

# EU packaging waste recycling goals demotivate waste prevention and bring limited environmental benefits

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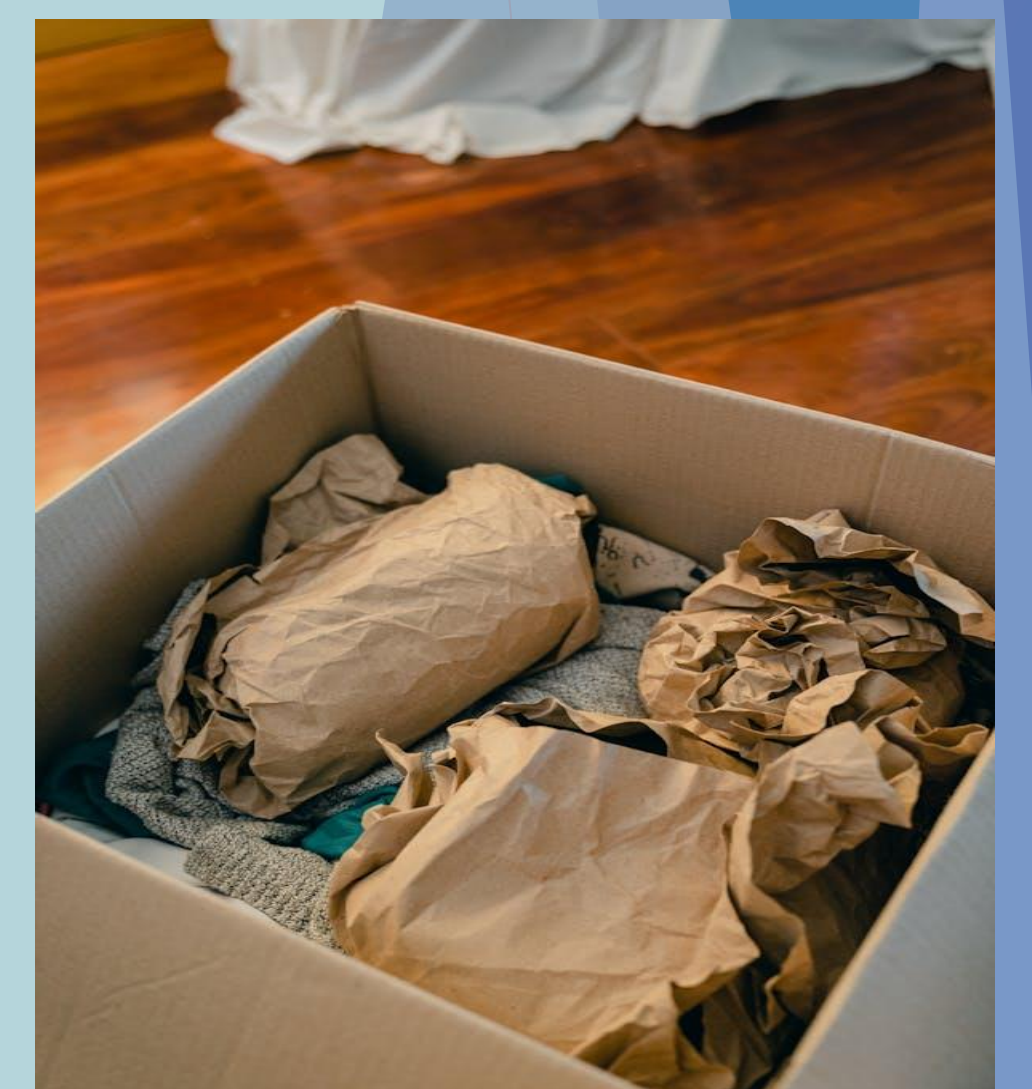
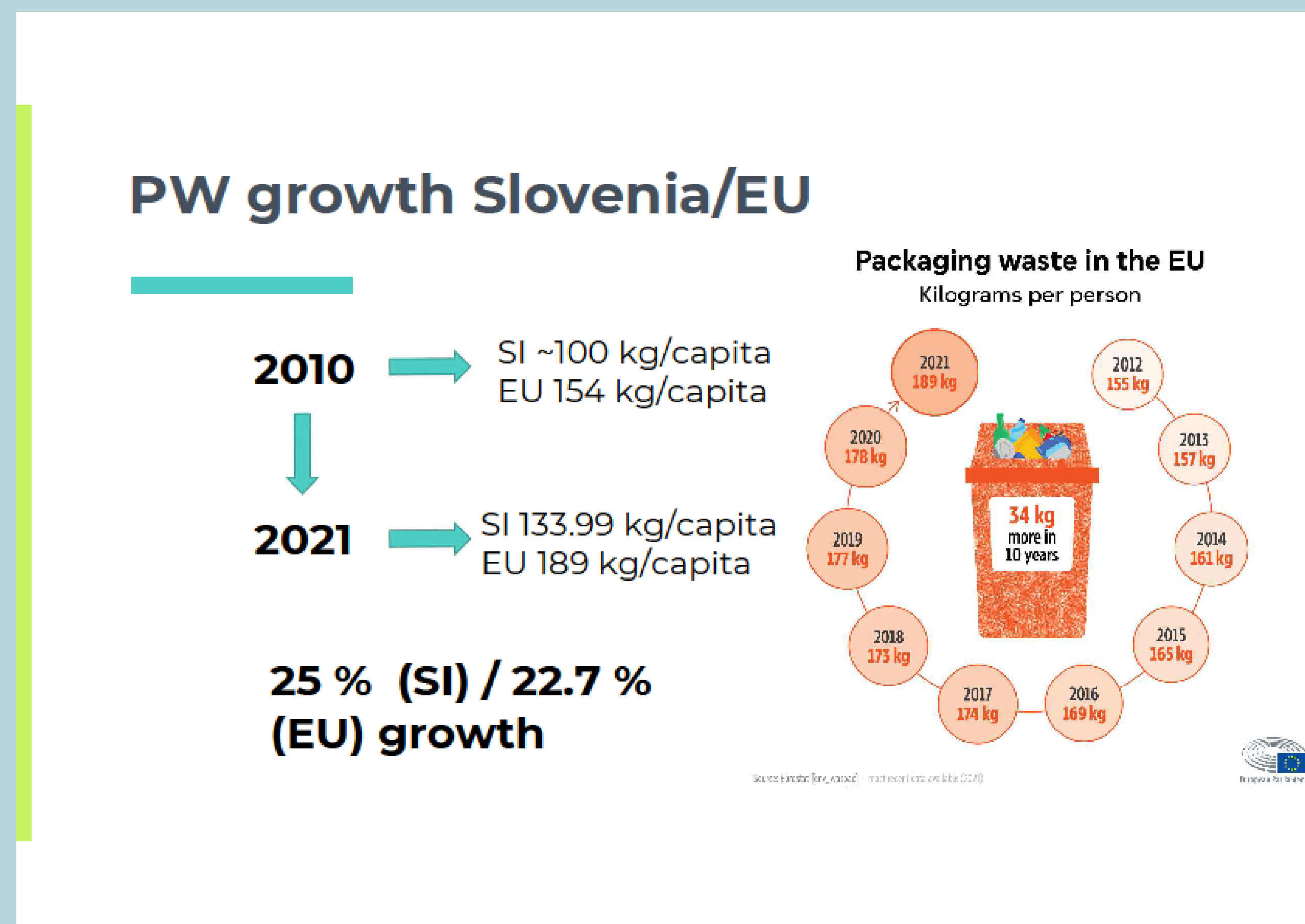
## Introduction

Eurostat statistics show that between 2020 and 2021, the amount of packaging waste (PW) at the EU level per person grew by 11 kg, while recycling grew by 7 kg. Total the amount of PW recycled was over 120 kg per person, and the amount of PW generated was under 189 kg per person. While the recycling rates vary, the growth in the amount of PW shows a similar growing trend across the EU. Even though the EU waste hierarchy enshrines waste prevention as the foremost priority in waste management, followed by reuse, recycling, recovery and disposal, in contrast, other EU legislation, especially the Packaging Directive, establishes legal framework for achieving high goals specifically in the field of waste recycling while giving other areas, such as prevention and reuse, less attention.

## Results and discussion

Based on available research, a **high amount of collected waste and a higher level of recycling as independently analysed factors in turn do not significantly affect GHG emissions nor significantly reduce them** based on latest research. The other environmental effects of packaging waste are not fully considered in existing literature, such as the effect of replacing reusable plastic packaging with single use paper and cardboard materials.

There are good practice examples of waste reduction including improving packaging design (**eco-design**) and production, assessing the **impacts of PW through LCA**, promoting and implementing **reusable packaging** in food consumption and online selling sites packaging, **raising consumer awareness** and introducing new, **stimulating tax policies** for waste prevention at the source. The EU Parliament is adopting new policies, but **still greatly favours recycling over reduction**.



## Conclusions

EU policies, including measures adopted by the EU Parliament on 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, favour and promote recycling, without adequate evidence of its environmental benefits and impact on GHG reduction, which is reducing the effects of waste prevention policies. Current EU trends show an increase in PW generation over all member states. There are proven effective policies in the area of waste prevention and reuse of PW, but are not implemented or emphasized, which is not in line with the EU waste hierarchy and is in favour of solely recycling.