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SUMMARY  
**THE FLEMISH  
POPULATION'S  
PREVENTION AND  
SORTING BEHAVIOUR**

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SURVEY 2021

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Quantitative and Qualitative Survey 2021  
publication date 29.04.2022



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# 1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to enable the client to acquire tools with which to encourage, convince and guide citizens to reduce their household waste through waste-prevention and sorting methods.

OVAM, Fost Plus, the intermunicipal cooperative societies and local authorities are to use the survey's results to get a clearer picture of what does and does not motivate citizens to prevent waste and to sort it correctly. The analysis should enable the distillation of more targeted action covering a range of themes such as service, communication, argumentation, information channels, taking into account the different driving forces and split up according to the diversity of the population/socio-demographic profiles.

The research is to provide answers to the following questions, if relevant for each socio-demographic profile:

- Why does a certain selective fraction sometimes still end up in household or bulky waste?
- What factors motivate/demotivate people to limit household-generated residual waste by means of waste prevention and waste sorting action?
- To what extent does conscious or unconscious behaviour (attitude versus behaviour) play a role?
- What ultimately persuades citizens to prevent residual waste (household and bulky waste)?
- Which information channels are used to gain information?

The eventual implementation of actions or elaboration of new communication emphases should lead to a further decrease in the amount of residual waste.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The quantitative survey was conducted by means of an online survey conducted among 2,500 Flemish citizens aged 18 and older.

The results of this quantitative research were studied in further detail, refined and supplemented with the results of the qualitative research carried out using five focus groups.

## 3. RESULTS

The following includes the most significant findings as regards the survey of the Flemish population on the one hand, and the focus groups on the other.

## 3.1 QUANTITATIVE ONLINE SURVEY OF FLEMISH POPULATION

The following elements are discussed successively:

1. Flemish people's behaviour in terms of limiting, preventing and sorting household waste;
2. motivators and demotivators that determine whether (or not) to sort waste;
3. the used and desired information channels;
4. possible incentives to avoid waste/sort more/sort better;
5. the six household profiles observed as regards limiting, preventing and sorting.

### 3.1.1 Behaviour: limiting, preventing and sorting waste<sup>1</sup>

- The respondents were presented with a list of 16 waste fractions, all of which must be sorted. The survey shows that the vast majority ( $\geq 80\%$ ) of households sorts these waste fractions consistently. The fractions least sorted and ending up with the residual waste (16% to 36%) are food waste and vegetable, garden and fruit waste (hereinafter referred to as VGF waste),<sup>2</sup> aluminium dishes and trays, small hard plastic, and plastic foils and bags. Another 6% of Flemish people admit to occasionally incinerating a waste fraction at home (mainly VFG waste and paper/cardboard).
- Three quarters of Flemish people try to limit their amount of waste as much as possible. In order to generate less household waste, four out of five Flemish people sort their waste as best as they possibly can. Many Flemish people have started using the second-hand market to give away or sell goods they no longer use (seven out of ten); four out of ten Flemish people sometimes buy second-hand goods. Of those who purchase a new item, 40% say they opt for one with a longer lifespan.

Three out of ten Flemish people sometimes throw something in with the residual waste when they are aware it does not belong there. The two most significant reasons for occasionally opting to consciously sort something incorrectly are throwing food leftovers, vegetable and fruit waste into the residual waste to be able to put this out sooner for collection, as well as disposing of packaged food by adding it to residual waste, because people do not wish to separate it from the packaging.

When in doubt about which waste bag or waste container to use for a certain waste item, a quarter of Flemish people throw away these items with the residual waste.

### 3.1.2 Motivators to Sort Waste

- The four most important reasons for sorting household waste (applying to roughly 80% of Flemish people) are that it is the right thing to do; it is part of the daily routine; it is a positive contribution to the environment; and the current sorting rules are clear.

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<sup>1</sup> the term “residual waste” as used in the questionnaire and in further decisions: this term should be understood to mean “household waste”; when preparing the questionnaire, it was decided to use the term “residual waste” because this is the term commonly used and understood by citizens. If the term “residual waste” is further mentioned in the report, it should be understood to mean “household waste”.

<sup>2</sup> VGF waste is not collected selectively everywhere; in this case, when this is the case, it is intended to end up with the household waste. The share of food scraps and VGF waste ending up with residual waste in the regions without VGF collection is 55%, compared to 28% in the regions with VGF collection.

### 3.1.3 Demotivators to Sort Waste

- The three most frequently cited reasons for not sorting household waste (applies to roughly 30% of Flemish people) are the idea that a lot of sorted waste eventually ends up on the same mountain of waste; the opinion that sorting is already sufficient and therefore occasionally sort something incorrectly is fine; and lastly, having too little of certain types of waste to fill a separate bag/waste container. Here the answers are not very explicitly defined – neither in a positive nor in a negative sense.

### 3.1.4 Information

- The printed waste calendar, followed by the city or municipality's website, are the channels most often used to find information about waste collection and sorting (for roughly 50% to 60%).
- The channel people use to obtain information and tips on waste reduction is also the printed waste calendar (50%).

### 3.1.5 Incentives

- More than eight out of ten Flemish people indicate that they could be encouraged to sort (even) more/better.  
The two most frequently reported incentives for sorting (for roughly four out of ten Flemish people) are making door-to-door collection of selective fractions more affordable, and clearly indicating on the packaging or on the product how it should be sorted.
- When it comes to waste prevention, the main incentives that the municipality or city can provide (for approximately 30% of Flemish people) include offering compost barrels and bins/containers; providing reusable shopping bags; organising second-hand fairs/flea markets; as well as the free or cheap loan of tools. Roughly a quarter of Flemish people do not require such incentives in order to prevent waste.

### 3.1.6 Household profiles observed with respect to preventing, limiting and sorting household waste.

- Five components can be distinguished behind the 34 motivators and demotivators for limiting household residual waste: (1) environmental awareness and sustainability, (2) objections, (3) limiting/avoiding waste, with financial motive, (4) disinterest, and (5) sense of duty and routine.
- When considering the five components together, six household profiles or 'clusters' (of people) can be distinguished that, based on statements reported by the respondents, display the same attitude and behaviour towards avoiding, limiting and sorting household waste.  
For each cluster, it is then possible to determine which measures can be used to encourage these people to sort more and/or better and to prevent waste, and which information channels can be used to reach the cluster.

### **3.1.6.1 Cluster 1: Indifferent – uninterested citizens (N=244)**

#### 3.1.3.1.1 Profile

- Cluster 1 includes the second least good sorters: they are the least concerned with environmental awareness and sustainability, and have the least sense of duty and routine when it comes to sorting; moreover, they more often cite objections to sorting and show a higher degree of disinterest in sorting.
- People in this cluster are on average younger (significant proportion in the 18 to 34 age group) and, more often than other clusters (except for cluster 4), they have children aged between three and five. Despite a larger presence in the lower income brackets, half of them state that they have no difficulty making ends meet.

#### 3.1.3.1.2 Information needs

- In cluster 1, the city or municipality's website is the most frequently used channel (33%) to search for information on waste collection or sorting; the second most important channel is the printed waste calendar (26%). By combining the two previously mentioned channels, up to half of the cluster can be reached. 18% of the people in cluster 1 do not want any additional information.
- Cluster 1 prefers to receive information and tips on reducing household waste via the printed waste calendar (25%). The additional provision of such information through the website of the city/municipality, through the magazine or newspaper of the city/municipality, and via the online waste calendar, increases the share of people reached in cluster 1 to 44%.  
Some 31% of the people in cluster 1 have no need for such information (in the other five clusters this ranges from 8% to 22%).

#### 3.1.3.1.3 Encourage: sorting and reduction of residual waste

- The measures in cluster 1 that would have the greatest effect on more and/or better sorting and so result in residual waste reduction are, first of all, making door-to-door collection of selective fractions more affordable, followed by simplifying the sorting rules and clearly indicating on the packaging or the product how to sort different types of items.
- Approximately a quarter of the Flemish people in cluster 1 also state that they do not need any incentives to encourage them to sort more and/or better.

#### 3.1.3.1.4 Encourage: waste prevention

- Cluster 1 is not only the group with the second least good sorters, but also the group that on average conducts the lowest number of targeted action campaigns aimed at achieving household waste reduction. This means one third of the people in cluster 1 also state here that they do not want any **incentives** to prevent waste.
- The three measures that a city or municipality can take to significantly encourage people in cluster 1 to prevent waste are: organising a second-hand fair or flea market; lending tools (such as drills and gardening tools) for free or cheaply and offering compost barrels.

### **3.1.6.2 Cluster 2: Modal citizens, who sort relatively well, (N=775)**

#### 3.1.6.2.1 Profile

- People in cluster 2 belong to one of the better sorting groups (together with cluster 5 and 6), but slightly more often (than cluster 5 and 6) cite reasons for occasionally sorting something incorrectly. It is a group that does not stand out in terms of attitude: with an average score on everything.
- There are no salient observations in terms of socio-demographic features, either: they are found equally in all age categories and all household types; however, they are somewhat more often found in two-person

households. Although, just as with cluster 1, they belong more often to the lower income brackets, this does not result in a lower subjective income.

#### 3.1.6.2.2 Information needs

- In cluster 2 (just as in clusters 3, 5 and 6), the two most frequently used channels for seeking information on waste collection and sorting are the printed waste calendar (62%) and the city or municipality's website (54%); the two together reach approximately 8 out of 10 people in this cluster.
- Cluster 2 prefers to receive information and tips on reducing household waste via the printed waste calendar (52%).

#### 3.1.6.2.3 Encourage: sorting and waste reduction

- The two most important measures that can encourage people in cluster 2 to sort more and/or better are: making door-to-door collection of plastic bottles, metal containers and drink cartons (PMD), VGF and green waste cheaper on the one hand, and on the other hand, clearly indicating on the packaging or product how to sort different items.
- Approximately one in ten people in cluster 2 state that they do not need any incentives.

#### 3.1.6.2.4 Encourage: waste prevention

- In cluster 2, the most frequently mentioned measure a local authority can take to encourage waste prevention is offering compost barrels and bins/containers.
- Approximately one in five people in cluster 2 indicate that they do not want any incentives to prevent waste, or an increased amount.

### **3.1.6.3 Cluster 3: careless people earning a good wage (n=363)**

#### 3.1.6.3.1 Profile

- In cluster 3, people generally display average sorting behaviour: they are neither the best sorters, nor the worst; sometimes they give a reason for deliberately sorting something incorrectly.
- They pay little attention to environmental awareness and sustainability, consequently being awarded the lowest score for avoiding and limiting waste (with financial motive). They generally score average on the other components.
- Cluster 3 is generally comprises younger respondents, with a large share aged between 18 and 49; with more female respondents. Although the family composition is not striking, we do see a slightly larger presence of households with children aged between 0 and 2. The respondents more often belong to the higher income bracket, and more often indicate that they can easily get by on a monthly basis.

#### 3.1.6.3.2 Information Needs

- In cluster 3 (just as in clusters 2, 5 and 6), the two most frequently used channels for seeking information on waste collection and sorting are the printed waste calendar (60%) and the city or municipality's website (46%); the two together reach approximately eight out of ten people in this cluster.
- Cluster 3 prefers to receive information and tips on reducing household waste via the printed waste calendar (48%).



#### 3.1.6.3.3 Encourage: sorting and waste reduction

- The measures that would already encourage a considerable number of people in cluster 3 to sort more and/or better and consequently reduce residual waste are clearly indicating on the packaging or the product how to sort and making door-to-door collection of PMD waste (plastic packaging materials, metal/cans and drink cartons), VGF and green waste cheaper.
- In cluster 3, slightly more than approximately one in ten people do not wish to be given incentives aimed at getting them to sort more or better.

#### 3.1.6.3.4 Encourage: waste prevention

- In cluster 3, too, offering compost barrels and containers is the most frequently mentioned measure a local authority can take to encourage waste prevention.
- Cluster 3 is the cluster with a current 'average' behaviour regarding waste prevention; this is also evident from the large share of people (about one in three) who do not want any incentives to prevent more waste.

### **3.1.6.4 Cluster 4: Young families (with children) who have difficulty making ends meet and do not sort properly (N=204)**

#### 3.1.6.4.1 Profile

- Cluster 4 contains those least good at sorting: they most frequently cite reasons – just as those in cluster 1 do – for occasionally throwing something into residual waste, knowing it does not belong there.
- Their low score regarding good sorting behaviour is related to them having the most negative attitude towards sorting: they have the highest score for citing objections and reasons not to sort, as well as the highest score for disinterest in sorting.
- Even more than in cluster 1, cluster 4 consists mainly of younger people. It is the cluster with the largest share of families with children (in various age categories) and the largest average family size. A larger proportion of people indicate they still live at home with their parents, or already live together with a partner and children. A larger proportion than in the other clusters indicate that they live in a studio apartment. In addition, it more often concerns people who have not lived in their city or municipality for very long. Even though the people in this cluster can be found in different income brackets (and even generally in the higher income brackets), they most frequently indicate that it is difficult (or very difficult) to make ends meet on a monthly basis.

#### 3.1.6.4.2 Information Needs

- As in cluster 1, in cluster 4 the city or municipality's website is the most frequently used channel to search for information about waste collection or sorting (32%); the second most important channel is the printed waste calendar (26%). By combining the two previously mentioned channels, up to half of the cluster can be reached.  
Those in cluster 4 also prefer receiving information and tips about reducing household waste via the printed waste calendar (26%: a lower share than in the other clusters compared to cluster 1).

#### 3.1.6.4.3 Encourage: sorting and waste reduction

- Cluster 4 contains – as is also the case in cluster 1 – those who on average obtain the lowest score for good sorting. In this case too, cheaper door-to-door collection of PMD, VGF and green waste is the most frequently mentioned measure for getting people to sort more and/or better, although the share here is much more modest than in the other clusters. A second important incentive measure concerns clearer communication about the rates charged at the recycling centre.
- 10% of the those in cluster 4 have no desire for incentives aimed at getting them to sort more and/or better.

#### 3.1.6.4.4 Encourage: waste prevention

- When compared to the other clusters, cluster 4 currently scores lowest for taking waste prevention action, although people in this cluster can be significantly urged to improve their waste prevention behaviour, given that only one in ten people say they do not want incentives.
- The measures local government can introduce to significantly spur these people on to prevent waste are providing reusable shopping bags, lending tools cheaply or free-of-charge and providing compost barrels and containers.

### **3.1.6.5 Cluster 5: Good waste sorters out of a sense of duty and routine with good income N=319**

#### 3.1.6.5.1 Profile

- Cluster 5 includes (together with cluster 6) the people with the best sorting behaviour: on average, they sort the biggest number of waste fractions and least often state reasons for placing an item into residual waste, knowing this is not the correct place for it.
- Their sorting behaviour is driven by a sense of duty and routine, rather than environmental awareness and sustainability. They have the lowest score for stating objections to sorting, and – together with cluster 6 – have the lowest score on the component ‘disinterest in sorting’.
- Cluster 5 generally includes older people, who can be classified under different household types. They are more likely to live in detached houses, rather than in an apartment, and have a good income (both objectively and subjectively).

#### 3.1.6.5.2 Information needs

- In cluster 5 (just as in clusters 2, 3 and 6), the two most frequently used channels for seeking information on waste collection and sorting are the printed waste calendar (67%) and the city or municipality's website (50%); the two together reach approximately eight out of ten people in this cluster.
- Cluster 5 prefers to receive information and tips on reducing household waste via the printed waste calendar (54%).

#### 3.1.6.5.3 Encourage: sorting and waste reduction

- The two most significant measures for encouraging people in cluster 5 to sort more and/or better are: clearly indicating on the packaging or product how to sort and making door-to-door collection of PMD, VGF and green waste cheaper.
- Approximately a quarter of the people in cluster 5 do not want incentives to sort more and/or better.

#### 3.1.6.5.4 Encourage: waste prevention

- Providing compost barrels and containers, in combination with providing reusable shopping bags, organising a second-hand fair or flea market, and lending tools cheaply or free-of-charge, are the most important measures local government can take to encourage people in cluster 5 to prevent waste.
- Since cluster 5 is one of the better clusters in terms of waste prevention, slightly more than one in three people state that they do not need any incentives in this regard.

### **3.1.6.6 Cluster 6: Good sorters who are a little older (N=595)**

#### 3.1.6.6.1 Profile

- Just like cluster 5, cluster 6 includes those with the best sorting behaviour in terms of consistent sorting of specific waste fractions, and regarding refraining from occasionally disposing of an item in a residual waste container despite knowing it is not the correct place.
- In contrast to those in cluster 5, the people in cluster 6 display a high degree of environmental awareness and sustainability, consequently resulting in a much greater degree of waste-reducing/avoidance behaviour (with financial motive) compared to cluster 5. They also score quite high in terms of sense of duty and routine. Cluster 6 also reveals a low score for the 'objections' component, and – together with cluster 5 – the lowest score for the 'disinterest' component.
- Cluster 6 includes the individuals with the highest average age. This mainly concerns couples without children, as well as a large proportion of single people; this is in the smallest average family size of all clusters. Despite a large portion of this cluster corresponding to lower income classes, an equally large portion of people are easily (or very easily) able to get manage on this.

#### 3.1.6.6.2 Information Needs

- In cluster 6 (just as in clusters 2, 3 and 5), the two most frequently used channels for seeking information on waste collection and sorting are the printed waste calendar (72%) and the city or municipality's website (56%); the two together reach approximately 8 out of 10 people in this cluster.
- Of all clusters, the printed waste calendar is the most explicitly preferred channel for receiving information and tips on reducing household waste (64%) in cluster 6.

#### 3.1.6.6.3 Encourage: sorting and waste reduction

- For those who do want this, the most popular option is to make the door-to-door collection of PMD, VGF and green waste cheaper, followed by clearly indicating how to sort different types of waste on the packaging or product.
- Approximately one in five people in cluster 6 do not want further incentives to sort more and/or better.

#### 3.1.6.6.4 Encourage: waste prevention

- The two main measures, which, according to the people in cluster 6, can be taken by local government to encourage them to prevent more waste are: the provision of compost barrels and containers, followed by the provision of reusable shopping bags.
- Approximately a quarter of the people in cluster 6 do not want measures (additional or otherwise) from local government to prevent household waste.

## **3.2 QUANTITATIVE SURVEY THROUGH FOCUS GROUPS**

In general – in this case across the five focus groups – it can be said that few differences emerged between the various household profiles in terms of knowledge, behaviour and perception regarding waste sorting, reduction and prevention.

The following key findings can be noted from the group discussions.

### 3.2.1 Waste collection in the municipality

- People are generally well-informed of the practical arrangements (which fractions and when) of waste collection in the city or municipality.
- The cost price (exact or otherwise) of the various waste fractions, including household waste, that are collected at home, but certainly of those that are collected at the recycling centre, is less well known.

### 3.2.2 Sorting – Practical

- The participants indicate that they are well informed of the current sorting rules for PMD and VGF waste. Nevertheless, among the people in almost every household profile, there are doubts about how specific types of waste should be sorted, for example, aluminium trays, polystyrene foam and eggshells.
- When in doubt, the waste is usually thrown in with the residual waste or is hidden away in another packaging (PMD) type. New organic waste rules also raise questions: eggshells, cat litter, meat scraps, etc.
- Expired packaged food products are mainly thrown into a residual waste container, this applies to all household profiles.
- Across all household profiles, it can be concluded that people do not go to the recycling centre very often, this is for various reasons.

### 3.2.3 Sorting – Motivation

- The most significant reasons why the participants do sort are: the cost price (sorting is cheaper/residual waste is more expensive than PMD/VFG/paper and cardboard waste), for environmental reasons, through habit and due to (social/legal) obligation.
- Although people are often unaware of the exact cost price of the various waste fractions collected, almost all participants are convinced that sorting is cheaper than putting everything in with the residual waste.

### 3.2.4 Sorting – Possible obstacles

- In the kitchen, people usually have separate waste bins for residual waste and PMD waste, and some also for VGF waste; meaning kitchen waste is usually well-sorted.
- We do note that those who (1) live in an apartment, (2) and/or have less space (outdoor or otherwise) to place waste bags/containers, and/or (3) have little waste (e.g. single people), more often throw the VGF waste in with the residual waste (certainly in the summer, such as odour nuisance).
- Waste generated in other parts of the house (such as toilet, bathroom and bedroom), where there is usually only one rubbish bin, is sorted less well and ends up with the residual waste; the exceptions are toilet rolls and larger PMD packaging (such as shampoo bottles and shaving foam cans).
- The two main obstacles that stop people going to the recycling plant are a lack of transport, personal or otherwise (especially in the case of large items), and the limited opening hours (within office hours, too busy on Saturdays, obligation to make an appointment first).

### 3.2.5 Sorting – Demotivation

- The most significant reasons for not sorting – or not sorting correctly – are a lack of time, laziness, unclear sorting rules, but also a lack of clarity about what happens to the sorted waste. There is a perception that a lot of sorted waste, as well as residual waste, is incinerated, melted, ground and/or 'shipped off' to the Third World.

- For some, the combination of different packaging materials (and consequently the separation of the different packaging) is also a reason not to sort waste and consequently, to throw it away with the residual waste.

### 3.2.6 Sorting – Incentives

- On the question of how to motivate people to produce less waste and/or to sort their waste (better), the most important incentives are introducing a deposit on certain items and making the collection (door-to-door as well as recycling plant) of sorted waste cheaper (especially for those who are financially disadvantaged, e.g. free PMD waste bag or through payment incentives).
- Other incentives repeatedly mentioned are clearer sorting rules; making products with lots of packaging more expensive or products with no or little packaging cheaper; providing a reward strategy versus a sanction strategy for those who sort well and those who sort badly; and finally, raising awareness/informing citizens about the importance of sorting well (including information on what happens to sorted waste).

### 3.2.7 Waste collection/recycling centre – Cost

- In general, people think that door-to-door collection of residual waste is correctly priced, since – so they say – the cost price is largely related to their own consumption behaviour.
- Nevertheless, according to the participants, a price increase could lead to less waste. The focus groups insist on compensation, in particular for those experiencing financial difficulties, if there is a price increase.
- A number of participants feel that the collection of paid waste fractions in the recycling plant has become expensive, with the exception of those who have free turns or x-number of kilograms free-of-charge.
- In this context, it is also noted that there is no uniformity in terms of organisation and pricing across city and municipal boundaries.

### 3.2.8 Waste collection/recycling centre – Possible points for improvement

- More frequent door-to-door collection of sorted waste, as well as residual waste, is mentioned by all household profiles as a possible point for improvement as regards door-to-door waste collection; there is also great demand for the door-to-door collection of glass. Also, free collection of bulky waste at home (e.g. half-yearly) is mentioned by a number of participants.
- Longer, flexible opening hours and a lower cost price (or more free waste fractions) are mentioned as possible points for improvement as regards waste collection through the recycling centre.
- In addition to standardising the operation and organisation of the recycling centres in Belgium, the setting up of a pop-up or mobile recycling centre is also seen as a possible point for improvement.

### 3.2.9 Communication

- All those categorised in the household profiles inform themselves firstly using the waste calendar (printed or otherwise). The city or municipality's information sheet is also used for this purpose.
- The following digital tools are also mentioned: social media, the *Recycle!* app and the city or municipality's website.
- If the sorting rules or other matters relating to waste collection change, people prefer to be informed of this in writing; for example, by means of a leaflet when buying new rubbish bags through a leaflet in their letter box. In the second instance, such information can also be provided using social media, email or a TV commercial.

### 3.2.10 Waste prevention and reuse

- In order to produce less waste, people – across all household profiles – are already making the following efforts: buying more consciously/buying less; reusing/repairing/selling goods; buying products with less or no packaging; composting as well as drinking tap water.
- In order to have generate even less waste in the future, people state – across all household profiles – that this can be achieved by buying even less/more consciously; as well as buying even more products with little or no packaging.  
Additionally – though be it to a lesser extent – people are prepared to commit as follows: paying deposit money; joining the sharing economy; setting up a vegetable garden/composting; and buying less plastic packaging (buying preferably glass instead).
- All those in the household profiles are of the opinion that they sort better than before and therefore produce less residual waste.

### 3.2.11 Priority Measures to be Taken

- According to the participants, priority measures to be taken to improve waste sorting/reduction are communication around the importance of sorting; how to sort (PMD and VGF waste); and what happens to sorted waste.
- Furthermore, people also expect an effect on sorting behaviour due to financial measures, such as making residual waste more expensive versus making sorted waste cheaper, rewarding good sorting behaviour versus sanctioning less good sorting behaviour, in addition to introducing a deposit.
- The collection of more waste fractions at home; more uniformity across city and municipal boundaries as regards waste collection and sorting; as well as encouraging producers to use less packaging, are also indicated as possible measures to be taken.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The finality of the sorting behaviour research is to provide insight into what could persuade citizens to optimise their sorting behaviour.

The aim of the research is to give OVAM the tools to (further) encourage, convince and lead citizens to produce less residual waste by preventing and sorting it beforehand.

Included in what follows in this regard is a series of recommended measures to be taken in which the following distinction can be made:

1. measures to encourage more/better sorting of household waste;
2. measures to encourage waste prevention; and
3. accompanying measures as regards limiting, avoiding and sorting residual household waste.

## 4.1 MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE MORE/BETTER SORTING OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE;

### 1 | Making door-to-door collection of sorted waste cheaper, coupled with making residual household waste more expensive.

Flemish people are aware that door-to-door collection of residual waste is<sup>3</sup> more expensive than the other sorted waste fractions. Nevertheless, certain waste fractions to be sorted are still deliberately thrown in residual waste containers.

For all household profiles defined in the research, a reduction in the price of sorted waste emerges as one of the most important measures – if not the most important – that will encourage them to sort more/better.

This measure is endorsed by all focus groups, however, they link this measure to a price increase for door-to-door collection of household residual waste. .

In order to overcome a possible negative impact, an allowance can be made for Flemish people with limited financial means.

### 2 | Sorting rules: simplification and better communication Promoting responsibility and raising awareness of producers

The survey, as well as the focus groups, reveal that some waste fractions to be sorted end up with residual waste because people are left in doubt; this predominantly concerns PMD waste (such as aluminium dishes and plastic bags), but also kitchen waste (such as eggshells).

Simplifying the sorting rules and making these more uniform (between municipalities) could remedy this and consequently reduce household residual waste.

In all focus groups, it is noted that the sorting rules must be adequately constant (frequent change creates confusion resulting in increased residual waste).

The producer also has a role to play in this respect, namely producing less packaging in general, particularly composite packaging, and indicating on the packaging how it should be sorted. Promoting responsibility and raising awareness of the producer is appropriate in this regard.

Since there is a need for clear information about the sorting rules – in this case practical arrangements – specific examples and indications of what belongs where – as appears from the survey and the focus groups, efforts should be made to improve communication and information provision in this respect. For all household profiles, the most appropriate channel is the printed waste calendar; supplemented by the municipality's website and information newspaper, in addition to the online waste calendar.

In case of new rules being enacted, people should preferably be informed of this via a leaflet in their letterbox and/or an information sheet attached to the PMD bags. These tools can by all means also be used to draw attention to the waste fractions that are currently often incorrectly sorted.

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<sup>3</sup> the term “residual waste” as used in the questionnaire and in further decisions: this term should be understood to mean “household waste”, when preparing the questionnaire a decision was taken to use the term “residual waste”, given that this is the term commonly used and understood by citizens. If the term “residual waste” is further mentioned in the report, it should be understood to mean “household waste”.

### 3 | Pricing of the Recycling Plant

The focus groups demonstrate that the pricing of the various waste fractions collected at the recycling plant is less well known; on the other hand, the perception is that waste collection at the recycling plant is expensive.

Improved communication where it concerns pricing of the various fractions (in this case, rate, whether or not fractions must be paid for) can offer an answer to this – certainly, as the survey shows, for the worst sorting household profiles this can be an incentive to sort more/better.

#### 4.2 MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE WASTE PREVENTION

The survey shows that local government can encourage citizens to prevent waste.

The two measures that would have the greatest effect across all household profiles are the provision of compost barrels and containers, and the provision of reusable shopping bags. The provision of both items by the local authority would encourage approximately half of the good sorters and approximately a third of the less good sorters to prevent waste/even more waste.

Two additional incentives from the local authority – which would mainly encourage the least good sorters to start waste prevention – are the organisation of a second-hand fair or flea market, as well as the free or cheap loan of tools. City and municipal authorities would in total reach no less than half of the least diligent sorters through this.

The provision of the above four measures can therefore be considerably effective; and this applies to all household profiles.

#### 4.3 ACCOMPANYING MEASURES AS REGARDS LIMITING, AVOIDING AND SORTING RESIDUAL HOUSEHOLD WASTE.

- In addition to better communication with respect to sorting rules and pricing of the recycling plant, communication/improved communication on the importance of sorting, but certainly the provision of information on what happens to the sorted waste, can also lead to effective results. From the survey and the focus groups, it is evident that the importance of sorting is questioned because people do not know – with certainty – what happens to sorted waste (is it for instance, incinerated, shipped off ?)
- Regarding the organisation and functioning of recycling centres, longer and more flexible opening hours could be a measure that would, on the one hand, lower the threshold for those who currently hardly go or do not go to a recycling plant and, on the other hand, be beneficial for those who already use them (such as better sorters who are professionally active).
- In addition to uniformity of sorting rules across municipal boundaries, the focus groups also asked for more uniformity between municipalities as regards the organisation and operation of recycling plants.



- In addition to sanctioning those who do not sort (properly), there is also a clear demand for a reward strategy for those who do sort well (such as handing in empty plastic bottles in exchange for a ticket, or a voucher)

In addition to this, the focus groups recommend the introduction of deposits as a measure to be taken in the context of reducing residual waste.

- Finally, more frequent collection of commonly sorted waste fractions would be another measure that could affect the entire population in the margin, particularly those living in an urban environment in an apartment or small house (without a garden), with a relatively large amount of waste, e.g. families with young children, those with a relatively small amount of waste (such as single people), in combination with offering smaller waste bags/waste containers.