

2026

Waste collection & Valorization at Fira Barcelona

Operational priorities and stakeholder actions for higher valorization

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2. Waste Management

Diagram of waste management at Fira de Barcelona. Waste fractions available, Collection points locations.

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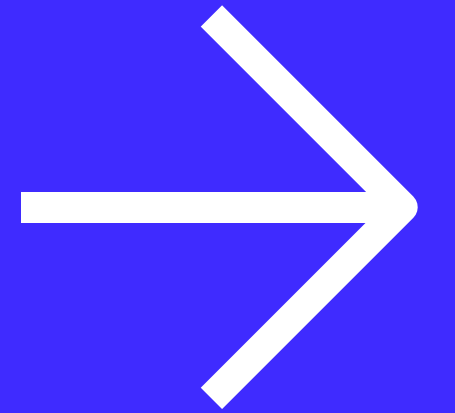
Waste generation in. Proper sorting of generated waste. Challenges to proper sorting. Musts.

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Expected valorization of each fraction.

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Impact and benefits. Objectives. Glossary



Introduction

The challenge and the opportunity

Why Waste Matters

The climate emergency and the growing waste crisis are reshaping industries worldwide, pushing businesses towards more sustainable and circular models. **Resource scarcity, evolving regulation, and increasing environmental impact are no longer future risks** — they are present challenges that directly affect competitiveness.

In this context, large-scale events represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Their high concentration of activity generates significant waste volumes in short periods, making efficient management and proper sorting at source essential to reduce environmental impact and improve resource recovery.

Trade fairs generate an average of 20.4 kg of waste per m², with the highest volumes occurring during build-up and breakdown phases. One of the main operational challenges remains the limited segregation of waste at source, which reduces recycling efficiency. At **Fira Barcelona** we have worked to reduce these average numbers to **3kg/sqm (gross)**. 64% of the waste generated at Fira Barcelona is during breakdown days.

As one of Europe's leading trade fair institutions, Fira de Barcelona operates at a scale that highlights both the magnitude of the challenge and the potential for transformation. Its activity brings together millions of people and companies every year, generating a significant environmental footprint but also a unique opportunity to drive change. Fira is already advancing towards more sustainable operations and circular practices — yet **proper waste sorting at source remains a critical lever to further increase recycling rates and reduce environmental impact.**

Why Waste Matters

Event waste peaks fast

- Large events compress heavy waste generation into a few intense days.
- Trade fairs average **20.4 kg of waste per m²**, creating rapid surges.

Highest-risk time windows

- Build-up and dismantling produce the largest volumes in the shortest time.
- When materials are mixed, recycling drops and handling becomes harder.

Main lever for organizers

- Plan for **sorting at source** so materials stay recoverable.
- Clear instructions reduce confusion and protect recycling quality.

Economic benefits

- **Reusing and recycling** has an economic benefit by avoiding waste costs
- **Sorting well** reduces waste costs, separate fractions are cheaper than general waste



Scale and Opportunity



A venue where small changes scale

- Operations span **790,000 m²**, so waste systems must perform at scale.
- High throughput means short-term decisions drive long-term outcomes.



Current performance and near-term goal

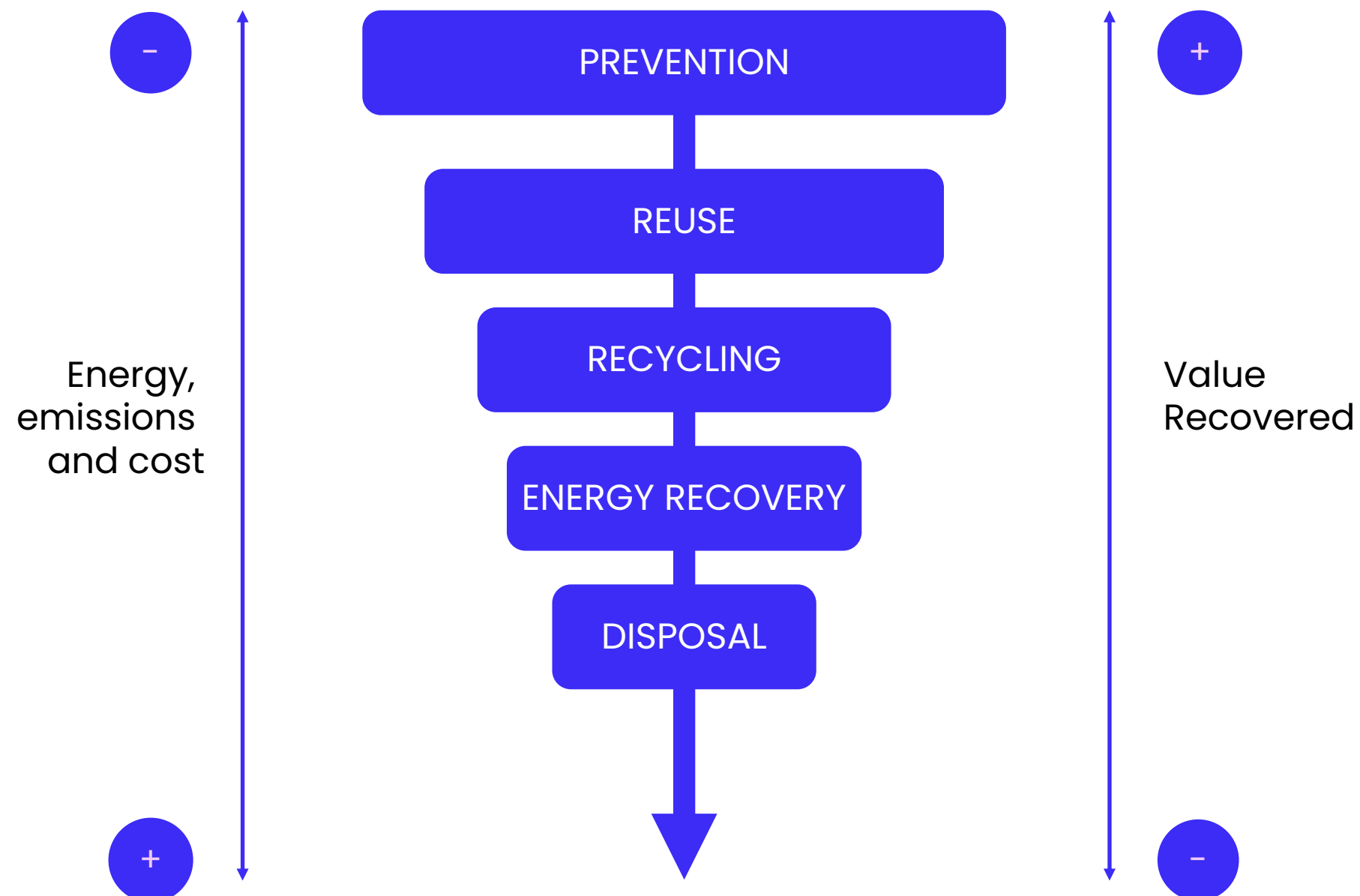
- Today's waste valorisation reaches **52.61%** across all fractions.
- The **2026 target is 55%**, making consistency the priority.



Why this matters to stakeholders

- Even small operational improvements translate into meaningful total impact.
- Clear requirements and coordination **protect performance at peak volumes.**

EU Waste Hierarchy



Objectives

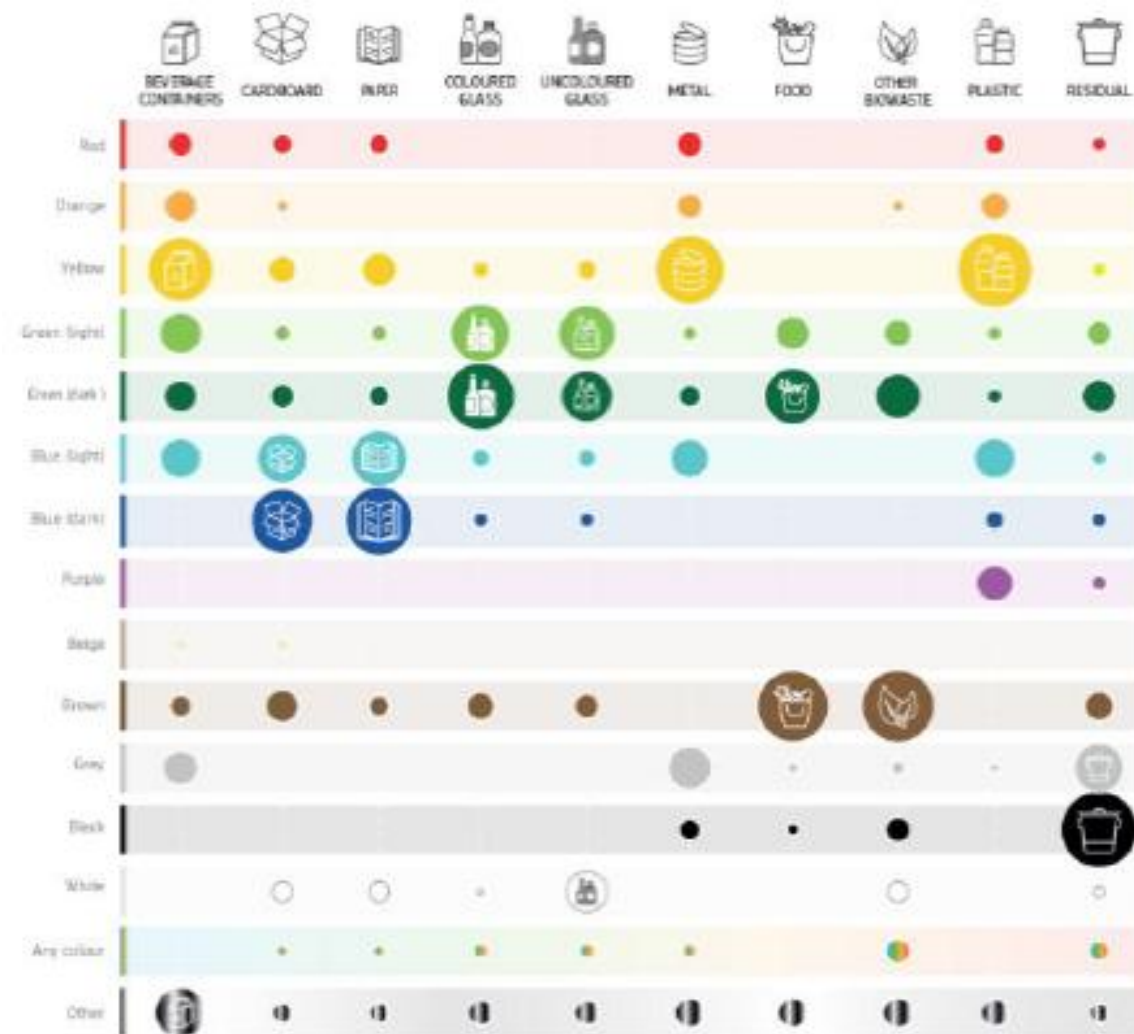
- To maximise avoidance of waste generation.
- To improve resource efficiency.

We use the EU Waste Hierarchy as the foundation for our waste management approach, prioritizing prevention, reuse, recycling, energy recovery, and disposal.

We apply this framework in practice through proper waste sorting to ensure all materials are handled in the most sustainable way.

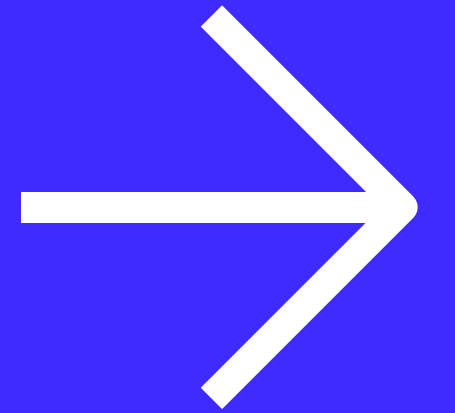
Colour code confusion

The colour of the bin or label that is most associated with each waste material is remarkably heterogeneous within the EU Member States alone.



TIP

When explaining how to sort waste correctly, it is important to explain that **the colour scheme may vary per country** and that it is important to look at the icons, signs or the leaflet itself to check where each type of waste should be sorted.



Waste Management at Fira Barcelona

The Management Approach



Framework: EU waste hierarchy

- Prioritise prevention and reuse, then recycling, recovery, and controlled disposal.



Prevention starts in planning

- Build waste-minimisation into stand design, purchasing, and logistics before arrival.



Sorting protects recyclability

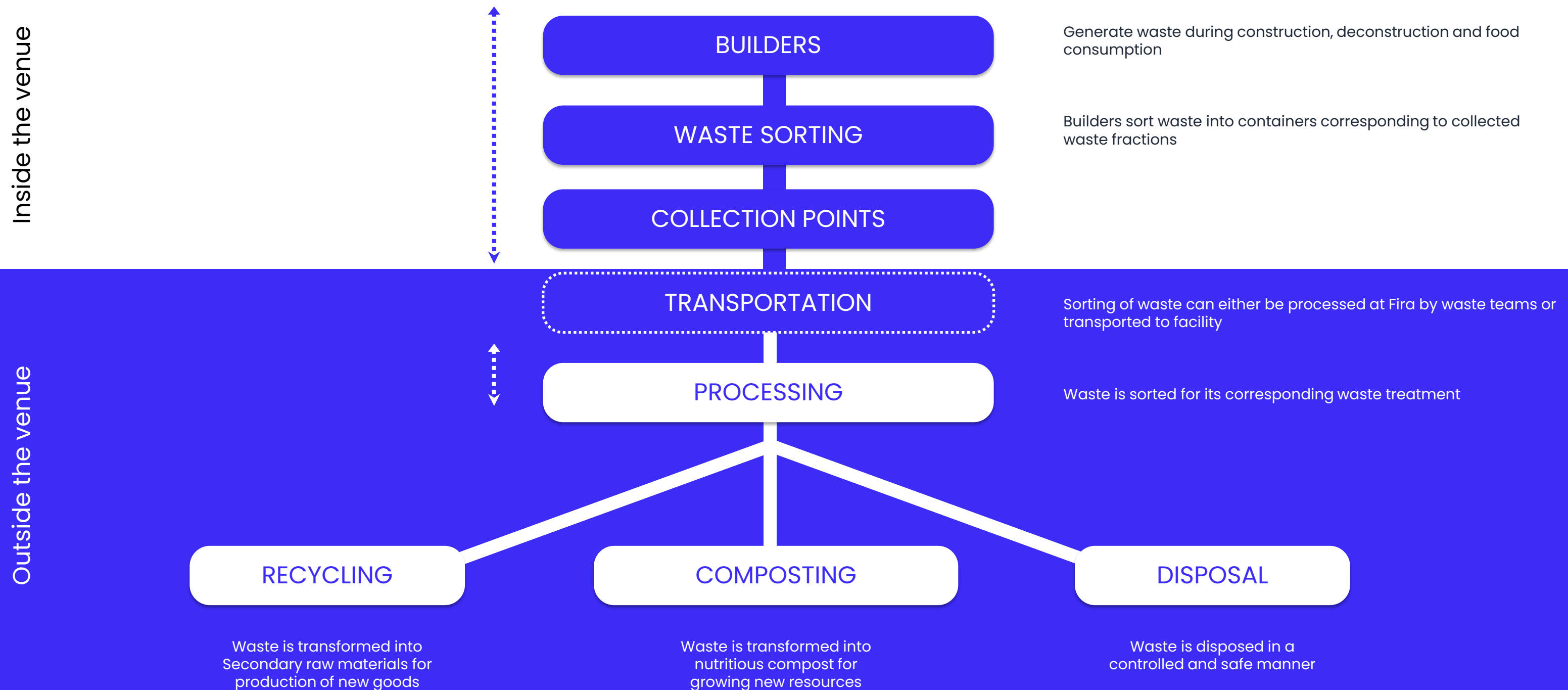
- Separate materials at source so clean loads stay recyclable.
- Avoid contamination, which can downgrade entire batches to mixed waste.



Operations depend on stakeholders

- Align exhibitors, builders, and suppliers on fractions, roles, and timelines.

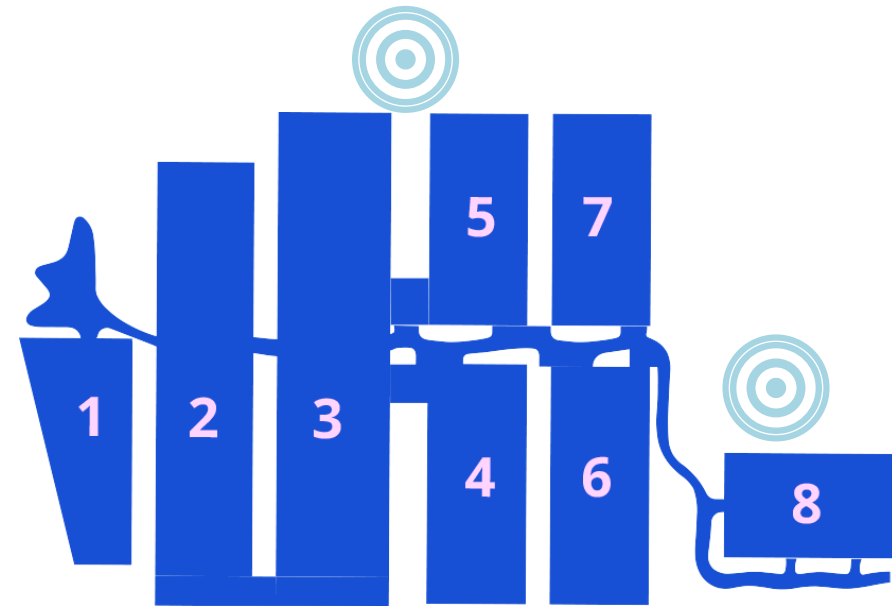
Waste Flow at Fira Barcelona



Location of collection points

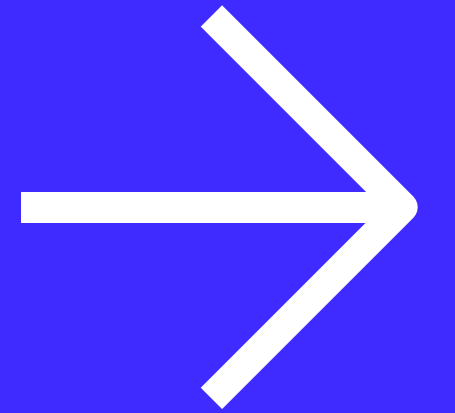


Waste Patrols are available during all build-up and dismantling periods to resolve any sorting doubts (additional service under request)



Fira has two main green points. Waste brought into the facilities is only managed by Fira cleaning teams





Proper sorting

Waste Fractions Overview

EWC = European Waste Catalogue (List of Waste).

** Hazardous waste (codes with asterisk) requires a specific protocol – see Section 04.*

Paper & Cardboard

20 01 01

Packaging, leaflets, catalogues, manuals.

Paper coffee cups, unused napkins, food trays

Plastic

15 01 02

Carpet protector film, porexpan, plastic packaging, metals

Metal

15 01 04

Bottles, cans, briks, lids, food packaging

Glass any colour

20 01 02

Glass elements from stand structure

Glass bottles

Organic

20 01 08

Plants, soil, bouquets

Food leftovers, tea bags, coffee grounds, used napkins

Wood

20 01 38

Single-use or broken pallets, beams, slats, DM boards

Mixed Unsorted

20 03 01

Tape, vinyl, tiles, bricks, mixed/composite items

Hazardous

20 01 27* / 35* / 33*

Paint, glue, finish, aerosols, oils, WEEE, batteries

If generated, please contact Fira

Musts – The 5 rules

1

Sort by
fraction

Every waste type goes to its own container.

2

Never
mix

One contaminated item drops a clean load to mixed.

3

Keep
aisles
clear

Waste stays inside your stand until collection.

4

Bundle &
Palletise

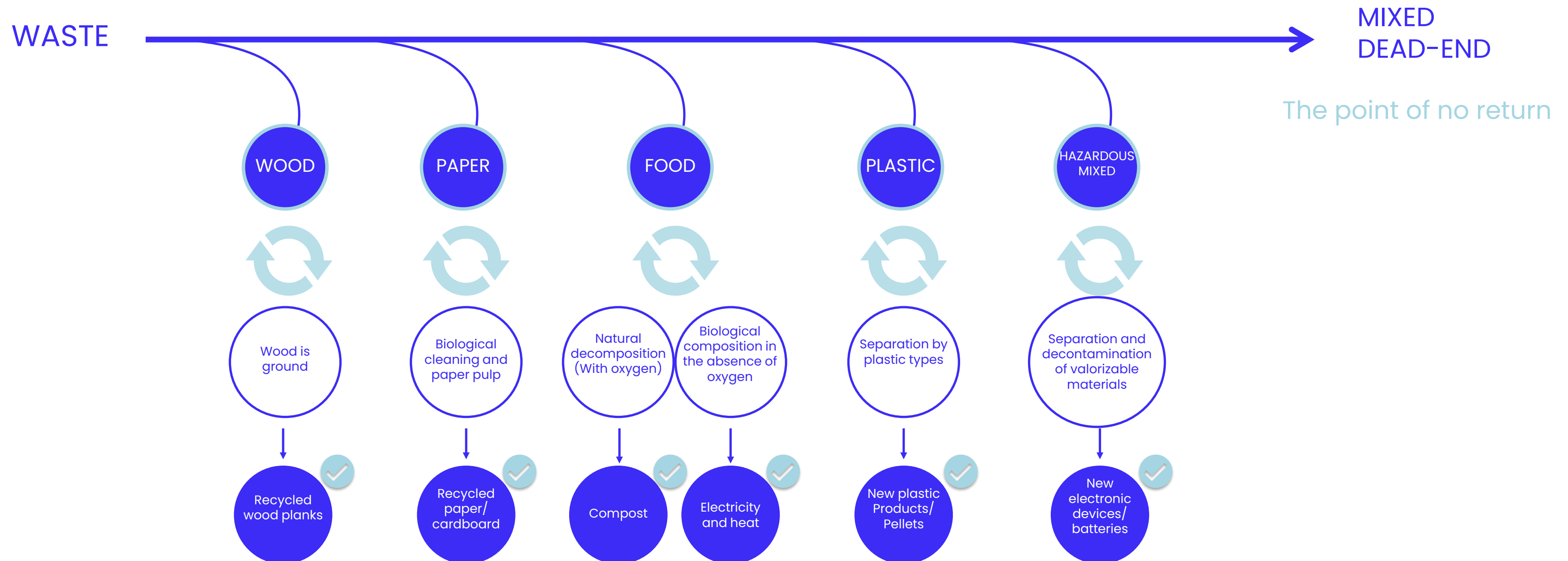
Stack wood, tie cardboard, group plastic.

5

Flag
special
waste

Hazardous or unusual? Call Operations first.

Musts – Don't mix



Hazardous Waste Handling



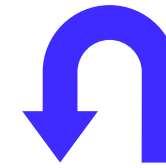
1 Identify hazardous items early

- Treat paint, glue, finishes, aerosols, oils, batteries and WEEE separately.



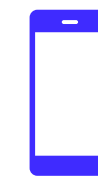
2 Label and isolate securely

- Keep items in original containers or clearly labelled replacements.



3 Isolate

- Store away from aisles and never place in common fraction bins.



4 Use the on-site protocol

- Contact Operations immediately; never dispose in mixed waste.
- Call Operations and wait for the designated hazardous collection process.















LITHIUM BATTERIES

Fire risk. Tape the terminals, never stack damaged cells, and call Operations immediately. Never in the mixed-waste bin.

Stand materials – cheat sheet

If you're building or dismantling a stand, this is what each material becomes:

→ See Section 02 for EWC codes and the full list.

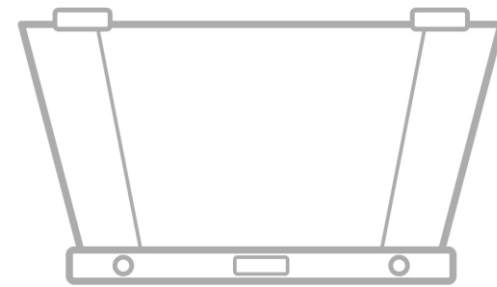
 Cardboard packaging	→	Paper	 Carpet & moquette	→	Carpet
 Porexpan / EPS foam	→	Plastic	 MDF / particleboard	→	Wood
 Plastic film (carpet)	→	Plastic	 Solid wood (pallets, beams)	→	Wood
 Aluminium / metal frames	→	Metal	 Glass elements	→	Glass
 Plexiglás (PMMA)	→	Mixed	 Paint, glue, finishes	→	Hazardous
 Vinyl, banners, tape	→	Mixed	 Electrical & WEEE	→	Hazardous

How it works at Fira Barcelona



1,100 L wheelie bins

- Paper, lightweight packaging, mixed.



20-30 L Containers

- Wood and bulky structural waste.



Labelled drums

- Hazardous waste — collected by request only.



Mobile carts

- Cleaning rounds during show days.

Request a pick up

Phone Operations

OR

Exhibitor portal

OR

Email request form

Response typically within minutes during build-up and dismantling

Ordinary collection is included; extraordinary pickups may carry a fee.

Phase-based operations



Build-up: keep packaging moving

- Frequent rounds. Priority on cardboard packaging, protective film and pallets. Keep stacked inside the stand and contract a pickup.



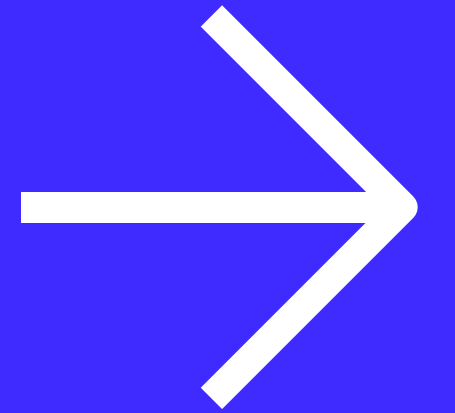
Show days: service-led collection

- Continuous collection of food-service fractions.
- No waste in aisles during visiting hours.



Dismantling: highest operational risk

- Critical window. Palletise everything. After the cut-off, any material left behind is treated as abandoned waste and charged back.



Waste valorization

Paper waste



Paper and cardboard waste is collected in blue bins



Paper waste is transported to a recycling facility



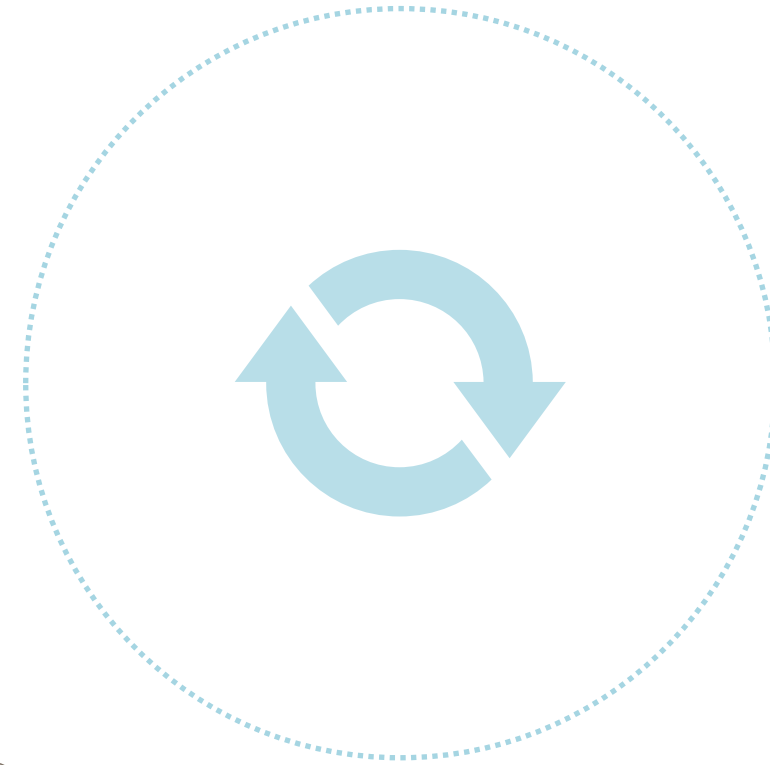
Waste is classified, cleaned and transformed into paper pulp



Paper pulp is transformed into new paper products: packaging, books, newspaper, office paper



New paper waste is generated and the circle continues



Plastic waste and light packaging



Plastic waste is collected separately in yellow bins



Plastic waste is transported to a plastic sorting plant.



In the sorting plant plastic waste is classified by plastic type



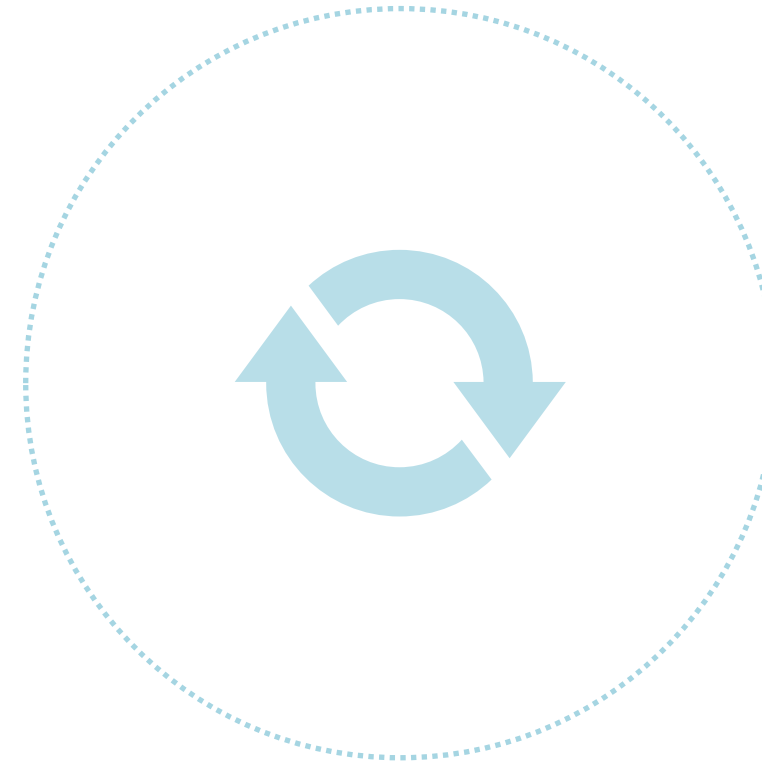
Classified plastic waste is transported to a recycling facility to be recycled



Plastic is mixed with virgin plastic and melted into pellets so it is ready for production



New plastic waste is generated and the circle continues



Glass waste



Glass waste is collected separately in green bins



Glass waste is transported to a sorting facility



Glass waste is sorted by colour



Sorted glass is transported to a recycling facility



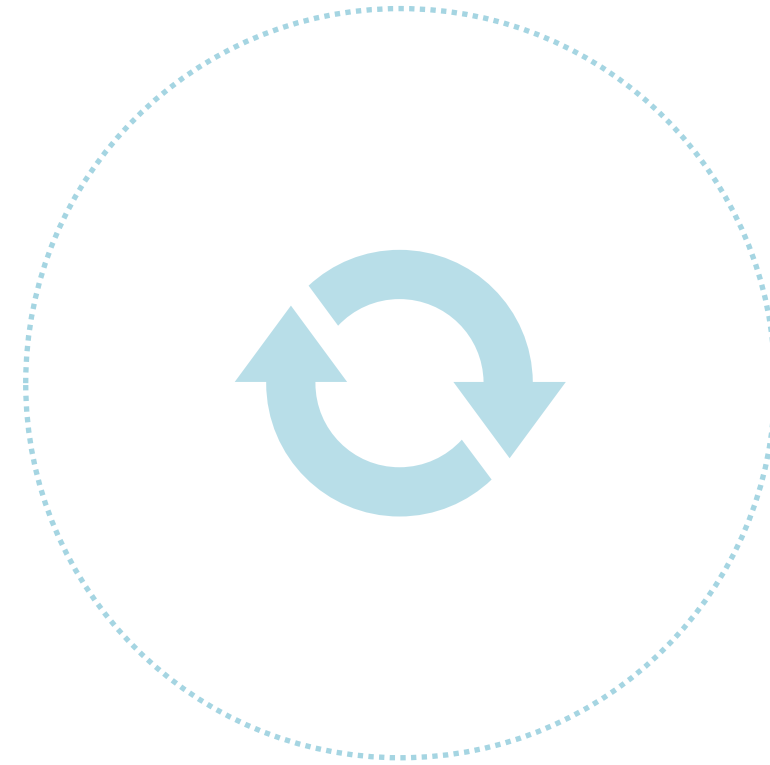
At recycling facilities crushed to the ideal size to prepare it for production



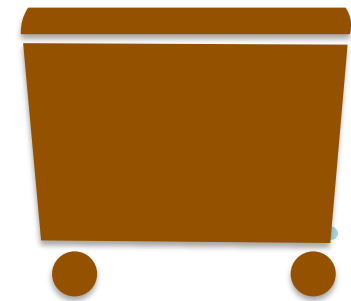
Crushed glass is used most of the time mixed with virgin raw materials to make new bottles or glass packaging



New glass waste is generated and the circle continues



Organic waste



Organic waste is collected separately in brown bins



New organic waste is generated, the circle continues



Organic waste is transported to a composting or anaerobic digestion facility



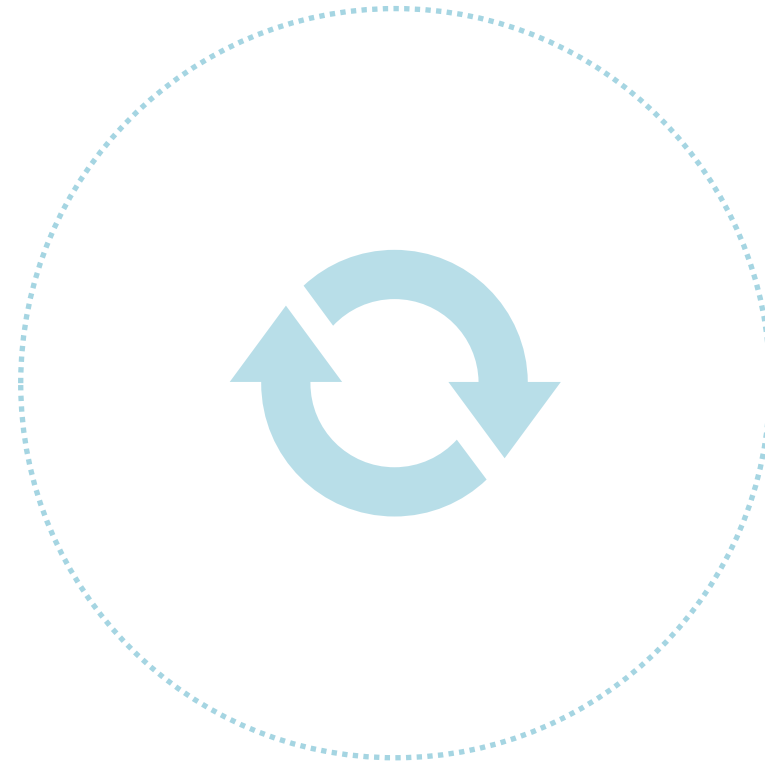
At composting facilities a biologic process treatment with oxygen takes place from which compost is obtained



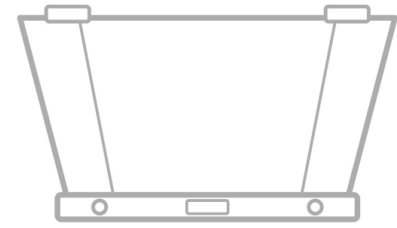
At anaerobic digestion facilities a biologic process in absence of oxygen takes place from which biogas (energy) is obtained



It becomes compost for agriculture and urban gardening projects



Wood waste



Solid wood is collected separately in specific bins

Solid wood is transported to a recycling facility



It is inspected and impurities are removed

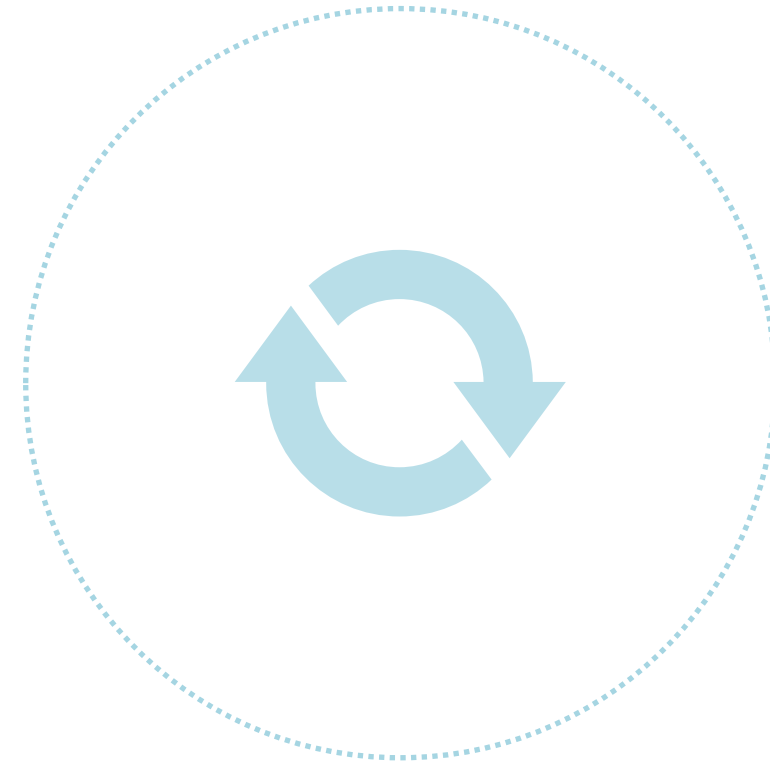


It is shredded to obtain chips between 5 and 10 cm

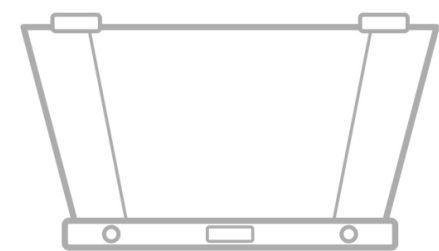


The majority of the shredded material will be transformed into recycled wood planks of high quality like MDF or OBS; or animal bedding o composting structuring agent

New solid waste is generated, the circle continues



Other-wood waste



Other-wood is collected separately in specific bins



Other-wood is transported to a recycling facility



It is inspected and impurities are removed



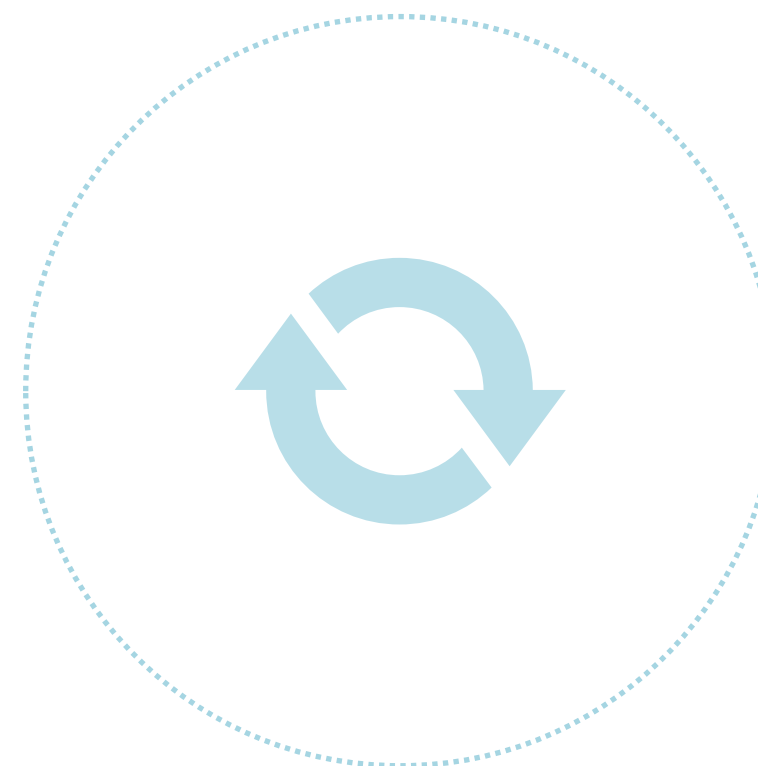
It is shredded to obtain chips between 5 and 10 cm



The majority of the shredded material will be transformed into recycled wood planks of lower quality chipboard. When material does not meet quality requirements it is burned



New solid waste is generated, the circle continues

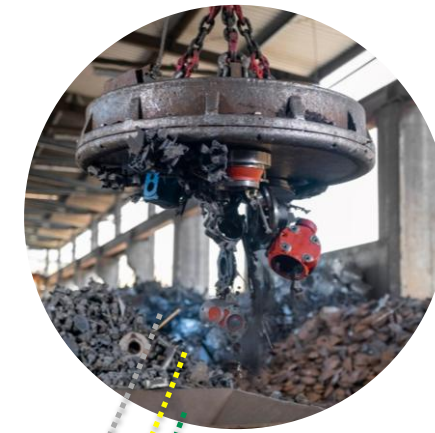


Mixed waste

The collected waste is transported into a waste treatment facility



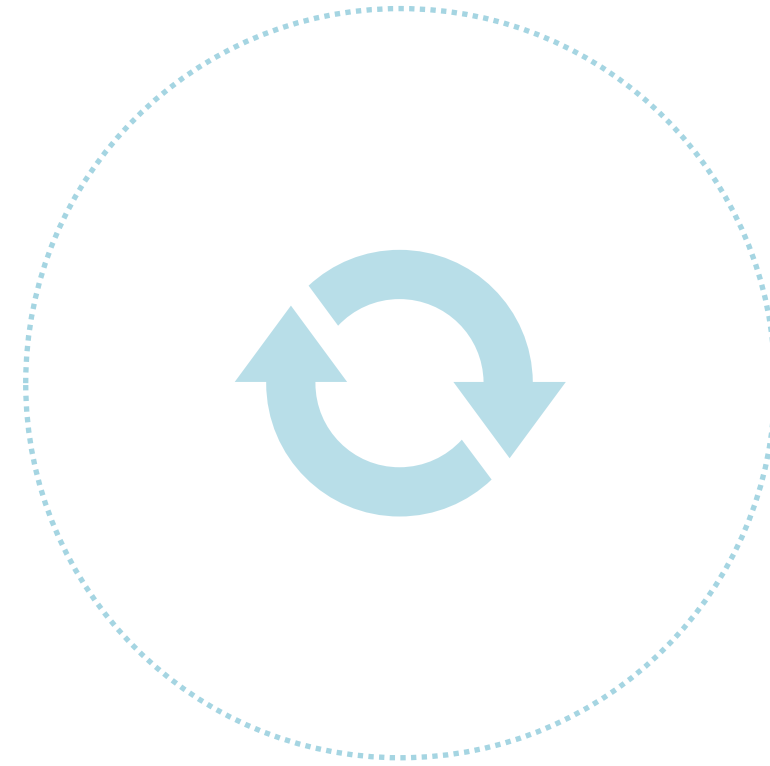
Mixed waste is collected separately in specific bins



Valuable materials like metals, plastics and glass are separated for recycling



Non valuable materials are disposed of in a controlled and safe manner or waste-to-energy valorisation (cremation)



Hazardous waste

The collected waste is transported into a waste treatment facility

Valuable materials are separated and decontaminated



Non valuable materials are disposed if in a controlled and safe manner



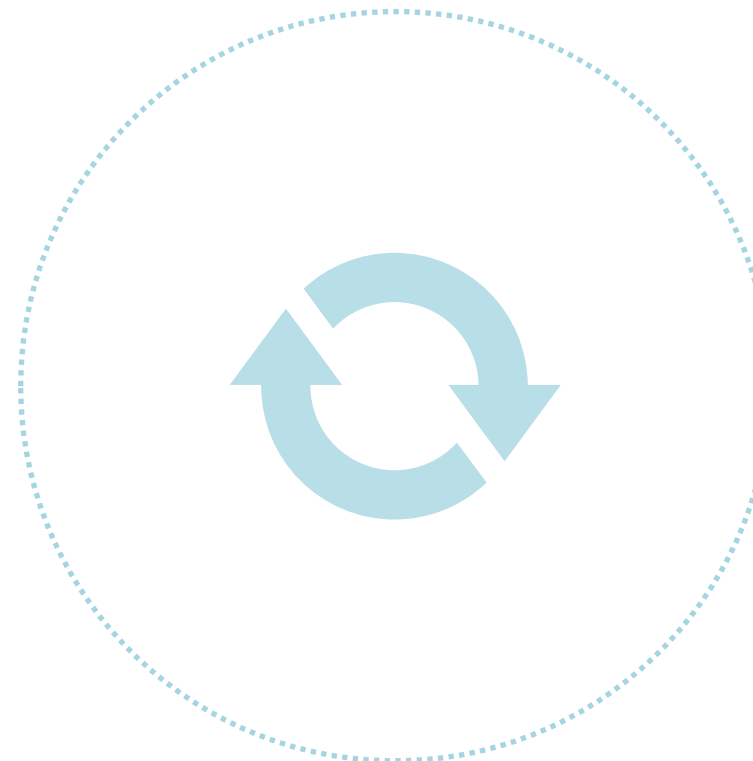
Valuable materials are turned into new products



New hazardous waste is generated, the circle continues



Hazardous waste is collected separately in specific bins

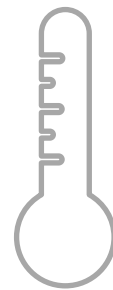


Benefits of recycling



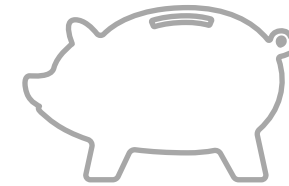
Saving resources

- Recycling helps use less raw materials, which means less harm to the environment and less energy needed to make new products.



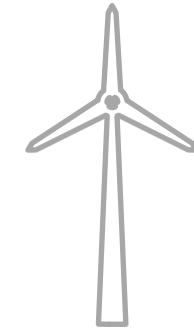
Protecting our health

- Proper recycling reduces harmful effects on our health and the health of others.



Lowering costs

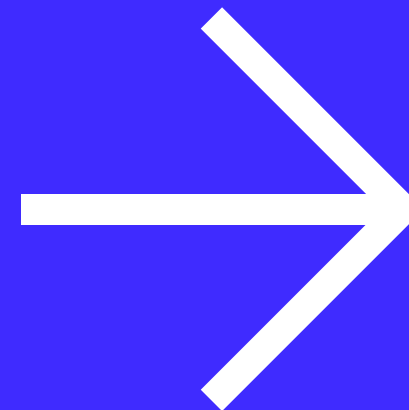
- Recycling can help reduce the costs of waste treatment and its impact on the environment.



Protecting the environment

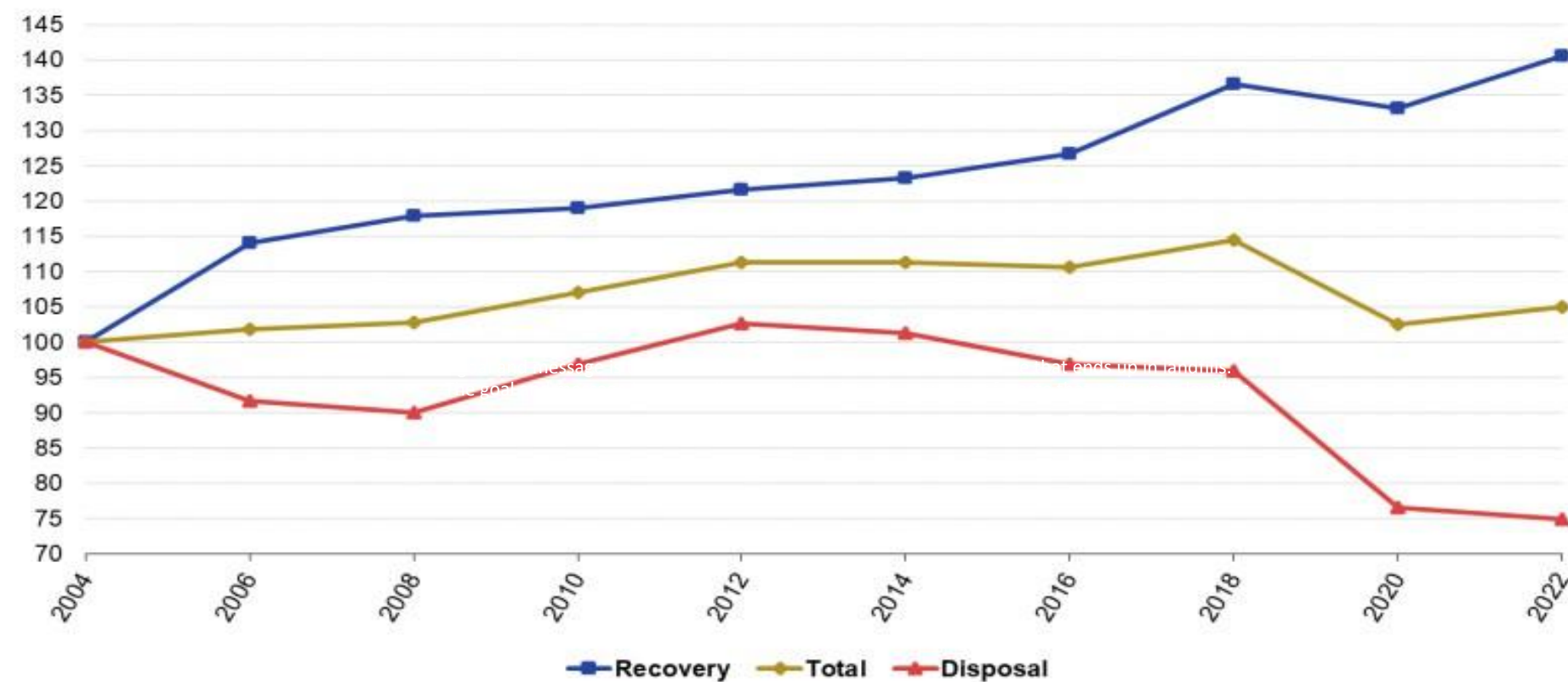
- Recycling can prevent pollution and keep ecosystems clean.

Goals



Where Value Is Recovered

Waste treatment, EU, 2004-2022
(Index 2004 = 100)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: env_wastrt)

eurostat 



TIP

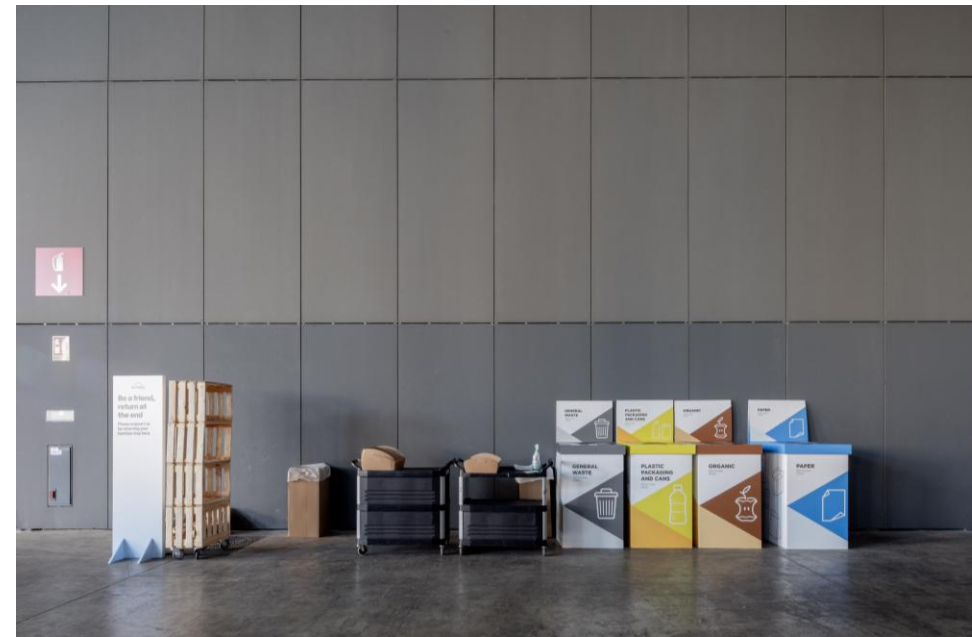
The goal and message is to contribute to the reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills.

Your sorting drives the result



7,021 t

Waste generated in 2025



52.61 %

Valorisation rate
(+34% vs 2024)



≈ 1,850 t

CO₂eq emissions avoided*

* CO₂eq avoided estimated from the 2025 fraction breakdown using MITECO/EU conversion factors. Source: Fira Barcelona environmental performance record (REGCOP07, 2025).

Waste management goals

EU-Spain and Fira Barcelona

EU & Spain regulation: Law 7/2022 on Waste and Contaminated Soil for a Circular Economy (EU) and Royal Decree 1055/2022 on Packaging and Packaging Waste related to waste management in Spain are outlined.

2023

70% separate collection
of single-use bottles

2025

40% landfill diversion
5% preparation for
reuse
13% reduction in waste
generation
65% recycling of
packaging waste

2026

FIRA BARCELONA TARGET

55%

Valorization across all fractions

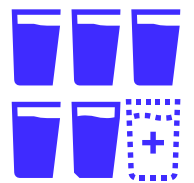
2030

60% recycling
5% reduction in
packaging waste
generation

2035

50% separate collection

Stakeholder Next Steps



Set clear expectations early

- Brief exhibitors and builders on fractions and on-site sorting rules.
- Remind teams that bin colours vary; follow Fira icons and signage.



Design for separation

- Choose stand materials that match Fira fractions (paper, wood, glass).
- Plan space and time to bundle cardboard and palletise wood.



Use Fira's collection system

- Keep waste inside stands until moved to the green points.
- Request pickups during build-up and dismantling before waste accumulates.



Protect outcomes and performance

- Avoid contamination; one wrong item can downgrade a whole load.
- Better sorting supports higher valorisation and lower CO2eq impact.

