# How to reduce packaging waste in the EU (infographics)

**Online shopping, take-away food, coffee to go... Packaging waste is growing. Find out how much is being produced and how the EU wants to reverse the trend.**



Packaging comes in different formats (bottles, containers, cans, boxes, bags), is made of different materials (paper, cardboard, plastics, glass, wood, metal) and used in all stages of production, from raw materials to processed goods. Manufacturers, transporters, supermarkets, restaurants, households - they all need and use packaging to protect and transport goods.
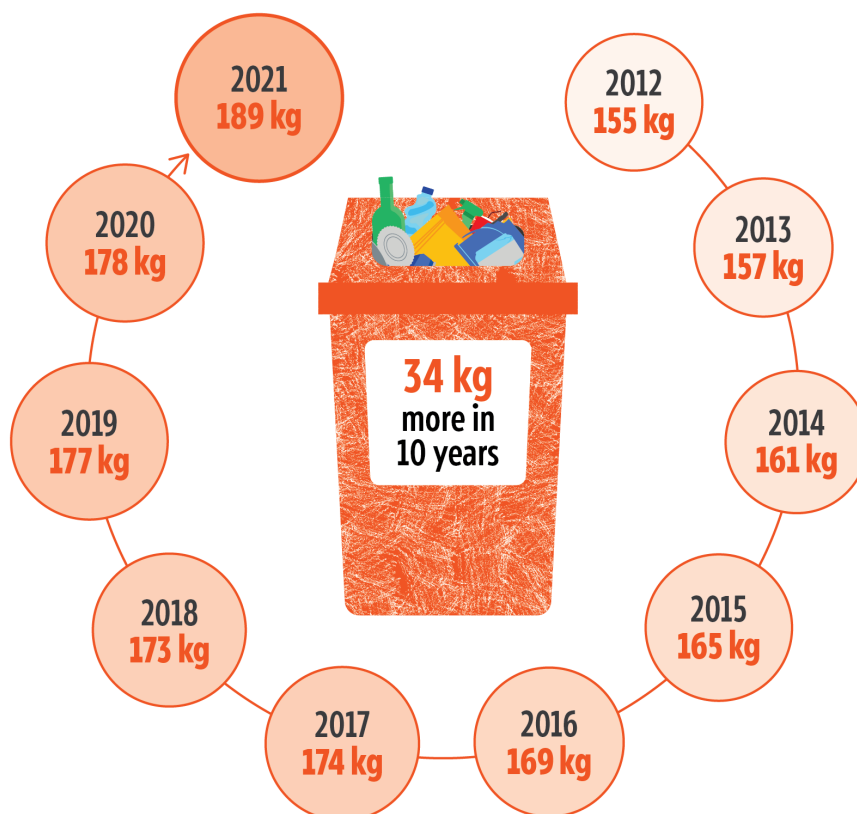
EN

**Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

1 I 5

......................................................................................................................................

*What is packaging?*

• Products used to contain, protect, handle, deliver or present goods

......................................................................................................................................

## How much packaging waste do we generate?

All this packaging has its environmental cost. On average, each EU resident generated 189 kilos of packaging waste in 2021. Over ten years, the amount has increased by over 20%.

EN **Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

2 I 5

# Packaging waste in the EU
## Kilograms per person

2021
189 kg

2020
178 kg

2019
177 kg

2018
173 kg

2017
174 kg

2016
169 kg

2015
165 kg

2014
161 kg

2013
157 kg

2012
155 kg

**34 kg**
more in
10 years

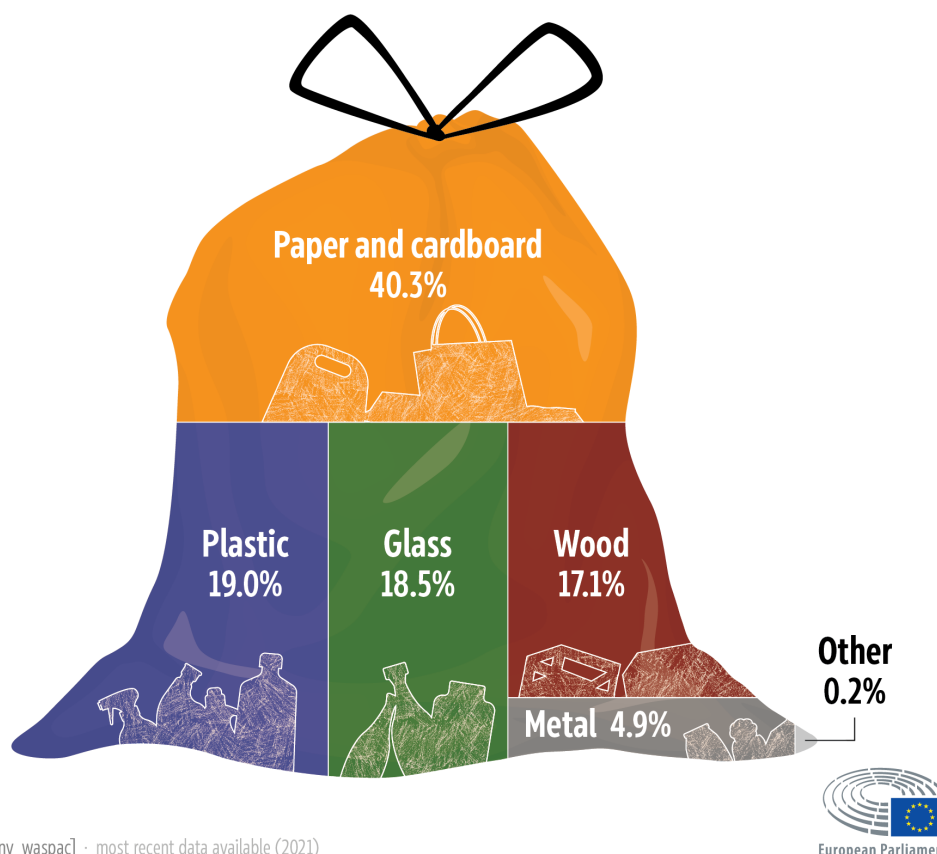Source: Eurostat [env_waspac] · most recent data available (2021)

European Parliament

Infographic showing the volume of packaging waste per person in the European Union from 2012 to 2021

Numbers vary between countries, from as low as 74 kilos per person in Croatia, to 246 kilos per person in Ireland.

In 2021, the EU generated a total of 84.3 million tonnes of packaging waste, 4.8 million tonnes more than a year before. Most of it was paper and cardboard (40.3%), followed by plastic (19%), glass (18.5%), wood (17.1%) and metal (4.9%).

EN

**Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

3 | 5

# Packaging waste generated in the EU by packaging material
## 84 million tonnes in 2021

**Paper and cardboard**
**40.3%**

**Plastic**
**19.0%**

**Glass**
**18.5%**

**Wood**
**17.1%**

**Other**
**0.2%**

**Metal 4.9%**

Source: Eurostat [env_waspac] · most recent data available (2021)

European Parliament

Infographic showing the amount of packaging waste generated in the EU in 2021 by different types of materials

Some 64% of packaging waste was recycled in 2021 and about 80% was recovered, which means that the waste has been treated in one way or another so that it can serve a useful purpose in the future (this also includes recycling).

**Further information**

Read more key facts on how waste is managed in the EU

## EU rules on packaging and packaging waste

The EU rules on packaging and packaging waste cover both packaging design and packaging waste management. Their goal is to harmonise national measures, prevent the production of

EN

**Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

**4** I 5

waste and increase reuse, recycling and recovery. They also set minimum requirements packaging on the EU market must meet.

These rules date from 1994 and were modified in 2018. As part of the EU efforts to create a circular economy by 2050, the Commission proposed a new revision of the rules in November 2022. Parliament and Council reached a deal on and MEPs approved it in April 2024 .

# What will the new rules bring?

The goal is to reduce, reuse and recycle packaging and increase its safety and sustainability. There is a special focus on plastic packaging as it is particularly harmful for the environment.

More specifically, the new rules will:

- Set packaging reduction targets (5% by 2030, 10% by 2035 and 15% by 2040)
- Ban different types of plastic packaging: very light weight plastic carrier bags, plastic packaging for fresh fruit and vegetables, small individual portions for sauces, sugar and similar products, miniature packaging for toiletry products and plastic wrapping for suitcases in airports from January 2030
- Ban from January 2030 persistent pollutants (also known as forever chemicals) used to fireproof or waterproof food packaging that might affect our health
- Encourage reuse and refill options by setting specific targets for reusable packaging for alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (at least 10% by 2030) and providing the possibility for consumers to bring their own containers for take away food and drinks

# Read more on tackling waste in the EU

- Plastic in the ocean: the facts, effects and new EU rules
- The impact of textile production and waste on the environment (infographics)
- E-waste in the EU: facts and figures (infographic)
- Food waste reduction: what EU actions are there

**More on packaging waste and new EU rules to reduce it**
Briefing (April 2024)
Check legislative progress
Statistics

EN **Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

**5 I 5**