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-György SZABÓ

Image Source: A landfill waste deposit near Budapest in Hungary. Photo Credit: <https://fr.depositphotos.com/stock-photos/hungary-waste.html?view=242952578>. Rights by Nicolas J.A. Buchoud.





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## Waste reduction efforts in Hungary from an NGO perspective

**Magdolna Molnár (MM):** Hungary, unlike many other EU member states, has not met the EU's ambitious waste management goals which stipulates that 55% of municipal and 65% of packaging waste must be prepared for re-use or recycling by 2025. Why do you think Hungary has not been able to meet the minimum waste management targets?

**György Szabó (GS):** Hungary had met its previous targets up to 2011 with the exception to glass waste that could not be met without a deposit return scheme. Despite public support

for a deposit system, as confirmed by several opinion polls, the government did not introduce the scheme. Nevertheless, strong hope remained that we would continue meeting at least the other targets for municipal and packaging waste. However, from 2012, the new government completely changed the waste collection system and financing tools; they decided to centralize waste management, which became completely bureaucratic, under-funded and cumbersome. The responsibility was taken out of the hands of local municipalities. Thus, collection became irregular, the tasks and responsibilities are not clear and waste management plans do not exist or are delayed.

The insufficient number of waste collection and treatment sites, the lack of re-use centers and repair shops as well as the lack of data on waste management are also problematic. As mentioned before, Hungary would desperately need a well-functioning deposit return system since the number of refillable bottles is decreasing. The establishment of an Environmental Ministry would also be essential to redirect adequate focus as well as enhance political will and accountability. Currently, there are no incentives for waste managers to make their operations more efficient - responsibility and profits are taken out of their hands. It is clear that the centralized waste management system does not work. At the same time, there are also no incentives for residents as we do not have a 'pay as you throw (PAYT) system'; there are also only a few governmental efforts for raising public awareness. The extension of separate waste collection to

more categories (e.g. hazardous waste, textile waste, bio-waste) would also be extremely important.

**MM:** One of your current campaigns is to promote Deposit Refund Systems. In many other European countries, it has become a common practice, for instance the “Pfandsystem” in Germany. Why did the Deposit Refund System almost completely cease to exist in Hungary?

**GS:** Unfortunately, environmental considerations are not prioritized at the governmental level. Industrial stakeholders (e.g. packaging industry, plastic manufacturers, big brands like Coca-Cola) have little or no interest at all to (re)introduce reuse systems, and their lobbying power is significant. Also, these deposit systems are complicated, thus, retailers are opposing them. Unfortunately, there is no real political will behind it, and the public demand is not significant enough to force change.

**MM:** How could the country reintroduce a refund system?

**GS:** For this to happen, the will of policy makers is needed, as well as the involvement of different stakeholders. At Humusz, we have already approached the responsible ministries and the largest retailers, and plan to get in touch with producers next. It would be important to start planning together and to use the best practices of effective deposit return systems of other countries in Europe (e.g. Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Denmark). We think that a collection

target for all beverages would quickly deliver strong results. As many studies show (e.g. TOMRA or Reloop), the deposit system should be easy, accessible and fair for all users, with producers financing and investing in the system using commodity revenues and an eco-modulated EPR fee. System integrity and appropriate checks and balances are also important.

We propose the standardization of refillable beverage bottles (including caps and labels), which will facilitate the expansion of refill schemes. Regionally operating cleaning centers are also essential. Clear labeling should be used to help consumers to be properly informed and make responsible choices when buying products. Packaging should clearly and prominently indicate whether it is refillable or not and include the appropriate disposal method for single-use packaging.

Humusz Waste Prevention Alliance: Circular Citizen Action  
<https://zerowasteeurope.eu/member/humusz-waste-prevention-alliance/>

Our Alliance works to create the will, to disseminate the knowledge required and to develop the societal, economic and environmental framework of conditions needed.

Humusz considers civil communities, teachers and students, municipalities attending higher education to be our outstanding allies. We provide the tools required to go zero waste, including the provision of information, education and consulting, the research for good practices, developing and establishing waste prevention examples and good practices, and the stimulation of community co-operations.