

Analysis

The EU processes almost half of generated municipal waste, while Republika Srpska processes negligible quantities

Waste Recycling – Between Reality and Necessity

In Republika Srpska, only 0.8% of generated municipal waste is handed over to secondary operators for further processing. Although the EU's targets and plans are not yet binding for Republika Srpska, regulations and policies arising from the European Green Deal can significantly influence the development of the domestic economy.

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We live in an era of frequent floods, prolonged droughts, stormy winds and other extreme weather events, serving as evidence that climate change is a reality we can attempt to mitigate or adapt to. On a global scale, it has become clear that without a comprehensive action plan involving all countries and stakeholders, it will not be possible to slow down or at least mitigate the consequences of climate change and protect the planet from further degradation.

Thus, at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, environmental protection, alongside economic growth and social inclusion, was established as the third dimension of the Sustainable Development Agenda, known as Agenda 2030. This dimension focuses on adopting sustainable consumption and production patterns as well as sustainable management of natural resources. Waste production has been recognised as a complex indicator of consumption patterns, the efficiency of waste management systems and the level of economic development of society. One of the numerous sub-targets of the Agenda is to significantly reduce waste production by 2030 through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

Observing the nearly continuous decline in total generated municipal waste, which has decreased by 5.7% over the past five years (2019-2023), it could be concluded that Republika Srpska is moving towards achieving one of the sustainable development goals. A conditionally encouraging fact is that municipal waste generated per capita amounts to only 341 kg (2022), or 338 kg in 2023, which is significantly below the European Union average, where the average resident generates 513 kg of municipal waste (2022).

However, of the total amount of municipal waste generated in the European Union, as much as 48% is recycled, whereas in Republika Srpska only 0.8% of municipal waste collected through public disposal systems is handed over to secondary operators for further processing. Nearly all remaining waste ends up in landfills, which not only reduces the available capacity of existing landfills but also negatively impacts soil quality and water bodies.

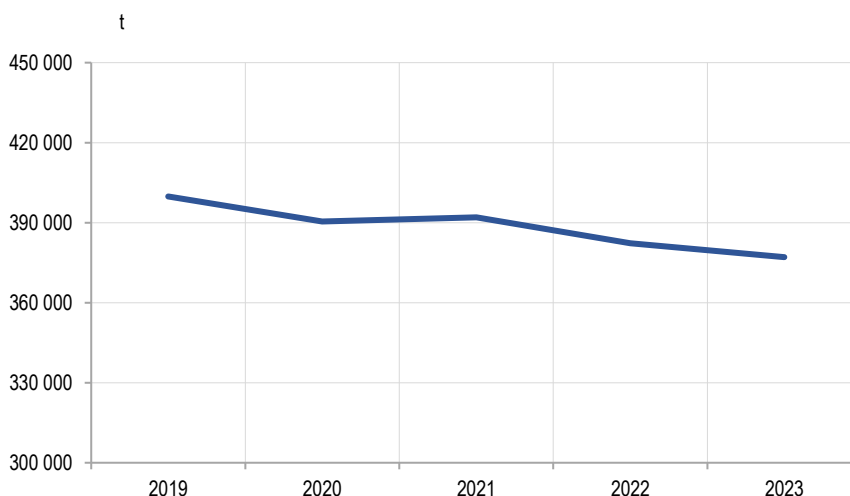


Chart 1. Generated municipal waste in Republika Srpska

Although the downward trend in municipal waste generation in Republika Srpska can conditionally be viewed as a positive indicator, the manner in which it is managed provides little reason for satisfaction, particularly given the highly ambitious target and obligation of EU member states to recycle 55% of generated municipal waste by 2025.

In addition to the negative impact waste can have on water and soil quality, its disposal in landfills contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Although small, the share of approximately 4% in total emissions results from a slight but continuous increase in emissions from landfills in Republika Srpska during the 2017-2021 period. On the other hand, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from all sources forms the foundation of all local and global plans to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change.

Although the goals and plans of the European Union are not yet binding for Republika Srpska, regulations and policies stemming from the European Green Deal, as another important EU development framework, can significantly influence the development of the domestic economy, either through restrictions or through incentives for improvement and a shift towards sustainable use of natural resources and environmental protection.

One example of the spillover effects of European regulations on the domestic market is the introduction of a carbon dioxide (CO₂) taxation mechanism and alignment with the European Union's Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). To protect the competitiveness of its own industry and achieve its climate neutrality plan by 2050, the European Union has introduced a mechanism to tax products whose production leads to significant carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

For Republika Srpska, this practically means that by 2026, and at the latest by 2030, the export of products whose production results in greenhouse gas emissions will be taxed, leading to significant price increases. This would mostly affect electricity production, which in Republika Srpska is largely, over 60%, based on the combustion of fossil fuels and is the source of nearly 80% of total equivalent carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions (2021).

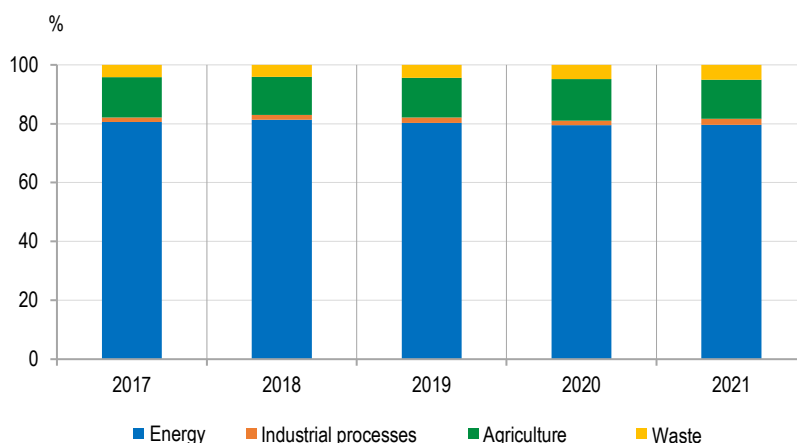


Chart 2. Greenhouse gas emissions in Republika Srpska by sources (CO₂-eq)

Globally, linear economic growth that is not based on the preservation of natural resources and the reduction of pollution stemming from it is unsustainable in the long term. The limited availability and preservation of natural resources are also the reason why the circular economy has become an imperative for developed societies. Resources are not only mineral raw materials, rivers and forests. Waste can also be a resource. If, before being disposed of in landfills, waste is repurposed through reuse, recycling or energy production, waste can transform from a source of pollution into an important raw material.

It is evident that the capacities and infrastructure of Republika Srpska, as well as many developing countries, are insufficient for dramatic and rapid shifts towards a circular economy. However, nothing prevents us from attempting to reduce the amount of waste we produce, to avoid discarding it before reusing or recycling it, to refrain from using riverbeds and forests as landfills and to preserve the natural wealth that even some more developed societies than cannot boast of.