6 Plastics, with a focus on marine litter

This chapter focuses on the priority area that seeks to achieve a more circular plastics life cycle in Albania, with particular attention on marine litter and most common applications of plastics in packaging, construction and single-use plastic products. It provides a synopsis of the current developments and challenges within the existing policy landscape, highlights areas requiring improvement, and puts forth a set of policy recommendations supported by international good practices.

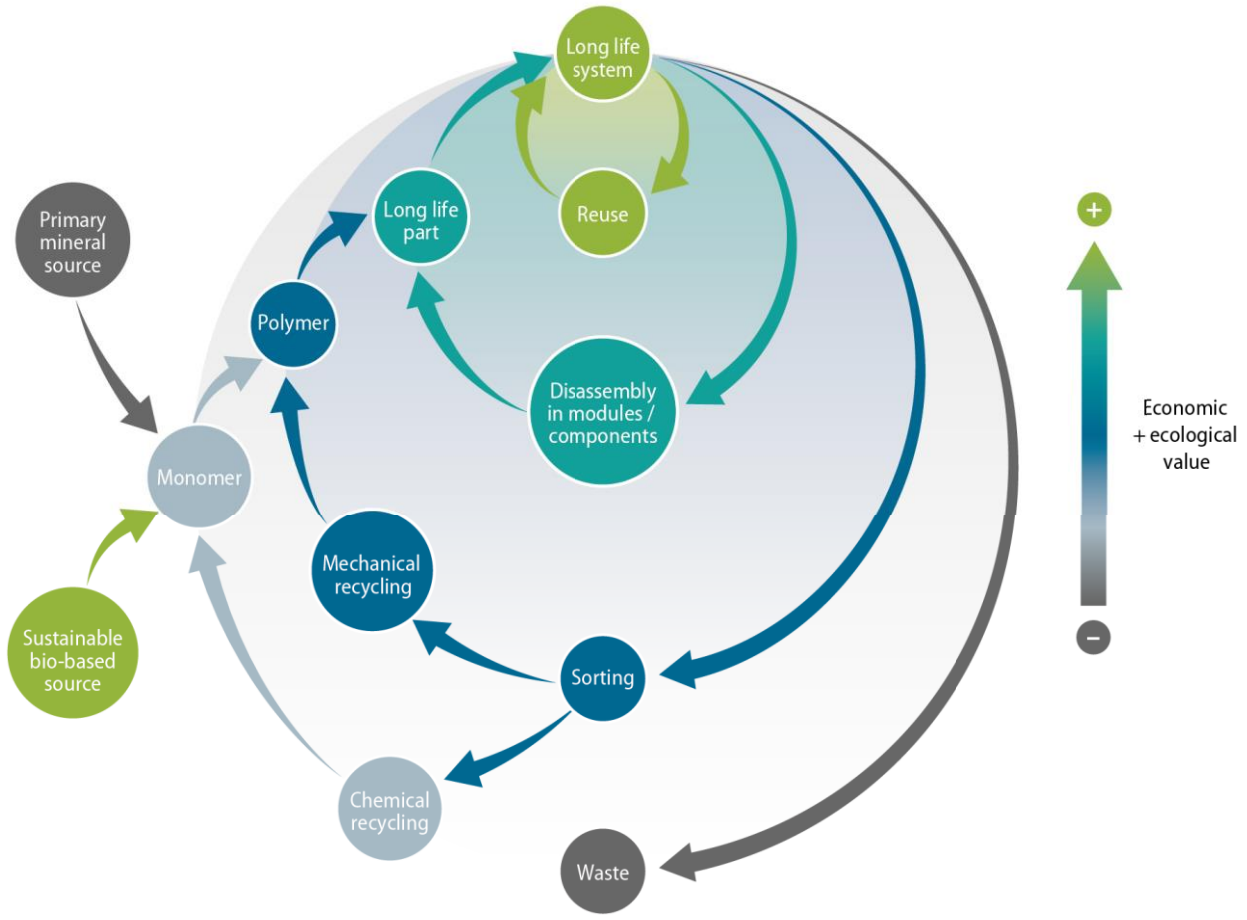
Circular economy in the plastics life cycle

Plastics are highly versatile, light and affordable. They are found in numerous applications, such as in packaging, construction, transportation, fishing and electronics. However, the widespread use of plastics has raised significant environmental concerns throughout the entire life cycle of the material (Figure 6.1) (OECD, 2022[1]). The circular economy can help minimise these environmental impacts by closing the plastics loop.

There are many opportunities to make plastics' life cycle more circular (OECD, 2023[2]), including:

- **More circular design:** A plastic product is designed to be used and reused over a long period of time. Once it becomes waste, it can be easily sorted, separately processed without cross-contamination and recycled.
- **Use of secondary feedstock in production:** A plastic product is manufactured from secondary plastics, whenever possible (if the technical features and requirements of the product allow). If primary feedstock is used for manufacturing, the harmful chemicals and additives that hamper recyclability should be avoided.
- **Longer use and more reuse:** A more circular use of plastics ensures that plastic products stay in use for as long as possible. Products with long lifetimes and high reusability are favoured over single-use plastics with short lifetimes. Products that can be disassembled, and whose parts are reused, repaired and replaced if they become obsolete or non-functional, are also treated preferentially.
- **End-of-life management:** A circular end-of-life treatment of plastics means ensuring that a large percentage of plastics is recycled once a product is discarded. This means a higher rate of separate collection, a higher purity of sorted plastic waste and thus, a higher quality of secondary plastic. Plastic waste that cannot be recycled is treated and leakage to the environment avoided.

Figure 6.1. The circular plastics life cycle keeps materials in a closed loop



Source: Adapted from OECD (2023[2]).

Motivations for the selection of plastics, with a focus on marine litter as a key priority area of the Roadmap

Plastics in Albania are assessed as a priority area with high policy relevance. Albania will need to implement national obligations and targets related to plastics. Namely, its National Plan for Integrated Waste Management (2020-2035) foresees specific targets for the recovery of plastic packaging waste generated (10% by 2025, 12% by 2030 and 22.5% by 2035). Albania will also need to align its regulatory framework with the European Union's (EU) plastics legislation, in line with its EU accession negotiations. EU plastics legislation contains a number of obligations and targets, including minimum recycling targets for plastic packaging materials, a separate collection target and minimum recycled plastic content for plastic bottles, as well as a ban on certain single-use plastic products. While Albania's waste law has been amended to ban the production, import and sale of certain categories of single-use plastic bags, more alignment with EU legislation will be needed. A task force has been established to ensure the enforcement of the ban and impose penalties for non-compliance.[1] In addition, on a regional level, this topic is an important element of the circular economy pillar of the Green Agenda of the Western Balkans and the related Action Plan until 2030. In this context, Albania, together with the five other Western Balkans economies, issued a joint statement on prevention of plastic pollution, including marine litter, at the Berlin Process Summit 2023 (Berlin Process Summit, 2023[3]). On a global level, there is also an ongoing

negotiation for an internationally legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution that has attracted the attention of global leaders.

Waste data in Albania are still not considered of high quality (see Chapter 4), in particular when it comes to specific waste streams. According to the available estimates, plastic waste constitutes a relatively small share of generated waste (around 9.2%). Moreover, while comprehensive estimates of the amount of recycled plastics are lacking, overall recycling rates are very low in Albania (17%) and the majority of plastics is collected for recycling by the informal sector. Albania is also one of the economies with large proportions of mismanaged waste, contributing to a high leakage of (often untreated) plastic waste into the Adriatic-Ionian basin, amounting to 20 kg per person per year (World Bank, 2020[4]), with litter from fishing and shipping in the Adriatic Sea further compounding the problem. This may result in plastic pollution and leakage from mismanaged plastic waste, which have important negative environmental implications and may harm nature and ecosystems, including marine ecosystems and human health. Throughout their life cycle, plastics also have a significant carbon footprint, contributing to 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2019 throughout their whole life cycle (OECD, 2022[1]). Albania has only recently started working on policy instruments in this domain. Further efforts are needed to fulfil its ambition to meet the relevant national and EU targets and obligations. The circularity and decarbonisation potential and strategic importance of plastics, especially plastic packaging, is, therefore, very high in Albania.

Plastics are also a strategic material to several economic sectors, in spite of their lower economic importance. The most important applications of plastics in Albania are packaging, textile, construction and fishing. Plastics' usage, in particular single-use plastic products, is also exacerbated by the growing tourism sector.

Overview and approach to the selection of the proposed policy recommendations

The approach to the selection of the proposed policy recommendations for the plastics priority area is similar to that for the priority area on economic instruments. Recommendations advocate a life cycle approach with a focus on design, production, (re)use and end-of-life stages. This is because the entire plastics life cycle, from the extraction of feedstock materials to the end-of-life stage, create significant environmental pressures affecting ecosystem health, economic growth and human well-being, as highlighted above. The proposed measures also aim to bridge the gap between the current situation in Albania and plastics obligations and targets stemming from national and EU legislation. They also aim to tap the high circularity potential this area offers (see Table 6.1), including reduced use of single-use plastics, increased recycling of plastics packaging and reduced plastic leakage into the environment, including the aquatic environment.

This priority area also integrates measures related to the use of plastics that can contribute to improved municipal waste management, a more sustainable tourism sector and increased awareness of the circular economy transition in Albania (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Overview of the proposed policy recommendations in the plastics priority area

Short term	Medium term	Long term
Improve municipal waste management in general	Introduce eco-modulated fees for plastic packaging within the EPR scheme for packaging	Support and scale up innovation into more recyclable plastic materials, plastics recycling technologies and processes as well as plastics reuse and reduction
Improve separate collection of plastic waste and other packaging	Develop a strategy to curb plastic pollution, including marine plastic litter	Introduce minimum recycled content requirements for specific plastic waste streams
Raise awareness and educate businesses, public authorities and households on plastic waste prevention, circular design and littering	Use green public procurement to favour reusable and recycled plastics	Consider taxes on virgin and non-recycled plastics
Implement an extended producer responsibility (EPR) take-back scheme for packaging (including plastic packaging)	Consider a deposit-refund system for plastic bottles	
Introduce taxes and/or bans on certain single-use plastics		

Key proposed policy recommendations

The proposed policy recommendations are structured around the plastics life cycle but also include some cross-cutting measures that can be applied across the plastics life cycle:

1. measures to close the plastics loop at the end-of-life phase and increase plastics recycling
2. measures focused on longer use and more reuse of plastics to shift demand from single-use plastics to alternatives and facilitate reuse and repair
3. measures targeting design and production to curb virgin plastics use and facilitate recycling
4. cross-cutting measures to support a transition to a more circular plastics use.

1. Closing the plastics loop through increased recycling and better waste management

As explained in Chapter 2, Albania faces several challenges with waste management, including municipal waste management. Better waste management and increased recycling in general are crucial to closing the plastics loop and to ensuring that there is a sufficient amount of recycled plastics material available for substituting virgin plastics more upstream in the value chain. This can be achieved through multiple and complementing policy measures aimed at the end-of-life phase of plastics products.

In the short term, Albania will need to improve municipal waste management in general. A mix of policy instruments is needed to achieve better (plastic) waste management. Legislation needs to provide clear definitions and obligations for private actors and municipalities as well as a monitoring and enforcement systems to monitor compliance. Awareness-raising instruments are needed to educate plastic waste generators, including households, on how to separate and dispose of waste (see Section “4. Cross-cutting measures”). Economic instruments are complementary tools that provide economic incentives for private actors to improve their environmental performance and help them achieve their obligations in a cost-effective manner (see Chapter 4).

Albania should focus on two key areas of improvement in the short term. **First, separate collection of plastic (and other packaging) waste must be improved, as it is a crucial pre-condition for plastic waste recycling and the generation of high-quality secondary material.** This will also require that adequate plastic waste collection and treatment infrastructure be in place across the country to cope with the increased amount of separately collected plastic waste in an environmentally sound manner. Municipal waste separation at source and relevant infrastructure is currently almost non-existent in Albania, despite a legal obligation to do so. The main method of managing municipal waste remains disposal to landfills –

with around 60% of waste disposed of at illegal landfills (EEA, 2021[5]). The collection of plastic waste for recycling is mainly carried out by the informal sector. A few pilot projects are, nevertheless, underway to introduce separate collection in some Albanian cities, including for plastics. To improve the infrastructure for the separate collection of plastic waste, Albania will need to ensure a regular collection of this waste, the provision of properly sized containers, and an appropriate distance to the waste infrastructure or a "door-to-door" collection. It will also require education of and incentives for households to separate their plastic waste (e.g. through household waste charges). Citizen co-operation is crucial for the successful separate collection of plastic waste (and other packaging waste) in municipalities. Separate waste collection at source contributes to better waste management, but it does not necessarily reduce the amount of waste produced. It does, however, allow municipalities to reach goals that are higher up in the waste hierarchy, shifting away from landfill and incineration. Efforts to promote separate waste collection should, therefore, be integrated with actions that reduce the generation of waste itself.

Second, Albania must implement an EPR take-back scheme for packaging, including plastic packaging, to shift the waste management costs to producers and importers of plastic products (under the polluter-pays principle)[2]. An EPR scheme for packaging waste is planned to be introduced in Albania in the upcoming period, following the development of the Law on EPR, planned to be adopted at the beginning of 2024. Chapter 4 provides a more detailed discussion of EPR take-back schemes. It also provides some key elements that need to be in place to facilitate an effective implementation of EPR take-back schemes. There is also a wealth of experience with implementing EPR take-back schemes for packaging. The Czech EPR for packaging can be regarded as a good practice example (Box 6.1).

Box 6.1. Czech extended producer responsibility system for packaging

Recycling data show that the extended producer responsibility (EPR) system for packaging and packaging waste works well in the Czech Republic, and consumers effectively sort their packaging waste. For the moment, there is only one producer responsibility organisation operating on the market, EKO-KOM, covering 93% of all packaging waste in the country and 84% of packaging introduced onto the market in the Czech Republic is by clients participating in the EKO-KOM system. Compared to other countries, EKO-KOM has been attaining a high degree of recycling of packaging waste and is cost-effective regarding separation and recycling per inhabitant per year. The producer responsibility organisation operates efficiently and transparently, has established clear mechanisms for recovery, and meets the relatively demanding targets set for recovery and processing. Compliance by obligated firms is good and is backed up by the threat that, if manufacturers and importers do not comply with the law, retailers and distributors will be held responsible for take-back obligations. EKO-KOM works with municipalities, covering 99% of the Czech population. EKO-KOM financially contributes to municipalities to provide for separate collection and take-back of packaging. It also operates a dense network of coloured containers, supplemented by waste bag kerbside collection and other separation methods (e.g. collection yards, buy-back facilities). EKO-KOM also charges eco-modulated fees for reusable or single-use packaging and differentiates per tonne of material.

Sources: EKO-KOM (n.d.[6]); OECD (2018[7]); Monier, Hestin and Cavé (2014[8]).

In the medium term, Albania could consider introducing a deposit-refund system (DRS) for plastic bottles to increase the quantity and quality of their separate collection. DRS combine a charge on the sale of a product (deposit) which is reimbursed upon the return of the product or its packaging through an approved collection facility. This provides an incentive for consumers to bring back empty packaging, which can then be reused or recycled. High rates of return for reuse or recycling can be achieved because the refund provides consumers with an economic incentive to return items through the appropriate channels. The main drawback of the system is its high implementation cost, which makes it economically unviable to

implement for a large range of products. DRS for plastic bottles have been implemented across OECD countries and would be a good starting point for Albania, as single-use plastics products for food consumption, including bottles, are among the top items ending up in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea (World Bank, 2020[4]). Box 6.2 describes a recent good practice example from the Slovak Republic.

Box 6.2. Deposit-refund system for single-use PET bottles and cans in the Slovak Republic

Act No. 302/2019 Coll. on the Deposit Refund System (DRS) for single-use packaging for beverages sets a number of separate collection targets:

- Plastic bottles: a minimum 60% of single-use plastic packaging placed on the market in a given year by weight should be separately collected by the end of 2022; 77% by the end of 2024 (this target is in line with the target set by the EU Single Use Plastics Directive); and 90% from 2027 onwards (the Directive sets this target from 2029 only).
- Metal cans: there is no target set for 2024; a minimum 70% of cans must be separately collected by the end of 2025; and 90% by the end of 2029. There is no such target at the EU level.

Decree No. 347/2019 Coll. of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic implementing certain provisions of the Act on DRS for single-use packaging for beverages sets the level of deposit and the scope of single-use packaging to which the DRS applies. The deposit must be a minimum of EUR 0.12 per plastic bottle and a minimum of EUR 0.10 per can. Based on evidence from other countries which have already implemented DRS schemes, these levels of deposit are expected to lead to a collection rate higher than 90%, which is an increase from the current 62% collection rate for PET bottles.

The new Slovak DRS for PET bottles and cans is set up in the form of a central system, often implemented in Scandinavian countries. Such a central system is composed of unions and associations of manufacturers. The role of the administrator is to co-ordinate and approve of the activities and to finance the system. The system is financed by manufacturers through an administrative fee for each plastic bottle and can. Additional costs incurred by retailers are financed by a handling fee. The selected DRS clearing organisation has set the level of deposit at EUR 0.15 per plastic bottle and per can.

Sources: Dráb and Slučiaková (2018[9]); Drab, Engel and Kristofory (2020[10]).

2. Shifting demand from single-use plastics to alternatives and more reuse

During the use phase, governments may influence consumers and the type of plastic products they purchase through several policy instruments. For Albania, two key policy recommendations are proposed, one for the short term and the other for the medium term to shift purchasing away from single-use plastic products to alternatives, such as reusable plastic products and products with recycled plastic content.

In the short term, Albania should introduce taxes and/or bans on certain single-use plastic products. Notably, Albania has already introduced a ban on light single-use plastic bags. Building on this, it may consider extending such a ban to additional single-use plastic products, in line with EU legislation. The recent boom in the tourism sector also underscores the importance of measures to mitigate the leakage of single-use plastic items associated with recreational activities, including, for example, plastic cups, containers, straws and beverage bottles. Such measures have been introduced across the European Union, also as a response to the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive. A tax is levied on the sale of products or groups of products increasing their price, and if passed on to consumers, can discourage them from buying those products. While product taxes have been primarily applied to certain plastic bags (e.g. Ireland), bans apply to a wider range of single-use plastic items. Both product taxes and bans have proved to be effective in reducing the use of single-use plastic bags. While taxes on plastic bags allow for

some flexibility in the degree to which consumers (and indirectly producers) change their behaviour, a ban can achieve a reduction in the use of single-use plastic bags more rapidly. However, a ban may lead to a less cost-effective solution, as firms may incur higher compliance costs than if a tax was introduced. Well-designed taxes should lead to the use of more durable and more sustainable alternatives and level the playing field between primary and secondary plastics (OECD, 2023[2]).

In the medium term, Albania needs to use green public procurement to favour reusable plastic products and products with recycled plastic content. As outlined in Chapter 4, the purchasing power of public authorities can be used to steer greater supply and use of sustainable products and services. The demand for sustainable plastic products can be improved by introducing, for example, mandatory criteria (e.g. recycled content) on the purchase of plastic products (see also Box 6.1). These criteria can include the use of secondary materials, recycled content, or reusability and recyclability of the plastic product, among others. There are a few international best practice examples on green public procurement criteria for plastics that could guide Albania. The municipality of Lolland in Denmark, for example, has introduced recycling and recyclability criteria for packaging in its tender for cleaning services. In Sweden, green public procurement criteria related to plastics are applied in the procurement of office IT equipment. In Belgium and Germany, bans on certain single-use products have been introduced. For example, the city of Hamburg banned the use of plastic coffee capsules, single-use bottles, utensils and plates in government buildings (Watkins et al., 2019[11]). Japan also uses green public procurement criteria on plastic products, where the higher the recycled content share in an evaluated good, the higher the evaluation score for that good. For instance, stationery products should contain at least 40% recycled plastics in terms of weight.

3. Curbing virgin plastics use through design and production-related measures

Decisions taken at the design and manufacturing stage can restrain plastic demand and enhance circularity by increasing the durability and reparability of plastic products as well as by using recycled plastic or alternative materials in production. This stage forms the basis for the consumption and end-of-life treatment stage, as product design determines the way a plastic product is produced, and from which materials, how it is consumed and disposed of as well as whether it can be repaired, reused and remanufactured. These stages also include the sourcing of materials that are used to manufacture a product, as well as the production process itself. A number of policy instruments can help make product design and production of plastic products in Albania more circular. As these instruments are more challenging to implement, they are thus proposed to be introduced only in the medium to long term in Albania.

In the medium term, Albania should introduce eco-modulated fees for plastic packaging within the EPR take-back scheme for packaging that should be implemented in the short term (see Table 6.1 as well as Table 4.1 in Chapter 4). While in the short term the focus would be on increased recycling and material recovery through EPR take-back schemes, in the medium term it should be on using EPR take-back schemes to incentivise producers to design plastic products that are more circular. EPR take-back schemes can incentivise “design-for-environment” by making individual firms face the cost of waste management that is directly related to the characteristics of the products that they themselves have produced. The evidence suggests that this is often not the case in a collective producer responsibility organisation (PRO) scheme. In a collective PRO, a crucial policy choice, which underpins the effectiveness of the EPR, is the design of the fee governing firms’ financial contributions to the PRO. Firms will only face clear incentives to reduce their end-of-life costs and improve the design of their products towards increased circularity if the fees that they have to pay to the PRO are “eco-modulated” (OECD, 2021[12]). Eco-modulated fees reflect the environmental characteristics of products that affect their end-of-life waste management costs (for example, recyclability and presence of hazardous substances) or even the entire product life cycle (for example, recycled content and product lifespan). For example, producer fees in Belgium for plastic packaging range from 0.1 EUR/kg for easy-to-recycle transparent colourless PET bottles to more than 1 EUR/kg for plastics which tend to be harder to recycle. First, in 2020, there were only three different tariffs for plastic packaging, ranging from 246 EUR/tonne to 711 EUR/tonne, but

since 2022, nine different tariffs apply for plastic packaging. The lowest fee applies to transparent colourless PET bottles, which dropped significantly from 246 EUR/tonne in 2020 to 104 EUR/tonne in 2022. Conversely, the highest fees of more than 1 000 EUR/tonne apply to PE films and other plastic (OECD, 2023[2]). Albania could also start simply differentiating fees for reusable plastic packaging (no fee) and for single-use plastic packaging (price per tonne of material), as the Czech Republic did in the past (OECD, 2021[12]). The relative novelty of these policies means that there are only limited insights about the performance of these schemes.

To boost the use of recycled plastics, in the long term Albania will need to implement minimum plastics recycled content requirements for specific plastic waste streams, for example plastic packaging. Minimum recycled content mandates typically take the form of a regulatory requirement for producers of a certain type of product to use a minimum percentage of recycled material in their production. This could, for example, be a requirement to use a certain percentage minimum recycled content in the manufacture of plastic bottles. Requirements for recycled content are relatively rare but are increasingly discussed in the context of plastic waste management (IRP, 2020[13]). They can be imposed by direct regulation or can be applied indirectly, for example through a voluntary agreement, in the context of an environmental tax, an EPR system through eco-modulation or green public procurement (Box 6.3). For example, as mentioned above, the European Union has set targets in its EU Single-Use Plastics Directive to incorporate 25% of recycled plastic in the manufacture of PET bottles from 2025 and 30% in all plastic bottles from 2030. Minimum plastics recycled content requirements may also apply to other plastic packaging as well as products, such as carpets, textiles, print cartridges and plastic bags (OECD, forthcoming[14]).

To incentivise the use of secondary and recyclable plastics further and beyond the minimum recycled content requirements, Albania may consider taxes on virgin and non-recycled plastics in the long term. Taxes on plastics can be imposed at different points in the value chain, ranging from taxing polymers to taxing finished products containing plastics. For example, to date, the United Kingdom has implemented a national-level plastics packaging tax levied on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled plastic content (in 2022) and Spain has a tax on non-reusable plastic packaging (since 2023). Taxes on plastics are also discussed in Chapter 4 and Section “2. Shifting demand from single-use plastics to alternatives and more reuse”.

Box 6.3. Examples of how minimum recycled content requirements for plastics have been applied

As direct regulation

The EU Single-Use Plastics Directive requires plastic bottles to be made of at least 25% recycled content by 2025 and 30% recycled content by 2030.

Through a voluntary agreement

The Netherlands launched the Dutch Plastic Pact (Plastic Pact NL) in 2019 to make single-use plastic products and packaging more sustainable and suitable for reuse. This voluntary agreement includes four targets, one of which requires single-use plastic products to contain at least 35% of recycled plastic.

Within the context of a tax

Since 2022, the United Kingdom applies a tax (200 GBP/tonne) on plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled material.

In Italy, a series of fiscal incentives, mainly in the form of tax credits for enterprises, have been introduced to discourage the use of virgin materials and incentivise the use of recycled or compostable materials, among other plastics. These include tax credits for enterprises that apply to the purchase of products made out of recycled plastics; packaging containing recycled paper, plastics or aluminium; and biodegradable packaging (introduced via the 2019 Budget Law). Tax credits correspond to 36% of the expenses incurred by the enterprise, up to a maximum annual amount of EUR 20 000.

In an extended producer responsibility scheme through eco-modulation

Extended producer responsibility fees can be modulated in line with the share of recycled materials in the product to incentivise such design-for-environment. For example, products that verifiably meet thresholds for recycled content could receive a bonus resulting in a lowered fee. Some producer responsibility organisations have started to experiment with incentives to increase recycled content. For example, in France, a 50% fee reduction is provided for polyethylene and polypropylene packaging with at least 50% recycled content.

Sources: RIVM (2020[15]); HM Revenue & Customs (2020[16]); CITEO (2021[17]); Laubinger et al. (2021[18]).

Also in the long term, to address the plastic product design and production in general, Albania will need to support and scale up innovation into more recyclable plastic materials, plastics recycling technologies and processes (to the extent possible) as well as plastics reuse and reduction. Innovation (and R&D) can be promoted at every stage of the plastics life cycle, from the introduction of new materials in the production phase to new technologies for plastic waste sorting or recycling. Certain plastic products are made up of different types of plastic, which make them difficult to recycle. Providing funding for new recycling technologies is, therefore, crucial to improve plastic waste management and produce secondary plastic material that can be used as recycled content in products. R&D programmes can also focus on technologies to reduce microplastics emissions. Microplastics are highly relevant for the textiles industry as they often occur during use, such as from releases of microfibers when garments are washed. Innovation and R&D could be supported in Albania through already established programmes for scientific research activities through the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation and financing schemes offered by the Albanian Investment Development Agency and the Innovation Fund.

4. Cross-cutting measures

To support a transition to a more circular use of plastics, Albania should also implement two cross-cutting measures in the short and medium term.

First, in the short term, Albania will need to work on raising awareness and educating businesses, public authorities and households on plastic waste prevention, circular design and littering. Knowledge and capacity building includes a better understanding of the environmental impact of plastic waste generation, the benefits of reusing plastic products and favouring repair over buying new products, among others. Businesses need to be aware of circular economy solutions and the benefits these can bring. They should also understand the use and application of new circular business models (e.g. sharing schemes, reuse and repair centres). Consumers are more likely to comply with waste management regulation and respond to incentives if they have information on how to properly sort waste and a better understanding of how sorted waste is used for recycling. Information campaigns play an important role in ensuring the proper disposal of plastic waste, particularly because of the variety of polymers (OECD, 2023[2]). Some awareness-raising activities have been conducted in Albania, such as the 2019 EU campaign "Plastic leaves no space for life" about plastic pollution and alternatives to single-use plastics. Moreover, the awareness-raising campaign on waste management recently undertaken by the National Environmental Agency aims to reduce the generation of plastic waste, especially single-use plastic items and targets both citizens and public authorities. Municipalities also organise the "Let's do it" public awareness campaigns promoting waste reduction, reuse and recycling for all waste streams, including plastics. Awareness-raising and education can be improved by further developing information and training materials, designing campaigns, and sharing best practices through catalogues or online platforms. This is often carried out in co-operation with civil society organisations. Albania could also aim at mainstreaming the circular economy into education programmes in schools, vocational education and training, and higher education. It is recommended to develop circular modules for different levels of the education system (schools, vocational education and training, and higher education), and to support voluntary activities by students and schools.

Second, in the medium term, Albania could develop a strategy to curb plastic pollution, including marine plastic litter. Albania is involved in the Western Balkans regional co-operation programme on preventing of plastic pollution, including marine litter. To support the programme's objectives, Albania could develop a national strategy on plastic pollution, with a focus on marine litter, that would outline key strategic objectives and possibly targets as well as measures to achieve them. One aim of such a strategy could be to prevent litter from entering the marine and coastal environment, and to support its removal, so as to bring environmental, economic and social benefits. Some of the measures could focus on improving waste prevention, waste collection and management in coastal areas in general, promoting effective wastewater treatment and storm water management, raising awareness, supporting removal and remediation activity, and strengthening stakeholder engagement (OECD, 2019[19]). Better waste management systems allow plastic waste to be captured before it impacts the environment. This strategy would be also relevant to the tourism sector, as Albania is an important seaside tourist destination. In this regard, Croatian plastic waste reduction initiatives can offer good practice examples on the development of strategic documents and the implementation of measures to curb plastic pollution in important tourist destinations (Box 6.4). Albania could also support businesses in the tourism sector in implementing systems for plastic waste reduction and minimisation in their business operations and strategies (see Chapter 5).

Box 6.4. How Croatian cities and islands are moving to reduce plastic waste

Tourism is a major industry in Croatia, significantly contributing to waste generation and putting a substantial strain on local waste management systems. During Croatia's tourist peaks in summer, waste generation increases considerably in coastal municipalities, with tourists producing up to twice as much waste as residents. In 2018, waste produced by tourists accounted for 9% of total municipal waste generated in the country. In the city of Dubrovnik, for instance, it is estimated that municipal waste increases by up to 400% in the summer months due to the city's popularity.

Two initiatives were launched in 2020 to curb plastic pollution and reduce the plastic footprint in Croatian popular tourist destinations, implemented by the Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development Sunce and funded by the Beyond Med Association and the Worldwide Fund for Nature:

- "Plastic Smart Cities Croatia" as part of which the city of Dubrovnik committed to reducing its plastic footprint by eliminating single-use plastics by 2030. As part of the project, an action plan to reduce plastic pollution was developed and adopted for the period 2021-26. It includes measures to improve the collection and disposal of compostable and biodegradable plastic waste and the establishment of a Reuse Center. It also includes the adoption of legal measures for limiting the use of disposable plastics by all public companies. Education and communication with the public are essential components of the action plan, with hospitality and tourism actors being important target groups in this regard.
- "For Plastic Free Croatian Islands", whose main objective is to implement waste management based on the principles of reduce, reuse and recycle in the islands of Dugi Otok and Hvar. A study was carried out to better understand the waste management system in place, the type of single-use plastic used and the level of plastic pollution. A "Plastic Free" Action Plan will then be developed in co-operation with identified stakeholders to propose alternatives for single-use plastics and increase awareness among the general public and businesses. The project also strives to build local, national and regional partnerships to encourage the sharing of experience and the replication of the actions implemented.

Sources: UNEP and WTTC (2021[20]); World Bank (2021[21]); Plastic Smart Cities (2021[22]).

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Notes

[1] Fines for non-compliance span between EUR 4 200 and EUR 12 500 and can lead to the loss of operation permit for repeated violations.

[2] Under the polluter-pays principle, the polluter should bear the expenses of pollution prevention and control measures. It is a fundamental principle for cost allocation by public authorities in OECD countries.