, with substantial industrial consequences. EU's rules on end-of-waste are not fully harmonised and leave a wide margin not only to Member States but also to regional authorities. Clarity about these definitions is essential to further the goals of the circular economy. In addition, some recycling activities by industry, such as the recycling of materials from waste streams for incorporation in the final product, are not taken into account for the calculation of national recycling targets.

Type of barrier: **THEMATIC**

Sectors involved: **ALL SPIRE SECTORS**

Challenges

One of the centrepieces of the circular economy is the possibility to use waste from one industry as a resource for another industry. While it is indeed essential that waste legislation requirements in terms of treatment and transport need to be fully complied with to ensure that the integrity and flow of processes that use the waste are not affected, there is room to address the following issues:

- In some Member States, well-defined by-products (such as Ground Granulated Blast Furnace slag) are not considered products and are therefore subject to double regulation, as they must comply with both the waste and the products requirements. This uneven application throughout the EU results in serious restrictions in the domestic and cross-border shipment of these materials in Europe. Furthermore, the glossaries of classification are overlapping and this constitutes a hindrance to the circular economy.
- Difficulties in applying EU waste classification methodologies and impact on the recyclability of materials which affects the use of secondary raw materials and leads to varying interpretations by national authorities. For instance, specific considerations of each waste stream and its management may allow wastes to be considered as non-hazardous even if the recovered material will be hazardous when placed on the market as secondary raw material (based on the content of hazardous substances, which may not be bioavailable/bioaccessible). The label “hazardous” in the current legislation adds significant costs to its treatment and reduces the options to recycle or reuse.

Another issue relates to the fact that material recycling whereby a secondary material from waste is recycled into an end-product, as in the cement industry, is counted towards national recycling targets.

Potential solutions

- Harmonization at EU level of end-of-waste rules.
- New concepts with high potential for the EU like Industrial symbiosis and Circular Economy as a whole, need better quality data dealing with waste but also an increase of trust in that data.
- Create governance cooperation models between EU, national and local authorities to ensure smooth and efficient permitting procedures for industrial symbiosis projects.
- Allow material recycling of waste into the final product to count towards national recycling targets.

List of related legislation



TCs and standardisation

- CEN/TC 183 “Waste management”
- CEN/TC 292 “Characterization of Waste”
- ISO/TC 297 “Waste management, recycling and road operation service”

