



Fork to Farm – Environmental association Za Zemiata factsheet



Organisation:
Environmental association Za Zemiata
Written by Danita Zarichinova

The municipalities we have worked with: Blagoevgrad

OVERVIEW

We worked on practical solutions for Blagoevgrad municipality on how to improve the separate collection of bio-waste, with a detailed focus on improving the communication with residents. During the first year of the project, we focused on collecting data in Blagoevgrad municipality through a compositional analysis of municipal waste and making recommendations to the city. Our work with citizens in Year 1 looked at two strategies, on the one hand, [we attracted students from the local university](#), with whom we conducted a visual analysis of their waste on campus, and a second strategy was the meetings we held with schoolchildren to promote better waste separation. The second year was devoted to developing a concept for communicating with citizens about how and why to separate bio-waste. We worked with local media and developed [a handbook](#) that the municipality could use directly or adapt to its needs.

One of our goals in the last years is to support municipalities in **introducing the mandated pay-as-you-throw system (PAYT) across Bulgaria**, and to show them that separating bio-waste is key to a successful implementation. Our team has been supporting municipality staff with materials for good practices and clarifications on different aspects of the scope of work in the process of introducing a PAYT system. We prepared for them informative materials, games and presentations on waste-related topics that can be used in their approach to children and youth in educational facilities.

In the last months, our team started working actively on the topic of bio-waste in Sofia, Bulgaria capital city. This new approach began because for several weeks there was no regular garbage collection in two areas of the city, so together with the Zero Waste Alliance of Bulgaria we decided to launch an information campaign on home and community composting, which can be successfully picked up by many residents as a way of reducing uncollected waste piling up in the street.





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CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Most of the Bulgarian municipalities don't have a digital system for collecting and monitoring essential data related to municipal solid waste management. There is no inventory or map showing the exact number and placement of mixed (residual) waste or separate collection containers. Information on the quantities of waste collected, sorted or treated, and ultimately disposed of is scattered across different organisations, depending on the waste stream and the type of activity. As a result, **there is no centralized database that brings these waste-flow records together.**

Bulgaria's political instability has persisted in the last 4 years and the absence of a regular long-term government typically leads to **delays, or even a halt, in numerous institutional processes.** The municipal team in Blagoevgrad, including the mayor, has been in power for two years and is highly motivated to work for a sustainable change, but unfortunately much of their time is spent correcting old mistakes and problems, including large illegal landfills. Also the citizens' trust in local authorities was lost in previous years, and they now have the difficult task of regaining it.

SUCCESS AND VICTORIES

One key success in this period was the **big conference we organised with over 90 participants**, with representatives of 60 municipalities attending, that examined how to implement an effective pay as you throw system with strong bio-waste management as a key part of the new system. We showed good practices from Croatia and Slovenia during the conference, with the feedback we received from the municipalities in attendance being very positive and has led to some follow-up meetings.

A change we can point to as a direct result of our work is that the municipality of Blagoevgrad is now working very specifically to improve communication with citizens. They are making greater use of online space to disseminate information. We have given them ideas for different approaches they haven't thought about to use the public spaces and monitors in the city to engage people outside.





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BLAGOEVGRAD

Population size: **77,441 inhabitants** | Type: **Mixed**

Focus:

- Household organic waste collection
- Partnerships with schools/universities
- Educational campaigns

Local community engagement: We created digital materials and we worked with local media.

Stories from the community

During the last 2 years of work in Blagoevgrad and several meetings with students and teachers, we inspired the Economics high school in Blagoevgrad to start their [compost zone and separate collection of bio-waste](#). The high school's Eco club is engaging with our community work and participating in different activities, such as waste audit in the American University in Bulgaria, local festivals, etc. The students are [volunteering in different initiatives](#).

During the waste audit on the campus of the American University in Bulgaria (based in Blagoevgrad), we had the opportunity to meet teachers and students who were actively involved in the audit, and we used the time together to talk about waste, problems and solutions. After the audit, the students studying public relations and media decided to invite us to talk [on their podcast on waste](#), the work of civil society organisations and support local communities fighting to protect nature and citizens' health in their region.





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BLAGOEVGRAD

Data collection on impact

Separately collected organic waste increased significantly. In 2023, before the project, the city collected 354.38 tonnes of organic waste from households and businesses. After implementation, the amount rose to 848 tonnes in 2024, and to 451 tonnes (partial data) in 2025 so far.

The volume of waste sent to landfill or incineration remained relatively stable between the baseline and the first year of implementation. In 2023, the amount was 20,244 tonnes, increasing slightly to 20,505 tonnes in 2024. In 2025, this volume stands at 16,827 tonnes so far, although data for the year are still partial.

Regarding resource recovery, 65 tonnes of compost were produced in 2025. Biogas production began only at the end of November 2025, with the new anaerobic digestion plant designed to process up to 16,000 tonnes per year.

In terms of participation, **124 containers have been deployed to households and/or businesses** to facilitate separate organic waste collection.

Finally, the project has had a **positive impact on employment.** The anaerobic digestion plant has created 11 new jobs, with the number expected to grow to 40 once the facility reaches full operational capacity.





Zero Waste Europe Factsheet

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[Zero Waste Europe](#) is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards the prevention 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.



[Za Zemiata](#) is an independent non-profit non-governmental organisation established in 1995 to work for environmental justice and sustainable and equitable life on our planet, without exploitation of people or nature.



The campaign forms one part of our broader work within the [European Methane Matters Coalition \(MMC\)](#). The coalition aims to ramp up ambition at the European Union level and within key European countries to reduce methane emissions across the energy, agriculture, and waste sectors by 2030.



In 2024, [#ForkToFarm campaign](#) made impressive advances, especially at the local level. The campaign empowered 541,366 people across six European countries with better bio-waste solutions, from separate collection to community composting.

