

Position Paper

Recommendations for a Harmonised and Implementable EU-wide EPR Framework

Plastics Europe urges the creation of a harmonised, EU-wide Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework to drive the circular economy and prevent market fragmentation. We call for incentives across Europe to accelerate the uptake of recycled plastics, ensuring technology neutrality and stimulating demand for secondary raw materials. These measures should complement existing incentives supporting the uptake of recyclable plastics.

Harmonisation must also cover EPR financing, registration, and reporting requirements to cut administrative burdens and deliver a level playing field across Member States.

Introduction

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes play a pivotal role in driving a circular economy by ensuring producers take accountability for the end-of-life management of finished products placed on the European market. These schemes secure funding for critical processes such as separate collection, transport, sorting, and recycling.

A harmonised EU approach to EPR is essential to avoid fragmentation and protect the Single Market. EPR systems should also make access to recycled materials simple and less bureaucratic, boosting their use in new products and contributing to a more circular economy, while reducing landfilling and incineration, which results in both the loss of valuable materials and increased environmental impact.

The proposed measures should be firmly anchored in existing and forthcoming EU legislation to ensure their effectiveness and consistency. The Waste Framework Directive (Directive 2008/98/EC) provides the overarching principles for waste management and Extended Producer Responsibility and could serve as a key instrument for implementing these changes. However, while many principles are in place, enforcement mechanisms remain limited.

Crucially, the forthcoming Circular Economy Act (CEA) offers an opportunity to drive harmonisation across Member States and establish EPR improvements across sectors, alongside product legislation such as the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR). The new Circular Economy Act further offers an opportunity to strengthen the enforcement of existing principles from the Waste Framework Directive.

While sectors such as packaging, automotive, and construction have different requirements, EPR systems can deliver strong benefits across industries when tailored to sector-specific needs. When extending mandatory product requirements or incentives, e.g. design-for-recycling criteria and recycled content targets, to additional applications like electrical and electronic equipment and

construction products, these should be introduced through product regulations or harmonised standards to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

Harmonisation of criteria among Members States, based on material and technology neutrality

Clear and harmonised criteria including an unambiguous definition of ‘producer’ and ‘place on the market’ are essential for defining EPR categories and guiding fee modulation. These criteria should be predictable and transparent to encourage manufacturers to design products for an improved end-of-life management, facilitating the supply of secondary raw materials, while ensuring that harmonisation does not lead to increased bureaucracy. Equally important, these criteria must remain material and technology neutral, including new recycling technologies like chemical recycling, dissolution and organic recycling.

For the harmonisation of these criteria, effective enforcement of Article 8a of the Waste Framework Directive (WFD)¹ should be considered to harmonise governing principles, increase transparency, and improve cost-efficiency across all waste streams.

- Bonus Systems to Boost Demand for Recycled Plastics

To boost uptake of secondary raw materials, offering bonuses under EPR schemes for the use of recycled materials in new products is an effective incentive. In this context, rewards should be granted to producers prioritising recycled plastics over primary raw materials to stimulate demand and investment in circular infrastructure.

Incentivising the use of EU-sourced recycled plastics within EPR schemes would create stronger demand for recycled materials, reinforce Europe’s plastics recycling value chain, and boost the competitiveness of the European plastics value chain. Such incentives are emerging in Member States, e.g. France² and the Netherlands³ and are already defined under the German Packaging Act⁴. While these examples provide useful guidance, safeguarding the integrity of the EU single market requires a harmonised, EU-wide set of EPR requirements. Such alignment would establish a stronger framework, enabling the recycling industry to progress towards greater scale and maturity.

It is also important to note that these rewards must be applied across all recycling technologies with focus on maximizing the return of post-consumer plastic waste back into the circular economy and minimizing disposal routes (e.g., incineration, landfilling).

¹ [Waste Framework Directive](#)

² [French Order](#): EPR framework establishing a system of financial bonuses for producers who incorporate recycled plastics into their products. Exceptions: automotive, construction and agriculture.

³ [Verpact in the Netherlands](#): a temporary reduction in the EPR fee for the producer when a recycled content exceeds 20% for normal packaging and 10% for contact sensitive packaging.

⁴ German [VerpackG](#): EPR systems for packaging are required to incentivize the use of recycled and bio-based materials as part of their participation fees under §21.

In line with Article 7 (7) of the PPWR, the financial contributions paid by producers in order to comply with their EPR obligations could be modulated based on the percentage of recycled content. Based on this principle, measures to harmonise the implementation of these financial bonuses across Member States, funded through the EPR systems, must be introduced.

An EU-wide set of EPR requirements should include product-specific criteria for eco-modulation, including as noted earlier rewards for the use of secondary raw materials (recycled plastics from mechanical, chemical and dissolution technologies) and also other circular plastics (biobased, bio-attributed and carbon capture and utilisation (CCU)). While promoting the use of diverse circular feedstocks is essential for Europe's transition to a circular economy, any targets for bio-based and CCU feedstocks should remain separate from those set for recycled plastics⁵.

Practical Steps for the Effective Implementation of the Framework

Effective implementation requires harmonised governance, fair competition and streamlined administrative processes across Member States. Harmonisation should also include EPR principles on transparency, financing, registration, and reporting requirements to reduce administrative burdens.

- Governance

State-run PROs⁶ should not be allowed and therefore, all references to State-run systems should be removed from EU legislation⁷. EPR fees must remain linked to waste management services for the products within the scope of the EPR, not general State budgets. In the context of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation's recyclability requirements, allowing state-run systems could undermine recycling targets and potentially restrict market access for certain packaging applications by 2035. Where State-run PROs remain, all fees must be strictly dedicated to EPR objectives and comply with the same standards as industry led systems.

Fair competition among PROs should be ensured and strategic actions like building infrastructure, using recycled content, developing Design for Recycling (DfR) criteria, and informing end users should be encouraged.

Finally, robust measures are needed to eliminate free riders - producers that evade EPR registration - because their non-compliance erodes fairness and drives up costs for responsible businesses. At

⁵ Introducing combined targets carries a significant risk: it will naturally favour the most economically feasible or technologically advanced options. This risks pushing emerging or less mature technologies to the margins, creating an uneven playing field and ultimately undermining innovation.

⁶ State-run models include both PROs that are fully governed by the government but operated by private entities, as well as tax-like systems where PRO governance is combined with state-run operations.

⁷ This concept has recently been incorporated into Regulation (EU) 2025/40 on packaging and packaging waste, as well as Directive 2008/98/EC on waste in relation to textile waste.

the same time, this enforcement should go hand in hand with clear and harmonised rules, including well-defined scope to ensure that compliance is practical and balanced across the value chain.

- Data and reporting requirements

Replacing national EPR databases with a unified EU-wide registration system would streamline compliance, eliminate the need for authorised representatives in each Member State, and reduce regulatory complexity.

Additionally, this system should include a centralised EU-level platform for registration and compliance, a digital one-stop-shop will help simplify compliance and reduce administrative fragmentation. This system should digitally integrate mass balance attribution models and certification schemes to enhance transparency and efficiency.

- Financing and cost coverage

Transparent and fair allocation of EPR fees is critical to ensure reinvestment into infrastructure, innovation, and improved recycling rates. Clear rules on fee modulation and reporting will prevent inefficiencies and cross-subsidisation of the waste management of different materials.

EPR fees should also cover certain costs beyond collection, sorting and recycling (WFD Article 8a section 4), such as awareness campaigns, compositional surveys, data gathering, and reporting, while deducting revenues from reuse or recovered secondary raw materials. It is recommended to regularly review how the use of EPR funds aligns with its defined scope and targets, helping to maintain focus and support the net-cost principle⁸.

Future proofing criteria

To remain effective, EPR systems must evolve with technological progress and changing market conditions. In this regard, EPR fees should be reassessed regularly using transparent data that compare revenues from secondary raw materials with the actual costs of collection sorting and recycling infrastructure.

⁸ Net cost principle: the costs producers pay should reflect the actual net cost of managing their products at end-of-life, after deducting any revenues from the sale of recycled materials.

Annex – Sector Specific Recommendations

- Certified compostable plastic applications

A dedicated EPR scheme for certified compostable plastic packaging and food service items would support their integration into bio-waste systems, helping meet organic recycling targets. EPR fees from compostable plastic applications placed on the market must be allocated to support organic recycling pathways.

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