

Executive Summary

The goal of this work is to find ways to dispose of bulky waste in Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia. Wild landfills stand out as a major problem in the preservation of the environment and biodiversity. We propose the opening of centers for the storage of old things. The paper highlights the key stakeholders and their role in the implementation of this policy process. At the same time, the paper also proposed a media campaign and the steps for its implementation. Through this policy proposal, we have identified the key audience and highlighted the benefits for the environment and its preservation.

Analysis of Current Situation

The current state of waste management in many local communities, while functional to some extent, reveals significant shortcomings, particularly regarding bulky waste. Although municipal companies occasionally organize bulky waste collection campaigns, a considerable amount still ends up in illegal dumpsites or directly polluting the environment. For example, people often leave bulky waste next to regular containers, hoping someone in need will take it. However, in many cases, this waste is collected by secondary raw material gatherers, raising the question of whether the waste is later properly disposed of afterward.

In Croatia, the disposal of bulky waste in public areas is prohibited by the Act on Sustainable Waste Management. Despite a 66% increase in bulky waste collection from 2017 to 2021, rural areas still face insufficient access to these services.¹ Public campaigns have successfully raised awareness, but further efforts are needed to improve recycling rates and expand infrastructure.

Serbia's progress in bulky waste management remains limited, despite regulatory frameworks like the 2009 Waste Management Law.² In 2020, 1,359 tons of bulky waste were collected, but only 418 tons were recycled.³ Challenges include low recycling rates, illegal dumping, and insufficient public awareness about reuse, despite the potential for reusing bulky items.

North Macedonia faces growing waste volumes with waste management systems lagging in both infrastructure and public awareness. Bulky waste is often disposed of illegally, and recycling rates are extremely low, at about 0.3%.⁴ Public campaigns have been initiated, corruption, inefficiency, and lack of enforcement of environmental laws hinder progress. Additionally, informal waste collection is associated with social

¹ Waste Management Plan of the Republic of Croatia for the Period from 2023 TO 2028

² Zakon o upravljanju otpadom, Službeni glasnik RS (2009)

³ Program upravljanja otpadom u Republici Srbiji za period 2022-2031, Službeni glasnik RS (2022)

⁴ Waste Management Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2008 – 2020)

stigmatization. Members of the Roma community, who often engage in collecting secondary raw materials, face prejudice and discrimination, making it harder for them to access education, employment in other sectors, and healthcare. This stigma further complicates their integration and improvement of living conditions.

Besides the social issues, such practices carry environmental risks.

If collectors are unaware of proper ways to process or dispose of certain materials, it can lead to environmental problems. For instance, improper disposal of hazardous materials or electronic waste can contaminate soil and water, leading to long-term consequences for the environment and public health.

Each country needs to invest further in infrastructure, education, and enforcement to meet environmental targets and reduce the impact of bulky waste on their ecosystems.

Proposal of Strategy and Policy Measures

Given the aforementioned problems, we propose establishing a *Reuse Center for Old Items and Furniture* as part of a broader strategy to improve bulky waste management. This center would allow citizens to donate items they no longer use, but which are still functional, instead of leaving them by containers or dumping them at illegal sites. The establishment of such a center brings multiple social and environmental benefits:

Reducing waste is a crucial goal of our initiative, as it aims to ensure that instead of old items ending up in landfills, they can find a new purpose. The center would facilitate the reuse of items, significantly reducing the amount of waste that needs to be processed or disposed of. An example to this is the Riperaj (Repair) project – a repair/reuse center in Rijeka, where citizens can repair defective small household appliances, broken and damaged furniture, clothes, toys and other for free with the help of craftsmen who possess the necessary knowledge and skills.

Assisting socially vulnerable groups can be a key benefit of the initiative, as items collected at the center could be distributed to those in need. This includes donations of furniture, appliances, or clothing to those in need, directly contributing to poverty reduction and improving living conditions.

The environmental benefits of this initiative are significant, as reusing old items reduces the demand for manufacturing new ones, thereby lowering the consumption of raw materials, energy, and the release of carbon emissions and other harmful gasses. In addition, the whole concept enables the active involvement of interested experts of various profiles who possess the necessary knowledge and skills, with the added value of direct socializing with interested users and social vulnerable groups.

This approach directly contributes to environmental protection and aligns with the goals of the circular economy, particularly those related to the reuse of items. Through this we support low-income families with necessary goods (furniture, appliances, clothing). In addition to recycling, our focus is on extending the life of products—especially those that may be damaged but can be repaired at the Reuse Center. This further reduces the carbon footprint by minimizing the need for new resources and preventing unnecessary waste.

Another of our proposals is the *organization of reuse markets*, which will help foster social solidarity. Organizing markets where people could bring items they no longer use, and others can take them, would encourage a sense of community and solidarity. Such events promote interaction among citizens and raise awareness about the importance of recycling and reuse. This approach provides a sustainable solution to the bulky waste problem while helping those in need of basic household items. The bazaars would also present an opportunity to raise citizens' awareness about the importance of recycling and reuse. We expect the long-term benefits of the center and bazaars to be multifaceted. In addition to the obvious environmental benefits, this approach could contribute to reducing social inequalities.

Advocacy Plan Analysis of Stakeholders

Proposing the Reuse/Repair Center concept will result as a cost-saving and socially responsible initiative. In order to implement our initiative, it is important to contact the relevant stakeholders who can assist us with this proposal. These primarily include the Public Utility Company (JKP) and the municipality. Establishing good communication with the municipality—specifically with the municipal president and their associates—where the initiative will be implemented is essential. The *local government* is directly interested in reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfills, meeting environmental protection goals, and cutting costs associated with waste disposal.

By approaching the local government with a clear plan, highlighting both the environmental and social benefits of the Reuse Center, we can demonstrate how the initiative aligns with their sustainability goals and waste reduction strategies. The institutions play a critical role in providing the necessary infrastructure, funding, and regulatory support.

Our key concern in preventing the disposal of bulky waste is ensuring that it is disposed of properly and in accordance with regulations, so that it does not end up in illegal landfills. The *public utility company* plays a crucial role in this process and should carry out the disposal of bulky waste appropriately.

Establishing communication with relevant civil society organizations that focus on sustainable development will help us in implementing initiatives and raise awareness among citizens about green topics. We would like to leverage *non-governmental organization networks* to recruit volunteers and expert craftspeople for repair workshops.

The citizens themselves are integral to the success of the Center.

We would organize community meetings and outreach campaigns to inform the public about the center's mission and how it will benefit not only

the environment but also vulnerable social groups. During these sessions, we would explain how they can contribute by donating functional, reusable

items instead of discarding them, and how this small action can have a significant impact.

As part of the awareness campaign, *educational institutions* would also play a pivotal role. We would collaborate with local schools and universities

to promote the Reuse Center as a learning opportunity, offering workshops

and apprenticeships where students can develop practical repair skills or learn more about sustainability. The target group for this project includes citizens aged 35 and older, as well as educational institutions. We assume that individuals over the age

of 35 are more likely to own bulky waste that requires proper disposal.

Additionally, educational institutions offer opportunities for hands-on learning for students, allowing them to contribute to the community while gaining valuable skills in sustainable waste management.

Communication strategy

Public Awareness Campaign

The objective of this project is to raise awareness and educate the public about the importance of sustainable solutions, such as reusing old furniture, in order to gain support for the establishment of a Reuse Center. To achieve this, we will focus on publishing educational content on social media and highlighting examples of good practices from neighboring countries, such as the Reuse center in Croatia. Additionally, we will organize free or low-cost workshops where citizens can learn how to repair household items under the guidance of skilled craftsmen. Live demonstrations at public events will showcase how easily everyday items, like furniture, electronics,

and clothing, can be repaired rather than thrown away. Moreover, we aim to collaborate with schools to integrate these repair workshops into sustainability programs or extracurricular activities.

Media Outreach

The objective is to engage individuals over 35 on social media through targeted public awareness campaigns on Instagram and Facebook, with the aim of reducing bulky waste. To achieve this, we will post educational content and promote the organization of markets where bulky furniture can be given away. Additionally, we will highlight the environmental impact by sharing reports, case studies, and metrics on waste diverted from landfills. We will reach our audience by leveraging existing Facebook groups used by specific residential communities and neighborhoods, ensuring direct engagement with those most likely to benefit from and participate in the initiative.

Conclusion

Addressing the issue of bulky waste management requires a multifaceted approach that integrates both social and environmental solutions. Through the establishment of Reuse Centers and the organization of community reuse markets, this policy proposal aims to reduce illegal dumping, foster environmental sustainability, and promote social inclusion. By encouraging the reuse of old items, we can significantly reduce waste while supporting vulnerable communities with necessary household goods.

The proposal highlights the importance of collaboration with key stakeholders, such as municipalities, public utility companies and humanitarian organizations, to ensure effective implementation of this initiative. Additionally, a targeted public awareness campaign will be essential in educating citizens and raising their awareness of the importance of sustainable waste management as well as in engaging them in a circular economy.

This strategy not only addresses the immediate need for improved bulky waste disposal but also aligns with the core principles of circular economy

- maximizing the use of resources by keeping items in circulation and use for as long as possible. By extending the life cycle of products and reducing

the demand for new resources, we contribute to a cleaner, greener future, while promoting long term environmental and social resilience. By investing in reuse centers, advocating for policy changes and actively participating in reuse markets, we can reduce illegal dumping, repurpose valuable items and transform bulky waste into a resource and a catalyst for both environmental protection and community growth.