

## Europe's soft drinks industry: Playing its part in packaging innovation

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Opinion Plus

Sigrid Ligné on why the European soft drinks industry has set high ambitions to make its plastic packaging more sustainable.



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The European soft drinks industry has recently announced a set of ambitions designed to contribute towards building a circular model for plastic packaging.

They will make the sector's plastic packaging more sustainable and improve its recyclability, recycled content, collection and reuse.

Achieving circularity through optimal collection, recycling and use of recycled PET is a top priority for

our sector.

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We want all our packaging - including plastics - to be collected and recycled and not discarded on our streets, oceans and waterways.

Beverage packaging is already the most collected packaging in the EU and the industry has worked hard to drive up recycling rates by establishing and running packaging recovery organisations across the continent.

Our four clear ambitions are that:

- By 2025 100% of our primary plastic packaging will be recyclable;
- By 2025 our PET bottles will contain a minimum 25% recycled material on average;
- Collection rates for recycling will be increased in all EU markets in collaboration with other packaging recovery actors;
- Soft drinks primary plastic packaging will be reused - including refillable bottles - where it makes environmental and economic sense.

Delivering this will require packaging collection systems to be well designed, set-up and managed by industry.

Indeed, improved collection and recycling are key to increasing the rPET content of beverage bottles and we support the growth of a market for secondary raw material that will make food grade quality rPET sufficiently available, accessible and affordable.

"Achieving circularity through optimal collection, recycling and use of recycled PET is a top priority for our sector"

With this in place our sector is ready to go way beyond the target of an average minimum 25% recycled material.

Greater consumer awareness and understanding will also be important in making our packaging more sustainable and driving up rates of recycling and reuse.

We have already done a lot to reduce our carbon footprint - including light-weighting programmes to reduce the amount of raw materials used in packaging, and removing technical barriers to recyclability.

The EU has taken a number of bold objectives to boost the uptake of recycled plastic products in the environment including the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy, which encourages voluntary pledges from industry; and the proposal for a Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment which also calls for a positive impact on collection rates, quality of collected material and subsequent recycling - in particular for beverage bottles.

These ambitions represent our sector's contribution to this EU vision and underline our commitment to increasing rates of collection for recycling in all markets.

They will enable the soft drinks industry to play its part in tackling the societal challenge of packaging waste by continuing to collaborate with other actors and working to drive ongoing packaging innovation and improvements.

## About the author

Sigrid Ligné is director general of UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe

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