THE BALTIPLAST **GUIDEBOOK**
FOR REDUCING SINGLE-USE PLASTICS AND
PLASTIC PACKAGING IN BUSINESSES

SMALL ACTIONS **PAY OFF**

Interreg Baltic Sea Region
Co-funded by the European Union
CIRCULAR ECONOMY BALTIPLAST

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BALTIPLAST: Baltic Approaches to Handling Plastic Pollution under a Circular Economy Context, Deliverable 3.3, May 2025

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SUP	Single Use Plastics
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CE	Circular Economy
PIT	Plastic Inventory Tool
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
PPWD	Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive
PPWR	Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation
ESPR	Eco-Design for Sustainable Products Regulation
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
CEAP	Circular Economy Action Plan
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
DRS	Germany's Deposit Return System
GPP	Green Public Procurement
CO_2e	Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
kg/y	Kilogram per Year
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the guidebook

The Guidebook on Plastic Waste Management in the Baltic Sea Region is designed to support businesses – ranging from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to large corporations – in adopting effective strategies to reduce their use of single-use plastics (SUPs) and plastic packaging, with the ultimate goal of minimizing the amount of plastic waste generated through their operations.

This guidebook serves as a practical tool for transferring the solutions developed within the BALTIPLAST project to companies. It introduces a selection of soft measures – low effort, low investment actions – that help prevent plastic pollution and promote the plastic-free approach. Additionally, it highlights technical solutions for reducing the use of single-use plastics and plastic packaging.

Guided by the motto "small actions pay off", this guidebook showcases the outcomes of the BALTIPLAST project. It seeks to bridge existing gaps in documentation and dissemination of plastic waste management initiatives across the Baltic Sea Region, ensuring that valuable experiences, lessons learned, and best practices reach a broader audience. The guidebook also promotes a more conscious use of resources by challenging prevailing practices surrounding single-use plastics and encouraging their more efficient and purposeful use where viable alternatives are not yet available.

As a complement to this guidebook, we have also produced a video that highlights key plastic waste challenges as well as successful case studies from the BALTIPLAST project and other relevant initiatives committed to tackling plastic pollution. Together, these resources aim to support businesses in making informed decisions, aligning with sustainability goals and strategies, and contributing to a cleaner, more circular economy (CE) in the Baltic Sea Region.

1.2 Relevance of SUP reduction for businesses (environmental, regulatory and economic benefits)

Plastic Waste: From Environmental Issue to Strategic Business Priority

In 2022, Europe generated 32.3 million tonnes of plastic waste, yet only about one-third of this waste is recycled . The rest is incinerated, landfilled, or ends up in the environment, contributing to pollution and the loss of valuable resources. What was once seen primarily as an environmental concern has now become a growing and urgent challenge for businesses, which are under increasing pressure to manage their plastic use more responsibly and align with circular economy principles – not only to comply with current and emerging legislation, but also to meet the evolving market demands and consumer expectations.

In this context, companies are facing growing regulatory pressures, financial risks, and reputational challenges linked to their plastic consumption. Taking action on plastic waste is not only an imperative responsibility but it should be recognized as a strategic opportunity to future-proof operations and align with emerging sustainability standards.

Navigating Regulations: Staying Ahead of the Curve

The European Union is enforcing stricter regulations to combat plastic waste and accelerate the transition to a circular economy. Key legislative frameworks include the Single-Use Plastics Directive, which targets the reduction of specific plastic items and promotes alternatives, and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which mandates greater transparency in sustainability performance, including the use of plastic.

Moreover, plastic pollution is also becoming an increasingly important factor in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting, directly influencing investor confidence, customer trust, and supply chain expectations. Thus, staying ahead of these regulatory shifts is essential for maintaining compliance, enhancing business resilience and brand reputation in the current sustainability-driven market.

Building Resilience: Gaining Competitive Advantage

Beyond reducing environmental impact and meeting regulatory requirements, cutting down on plastic consumption and waste offers tangible financial and strategic advantages for businesses. A well-designed plastic reduction strategy often starts by reassessing and reorganising internal processes, helping to identify inefficient practices across operations. This streamlining can lead to significant cost savings while also improving overall resource efficiency.

For instance, implementing reusable systems or optimizing packaging can significantly reduce procurement and logistics expenses, as well as minimize waste management costs. At the same time, aligning with the growing consumer demand for sustainable products and services, helps reinforce brand loyalty and the company's competitive positioning.

To sum up, addressing plastic use has become a critical priority for businesses across all sectors, not only for environmental reasons but also due to growing economic, regulatory and reputational pressures. Key reasons why plastics are a pressing business issue include:

- Rising disposal and compliance costs, especially for mixed or contaminated plastics;
- Stricter regulations at EU and national levels, which require transparent reporting and reduction of plastic use;
- Reputational risks, stakeholders with higher expectations which is not met can risk brand trust and customer loyalty;
- Impact on business locations, particularly in coastal or environmentally sensitive areas affected by plastic pollution;
- Supply chain vulnerabilities, as shown during COVID-19, when virgin plastic availability was disrupted;
- Need to future-proof operations by anticipating market shifts, policy developments, and stakeholder expectations.

By tackling plastic use proactively, businesses can reduce risks, contribute to the circular economy and position themselves to thrive in a resource-constrained and sustainability-driven future.

1.3 Overview of the BALTIPLAST project and its role

The BALTIPLAST project is committed to reducing single-use plastic consumption and advancing solutions for improved plastic waste management in the Baltic Sea Region. It supports businesses, municipalities and other stakeholders by providing them with practical tools, strategic approaches, and collaborative solutions to address the growing plastic pollution challenge. Recognizing the significant risks posed by plastic waste in the region, the project promotes reduction efforts through behaviour change, optimised waste management practices, and technical innovations.

How the BALTIPLAST Project Supports Businesses?

The BALTIPLAST Project empowers businesses to move away from a linear, fossil-based system and transition toward a more circular and sustainable approach to plastics. It helps companies assess their current plastic consumption, identify tailored reduction strategies and implement effective solutions that align with their operational needs as well as broader corporate, local and regional sustainability goals.

By doing so, BALTIPLAST enables businesses to stay ahead of evolving regulations, improving operational efficiency, and strengthen corporate environmental responsibility. Taking proactive steps today not only contributes to environmental protection but also builds long-term business resilience in a rapidly evolving regulatory and market landscape.

Challenges for Business	BALTIPLAST support
Lack of awareness of how much plastic is consumed within company operations.	Plastic assessment tools to measure and analyze current plastic usage in company operations.
Dependency on fossil-based plastic materials due to lack of viable, cost-effective alternatives.	Tailored reduction strategies based on the company's sector, size, and regional context.
Limited internal capacity or expertise to design and implement circular plastic strategies.	Capacity-building and guidance to support the implementation of circular practices.
Difficulty aligning plastic reduction efforts with broader corporate sustainability goals.	Alignment with corporate, local, and regional sustainability goals, ensuring coherence and impact.
Increased pressure from evolving regulations (e.g., EU Single-Use Plastics Directive).	Support in anticipating and complying with future regulations, reducing compliance risks.
Complexity in identifying tailored and scalable solutions that suit specific industry contexts.	Sector-specific guidance and showcases real-world pilot examples from diverse business types (learn from peers and adopt proven, scalable solutions)

Figure 1. Support of BALTIPLAST project to businesses

In a landscape where businesses are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their environmental impact, the challenges of plastic reduction can seem complex and overwhelming. However, with the right tools, guidance, and strategies, these challenges can be transformed into actionable opportunities. **Figure 1** highlights how BALTIPLAST offers a practical pathway forward, empowering businesses to understand their plastic footprint, implement effective and scalable solutions, and align their actions with both regulatory demands and market expectations. By adopting these measures, companies not only improve their environmental performance but also build resilience, gain a competitive edge, and contribute meaningfully to a more circular and sustainable future.

1.4 How to use this guide?

This guide is designed for any company – regardless of sector, size, or location – seeking to reduce its plastic consumption and move towards a plastic-free approach.

1. Understand the Regulatory Landscape

- √ Familiarize yourself with current regulations relevant to your operations.
- √ Understand which requirements are mandatory and which are voluntary.
- √ Use our comprehensive legislation overview to check compliance and best practices in the realm of plastics.

2. Discover financial and environmental benefits

- √ Explore our proposed low-effort, low-investment measures to reduce single-use plastics.
- √ Benefit from reduced waste, lower operational costs and decreased CO_2 emissions.

3. Follow our Step-by-Step Action Plans

We'll guide you through the entire process:

- √ Identify main plastic consumption sources in your company.
- √ Comparing these findings with your sustainability targets.
- √ Select the most suitable reduction measures.
- √ Implement those measures effectively across your operations.
- √ Engage internal and external stakeholders for long-term success.

4. Explore best practices and success stories

- √ Check these real-world examples showcasing the tangible benefits of adopting our solutions
- √ Get inspired to start your plastic-free journey.

The guidebook concludes with a call to action – inviting you and your peers to become part of a growing movement working toward a plastic-waste-free Baltic Sea Region.

The goal is to create a domino effect, where your actions inspire broader change – among suppliers, partners, and even in your employees' personal lives.

2. COMPLIANCE & REGULATIONS

2.1 Why Plastic Regulations Matter for Businesses?

Plastic regulations are no longer just a legal obligation, they are a strategic necessity for modern businesses. Across the EU, legislations such as the Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Directive and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD) and the upcoming Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) and Eco-Design for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) are fundamentally reshaping how plastics are designed, produced, used, and managed.

These policies aim to reduce environmental harm, promote responsible production, and accelerate the shift to a circular economy. For businesses, they bring not only compliance requirements but also opportunities to improve efficiency, drive innovation, and enhance market competitiveness.

By proactively aligning with current and future regulations, companies can:

- Reduce operational costs by cutting down on plastic waste and optimizing materials.
- Enhance brand reputation and attract eco-conscious consumers, investors, and partners.
- Avoid fines, legal risks and supply chain disruptions.
- Future-proof operations by implementing circular economy principles.
- Build stronger customer loyalty by aligning with growing consumer demand for sustainable and responsible brands.
- Tap into emerging green market niches, opening new revenue streams and competitive advantages.
- Contribute to environmental sustainability, social welfare, and the creation of green jobs, supporting broader regional and global sustainability goals.

With consumer expectations, investor priorities, and policy frameworks shifting toward sustainability, plastic regulations are shaping the future of business operations across industries.

2.2 Key Areas of Plastic Regulation

Plastic regulations in the European region currently focus on four key areas:

Single-Use Plastics (SUP) Restrictions

The Single-Use Plastics Directive (SUP Directive) is one of the most impactful regulations, banning and restricting common disposable plastic products such as cutlery, straws, and plates. It aims to reduce plastic litter, especially in marine environments, and shift businesses toward reusable or biodegradable alternatives.

Packaging & Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

Businesses that produce or use plastic packaging must comply with packaging waste regulations, such as the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD) or more recently, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR), which sets binding requirements for packaging design, reuse, and waste management, applying directly across all 27 EU member states. Aimed at reducing the environmental impact of packaging, the regulation mandates that by 2030, all packaging placed on the EU market must be recyclable. By 2035, the majority of packaging must meet recyclability standards, and from that year onward, manufacturers will be required to demonstrate that their packaging is extensively recycled.. These regulations enforce recycling targets and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, requiring companies to finance the collection and recycling of their packaging materials.

Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)

The Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) is a key EU strategy that promotes resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable product design. It emphasizes the need for a closed-loop economy, where materials, including plastics, are reused, repaired, or recycled instead of being disposed of. Businesses must align their production and packaging processes with CEAP objectives.

Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) expands sustainability reporting requirements, making it mandatory for companies to disclose environmental impacts, including plastic use and waste management strategies. This directive pushes businesses to adopt transparent and measurable sustainability goals.

EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities

The EU Taxonomy establishes a classification system to help companies and investors identify which economic activities are considered sustainable. It influences financing and investment in industries, encouraging businesses to align their plastic production, recycling, and waste management practices with sustainability goals.

2.3 Upcoming Regulations: Preparing for the Future

The future of plastic regulations will introduce even stricter controls on plastic production, recyclability, and disposal. It is imperative that your business starts preparing for:

- Higher recycled content requirements – Companies will be required to include a minimum percentage of recycled plastic in their products. Starting August 12, 2026, it will become mandatory and replace the previous Packaging Directive.
- Stronger Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rules – Businesses will bear greater financial responsibility for the waste their products generate.
- Stricter eco-design regulations – Packaging and plastic products must meet new durability, reusability, and recyclability standards. Specific design requirements are imposed to enhance the recyclability of packaging. This means companies are encouraged to eliminate unnecessary packaging and, where possible, use reusable packaging.
- New plastic taxation policies – Governments may introduce additional taxes on virgin plastic materials and single-use items to encourage sustainable alternatives.

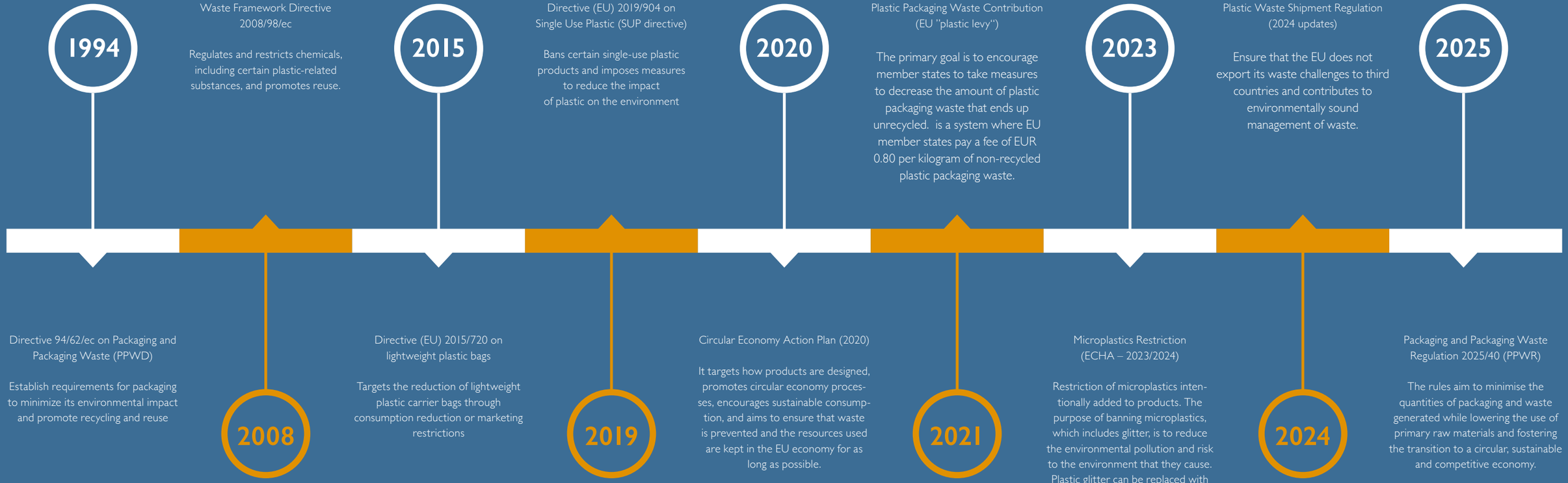
Businesses that act now to adapt their packaging, supply chains, and waste management strategies will be in a stronger position when these laws take effect.

EXISTING PLASTIC REGULATIONS IN EUROPE

(APPLICABLE TO BUSINESSES)

This section provides an overview of key European regulations governing plastic use and waste management, focusing on policies that affect businesses operating in specific countries, the broader Baltic Sea Region (BSR), and the EU as a whole. Although these regulations are developed and implemented at the EU level, their influence extends to the national level, often driving the creation of country-specific legislation such as Germany's VerpackG or Sweden's plastic tax.

As BSR countries share interconnected ecosystems and strong economic ties, national regulations not only respond to EU directives but also reinforce regional progress. This creates a positive cycle where EU-level initiatives inspire national action, which in turn contributes to broader regional harmonization in reducing plastic pollution, promoting circularity, and aligning standards across supply chains. National-level regulations are listed in Annex 1.



2.4 How to Ensure Compliance for the Reduction of Plastic Waste: A Practical Guide

Reducing plastic waste has become a key focus for businesses as governments and regulatory bodies introduce stricter sustainability standards. To help companies navigate these regulations and implement effective waste reduction strategies, we present here a comprehensive checklist and actionable steps for compliance.

1. Identify Relevant Regulations

√ Assess Business Activities: Review your operations to understand which sustainability regulations apply based on industry, location, and supply chain (e.g., EU directives, national laws).

√ Stay Informed: Regularly monitor updates from regulatory bodies, industry organizations, and government publications to stay on top of any changes. Some relevant institutions to find updated information are:

- o European Commission – Environment
- o European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) – Especially relevant for packaging and plastics regulation
- o European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform

√ Gap Analysis: Conduct an audit to identify gaps in compliance. Determine what areas need improvement to meet current or upcoming regulations.

2. Integrate Compliance Measures

√ Track Sustainability Metrics: Implement tracking systems to monitor plastic usage, waste generation, and other sustainability metrics in real-time. Some useful sites are Circularity Check by Ecopreneur & WBCSD, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), EU Consumer Footprint Calculator.

√ Train Employees: Provide ongoing training to ensure employees are aware of compliance requirements and integrate sustainable practices into their daily activities. Some relevant site to find information are EU Academy – Circular Economy Courses and ILO Green Jobs Training Tools.

√ Sustainable Alternatives: Transition to eco-friendly packaging, use recycled materials, and adopt circular economy principles to minimize plastic waste generation (e.g: EU Ecodesign Directory and RecyClass – Tool for assessing recyclability)

3. Future-Proof Your Business for Sustainability

√ Leverage Data & Reporting Tools: Utilize ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) tools to monitor sustainability progress and generate reports for stakeholders and regulators (e.g: CDP Disclosure System and EU Taxonomy Navigator)

√ Benchmark Against Best Practices: Regularly compare your sustainability efforts with industry leaders to identify areas for improvement and maintain a competitive edge (e.g.: EU Circular Economy Monitoring Framework)

√ Proactive Innovation: Invest in sustainable product development and supply chain improvements that reduce plastic waste and enhance long-term resilience.

4. Anticipate Future

√ According to the latest Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum, environmental and socio-political risks rank among the most critical threats for global business.

√ Increase resilience by integrating environmental and socio-political risks into your strategic planning.

√ Assess climate-related financial risks and safeguard your business from future regulatory, reputational and market shocks.

2.5 Incentives, Penalties, and Support Programs

In Europe, several countries have implemented incentives, penalties, and support programs aimed at reducing plastic waste and promoting sustainability. Businesses operating in the region can benefit from these programs, which offer financial support, regulatory guidance, and market advantages.

1. Incentives

- Financial Support and Grants: Governments in the Baltic region offer financial incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices, including reducing plastic waste.
  - o Example: The European Union's LIFE Program offers funding to projects that contribute to environmental sustainability, including plastic waste reduction. Businesses can apply for grants to implement circular economy practices and reduce plastic use (EU LIFE Program).
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR): Countries within the BSR and beyond are increasingly adopting EPR systems, which hold producers accountable for the lifecycle of their products.
  - o Example: Germany's Deposit Return System (DRS) encourages consumers to return plastic bottles and cans by offering a deposit refund, helping businesses participate in recycling efforts. In 2020, the system achieved a 98% return rate for bottles. (Germany's DRS).
- Eco-Labelling: Companies that meet environmental standards are eligible for certifications that can enhance their marketability.
  - o The Nordic Swan Ecolabel is a holistic environmental labelling scheme. It promotes resource efficiency, reduced climate impact, a non-toxic circular economy and conservation of biodiversity – always with a strong focus on health (The Nordic Swan Ecolabel).
  - o Latvia's Eco-Label is a national certification that recognizes products and services meeting high environmental standards, including those that reduce plastic usage. The label helps businesses promote their commitment to sustainability (Latvia's Eco-Label).

2. Penalties

- Fines for Non-Compliance: Businesses that fail to meet waste management or plastic reduction standards may face fines.
  - o Example: Estonia's Waste Act imposes penalties for failing to properly manage plastic packaging waste, including fines for companies that do not participate in the national recycling programs. Non-compliance can lead to significant financial penalties (Estonia's Waste Act).

- Market Exclusion: Companies that do not comply with environmental regulations may lose access to specific markets, particularly in government procurement.
  - o Example: In Estonia, the Ministry of the Environment has introduced green public procurement (GPP) criteria. Companies that supply products with non-recyclable or excessive plastic packaging may be excluded from bidding on public contracts – especially for food services, office supplies, and event management. (Green Public Procurement in Estonia).

- Environmental Fines: Non-compliance with plastic waste management standards could also result in environmental fines.
  - o Example: Lithuania applies a plastic tax as part of its effort to meet the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan and the EU Plastic Packaging Waste Levy. Companies that fail to reduce or recycle their plastic packaging may face financial penalties through increased waste management fees and levies on non-recyclable plastic (Lithuania's Waste Legislation).

3. Support Programs

- Government Grants and Funding: European governments offer financial support to businesses transitioning to more sustainable operations.
  - o Example: The European Commission's Circular Economy Action Plan provides funding for businesses that implement circular economy practices, including reducing plastic waste. The plan encourages resource efficiency and supports waste management and recycling innovation (Circular Economy Action Plan).

- Industry Collaboration: Many sectors in Europe collaborate through initiatives that provide support to businesses.
  - o Example: The European Plastics Pact is a collective initiative involving businesses, governments, and other stakeholders aiming to make plastic packaging recyclable and circular by 2025. It provides resources, partnerships, and guidance to businesses committed to reducing plastic waste (European Plastics Pact).

- Recycling and Waste Management Support: Many Baltic countries offer support programs for businesses involved in recycling or waste management.
  - o Example: In Lithuania, the government provides support for companies to invest in waste separation and recycling infrastructure, helping businesses comply with national recycling targets and reduce plastic waste (Lithuanian Waste Management).

SUPPORT

3. COST-BENEFIT & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

3.1 The business case for SUP reduction

A Strategic Perspective: Cost Savings, Competitive Advantage, Brand Reputation, Customer Demand, and Supply Chain Resilience

As demonstrated by the BALTIPLAST project and global best practices, integrating SUP reduction into business operations can create value across several dimensions, from enhanced financial performance to long-term resilience. This section explores five key pillars that make the business case for SUP reduction compelling for companies of all types and sizes.

3.1.1 Cost Savings through Efficiency

One of the strongest incentives for reducing SUP is cost efficiency. Contrary to the common perception that sustainability comes at a premium, many SUP reduction measures lead to immediate or short-term financial savings. Companies that replace disposable items with reusable alternatives – such as refillable packaging, return systems, or bulk dispensing – often reduce recurring procurement costs significantly. For example, replacing plastic cutlery, cups, or packaging with durable, washable alternatives minimizes the need for constant restocking.

In addition to procurement savings, companies can reduce costs related to waste management and disposal. Landfilling or incinerating plastic waste comes with both financial and environmental costs, by reducing the volume of plastic waste generated, businesses can lower collection fees, avoid penalties, and even benefit from the incentives provided by local or national governments for waste reduction.

Implementing lightweight packaging designs or material-efficient solutions also offers savings in transport and storage. Less packaging means reduced shipping weight and volume, which can lower logistics costs, especially for companies operating across borders or managing high product turnover.

3.1.2 Competitive Advantage in a Changing Market

The market landscape is evolving rapidly. Nowadays, consumers, clients, and governments are placing increasing pressure on companies to demonstrate environmental responsibility. Businesses that proactively reduce SUPs position themselves as sustainability leaders and gain a valuable competitive edge in comparison to their counterparts.

Pioneers in plastic reduction often benefit from improved market visibility and stronger brand loyalty. In highly competitive sectors – such as retail, food service, tourism, and manufacturing – this differentiation can be a decisive factor. Companies embracing SUP reduction are more likely to be selected as suppliers by environmentally conscious clients or public institutions with green procurement policies.

Moreover, sustainability-driven innovation opens doors to new business models and partnerships. For example, offering zero-waste product lines, establishing take-back schemes, or collaborating on circular packaging solutions can enhance your product portfolio and attract new customer segments. Businesses that participate in such initiatives not only stand out but often unlock new revenue streams and funding opportunities tied to green innovation.

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3.1.3 Strengthening Brand Reputation and Building Trust

Today's stakeholders expect companies to take responsibility for their environmental footprint – and plastic use is a visible and symbolic part of their sustainability efforts. By actively reducing SUPs, companies send a clear message about their commitment to sustainability, transparency, and future-oriented values.

Public commitments to reduce plastic use can significantly boost brand reputation, especially when backed by measurable results and consistent communication. Internally, these initiatives increase employee pride and engagement, as staff feel part of a company that's making a difference. Externally, they build trust with consumers, investors, regulators, and the broader community.

In the BALTIPLAST project, companies that communicated their plastic reduction efforts – through social media, product labelling, or sustainability reports – experienced positive customer feedback and increased media attention. Transparent storytelling around environmental progress is a powerful tool that strengthens stakeholder relations and positions your business as a credible actor in the sustainability transition.

Being known as a responsible brand also pays off during times of crisis or scrutiny. A solid environmental track record can help buffer reputational risks, enhance investor confidence, and even support legal compliance in cases where stricter policies are enforced

3.1.4 Meeting Evolving Customer Demand

In today's world, consumer preferences are shifting. More people are actively seeking products and services with lower environmental impact – especially younger generations, who are increasingly driving purchasing trends. Reducing SUPs directly responds to this demand and aligns your business with consumer values.

By offering plastic-free options, reusable packaging, or minimal-waste alternatives, companies can appeal to environmentally conscious customers and build lasting brand loyalty. Studies have shown that a growing number of consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products. This trend is particularly strong in sectors such as food and beverage, cosmetics, fashion, and e-commerce, where packaging plays a prominent role in product perception.

BALTIPLAST pilots demonstrated that even small changes, like replacing plastic wrapping with compostable paper or offering refill stations, can resonate strongly with customers. These measures can enhance the customer experience and create emotional connections that go beyond the transaction, fostering repeat business and positive word-of-mouth.

Incorporating sustainability into your value proposition also enables stronger marketing narratives and customer engagement campaigns. Whether through educational content, loyalty programs, or branded sustainability challenges, businesses can turn SUP reduction into a key part of their customer relationship strategy.

3.1.5 Enhancing Supply Chain Resilience

The global plastics supply chain is facing increasing volatility due to fossil fuel dependency, regulatory pressure, and public backlash. Relying on disposable, petroleum-based plastic products exposes companies to long-term risks, including rising material costs, trade restrictions, and policy bans.

Transitioning away from SUPs help companies future-proof their supply chains. By embracing circular design principles and working with suppliers on sustainable material sourcing, businesses can reduce exposure to raw material disruptions and regulatory fines. Additionally, investing in reusable systems or closed-loop logistics models increases control over material flows and reduces dependence on third-party suppliers.

Reducing plastic use also encourages upstream innovation and collaboration. Companies that engage their supply chain partners in sustainability initiatives are more likely to co-develop efficient packaging, identify eco-friendly alternatives, and uncover synergies that benefit all parties. This approach builds stronger, more transparent relationships across the value chain.

The BALTIPLAST project highlighted that businesses who worked closely with suppliers to reduce packaging or switch materials not only improved sustainability metrics but also gained flexibility and responsiveness – two key qualities in an increasingly unpredictable global market.

The BALTIPLAST project has shown that even small, practical actions can lead to measurable benefits, both financially and environmentally. Small actions pay off!

3.2 Measuring Financial and Environmental Impacts

Evaluating both the financial and environmental impacts of implemented measures is essential to assess their effectiveness. This includes tracking reductions in plastic consumption, carbon footprint, and waste disposal costs. To support this, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted using the data collected through our BALTIPLAST plastic inventory tool tailored for businesses.

The following data was gathered from participating companies:

- General organisational information (contacts, number of employees, etc.)
- Types of plastic products in use, categorised by office areas
- Amounts of products, automatically converted into kg/year
- Type of plastic/material
- Disposal methods, including type of bin used
- Reduction measures implemented and estimated reductions per product

The methodology for conducting the EIA is straightforward. Based on the quantity and type of plastic material, the environmental impact associated with its production was calculated. End-of-life impacts were also assessed – items disposed in the residual waste bin were attributed to incineration, while those sorted into the recycling bins were assigned impacts related to recycling processes. The effectiveness of the reduction measures was evaluated by comparing the initial environmental impact (before implementation) with the reduced impact, subtracting the avoided emissions and resource use resulting from decreased plastic consumption.

A total of 18 companies participated during the implementation of the BALTIPLAST project: 5 from Estonia, 8 from Lithuania, and 5 from Latvia. The figure #2 illustrates the current and achieved carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2 eq) emissions per employee (in kilograms per year) on average for Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia.

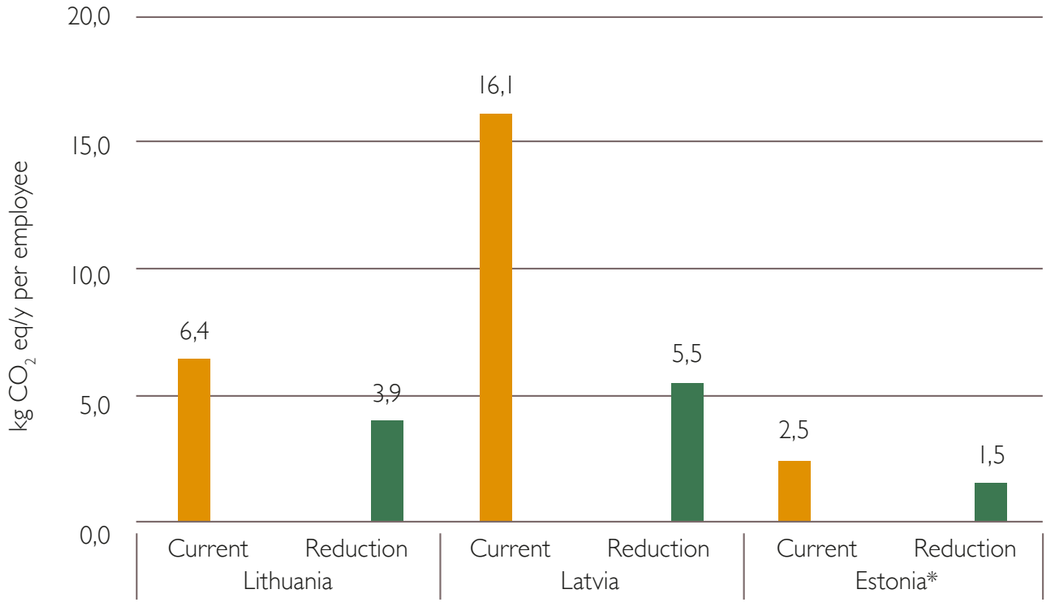


Figure 2. Average CO_2 eq emissions per country per employee for businesses per year

In Lithuania, emissions decreased from 6.4 kg to 3.9 kg CO_2 eq/y per employee following the implementation of reduction measures. Latvia had the highest initial emissions at 16.1 kg CO_2 eq/y per employee, which were reduced to 5.5 kg CO_2 eq/y per employee. In Estonia, initial emissions were 2.5 kg CO_2 eq/y per employee with a potential reduction to 1.5 kg CO_2 eq/year per employee*. These figures reflect the situation before and after businesses adopted reduction measures, primarily by reducing or avoiding certain products - mainly food packaging.

To make these results more tangible – especially for those unfamiliar with CO_2 emissions - marginal prevention costs were calculated. This refers to the monetary investment required to prevent this amount of CO_2 emissions per year. These figures help illustrate the financial efficiency of plastic reduction measures from a business perspective. Table #1 presents the marginal prevention costs (in EUR/kg CO_2 per year) for Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, comparing values before and after implementing reduction measures.

- In Lithuania, costs decreased from € 21.30 to € 15.80 per pilot business
- In Latvia, they dropped from € 100.90 to € 62.40
- In Estonia, costs fell from € 16.30 to € 9.80 – though these figures are based on estimated reductions extrapolated from trends observed in the neighbouring countries.

On average, companies achieved costs savings of 26–40% through the implementation of reduction and avoidance measures, primarily targeting unnecessary plastic items.

Table 1. Marginal Prevention Costs of CO_2 Emissions from Businesses (EUR/kg CO_2) per Year

	Current Situation, €		After Reduction, €	
	Per pilot	Total	Per pilot	Total
Lithuania	21,3	170,33	15,8	126,16
Latvia	100,9	504,59	62,4	311,94
Estonia*	16,3	81,39	9,8	49,21

The solutions developed through the BALTIPLAST project led to significant environmental improvements, with participating businesses reporting average carbon footprint reductions of 39% to 66%. Notably, these environmental gains were accompanied by substantial economic benefits: the implementation of reduction measures resulted in a 26–40% decrease in marginal prevention costs. These findings demonstrate that well-targeted plastic reduction strategies can effectively lower both environmental impact and the financial effort required to prevent emissions, making them a win-win for sustainability and business performance.

* The reduction value for Estonia is based on extrapolations from the trends observed in Latvia and Lithuania and should be considered an estimate.

4. STEP-BY-STEP ACTION PLAN

Reducing plastic waste in a business setting requires a structured approach, balancing immediate actions with long-term strategies. This step-by-step guide provides businesses with a practical framework for assessing, reducing, and monitoring their plastic usage, ensuring measurable impact and sustainable change.

4.1 Assess your current plastic usage

Step 1.

Before implementing any changes, businesses must first understand their plastic consumption patterns. A plastic inventory provides a clear baseline and helps identify where reductions can be made.

How to Conduct a Plastic Inventory:

- Collect Data: Track plastic waste generation by weighing and categorizing it over a set period (e.g., one month).
- Analyse Procurement: Review purchasing records to identify plastic packaging, office supplies, or single-use items entering the supply chain.
- Engage Employees: Encourage staff to log their personal plastic use within the workplace to get a full picture of daily habits.
- Identify Key Areas: Determine where the highest amounts of plastic waste occur – whether in packaging, food services, or office supplies.

Tip: Use the BALTIPLAST Plastic Inventory Tool to structure and simplify this process

4.2 Identify priorities and set goals

Step 2.

With a clear understanding of plastic usage, businesses should define realistic and impactful reduction targets.

Setting SMART Goals:

- Specific: Focus on tangible areas (e.g., "Reduce plastic packaging waste by 30% in 12 months").
- Measurable: Use weight or quantity metrics to track progress.
- Achievable: Ensure that goals are practical and align with business operations.
- Relevant: Prioritize actions that align with sustainability goals and stakeholder expectations.
- Time-bound: Set a clear timeframe for implementation and review.

Example: A hotel might aim to eliminate single-use plastic toiletries and replace them with refillable dispensers within six months

4.3 Implement reduction strategies

Step 3.

Once priorities are set, businesses can begin taking concrete steps to minimize plastic use.

Common Reduction Strategies:

- Switch to Reusable Alternatives: Replace plastic cups, bags, and utensils with durable, reusable options.
- Improve Procurement Practices: Work with suppliers to reduce plastic packaging or opt for bulk purchases to minimize waste.
- Reduce Single-Use Plastics in Daily Operations: Encourage the use of refillable containers and provide alternatives to disposable items.
- Optimize Waste Sorting & Recycling: Ensure plastic waste is correctly separated to avoid contamination and improve recycling rates.
- Raise Employee Awareness: Provide internal guidance on how to reduce plastic consumption at work.

Case Example: A waste management centre in Kaunas (Lithuania) successfully cut its previously recorded plastic use by 40% by replacing single-use coffee cups and encouraging employees to bring reusable food containers.

4.4 Engage stakeholders (suppliers, employees, costumers)

Step 4.

Plastic reduction is most effective when all key stakeholders – both internal and external – are actively involved.

Ways to Engage Stakeholders:

- Suppliers: Negotiate plastic-free alternatives and request sustainable packaging options.
- Employees: Provide training sessions, set up challenges, and incentivize plastic-saving habits.
- Customers: Communicate sustainability efforts through marketing, encourage reusable packaging, and offer discounts for eco-friendly practices.

Example: A catering business in Valmiera (Latvia) engaged suppliers to take back and reuse vegetable boxes, reducing their initially recorded plastic waste by 12%.

4.5 Monitor progress and report results and adjust strategies

Step 5.

Sustained impact requires continuous tracking, evaluation, and adaptation.

Key Steps in Monitoring Progress:

- Regular Audits: Conduct periodic plastic inventories to measure improvements.
- Feedback Loops: Gather insights from employees and customers on implemented changes.
- Report Achievements: Share progress through sustainability reports, website updates, and social media.
- Adjust Strategies: If goals aren't met, refine tactics and explore new reduction opportunities.

Example: Businesses in Tallinn (Estonia) noted improved waste sorting and lower plastic contamination as a consequence of the Plastic Inventory process prompting them to further refine their recycling processes

5. BEST PRACTICES AND SUCCESS STORIES

5.1 Best practices in the BSR

In the BSR, businesses have played a critical role in advancing practical, scalable solutions to reduce plastic consumption and waste. Through projects like BALTIPLAST and other regional initiatives, companies have piloted measures that not only contribute to environmental protection but also deliver operational and economic benefits. The following best practices illustrate how businesses across the region are tackling plastic pollution:

Switching to Reusable Systems to replace SUPs
Transitioning from single-use packaging to reusable systems has proven effective, not only in reducing waste volumes and disposal costs but also economically advantageous for businesses. These systems often involve moderate initial investments yet deliver long-term savings.

Example: In Aarhus, Denmark, businesses joined forces with technology provider TOMRA and the municipality to launch REUSEABLE, the world's first city-wide system for reusable takeaway packaging since January 2024. Participating cafés and restaurants offer beverages in reusable cups for a small deposit, which is refunded when cups are returned at automated collection points. This model has achieved an impressive 85% return rate, with over 947,000 cups collected and an estimated 18.6 tonnes of CO_2 saved. For participating businesses, the system reduces reliance on single-use packaging, cuts operational waste costs, and appeals to sustainability-conscious consumers – strengthening customer loyalty and competitive edge.

Optimizing Procurement to Reduce Plastic
Re-evaluating procurement and inventory systems offers businesses an effective strategy to reduce plastic waste at the source. By avoiding over-ordering, choosing products in bulk, and working with suppliers that offer minimal or returnable packaging, companies can significantly lower their plastic footprint.

Example: In Germany, WWTec GmbH & Co. KG developed a packaging optimization strategy for bulk material transport aimed at reducing SUPs. By switching to reusable and returnable packaging systems, this company and its partner businesses significantly cut down on plastic packaging waste while also achieving cost savings and logistical efficiency. The approach emphasizes smarter procurement, bulk packaging, and supplier collaboration as key levers for both environmental and economic benefit.

Integrating Sustainability into Business Operations through Digital Tools
Modern businesses are increasingly recognizing the importance of embedding sustainability into their core operations. Digital tools can play a pivotal role in this transformation by providing actionable insights and facilitating the implementation of sustainable practices.

Example: The SUSTOOL project, is developing a digital sustainability reporting tool tailored for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This tool aims to assist businesses in assessing their environmental impact, including plastic usage, and in identifying areas for improvement. By leveraging such tools, companies can make informed decisions to reduce plastic consumption, enhance operational efficiency, and meet regulatory requirements.

Engaging Employees in Sustainability Initiatives
Employee involvement is crucial for the success of plastic reduction strategies. Companies have implemented awareness campaigns and sustainability challenges to foster a culture of environmental responsibility.

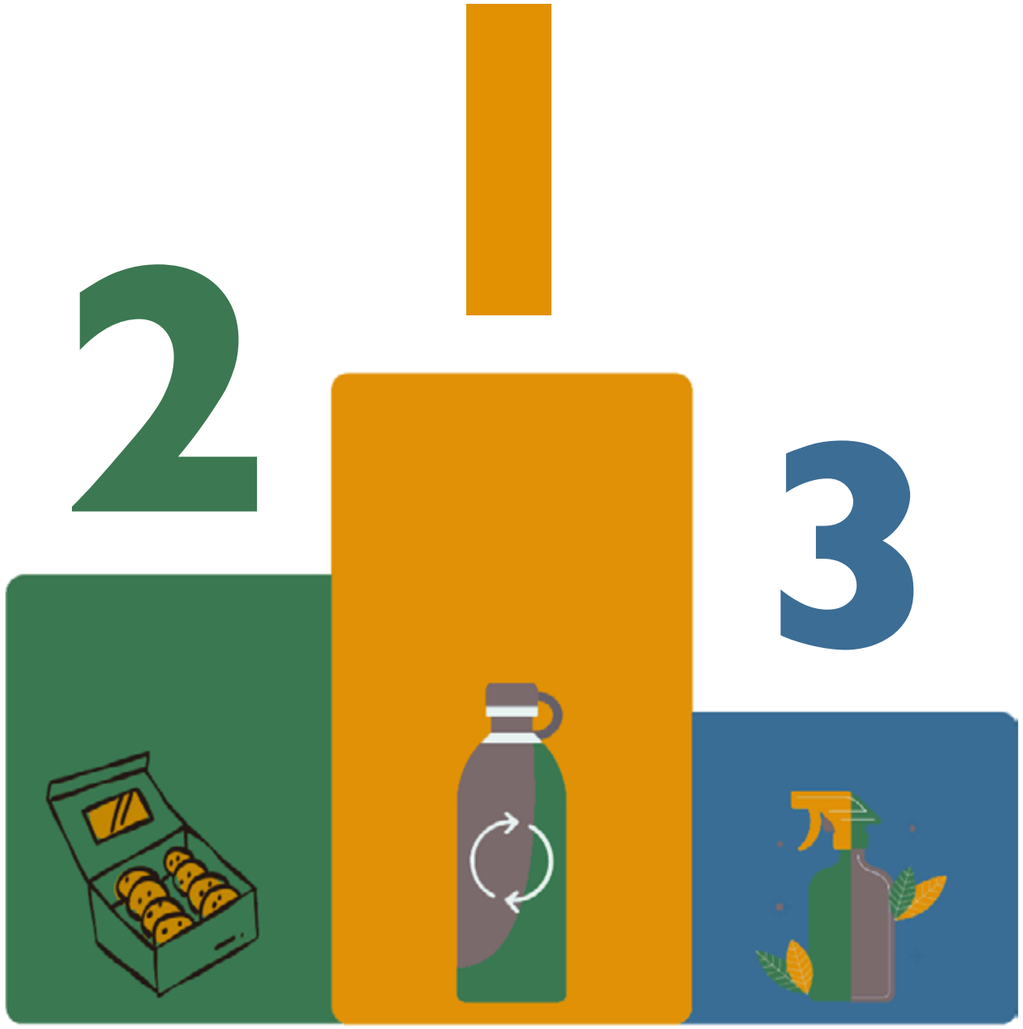
Example: A retail company in Lithuania organized an internal plastic-free month, encouraging departments to propose plastic-saving ideas. Successful initiatives included adopting reusable shipment packaging and centralizing supplies to minimize over-packaging.

Leveraging Sustainability for Brand Differentiation
Companies have used their plastic reduction efforts to strengthen brand identity and appeal to sustainability-minded consumers. By actively reducing plastic usage and adopting eco-friendly practices, businesses not only contribute to environmental conservation but also resonate with the growing segment of environmentally conscious consumers.

Example: MÁDARA Cosmetics, a Latvian manufacturer of organic skincare products, has embedded sustainability into its brand culture. The company utilizes FSC-certified and recyclable packaging and became the first SME in the Baltic states to partner with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to reduce transport emissions by shipping products directly from the manufacturer to the customer. These initiatives have strengthened MÁDARA's brand identity, attracting sustainability-minded customers and expanding its market reach within the EU. This example illustrates that proactive plastic reduction is both an environmental responsibility and a strategic business decision.

5.2 Best Practices Identified from BALTIPLAST Project

During the piloting of the BALTIPLAST Plastic Inventory Tool, businesses from diverse sectors applied the methodology primarily within office environments. Despite differences in size and industry, participating companies consistently implemented similar, effective actions to reduce their plastic footprint.



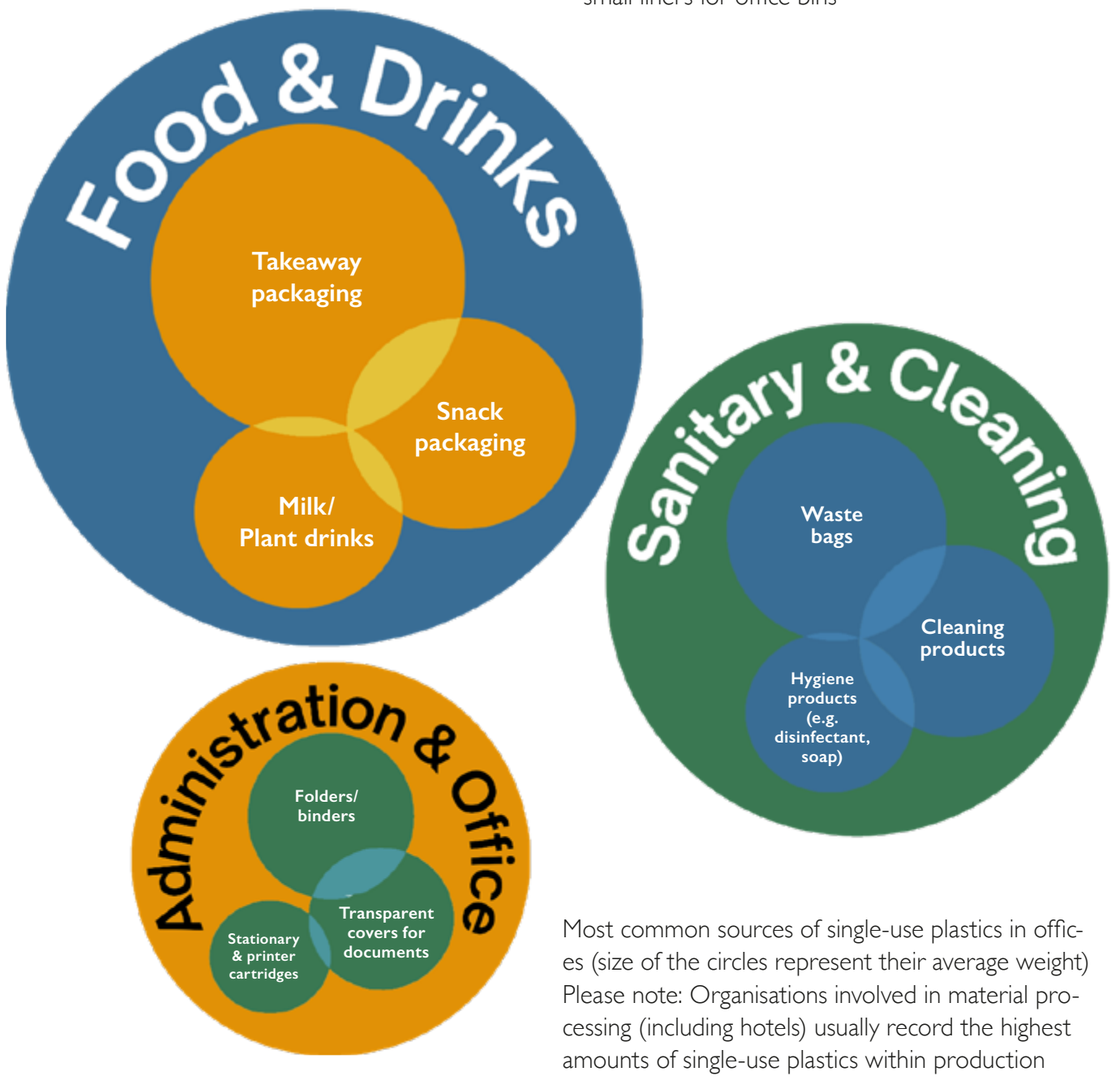
Plastic-free snack packaging

Reusable bottles instead of single-use

Plastic-free cleaning and hygiene products (e.g. concentrates)

Most implemented measures (low-hanging fruits)

√ The following top measures emerged as both practical and impactful across the pilot businesses:
√ Switching to refillable water bottles instead of single-use plastic bottles
√ Reusing folders and office supplies to minimize unnecessary plastic consumption
√ Using reusable food boxes and jars to replace single-use packaging from takeaways and food deliveries
√ Avoiding single-use coffee cups by encouraging reusable mugs or cups
√ Returning packaging (where possible) to suppliers for reuse
√ Reducing snack packaging waste by opting for bulk purchasing options
√ Cutting back on plastic film use, particularly in packaging or deliveries
√ Replacing dishwashing liquid containers with refillable or bulk alternatives
√ Buying coffee and hygiene products in larger packaging to reduce waste per unit
√ Opting out of unnecessary waste bags, especially small liners for office bins



Most common sources of single-use plastics in offices (size of the circles represent their average weight)
Please note: Organisations involved in material processing (including hotels) usually record the highest amounts of single-use plastics within production and/ or incoming goods.

5.3 Case Study 1 – Kaunas Businesses Take Charge: A Journey to Plastic Reduction

Location:
Kaunas, Lithuania

Participants: Businesses from waste management, catering, consulting, and retail

Context

In Kaunas, Lithuania, a group of businesses decided to take action! They knew plastic waste was a growing problem, but how much did their own companies contribute? And more importantly – what could they do about it? The BALTIPLAST plastic inventory pilot gave them the opportunity to find out and take real steps toward change.

The businesses, ranging from waste management and catering services to business consulting and retail, approached the challenge differently. Some collected and weighed all plastic waste over a month, while others analysed procurement records to track how much plastic entered their supply chains. One company even turned the inventory into a team effort, having employees track their own plastic use to get a full picture of everyday habits.

When the results came in, the reality was clear plastic was everywhere, much of it unnecessary. But rather than feeling overwhelmed, the businesses saw opportunities. They got to work designing custom reduction plans, aiming not just to recycle better but to eliminate plastic use wherever possible.

Key Challenges:

Lack of awareness about the quantity and types of plastic used

High prevalence of unnecessary plastics in daily operations

Office habits leading to high volumes of disposable plastics

Benefits

At the Kaunas Regional Development Agency, they discovered that simple changes – like switching to reusable materials and eliminating redundant plastic items – led to an impressive 53% reduction in plastic waste. Meanwhile, at the Kaunas Regional Waste Management Centre, they tackled a common office issue: plastic packaging from takeout meals and coffee cups. By encouraging employees to bring their own reusable containers and ditching disposable cups, they cut their plastic waste by 40%.

Now, these businesses aren't just reducing their own waste – they're leading the way for others. Their experience shows that with simple tools, collaboration, and a commitment to sustainability, plastic waste can be significantly reduced. And this is just the beginning – many of them plan to continue their efforts beyond 2024, setting a new standard for business sustainability in Lithuania and beyond.

53 % Reduction in plastic waste by the Kaunas, Regional Development Agency by switching to reusable items and eliminating redundant plastics

40 % Reduction in office plastic waste by the Kaunas Waste Management Center through reusable food containers and coffee cups

Figure 3. Kaunas Business Case Study

5.4 Case Study 2 – Valmiera Businesses: Acting on Plastic Pollution

Location:
Valmiera, Latvia

Participants: Hotel, event organizer, co-creation studio, university

Context

In Valmiera, a dynamic mix of local businesses is stepping up to tackle the growing problem of plastic waste through the BALTIPLAST plastic inventory pilot. These forward-thinking organizations – ranging from a local hotel and an event organizer to a co-creation studio and universit – are discovering first-hand the extent of their plastic footprint and uncovering practical ways to reduce it.

The hotel has already completed its inventory, revealing significant usage of items such as latex gloves and plastic bags. This eye-opening data has inspired them to explore alternative products and smarter procurement practices. For example, larger plastic bags from deliveries are now being used as waste bags and in collaboration with the cleaning staff they are now reducing the number of gloves and single-use liquid soap in plastic packaging will be replaced with refillable ones. Meanwhile, the event organizer is preparing to launch their own inventory process, setting the stage for transformative changes in their operations.

Key Challenges:

High usage of latex gloves and plastic bags in hotel operations

Single-use packaging for soaps and amenities

Lack of awareness about alternatives and reduction options

Benefits

Each business is approaching the challenge in its own unique way – some meticulously collecting and weighing plastic waste over a month, others analysing purchasing records to track plastic inputs into their supply chains, and some even engaging their staff to monitor everyday plastic use. The results consistently point to a clear opportunity: a substantial amount of the plastic consumed is unnecessary and can be eliminated with targeted actions.

Rather than being overwhelmed, these Valmiera businesses view the findings as a catalyst for change. They are developing customized reduction plans that not only enhance recycling efforts but also aim to phase out plastic use altogether. With the support of the BALTIPLAST pilot, these organizations are setting a new standard for sustainability in the region, proving that with commitment, collaboration, and simple yet effective measures, significant plastic reductions are well within reach – paving the way for a cleaner, greener future beyond 2024.

Significant reduction in plastic items like gloves, bags, and soap packaging by the hotel, through internal audits and product switches

Inventory process launched by the event organizer, paving the way for data-driven reduction strategies

Figure 4. Valmiera Business Case Study

5.5 What works and what to avoid?

Success Factors

- Support from "above": inventories (as well as other measures for sustainability) tend to be more successful when the managerial level not only endorse the project but actively support it
- Personal convictions and personal contacts: many of the businesses in our network have joined both thanks to high environmental values within the team/ leaders and personal contacts with members of local NGOs guiding the inventory/ BALTIPLAST representatives
- Clear responsibilities and good communication within the business and with external stakeholders: collecting the data and implementing reduction measures often requires cross-department collaboration and maintaining good relationships with suppliers and motivate employees
- Creativity: plastic reduction often means getting off the beaten path and rethinking processes to be smarter
- Ideally, a certain time budget can be attributed to the project per week and is not added "on top"
- Often, reduction measures also open up other sustainability measures or efficiency improvements within the business, e.g. less biowaste and paper waste and better sorting
- Focusing on the monetary benefit of saving SUP when convincing the team
- For recruitment personal contacts and a local presence are essential/ very helpful
- Support for inventory by e.g. collaboration with students

Challenges

- Challenges in putting plastic at the top of the agenda - possibly due to conflicts of interest (possibly economic vs. environmental concerns in crisis-laden times, priorities – problem: externalisation of environmental costs)???
- Lack of human and time resources
- Lack of data (e.g. weight of products) to render the inventory more efficient and easier to implement
- Prioritising the implementation of reduction measures
- Difficulties for businesses in conducting the inventory without guidance –

THAT'S WHY WE ARE HERE TO GUIDE

6. CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

6.1 Key take aways: How Reducing Single-Use Plastics Strengthens Your Business

Reducing single-use plastics isn't just good for the planet – it delivers tangible benefits for your business. By making plastics visible, measurable, and avoidable, your company can unlock real benefits such as lower disposal costs, boost stakeholder trust, and readiness for upcoming sustainability reporting requirements.

Across a wide range of businesses, simple but targeted actions have proven highly effective in reducing plastic use. These examples demonstrate that reducing single-use plastics delivers clear environmental and economic value. Here's what we've learned:

- √ Track your plastic usage: Use tools like the Plastic Inventory Tool to identify where plastics are used in procurement, operations, and waste. Measuring your baseline is the first step to making impactful changes.
- √ Rethink procurement: Collaborate with your suppliers to eliminate unnecessary plastic packaging. For instance, the facility of a Hotel in Germany asked its suppliers to find an alternative to plastic foil used for euro pallet deliveries. After three trials, the supplier transitioned to reusable rolling containers, saving 312 kg of plastic per year.
- √ Offer plastic-free services: Redesign service delivery to avoid plastic use altogether. Example: A cleaning company in Hamburg switched to a bag-free waste collection system in offices, saving 472,818 plastic bags annually.
- √ Encourage reuse: Introduce systems that allow continual reuse of materials. Like in Hamburg, where a flowerpot return system for cemeteries led to a 90% reuse rate, saving 1,580 kg of plastic each year.
- √ Quantify the impact: Small operational changes can lead to significant savings. Actions like these can help a company with 100 employees save up to 255 kg of plastic waste annually just by rethinking use of waste bags. This is the equivalent of six industrial plastic waste containers filled with plastic bags.

Ready to start? Measure, rethink, act – and make a real difference!

GET INVOLVED WITH BALTIPLAST

Plastic reduction is no longer optional – it's a smart, strategic move.

For companies, plastic waste is not only measurable, but often avoidable. By addressing it proactively, your organization can unlock real benefits: from lowering disposal and operational costs to building stakeholder trust and preparing for new sustainability reporting requirements. The BALTIPLAST project supports businesses ready to take that step with practical tools and real-world solutions. Now is the time to act – measure your impact, rethink your approach, and lead the way in sustainable change.

Need Support? Join Our Coaching Sessions!

We offer monthly coaching sessions during 2025 to help organizations navigate the inventory process, share best practices, and answer questions.
If you'd like to participate, sign up here:

Impressum

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ANNEX I

NATIONAL-LEVEL REGULATIONS

2019

GERMANY

German Packaging Act (verpackungsgesetz)

Imposes obligations on producer and distributors to register packaging and ensure proper waste management and recycling

2019

GERMANY

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR-Germany)

Holds producers responsible for the end-of-life management of packaking and other plastic products they place on the market

2022

SWEDEN

Swedish Packaging Ordinance (Förpackningsförordningen)

This regulation contains provisions on the design of packaging and on a system for extended producer responsibility for packaging waste management.

2022

FINLAND

Finnish National Waste Management Plan (NWMP)

One of the main objectives of which is to avoid unnecessary consumption of plastics and promote the reuse of plastics

2022

LATVIA

Latvian Deposit-Return System

Uses a return-to-retail model, where consumers can return empty cans and bottles for recycling to stores to get their deposit back.

2024

GERMANY

Single-Use Plastics Fund Act (EWKFondsG)

Introduces financial contributions from producers of single-use plastics to cover waste collection and cleaning costs.