

Waste management country profile

with a focus on municipal and packaging waste

Switzerland

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Key messages

- The total waste generation has increased over the past decades and is estimated to further increase. The increasing population and GDP are likely to be drivers for the waste generation increase. Municipal waste generation per capita has been rather stable in the period 2010-2022 showing a slightly decreasing tendency.
- Switzerland is recycling around 50% of its municipal waste, and this rate has barely changed since 2010.
- The remainder of the municipal waste is incinerated with energy recovery, while no municipal waste is landfilled.

Trends in waste generation and treatment

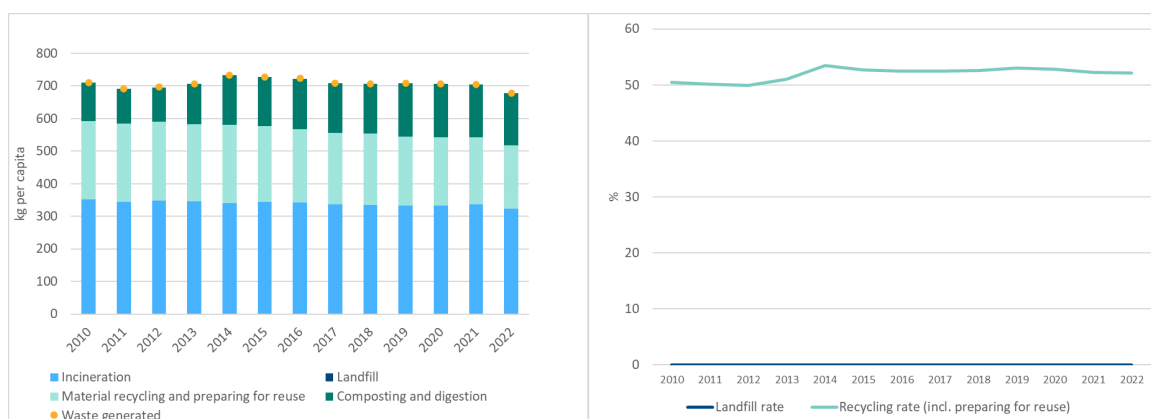
Total waste generation

Switzerland generates between 80 to 90 million tonnes of waste annually, and this is estimated to increase in the future. The major waste categories are mineral wastes, including primarily excavated and quarried materials (54 million tonnes in 2020), and materials from dismantling, demolition or deconstruction of buildings (18 million tonnes in 2020). The second largest waste category is municipal waste (6.1 million tonnes in 2020) (FOEN, 2023a). The amount of waste generated has increased over the past 30 years (FOEN, 2023b). Both population (FOEN, 2024a) and GDP (FOEN, 2024b) have increased, and it is likely that these are drivers for the waste increase.

Municipal waste

Switzerland's per capita municipal waste generation has remained rather unchanged in the period 2010-2022 showing lately a slightly decreasing trend. In 2022, the country generated 677 kg/cap of municipal waste which is significantly above the (estimated) EU-27 average of 513 kg/cap. Switzerland has a recycling rate of 52%, which is very close to the (estimated) EU-27 average of 49%. The recycling rate has stagnated since 2010.

Figure 1 Municipal waste management (left) and rates of recycling (incl. preparing for reuse) and landfill (right), 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat (2024)

Since 2010, Switzerland has achieved a 0% landfilling rate for municipal waste, which is a result of a policy implemented on 1 January 2000, requiring all non-recyclable combustible waste to be incinerated in designated facilities. The main treatment paths are incineration, material recycling, and composting. The incineration rate and recycling rate have stagnated, at around 50% between 2010 and 2022. The share of composting shows a steady increase at the expense of materials recycling.

Policies in place to encourage waste prevention measures and to increase recycling

Legislative framework and waste management plans

The main acts and regulations regarding waste include the Federal Act on the Protection of the Environment (Swiss Confederation, 1983), the Ordinance on the Avoidance and Disposal of Waste (Swiss Confederation, 2015), the Ordinance on Movements of Waste (Swiss Confederation, 2005), the Ordinance on Beverage Containers (Swiss Confederation, 2000), the Ordinance on the Return, Take-Back and Disposal of Electrical and Electronic Equipment (Swiss Confederation, 2021), the Ordinance on the prepaid disposal contribution for glass beverage containers (Swiss Confederation, 2001b), the Ordinance on the prepaid disposal fee for batteries (Swiss Confederation, 2011a), and the Ordinance on animal by-products (Swiss Confederation, 2011b).

The Ordinance on the Avoidance and Disposal of Waste includes a waste management plan, which was adopted in 2016 (Swiss Confederation, 2015). The waste management plans are organised at the canton level. As Switzerland is not a member of the EU nor the European Economic Area, the Swiss waste legislation does not follow the EU waste legislation.

Promoting circular economy and waste reduction

In 2024, the Swiss Parliament adopted the initiative 20.433 'Developing the circular economy in Switzerland'. The corresponding legal amendments, in particular to the Swiss Environmental Protection Act, come into force for the most part in 2025. These changes notably provide a revised waste treatment hierarchy with priority given to the preparation for reuse and waste recycling over incineration. In particular, the focus is on recovering valuable materials such as metals, excavated materials, nutrients, and biogenic waste. In the building sector, the cantons are now responsible for setting limit values for the grey energy generated by new buildings and major renovations (greenhouse gas emissions related to the production of the materials, construction, and renovation of a building). The aim is to create incentives for environmentally friendly construction. In addition, the Federal Council has been given competence to specify requirements for resource-efficient construction and product designs. (The Swiss Federal Council, 2024)

In 2022, Switzerland adopted an action plan to reduce food waste with the following three objectives: halving food waste, defining industry-specific reduction targets, and reducing the environmental impact due to food waste (The Swiss Federal Council, 2022). The potential environmental impacts to be saved are considered when prioritising the measures, and could be considered a best practice in Europe.

The action plan to reduce food waste distinguishes two different periods, 2022-2025 and 2026-2030. In the first period, seven self-regulatory measures are included for the economy, five measures for the public sector, and two measures focused on information and education. In 2025, the measures and progress of the action plan against food waste will be evaluated. If necessary, additional and more binding measures will be taken (The Swiss Federal Council, 2022).

Switzerland has several reuse initiatives in the construction sector, such as the project on the 'Re-Use of Steel Sections' (RUSS) by the Swiss Business Council for Sustainable Development (Oebu), the steel and real estate industry (Swiss Business Council for Sustainable Development (Oebu), 2022) and Cirkla, an association of actors of reuse in the construction sector, supported by environmental technology promotion (Bauteilnetz Schweiz, 2020).

Policies to encourage separate collection and recycling

In Switzerland, separate collection is organised for biogenic waste, paper and cardboard, glass containers, electrical and electronic devices, fluorescent lamps, PET beverage containers, tin cans, aluminium packaging and beverage cans, batteries, and cars. Paper and cardboard, textiles and glass containers are collected in municipal recycling centres and at public waste collection points. Electrical and electronic devices, fluorescent lamps, PET beverage containers, and batteries are mainly collected at sales outlets. Tin cans, aluminium packaging and aluminium beverage cans are mainly collected at public waste collections. (FOEN, 2024c) For the collection of biogenic waste, the cantons decide on the logistics and collection model.

Several private companies have initiated regional collection systems for plastic waste. A comprehensive legal framework, likely coming into effect in 2026, will enable the establishment of a unified nationwide system. In order to incentivise households and businesses to sort waste at the source, Switzerland uses a pay-as-you-throw scheme, namely a tax per bag used for household waste, aiming to reduce the volume of waste (OECD, 2019).

Switzerland does not yet have a comprehensive Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for packaging, and there is no levy on packaging materials or packaging used (FOEN, 2021). Enabling a national collection of plastics is planned as part of the legal framework that will likely come into force in 2026. A prepaid disposal fee is applied for glass bottles, between 0.02 and 0.06 CHF per bottle (eq. 0.021 and 0.062 EUR) (Swiss Confederation, 2001a). There are private companies managing the recovery of PET beverage bottles, aluminium and tin cans (FOEN, 2021).

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