

How to reduce plastic waste: EU strategy explained

The EU wants to reduce plastic waste. Discover its strategy from increasing recycling to introducing bans on certain micro-plastics and single-use plastics.

Cheap and durable plastics are widely used, but their soaring popularity has been accompanied by growing amounts of plastic waste and marine litter, which affects the environment and people's health.

Every year about 26 million tonnes of plastic waste are generated in the EU. Less than 30% of it is recycled, while some of it is exported to non-EU countries for treatment. The rest either goes to landfill, is incinerated, or ends up uncollected in nature, including on beaches or in forests, rivers and seas.

In a bid to tackle plastic pollution, the European Commission proposed a [plastics strategy](#) with the aims of ensuring that by 2030 every piece of plastic packaging can be reused or recycled, as well as of reducing the consumption of single-use plastics and the use of [micro-plastics](#).

Plastic recycling

In a resolution adopted on 13 September 2018, MEPs welcomed the Commission plans. In addition they called for a ban on intentionally added micro-plastics in cosmetics, personal care products, detergents and cleaning products by 2020, as well as for a minimum of recycled content for some plastic products as well as quality standards for recycled plastics. They are also proposing that companies release less micro-plastics when producing products such as textiles, tyres, paint and cigarette butts.

In addition MEPs are also currently discussing a [proposal to ban certain single-use plastics](#) such as cutlery, plates and balloon sticks, as well require goods packaging companies to contribute towards the cost of cleaning up discarded plastics. The plenary vote on it is expected to take place in October.

Learn more about [recycling rates in the EU](#).

Micro-plastics

Microplastics are very small particles (<5mm) of plastic material. They are found in growing quantities in the ocean, but also in food and drink.

MEPs called for a ban on intentionally added micro-plastics in cosmetics, personal care products, detergents and cleaning products by 2020. They also proposed stricter norms for products such as textiles, tyres, paint and cigarette butts in order to reduce the release of micro-plastics from them.

Find out more about [micro-plastics' sources and effects](#).

Single-use plastics

EU lawmakers [agreed in December 2018 to ban certain single-use plastics](#) such as cutlery, plates and balloon sticks, and to require goods packaging companies to contribute towards the cost of cleaning up discarded plastics.

[Legislation restricting lightweight plastics bags](#) was adopted by Parliament in 2015.

More on this ban in our article: [key facts on plastic in the ocean](#).

Briefing

[Plastics in a circular economy](#)



Video

<https://www.europartv.europa.eu/en/programme/eu-affairs/a-plastic-strategy-for-a-circular-economy>