



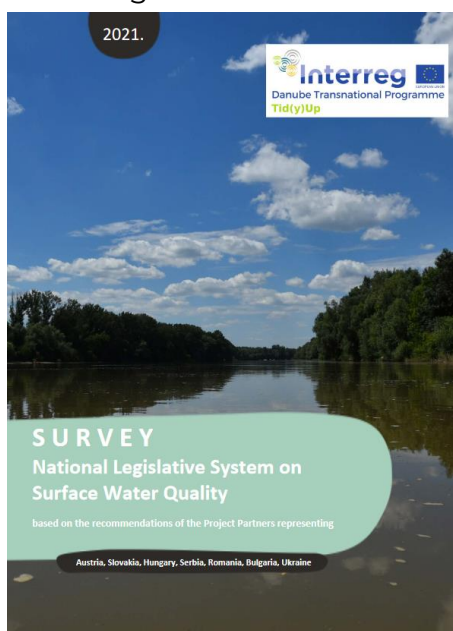
The plastic pollution of rivers can be managed with complex planning and international cooperation

A newly released policy guide, based on the experiences of river plastic pollution experts in the Danube basin, helps the protection of rivers worldwide.

Budapest, February 27, 2024.

Published by the Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises (KSZGYSZ) and the Plastic Cup Society

Over the past decade, Hungarian river protection methods and efforts have risen to prominence on the global stage. The driving force behind this surge is the Plastic Cup initiative, which leverages decades of experience in water and waste management to transform river cleanups into compelling and inspirational endeavors. The recently published policy paper highlights the cumulative impact of countless hours of overtime and volunteer work by hundreds of individuals, with invaluable support from colleagues in water management directorates and waste management utilities.



The policy paper is built upon the outcomes of the [Tid\(y\)Up](#) project, conducted from 2020 to 2022, which gained international recognition and, as an EU flagship initiative, facilitated the implementation of crucial documents and professional advancements. The Tisza round tables were expanded to include all Tisza countries, involving a total of 21 organizations from Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. Within this framework, these organizations collaborated to conduct a comprehensive survey on the recent international and national legal and environmental

protection measures pertaining to surface [Survey - National Legislative System on water quality](#) in the project countries: [Surface Water Quality](#) "

This gap-filling document provided a comprehensive overview of the relevant sector-specific legislation, described the institutional structure of each country and the mechanisms related to pollution.

Based on this, the recently published policy guide was compiled, the importance of which was noticed by the [International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River](#) (ICPDR) and participated in its development as a co-author. The authors presented the material at numerous international conferences, including meetings of the ICPDR working group, the [Carpathian Convention](#) conference, the [International Solid Waste Association](#) (ISWA) congress, the [UN Environment Program conference](#) (UNEP) and the [UN in professional, preparatory](#) webinars related to [the global plastic convention](#).



The objective of the study is to provide citizens, researchers, and decision-makers with recommendations for universally applicable best practices grounded in proven methodologies. These practices can be applied to address pollution in other rivers, contributing to the preservation of diverse river ecosystems worldwide.

Effective transboundary waste, water, and watershed management necessitates close cooperation and robust partnerships among countries. While significant efforts have been made by Danube countries in treating widely known pollutants such as organic substances and chemicals, as well as certain micropollutants, macroplastic riverine litter pollution presents a novel challenge for which no basin-wide treatment strategy has been developed thus far. This underscores the importance of the study and the authors' roles in addressing this pressing issue.

"What proves effective in the world's most international watershed is likely to be adopted elsewhere. Our achievements stem from extensive collaboration, as when water management, waste management, civil society, local governments, higher education institutions, and the green industry come



together, cost-effective protection, damage prevention, and utilization can be achieved through symbiotic relationships."

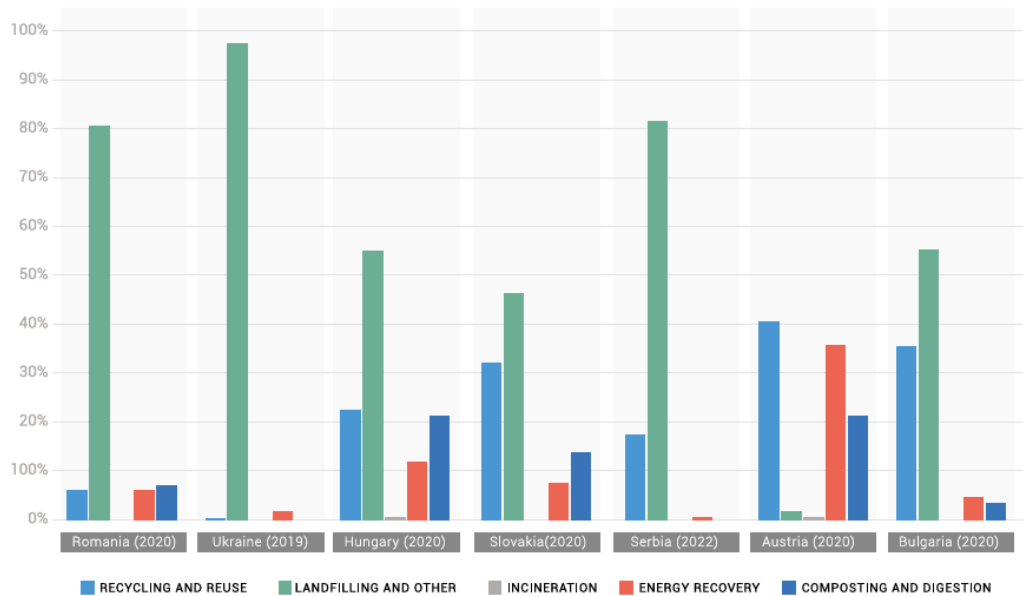
Gergely Hankó - managing director, KSZGYSZ

Plastic pollution is a significant concern worldwide, prompting action at both the global and EU levels. The ongoing negotiations for a UN convention on plastic pollution hold promise for bringing about crucial and much-needed changes. Prior to this, the EU had already implemented its plastics strategy focused on promoting the sustainable and safe use of plastics.



When there is a plastic flood, the water department and volunteers work hand in hand

[Plastic Cup Society](#) and [KSZGYSZ](#) aim to contribute field experience and scientific findings to this endeavor. Particularly, observations conducted in the Upper Tisza basin and the Drina watershed have revealed that severe waste pollution during floods inflicts significant damage on protected riverside floodplain areas (Natura 2000 conservation areas), disrupts the operation of water facilities, and jeopardizes drinking water quality. This is largely attributed to the absence of waste collection systems or their operational discontinuity (about 200 settlements in Transcarpathia lack waste management). The study adopts a comprehensive approach to examine the driving forces behind these challenges and potential solutions. It assesses the status of extended producer responsibility systems (EPR systems) in the relevant countries, the anticipated implementation of deposit redemption systems (DRS), and the negative incentives associated with the illegal dumping of waste.



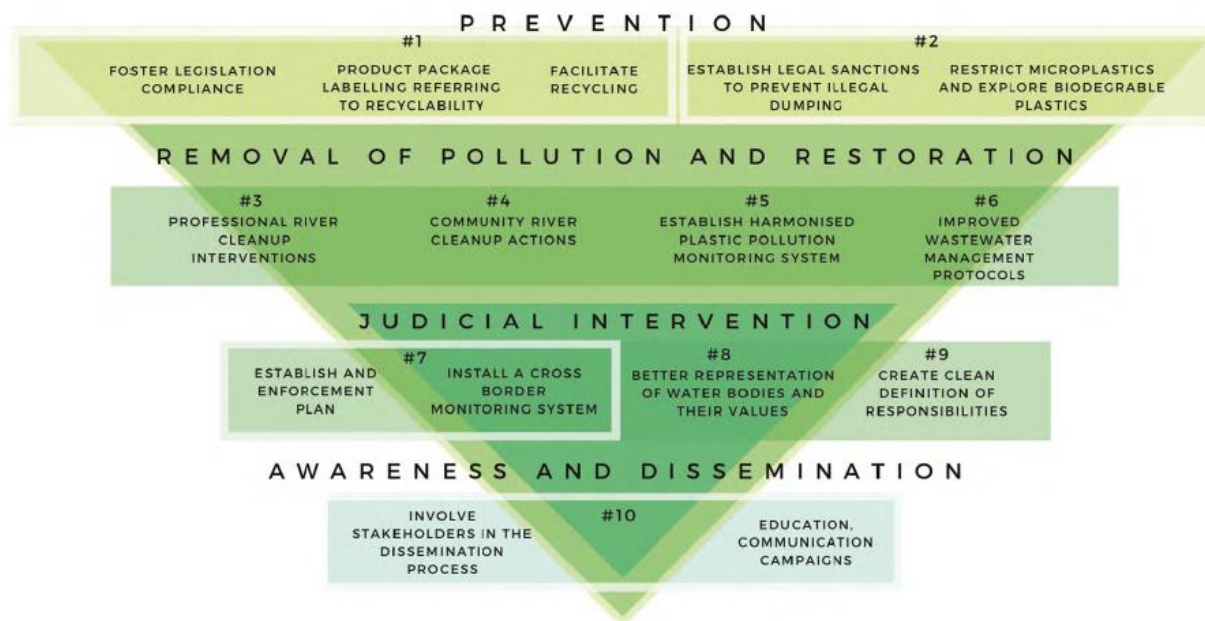
Distribution of waste management methods in the examined countries

An extensive international citizen science project unveiled over 3500 polluted sites within the [Tisza River Basin](#), where a significant accumulation of riverine litter, predominantly plastics, was observed. The monitoring of plastic pollution in rivers, conducted through fieldwork and advanced technologies like remote sensing, has been instrumental in guiding cleanup efforts. Consequently, cleanup operations in the Tisza River Basin have successfully addressed over 900 sites.

The policy paper offers guidance in the following areas:

- >> Provides recommendations for essential regulatory measures to establish effective waste management systems and combat illegal waste disposal, including the review of existing waste management facilities.
- >> Proposes financial and planning instruments to bolster these measures, such as environmental protection guarantees.
- >> Highlights key strategic interventions aligned with the waste hierarchy, prioritizing waste management options based on environmental benefits.
- >> Stresses the critical importance of closely coordinating effective monitoring of plastic pollution and implementing regular and comprehensive river cleaning activities.
- >> Underlines the significance of education, public opinion shaping, and fostering attitude change as crucial elements for promoting more responsible and sustainable management of plastics and other waste materials.

To enhance clarity, their recommendations have been categorized into 10 main groups:



Best practices all over

The [Call-Action project](#), funded by Diageo since 2022, aims to bolster selective waste collection and enhance waste management in Transcarpathia, Ukraine. The initiative seeks to ameliorate living conditions for over 120,000 residents along the Tisza River by reintroducing several tons of valuable sorted waste into the recycling cycle and generating employment opportunities in the region. Initially targeting the collection, sorting, and treatment of at least 690 tons of waste throughout the project's duration, the endeavor exceeded expectations. By November 2023, over 1,100 tons of waste had already been collected. The initiative notably expanded waste collection capacity in Uzhhorod, Beregovo, and the surrounding areas. The project is set to continue into 2024.



The EcoBus travels around Uzhhorod and collects usable packaging waste from the residents

What comes next?

The journey persists, with one of its highlights being the INTERREG Aquatic Plastic project, launched on January 1st. Thirteen organizations from nine countries will collaborate closely for two and a half years. Their focus will encompass researching micro and macro plastics, mapping river pollution, eliminating pollution sources, facilitating professional roundtable discussions, and conducting scientific lectures. It is worth following the pages of the [Plastic Cup](#) and the [Aquatic Plastic](#) project.

The policy guide can be downloaded using the QR code. >>

More information:



Gergely Hankó
Managing Director
HAEE
00 36 20 383 6242
ugyvezeto@kszgysz.hu
www.kszgysz.hu/en

