

Missing the Targets: Revise the WEEE Directive to match market realities

Brussels, July 29, 2024 – The European Commission recently launched formal infringement procedures against all 27 member states for failing to meet waste collection and recycling targets as mandated by EU law. This legal action highlights the challenges faced by the European Union in achieving its ambitious environmental goals. APPLiA, representing the home appliance industry, believes that this juncture highlights once again the need to revise the current Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive to close the gaps and further improve the level of WEEE collected and properly treated and recycled across the EU.

The context

Targets, defined in the EU's Waste Framework Directive, required countries to prepare at least 50 percent of their municipal waste for reuse or recycling including paper, plastic metal and glass, by 2020, and to recycle at least 55 percent of all packaging distributed and thrown out within the European market by 2008 by 2008. Additionally, the majority of countries also failed to separately collect and treat at least 65 percent of electrical and electronic equipment placed on the market over three years, as required by EU rules on electronic waste in the WEEE Directive.

"The inadequacy in meeting the targets by all Member states, highlighted by these infringement procedures, demonstrates a need for reform within the WEEE legislation," says APPLiA Director General, Paolo Falcioni *"It is time to rethink our approach to waste management and set ambitious yet attainable goals."*

Identifying the gaps

The obligation to separately collect WEEE needs to be implemented by all actors handling WEEE. Even after 20 years of experience, several collectors still fail to comply with the requirement to separately collect WEEE, often mixing it with other waste fractions like scrap metal, construction waste, or demolition waste. This leads to improper treatment of the WEEE and thus to an increased environmental impact, loss of valuable resources, and missed opportunities for reuse.

Many studies and official reports, including Eurostat data, reveal that the majority of countries struggle to meet the current targets set by the Directive. The methodology, which primarily uses the quantity of Electrical and Electronic Equipment (EEE) placed on the market (POM) as a metric, does not accurately correspond to the actual amount of WEEE



generated and collected in a country. This discrepancy has led to significant compliance issues and opens up the debate about how realistic and fit for purpose the collection target is. Flaws in the collection methodologies are becoming more apparent as experience with WEEE management develops and the statistical base grows.

APPLiA recommends that future WEEE legislation should define clear and enforceable legal obligations for all actors involved, including producers, collection operators, treatment operators as well as the member states themselves, based on a good understanding of their respective roles in WEEE management. Moreover, to close the gaps and further improve the level of WEEE collected, properly treated, and recycled across the EU, we recommend that the legal requirements related to the collection of WEEE are revised.

A call for change: APPLiA's perspective

In conclusion, to effectively address these shortcomings and elevate the standard of WEEE management across the EU, APPLiA proposes to:

- 1) Revise collection targets methodology:** A more realistic and direct linkage between new EEE placed on the market and the actual amount of WEEE collected in each member state must be established. This should consider factors that influence collection such as expected lifetime, technological advancements, market trends, consumer behaviour, and the value of secondary raw materials. In addition there should be a strict enforcement of the separate collection requirement.
- 2) Enforce legal obligations for all parties:** Future legislation should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all WEEE actors involved in the collection, transportation, sorting and treatment under an effectively enforced legislation to ensure that all WEEE is accounted for and treated properly. Targets for enforcement could be set as an obligation for Member states and an EU enforcement agency should audit the obligations of the Member state.

"The current targets are not achievable as they stand, given they don't fully account for the the development of market realities and the practical experience of WEEE management," concludes APPLiA Senior Environment Policy Director Korrina Hegarty "A revised, well-informed legislative framework is crucial to meeting our environmental commitments and safeguarding resources for future generations."

The European Commission's legal pursuit spotlights a critical juncture in our journey towards a sustainable future. It is vital for policy frameworks to be both supportive and enabling. APPLiA calls for a cohesive and comprehensive approach to address the bottlenecks impeding progress. This involves not only strict adherence to protocols but also incentivising the adoption of new, efficient technologies and practices.

