



# Zero Waste Europe Strategic Framework

2025-2030

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ZERO  
WASTE  
EUROPE

European network of communities,  
experts, and change agents  
towards a better use of resources  
and elimination of waste in our society.  
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# A Strategic Framework from the ground up

Our Strategic Framework (SF) 2025-2030 emerged from a thoughtful development process that acknowledged the **paradox of long-term planning in our rapidly changing and unpredictable world.**

At Zero Waste Europe, we viewed this as an **opportunity to pause, reflect on our collective journey as a network, and strategically (re) direct our energy for the years ahead.** The SF is designed to reflect ZWE's comprehensive efforts, encompassing both our dedicated team initiatives and areas where team expertise and member-driven activities naturally converge to create collective impact.

It was developed through a thoughtful, inclusive process spanning nearly two years. Rather than focusing on specific waste streams, we prioritised long-term strategic goals that cross team boundaries to prevent siloed implementation. We began with a comprehensive contextual analysis to understand future challenges and opportunities. Then, we refined our vision through multiple collaborative sessions, including our bimonthly members "Plots & Plans" meetings, our annual Network-Wide Gathering, and targeted brainstorming. Throughout this journey, we maintained continuous feedback loops with members via various engagement channels while developing a robust impact framework that clearly distinguishes between impact indicators and progress metrics. This approach has produced not just a document, but a living compass that will guide our collective work as a network and decision-making through 2030.

The ZWE 2025-2030 SF was formally and unanimously adopted at the annual Network-Wide Gathering in May 2025.



# Long-term Vision, Mission and Theory of Change

Our long-term vision, mission and theory of change remain unchanged.

## Our long-term vision

A zero waste, just, and inclusive Europe built on respect for ecological limits and community rights.

A Europe where our production and consumption models are compatible with the resilience and wellbeing of communities, and support people's right to a safe and healthy environment – all resulting in a more equitable income distribution.

A Europe where regenerative, people-focused, and community-led solutions restore and conserve our resources.

A Europe that leads by example, takes responsibility for its impact outside its border, and acts as a catalyst for a global transition towards zero waste.

## Our mission

Redesigning our relationship with resources by empowering communities and changemakers across Europe.

As the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards a better use of resources and elimination of waste in our society, we advocate for sustainable systems; for the redesign of our relationship with resources; and for a global shift towards environmental justice, accelerating a just transition towards zero waste for the benefit of people and the planet.

## Our Theory of Change

Catalysing an ambitious transition to a zero waste Europe requires to interconnect and simultaneously act on 3 core pillars:

- 1 Implementing zero waste solutions on the ground** by mobilising cities, businesses and investment – a "show, don't tell" approach, where we shape and provide living examples of our vision.
- 2 Creating the enabling conditions by influencing policies**, financial frameworks and narratives – with a strong focus on moving higher up in the waste hierarchy and enabling a better management of our resources.
- 3 Movement and power building** by organising and mobilising groups inside and outside our organisation and immediate network – bridging efforts with other movements and building alignment, including among unusual allies and partners.





# State of Play 2025

Europe continues to grapple with a **paradoxical challenge**: a rising resistance against environmental policies perceived as too rapid or unfair, while the current green policies and measures remain insufficient and inadequately resourced for the transition needed.

This contradiction occurs as we experience a triple global crisis – climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss – and we keep moving closer to irreversible disruption on several planetary boundaries while furthering existing inequalities.

The political narrative opposing wellbeing, fairness, and environmental action has gained further traction following the recent wave of elections across Europe. More broadly, we see decreasing space for civil society and attacks on their work in many countries, whilst, at the European level, misinformation and direct attacks are used to challenge EU funding for environmental NGOs.

At a time when trust in democracies and the rule of law is weakening and social inequalities are deepening, it is crucial to explore and **find new ways to advance and implement a progressive and ambitious environmental and social agenda.**

In the middle of it all, there are opportunities that align with ZWE's strategic approach. For instance, the new European Commission's focus on competitiveness, industrial strategy, and resource security provides an opening to position our zero waste work as an integral part of strategic resource management. This shift in framing allows us to demonstrate **how our approaches contribute to European resilience and autonomy while maintaining environmental ambition.**



Our growing evidence base of successful change continues to strengthen our position:



We now closely work with 86 municipalities across 18 countries, reaching 18 million Europeans, showing both the scalability of our approach and providing concrete examples of benefits.



From proof of cost-savings to the diversion of hundreds of tonnes of bio-waste from landfills, these success stories offer powerful and relatable demonstrations of how environmental action can support local economies and communities.



Our collective work (including the one with our spin-off, the Mission Zero Academy [MiZA]) to design and implement ambitious zero waste strategies is increasingly recognised by cities and businesses, and positions us and our members as a central node in local ecosystems.

In the meantime, new opportunities to seize in positioning our zero waste approaches as solutions to larger systemic challenges: for example, by expanding our narrative from bio-waste management to methane mitigation, to healthy soils and sustainable food systems.

**Our network has grown stronger** than ever over the last years, reinforcing our credibility and power by increasing our collective skills, expertise, and knowledge base – **swiftly moving our focus to emerging strategic issues.**

We have stepped up our HR, financial management, staff skills development, fundraising, and overall governance and compliance efforts. These substantial improvements are now solid foundations for our future work.

All in all, these times provide both grave threats and exciting opportunities to embed meaningful change. Focusing on our plans in such a world will be like anchoring a ship in a hurricane. It will require us to be both the anchor and the sail – strong enough to hold steady, yet flexible enough to adapt when the winds change. This balance of resilience and adaptability will guide our strategic outlook as we navigate likely uncertain waters.

# Our 2030 Vision

Shifting from waste management to resource stewardship, we prioritise the interconnected wellbeing of humans, environment, and ecosystems, while empowering local communities to lead the way.

## Let's imagine we're in 2030 and...

Europe is making significant strides towards a zero waste future. The **strategic use of resources**, circular economy, and respect for **planetary and social boundaries** are being further mainstreamed in **political discourses** and **shaping the agenda of the next Commission**.

**Pioneer cities and businesses** across the region are implementing innovative strategies for waste prevention, reuse, and recycling. They are supported by robust policy frameworks and financial incentives, and by collaborating with local communities.

**Grassroots initiatives** are driving change from the ground up, fostering a **sense of ownership** and pride in the transition to a zero waste future.

Collaboration within the wider zero waste ecosystem fosters a vibrant and interconnected

movement across Europe, enabling knowledge sharing, innovation, new opportunities for businesses and solutions providers, and alignment with other movements.

Zero waste models continue to deliver tangible benefits, and more specifically for public health, the environment, and local communities. A growing body of evidence and case studies demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of aligning economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental sustainability in the pursuit of a zero waste future.

In an era of global political mayhem, threats of protectionism, and retrenchment, key cross-regional and global initiatives maintain collective impact. Waste knows no borders, but neither do its solutions.



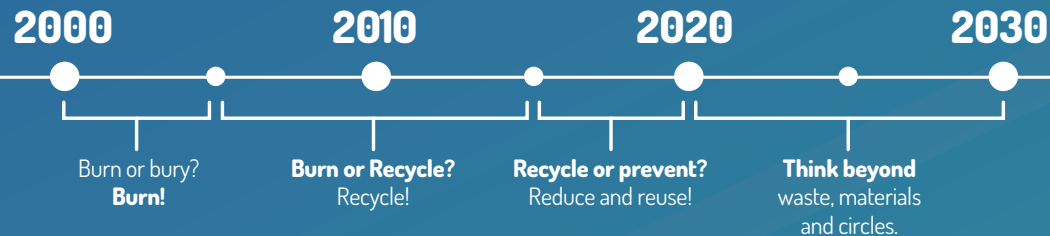


# Introducing the Framework

Our 2030 vision exemplifies the next stepping stone to help us get one step closer to our long-term vision – summarised as our contribution as a network to ensuring **“an environmentally safe and socially just space for humanity”**.

Besides the continuation of our historical efforts, our 2030 vision emphasises:

- ✓ Shifting the debate from waste to materials and resources.
- ✓ Putting public health at the heart of solutions.
- ✓ Building the power of local communities and the wider zero waste ecosystem.



**A set of 6 strategic goals (SG) will help achieve this vision:**

**SG1 and SG2:** Materials reduction and health/wellbeing are situated closer to the vision. They are more aspirational than other goals, and long-term by design.

**SG3 and SG4:** Policies and implementation model shaping are further deepened and grounded in our current work, with a stronger focus on prevention.

**SG5:** Our network and movement are at the core of our work.

**SG6:** Our organisational development and narrative efforts act as a springboard to enable all of our work.

# Diving into the 6 Strategic Goals

SG1

SG2

SG3

SG4

SG5

SG6



## SG1

## ADVANCING THE POLITICAL DEBATE ON STRATEGIC USE OF MATERIALS

Over the years, Zero Waste Europe has advocated moving away from waste incineration to the prevention, reuse, and recycling of products and materials. The next frontier is to **reduce material use in Europe whilst ensuring wellbeing for all**.

Currently, EU legislation approaches material use primarily from a waste management perspective, failing to address our ever-increasing consumption and production of resources, as well as the **exceeding of planetary boundaries**. However, with rising concerns over **supply chain resilience** and **EU competitiveness**, there is a crucial opportunity to **shift the policy narrative** and push for action that addresses material use at its source.

Therefore, we aim to embed **strategic material use** in the upcoming **Circular Economy Act (CEA)** and other regulatory frameworks. Our approach is to shape the policy narrative to align with broader EU priorities, ensuring material use reduction is seen as a driver of economic strength, industrial resilience, and reduced dependency on external resources.

At the same time, we want to demonstrate the **power of local action** by showcasing how cities and regions can lead the way with sufficiency-minded policies through ambitious municipal policies, local business models, and community-driven initiatives prioritising resource efficiency, waste prevention, and circular economy solutions. By highlighting these concrete examples, we build momentum for broader policy shifts and **equip decision-makers** with proven, scalable solutions to inform and inspire national and EU-level action.

### MAIN IMPACT AND SHIFTS

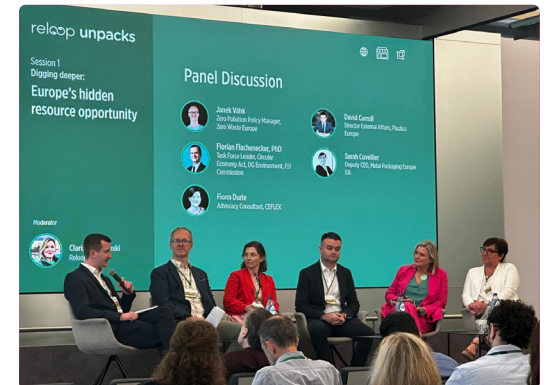
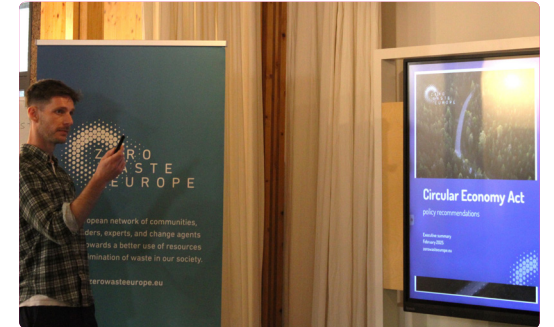
- ✓ Wording and references of material use in line with our new narrative in EU policies (CEA), integrating it as a fundamental pillar of the circular economy.
- ✓ A shift in policy narratives, where reducing resource consumption – albeit with different wording – is recognised as key to strategic autonomy, industrial resilience, and economic competitiveness.

### SUPPORTING OUTCOMES

- ✓ The Circular Economy Act (or another regulatory framework) explicitly includes wording on material use regulation, or the European Commission conducts impact assessments considering this approach.
- ✓ Increased visibility of material use reduction in EU policy documents, speeches, and official communications, demonstrating its rise on the agenda.
- ✓ Stronger alignment among key stakeholders, including industry, policy-makers, and civil society on the need for material use regulation.

### KEY IMPACT KPIS

- ✓ Inclusion of strategic use of resources in EU legislation (measured through official documents, preparatory studies, or legal provisions).
- ✓ Greater political and industry engagement on strategic material use, reflected in policy consultations, stakeholder alliances, and corporate commitments.



# SG2

## PUTTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTRE OF ZERO WASTE SOLUTIONS

### The environmental benefits of zero waste are well established and well integrated into our work.

Yet these solutions' benefits on human health and social cohesion are less well known and even less documented. With the new SF, we want to embed health and communities' wellbeing as core pillars of our policy, implementation, and narrative work.

By wellbeing, we mean the "quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose. [...] A society's wellbeing can be observed by the extent to which they are resilient, build capacity for action, and are prepared to transcend challenges." In the context of our work, putting wellbeing at the core of our activities means maximising the **social benefits of zero waste**: for example, ensuring the creation of more quality, dignified jobs; but also promoting zero waste business models that make local economies more resilient and contribute to enhancing communities' quality of life. Additionally, it also means ensuring **communities' active participation in the design of zero strategies**. For this, we will explore a broader Environmental Justice (EJ) framework for our work, making sure this lens becomes second nature to our team and strengthens our members' work on the ground.

On the health side, we want to push for a future where **materials are safely and sustainably produced, used, and reintroduced into the economy** — reducing reliance on virgin resources and minimising harm to people and the planet.

**We also aim to reframe the protection of health — not just as a social imperative, but as a strategic and economic one. In a context where competitiveness is high on the agenda, with increased resource scarcity, geopolitical tensions, and rising consumer expectations, ensuring safe, non-toxic material flows can become a true competitive advantage for Europe. Circular systems prioritising health and safety help reduce costly environmental liabilities, lower public health burdens, and boost the resilience of European industry.**

In practice, we intend to reinforce our work on packaging reuse, by ensuring that reuse **practices are implemented** in ways that are safe and beneficial for both people and the environment. At the same time, we will push for a **strong legal framework** that prioritises circularity while safeguarding both environmental and human health. This is particularly timely, given the European Commission's planned Circular Economy Act (CEA) in 2026.

### MAIN IMPACT AND SHIFTS

- ✓ A greater number of policies prioritise sustainable design and yet maximise reuse; and enhance recycling practices (health and environmental performance).
- ✓ More data and evidence is used to 1) inform policy-making based on the risks and benefits to public health across the waste hierarchy and 2) design zero waste models on the ground to enhance the social benefits of zero waste.

### SUPPORTING OUTCOMES

- ✓ ZWE and its members are equipped to advance public health and community wellbeing.
- ✓ Environmental Justice (EJ) principles are better integrated into our work, with a good understanding of how to put them into practice across specific working areas.

### KEY IMPACT KPIS

- ✓ A health dimension is consistently present in our work and the way we communicate about it.
- ✓ Number of partners/allies that embed packaging reuse safety (e.g. using the RSVP Blueprint) in their implementation and to inform policy-making.
- ✓ Number of cities working on/implementing sufficiency-based policies.
- ✓ Interest/mentions/policy language through the work of ZWE and its health and wellbeing focus.
- ✓ The Circular Economy Act (CEA) integrates language on safety and human health.





## SG3

## SECURING THE POLICIES AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS TO BOOST CIRCULARITY

We want to continue **ensuring that circular economy principles are embedded in EU and national legislation**. We aim to push for **stronger waste prevention, reuse, recycling, and material recovery policies while securing financial frameworks that support zero waste solutions**.

To achieve this, ZWE influences regulatory frameworks, engages with decision-makers, and builds alliances to counter industry lobbying. Our challenge is to keep raising the bar in terms of ambition, but also protect past achievements from being backtracked or deprioritised.

With “competitiveness” as the dominant political lens, we have an opportunity and a necessity to further research and promote the contribution of zero waste models to economic resilience and prosperity. Concretely, in a resource-constrained and geopolitically tense world, reducing dependency on virgin materials is no longer just about sustainability – it’s about strengthening Europe’s industrial base and strategic autonomy.

We will double down on our core strengths in coalition building, building alignment among stakeholders and unusual allies, providing technical expertise, and our evidence-based approach. However, we also need to **explore new ways of reaching our goals, working more closely with other groups**. **More broadly, we aim to position zero waste solutions as the operational backbone of a circular economy that delivers not only environmental protection, but also health and economic stability — ensuring it remains a solid and uncontroversial priority across political contexts.**

### MAIN IMPACT AND SHIFTS

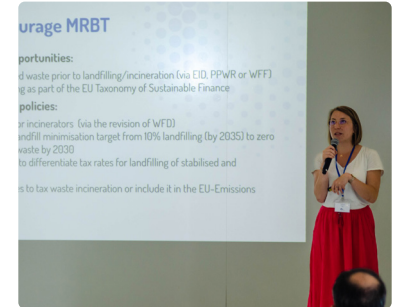
- ✓ Progressive policy adoption that is twofold:
- ✓ Financial backing for zero waste solutions: economic incentives – such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, taxes, and levies – will support circular solutions at local, national, and EU levels. Public funding goes to circular solutions: ZWE shapes how EU and national funding goes to circular initiatives and projects.

### SUPPORTING OUTCOMES

- ✓ More ambitious national policies: e.g. at least three Member States (MS) are expected to adopt stricter reuse and prevention measures beyond EU requirements.
- ✓ Reduction of single-use packaging waste: e.g. at least three MS achieve waste reduction targets under the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) and Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR).
- ✓ Financial incentives for circularity: more public authorities at various levels will introduce economic measures to discourage waste and promote reuse. Increased public funding prioritising circular economy projects and initiatives higher up the waste hierarchy.

### KEY IMPACT KPIS

- ✓ Number of Member States adopting more ambitious waste prevention and reuse measures.
- ✓ Number of Member States meeting the waste reduction targets set under WFD and PPWR.
- ✓ Number of ZWE recommendations integrated into EU Circular Economy legislation.



## SG4

EMPOWERING CITIES AND BUSINESSES  
AS REUSE AND PREVENTION CHAMPIONS

Our local implementation is a **historic strength of our network**, one that we are widely recognised for, including our shared efforts towards Zero Waste Cities, and this SG is focused on deepening our impact on the ground. This SG is at the core of our local implementation work.

We want to continue building a bigger pool of cities and businesses that are implementing truly effective waste prevention measures, with more data, knowledge, and networking all flowing more freely between ZWE and this ecosystem, **helping to improve the performance of local initiatives**. In order to create prevention and reuse champions, we will focus on the **upper ends of the hierarchy and the core foundations of strong zero waste policies** – collection, recycling, and communications. Behind this success lies greater recognition and stable funding for ZWE and MiZA, working effectively as a collective unit – two entities, one mission, proven, scalable solutions to inform and inspire national and EU-level action.

## MAIN IMPACT AND SHIFTS

- ✓ Tangible data that shows waste reduction in our key target areas and waste streams.

## SUPPORTING OUTCOMES

- ✓ The co-benefits of zero waste solutions are more widely recognised and backed with data on:
  - Total waste generation reduction.
  - GhG emission savings.
  - Cost savings for cities and businesses in different contexts.
  - More job opportunities and different social benefits (in collaboration with SG2).
- ✓ ZWE and MiZA's expertise, network, and services are recognised as the gold standard for zero waste performance.

## KEY IMPACT KPIS

- ✓ Number of cities that can showcase a positive impact due to our support across the MiZA Certification and ZWE projects.
- ✓ Number of cities supported by our network to implement impactful prevention strategies following our methodology. Among them – number of cities that showcase clear, targeted waste stream-specific reduction.
- ✓ Number of business collaborations with MiZA and ZWE projects.
- ✓ Percentage of our partner businesses that showcase clear, targeted waste stream-specific reduction.





# SG5

## BUILDING AN INTEGRATED NETWORK AND A STRONG MOVEMENT

Our network and movement building efforts are at the core of our strategy. They ensure that the zero waste movement continues to grow and strengthen with a shared vision for a zero waste future across Europe.

Today, our network is stronger than ever, and we want to build on this momentum over the next five years by increasing our collective power, both within and beyond our immediate membership. We will focus on **capacity building, knowledge sharing, and peer learning** with and for our members to achieve this. We will deepen and diversify spaces for collaboration and community building while continuing to improve the tools and resources we provide. We aim to become a more integrated network — one where members are empowered and enabled to take on shared leadership in joint projects and campaigns; and where collaboration happens in a decentralised way where relevant.

We will continue to expand the movement by welcoming new groups into our network while maintaining strong support for national zero waste alliances to grow and emerge through our members' efforts. At the same time, we will **extend our reach and impact by working with diverse groups and partners across Europe and beyond**, integrating environmental justice principles more deeply into our work. We'll continue to collaborate in solidarity with NGOs and groups across the globe, strengthening our shared voice on the international stage, via GAIA regional offices, Break Free From Plastic and other international partners. We will also ensure that our **stories and messages travel beyond Brussels**, amplifying the voices and experiences of our members across Europe.

Through our collective work, we aim to **make ZWE a powerful, knowledgeable, and connected movement** — one that drives impactful policies; accelerates the adoption of zero waste solutions; acts in solidarity both within and beyond the movement; and shapes narratives across different regions.

### MAIN IMPACT AND SHIFTS

- ✓ Our members strongly impact policies, zero waste solutions uptake, and narratives in their countries/regions.
- ✓ Designing and delivering joint activities becomes second nature for the ZWE network.
- ✓ ZWE and its members have increased collaboration with other groups and partners in Europe and beyond.

### SUPPORTING OUTCOMES

- ✓ Members feel a strong sense of connection and belonging to the network, with increased support, knowledge-sharing, and solidarity.
- ✓ Our movement has grown, with new groups joining ZWE and zero waste platforms/alliances strengthening and/or forming.
- ✓ We have reinforced our position as a Europe-wide "network of networks".

### KEY IMPACT KPIS

- ✓ Scale of policy change influenced by members in their regions (number of members effectively influencing zero waste policy-making or implementation strategies, with increased knowledge, experience, and confidence across the network).
- ✓ Member satisfaction rating regarding network connection and strategy alignment.
- ✓ Breadth and depth of cross-network collaboration (number of member-to-member collaborative initiatives; participation rate of members in the co-creation of projects; ...).
- ✓ Number of new aligned zero waste groups joining the network.
- ✓ Amplification of member expertise and solutions in diverse media outlets.



## SG6

## CULTIVATING A FUTURE-PROOF AND THRIVING ORGANISATION WITH A CLEAR, STRONG VOICE

ZWE has around 21 full-time staff members. After the previous five years of intense building of its team and operational infrastructure, the coming five years at ZWE will be marked by stable team growth in key areas of focus, and a **clear consolidation of our operations** (legal, finance and fundraising, organisational processes, and human resources).

Building on our foundations – where we put efforts stabilising our communications strategy, messaging, processes, and branding –, in the next period, we will focus on developing and strengthening our skills in our newer/emerging topics; **finding new ways/formats of communicating; improving our storytelling skills and finding new opportunities** to promote our content; and integrating our narratives in an ever-changing political and societal context. More broadly, we intend to strengthen how ZWE is positioned towards our primary target audiences and spheres of both influence and control.

### MAIN IMPACT AND SHIFTS

- ✓ Employee engagement is high amidst a changing political and societal context.
- ✓ Stable, diverse, and unrestricted funding.
- ✓ ZWE drives a shift in public discourse by introducing new perspectives and narratives on resources and waste.



### SUPPORTING OUTCOMES

- ✓ Our people are engaged, and our internal processes, skills, and tools have matured to meet evolving needs.
- ✓ Our funding is diverse and stable, allowing us to freely pursue our mission on both existing and new topics.
- ✓ Our brand identity is strengthened and solidified, with diversified communication channels and media production.



### KEY IMPACT KPis

- ✓ Organisational confidence and overall engagement scores.
- ✓ Financial resilience index (multi-year funding security, funding source diversification, and flexibility ratio).
- ✓ Percentage of direct and indirect funding secured to financially empower members.
- ✓ Effective capacity development on narrative.
- ✓ Content innovation and reach measurement.







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