

# **Zero-waste: the new norm?**

## *Circular economy*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Europeans have been producing more and more waste for many years, and their ecological debt to society is increasing. The myth that we live in a world with infinite resources is certainly not true, year by year, the environment is increasingly polluted with waste. Therefore, we should think about reducing waste and managing already existing unnecessary things. Food and beverage are critically important segments in this respect: after consumption, in most cases, plastic packaging is not getting reused.

The European strategy for sustainable development points to the necessary changes in this topic. It is therefore worth considering a recycling society that will take into account the reduction of material and energy consumption to transform it into a zero-waste society, which reduces the consumption of materials and energy, has an impact on the local economy and grassroots initiatives.

However, not everybody can be convinced to live a more sustainable life. Positive trends connected with recycling, reusing, or repairing things are present, but this is still not enough. Our research question is: How can a generation change the approach to sustainability? The ultimate goal is to prevent the generation of waste before the packaging is even produced. For a deeper understanding of the problem and the current market trends, primarily among generation Z customers, we have prepared a questionnaire and had 25 interviews in written form. Regarding the expected results, we think that the majority of the respective age group is aware of the importance of the problem. However, they would prefer alternatives with competitive pricing.

### **1. Introduction**

In our research, we have focused on several aspects and a couple of forms of gaining data and information. First of all, we found some eco-friendly companies and ideas across the world. Secondly, we approached some people and asked them about their eco attitudes and habits. Additionally, we prepared some analysis of how much tons of waste are generated in European countries. For a deeper understanding of the process, we have decided to conduct our primary research based on two methods: questionnaire via Google Forms and interviews in written form (which helped us to understand the complex aspects of the problem).

## 2. Eco ideas, trends, and projects across the world

### 2.1. Ways to become eco

Firstly, we decided to look around and find some aspects that may be repetitive or considered as trends, just to understand our society better. When it comes to being eco, we may focus on three groups:

- products that are an alternative to disposable products - a steel straw, a textile shopping bag, or a reusable diaper,
- not the product itself, but the raw materials used and the method of packaging - metal, paper, or wood,
- things that are simply durable and will last for years.

### 2.2. Analysis of the European population

In 2019 the 15-24 and 25-49 age groups were the most considerable. This means these groups should learn as much as they can about zero waste because they will define the next years' waste generation trends (Eurostat, 2020).

## Population by age group in EU (28 countries), 2019

■ 0-14 years ■ 15-24 years ■ 25-49 years ■ 50-64 years ■ 65-79 years ■ 80- years

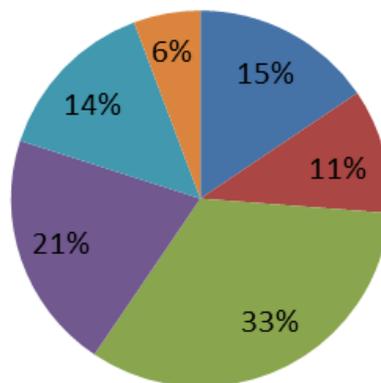
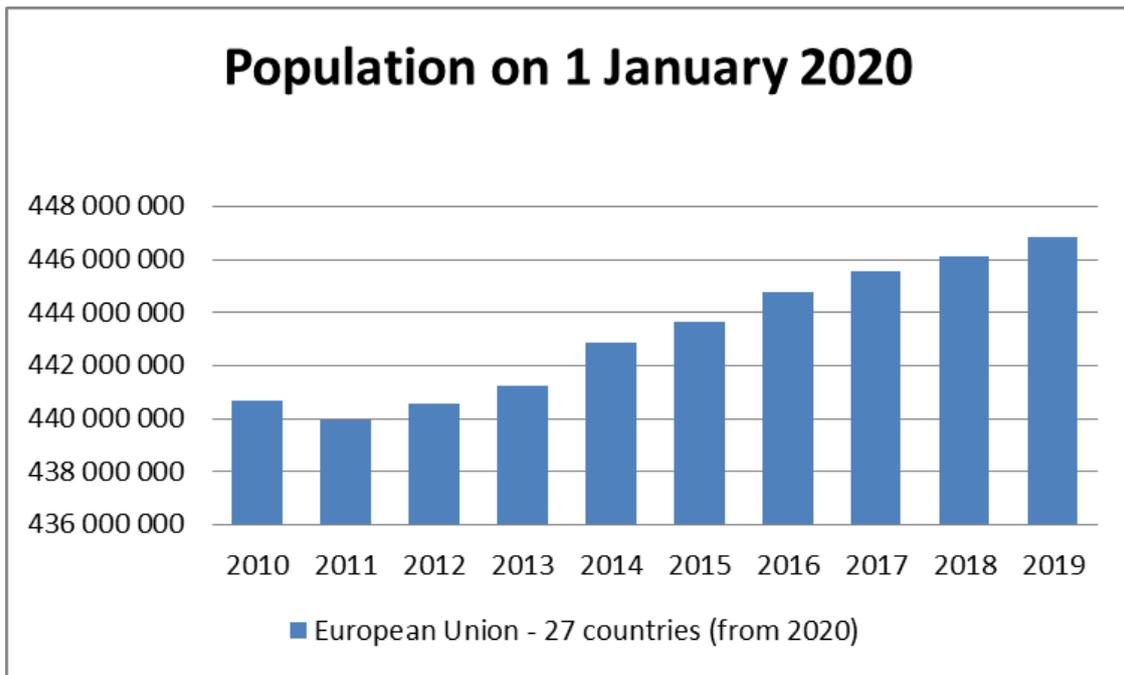


Figure 1: EU population by age groups

source: Eurostat



**Figure 2: EU population (data from 1st of January 2020)**  
*source: Eurostat*

### 3.3. What should be done? Possible solutions

What can we do about all this? There are many videos on social networking sites. We would like to highlight just two of them. One is Natalie Fee's Ted Talk performance on Why Plastic Pollution is Personal. In her speech, she draws attention to how much garbage households flush down the toilet in England. She calls for a reduction in the use of plastics in the bathroom, such as the use of eco-friendly products instead of plastic ear swabs, which are available in larger environmentally conscious stores (Fee, 2017). The other video is also a Ted Talk lecture: The surprising solution to ocean plastic - David Katz. His idea is to buy garbage from poor regions and sell it to large corporations for recycling. This will help disadvantaged people to work and reach better living conditions (Katz, 2017).

Despite all the good ideas, we are confident, there is only one "final" solution: to stop producing new plastics and to reuse existing plastics over and over again, as £ 18 billion, or 8 million tons of garbage a year, goes into the waters of the oceans alone. If this goes on by 2050, there will be more plastic waste in the oceans than fish (Katz, 2017).

Not all of the presented cases and ideas are revolutionary, but it clearly shows, some habits, trends, and attractive eco-friendly approaches can bring significant changes. We should take advantage of them in terms of increasing awareness of the importance of sustainable products among Z generation customers.

SCOBY, or organic packaging, is an invention of a Polish woman - Róża Rutkowska, a graduate of the Poznań School of Form. Short for Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast - is an organic packaging that is grown for two weeks like onions, i.e. by layering. There are no great requirements. It does not need light, sterile conditions, or even advanced technology. "Foil" is made of so-called tea mushroom or kombucha, fed with agricultural waste. Used packaging can be thrown into compost or simply eaten (Osmanski, 2020).

Getting a reusable water bottle and coffee cup is one of the simplest zero waste changes people can make. Making coffee at home and taking it in a reusable cup, or filling up a bottle of water for free instead of buying a new bottle each time, saves lots of money in the long run.

Silo is a restaurant conceived from a desire to innovate the food industry. They have their flour mill that turns ancient varieties of wheat into flour the original way, opposing over-processed industrialized bread-making techniques. They churn their butter, make their oat milk. The restaurant furniture and fittings are created from a desire to re-use, choosing up-cycling before recycling. The furniture is made from materials that would otherwise have been wasted, crafted with innovation to serve a function. The plates are formed from plastic bags and tables from reconstituted food packaging. To achieve zero waste, all products delivered to the restaurant come in reusable vessels such as crates, pails, urns, or containers. Anything that is not consumed by our customers (or us) is fed into our aerobic digester, which can generate up to 60kg of compost in just 24 hours (Levy, 2020).

Original Unverpackt, Germany. Original Unverpackt is the first supermarket chain that provides a full range of products while abstaining from the use of disposable packaging materials. Therefore, they are offering consumers an easy option to live a more environmentally friendly life. All it takes is a minor shift in the customer's shopping behavior. Reusable containers are being used, filled with groceries, and finally paid by weight. This method also decreases the amount of food being thrown away. You only buy the amount you want. Big problems need simple solutions. The 16 million tons of packaging that are thrown away annually in Germany are a big problem and Original Unverpackt offers an intuitive solution: Shopping without packaging (MoreThanGreen, 2020).

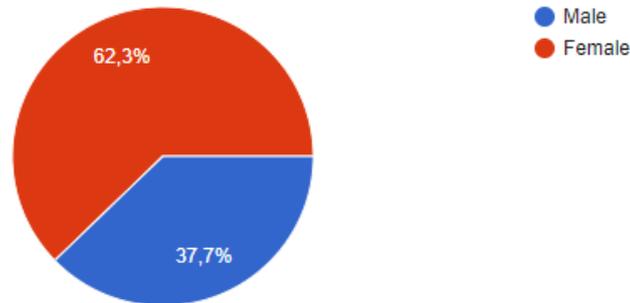
Misfits Market US (usually) provides imperfect fruits and vegetables to reduce the waste of food and they use recyclable packages. In the US, many of the inhabitants still do not have access to high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables. They waste as much food as they eat. Almost half of what the nation's farms grow is never eaten. Much of this is due to modern-day beauty standards for food. Funny-looking fruits, misshapen vegetables, and delicious but odd-sized produce are squandered at every level. The Misfits Market's mission is the following: Bringing delicious, fresh, and affordable rescued produce to people everywhere and reduce food waste at a scale that creates a positive and lasting impact. Unlike other brands, they do not focus only on dense urban areas. They offer fresh produce that might not check all the boxes for perfection into boxes and sending it straight to the customer. Every box of Misfits Market produce ordered benefits farmers, helps prevent food waste, and ultimately helps save our environment.

### 3. Research findings based on the prepared questionnaire

#### 3.1. Closed-ended questions

What is your gender?

106 válasz

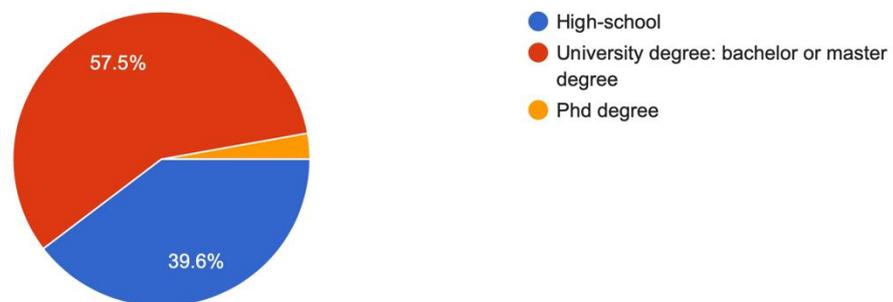


**Figure 3: Gender of respondents**

*For our questionnaire, we got 106 responses. Females dominated in the questionnaire for 62.3%.*

What is your qualification?

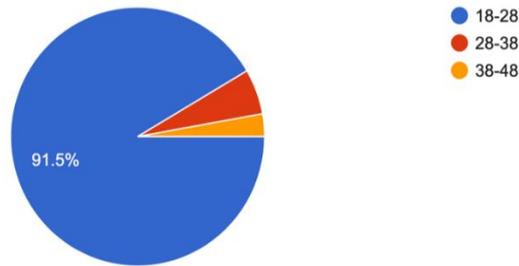
106 responses



**Figure 4: Qualification of respondents**

*In terms of qualification, the majority of our respondents have a university (BA or MA degree) or have finished high school. The number of respondents with a Ph.D. degree is marginal (2.9%).*

What is your age?  
106 responses



**Figure 5: Age of respondents**

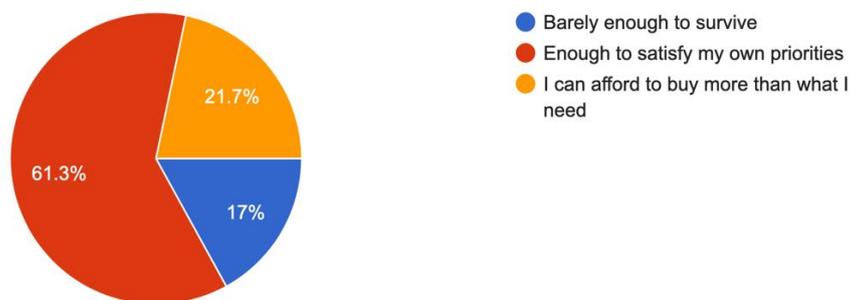
*91.5% of our respondents are members of Generation Z, 5.7% are from the age group of 28-38 and 2.8% are from the 38-48 age group*

As for the research question we focused on generation Z. In our kind opinion, we think that could change the nation’s thinking and actions too, just by making more and more opportunities to grow in the circular economy circle.

“In December 2019, First Insight surveyed consumers in the U.S. on how sustainable practices are impacting shopping habits and purchase decisions. The results point to the growing expectation for sustainable models, with Generation Z making more shopping decisions based on sustainable retail practices than even Millennials and Generation X. Baby Boomers overall were the least influenced by sustainability factors (FirstInsight, 2020).

Most of the cases are characterized as people do not know how and why to start thinking about sustainability as an important aspect. One of the areas now, significant growth can and have to be achieved is the sustainable industry. The most important is to increase awareness regarding the importance of the problem.

How would you rate your monthly income?  
106 responses



**Figure 6: Monthly income of respondents**

As we can see, most people are satisfied with their monthly income and how can manage to have everything they do need in their household, leading with 61.3% in terms of responses. Until

recyclable and zero-waste products are relatively hard to find (necessity of additional effort) and in most of the cases are more expensive than the others, monthly income is an important aspect.

Do you think that zero waste programs are affordable?  
106 responses

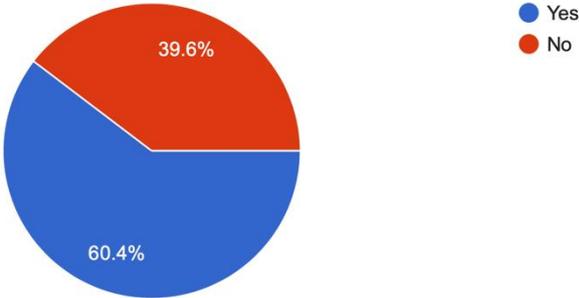


Figure 7: Affordability of zero-waste lifestyle

This ratio was relatively unexpected. Just because people may know about the zero waste programs, it seems like, they consider this approach affordable. As soon as the majority of respondents do not have proper experience regarding zero-waste programs, these percentages may show the willingness to change the way of thinking regarding sustainability, waste management, or prevention of waste creation, thinking about the future of humanity and planet Earth.

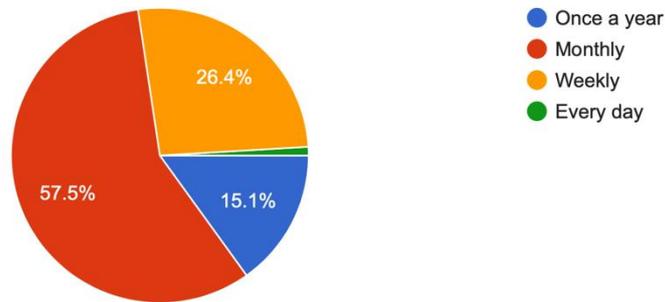
How important is it to you to reduce your ecological footprint (this metric shows how much we use the Earth's resources)?  
106 responses



Figure 8: Importance of ecological footprint reduction

About half of respondents are aware of the importance of ecological footprint reduction. However, 41.5% of respondents are aware of the problem, but their consumption is not influenced by it, because eco-friendly products are relatively hard to find in regular stores and their price is higher in most cases.

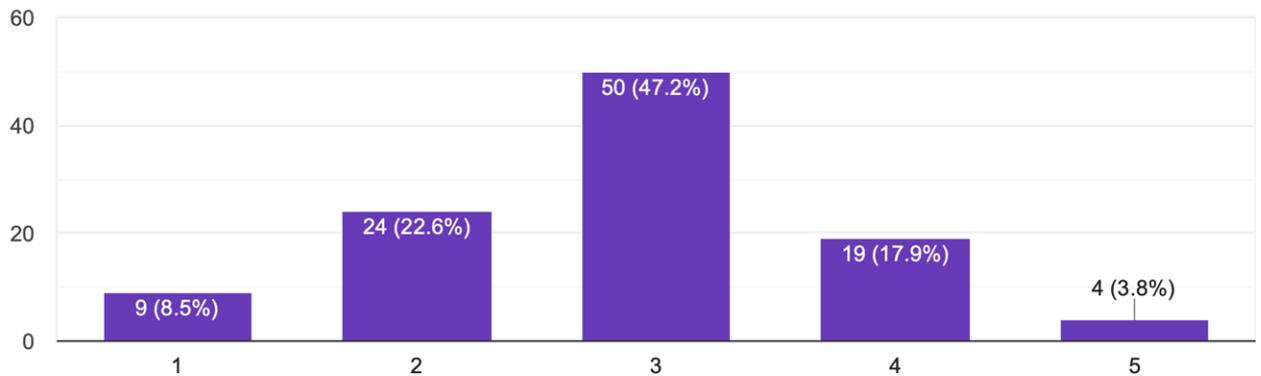
How often do you order fast food?  
106 responses



**Figure 9: Frequency of fast-food orders among respondents**

Another important aspect regarding food-related pollution is the amount of ordered fast food. Our respondents admitted the usage of the possibility of fast food orders. Packaging of ordered food is also a hot topic in terms of sustainability.

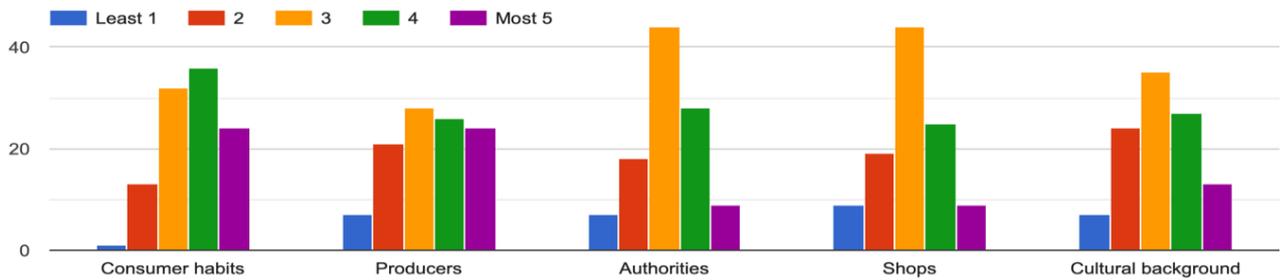
How typical is the excessive consumption in your household?  
106 responses



**Figure 10: Presence of excessive consumption in the household of respondents**

Results of the questionnaire have proved that excessive consumption is a serious problem among the members of generation Z and campaigns should be prepared to express the importance of the aspect.

Who or what is to blame?



**Figure 11: Parties responsible for excessive waste generation**

To analyze the situation effectively, it has to be seen which party is the most responsible for the problem of waste generation. As of the results, based on our questionnaire, consumer habits, producers and cultural background are the most important factors. However, the responsibility of authorities and shops is also significant.

### 3.2. Open-ended questions

*How do SMEs handle this issue in your country? (SMEs= small and medium-sized enterprises)*

SMEs are a really important part of the economy, as soon as 93% of non-financial institutions of the EU are micro-enterprises (less than 10 employees) and 99% are categorized as SMEs, accounting for more than half of Europe's GDP, ensuring jobs for approximately 100 million European people (European Commission, 2020).

The most frequent answers:

1. They do not know about it.
2. No.
3. Bad / difficult options.
4. SMEs are doing a better job->they afford more and more zero waste options.
5. Selective options.
6. They play an important role in the structure.

The most frequent answers, people did not know anything about it or they did not have enough knowledge about it. At some point if want to change something, we should spread more and more awareness about it, but as maintainable as it could be. For example, starting teaching in schools or making more and more workshops, where they could learn and try to do something maintainable, as a

bag, or not using plastic as wrapping paper, maybe fruit or any alternatives. Small steps could make the change.

*Do you have any prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?*

The most frequent answers:

1. No.
2. Most of them do not have a specific plan. But they are trying to produce as little waste they can. / Not enough knowledge about the subject.
3. Not throwing out food / composting.
4. Simplest things: bringing a bag, going by foot, reducing plastic in the household.
5. Yes, with a purpose or a specific need.
6. Yes, however importance of increasing awareness is crucial via different channels.

#### **4. Research findings based on interviews**

We have done in total 23 interviews with 15 female and 8 male interviewees, with an average age of 28.9 years. Our interviewees live in 8 different countries, the distribution of them is the following: Romania - 15, Hungary - 2, Brazil, Czech Republic, France, Netherlands, Slovakia, and the USA - one interviewee from each country. As of specializations we have had the opportunity to talk with students (13), teachers (2), sales managers (2), owner of media platform, legal expert, social worker, engineer, photographer, and medical researcher.

All interviewees agreed that eco-friendliness is an important aspect and its ultimate goal is zero-waste. The optimism of them varied about the possibility of the widespread appearance of zero-waste shortly. Every individual, but also communities are responsible for the environment. The acting of governments and local authorities is crucial. On the one hand, the introduction of guidelines and presentation of best practices can be beneficial, can enrich the awareness of people. On the other hand, enforcement of laws is also needed. To change the mindset, strict regulations have to be applied for individuals and also for companies.

The biggest problem is regarding plastic packaging and products. To buy a wide range of package-free products can be a real challenge, even in Western Europe or the USA, as our interviewees confirmed. Until this will not change, zero-waste will not become possible for a significantly bigger group of people than now. This would be only the first step. Eco-friendly products have to be sold at a fair price level because of two factors. Firstly, people will not buy eco-friendly products at a considerably higher price level, and even less convenient than in the case of traditional packaging. Secondly, people with lower income levels will not afford to become eco-friendly and zero-waste.

Until a 1.5-liter soft drink can be bought for 50 cents in a PET, it is practically impossible to promote zero-waste effectively. Even if somebody would like to buy something in eco-friendly packaging in a regular shop, it is not possible. Only some specialized shops are available and only for a limited variety of products. Selling products without packaging and put it directly into a bag is possible only for a

limited number of products (for example, fruits and vegetables), so having reusable, but special packaging could be the best solution. For sure, this will require efforts from the side of the company and also from the side of the shop (for example, to be able to fill a glass with juice in the store or to fill a box with rice and weigh it after). None of our interviewees would be able to change to fully zero-waste in the current conditions.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, a solution regarding eco-friendly packaging (or if it is possible, without packaging) for a variety of products, especially which are daily used, for example, food and beverage, at a competitive price level can be successful in the following years. This way the awareness regarding zero-waste, it could be offered also in regular shops. If people are aware of the importance and irreversibility of the ecological footprint, the amount of generated waste will decline significantly, and – at least – selective collection of waste becomes more common and a zero-waste lifestyle can become a realistic goal in everyone's life without compromises. This can be more effective if governments and local authorities would start to impose guidelines and enforce stricter regulations in the field. We have seen the tightening regarding shopping bags and some other single-use products. The direction is good but it has to be continued as soon as possible.

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## **Appendix – transcript of interviews**

*1<sup>st</sup> interviewee: 26 years old female, export sales manager, Hungary*

### **1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I do not think it is so feasible because a lot of conditions are not given. For example, the majority of stores still offer most of the items in plastic packaging.

### **2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at a company and individual level?**

At the company level (Aluminium gravity-die casting SME in Hungary), practically all of the produced waste is hazardous waste. Only companies that specialize in it can transport, handle and destroy it. We have a lot of regulations to comply with, it is expensive and often inspected by the authorities. I think that's why these are easier to enforce at the corporate level than at the individual level.

### **3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Hungary?**

For example, now due to the construction of a new building, the environmental authority has come to the plant as well, they also had to approve the plan. There is a certain company register. Fields of activities are also regulated regarding waste management processes. We cannot engage in activities where waste treatment is not resolved. So, we have a contract with about 10 types of companies: someone takes away the aluminum powder, someone takes the used oil, someone the sands core and that's how we can work.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

Here is what I mentioned in the first question. While stores offer everything in plastic and it is cheaper, most people buy it. I think regulations should be tightened so that people have no choice regarding the packaging.

### **5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

The responsibility is the same, but as I said, I think it is easier to enforce at the company level due to full regulation than at the individual level. If a country is more in favor of an environmentally friendly lifestyle, then residents also do not have many choices. That forced awareness is not the best because of the way of enforcement, but as long as they are allowed to buy plastic straws, they will buy it, if they are not allowed it, they will not.

### **6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

I think companies, at least we, are not able to reduce the quantity of waste significantly. It has to be regulated properly. At the individual level, the approach should be "reshaped" primarily, and companies should not be allowed to produce as much useless and mostly plastic single-use products as they do today.

### **7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I know more and more people who are trying to switch, but zero waste is not going for anyone yet. There are not so many alternatives in Hungary, or only in Budapest. There you can find package-free

shops, but in smaller cities not really. For example, you cannot buy rice either, just in a plastic bag, pre-packaged.

*2<sup>nd</sup> interviewee: 39 years old male, legal expert, Romania*

### **1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

In my opinion, they are feasible in the case of economically advanced countries and depend on so many variables in countries that are much less developed. In the less developed countries, the problem is two-sided: 1. one side is that there are developed and used daily, or more or less (they have the legal base for them) but locally the active implementation of them is poor, or varies from place to place. 2. The behavior of the society for which is a new thing and they do not take it seriously because they think they have more serious problems than this kind of problems, which they think most are the ones of the higher living standard people's problems.

### **2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

This is a very complex question. It is complex because you can take the problem on a national and local basis to, legal approach or of course an economic approach.

OK, let's say the legal approach is OK in the EU, because of the implementation in the national law of the EU law enforcement. But there are differences regardless of the legal enforcements... The economic ones depend very much on the companies and their economic reasons, how they interpreted the legal requirements, and of course their will to be eco-friendly in the first hand, even if their economic growth is affected by these measures.

On the individual level, I think it is up to the person himself, his/her intellectual level, and not least how in his environment is integrated the belief on this problem (eco-friendliness and all the problems with it).

### **3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania?**

In Romania, the legal bases are there like in the entire EU. All the differences become mostly from the mentality of his inhabitants, local administrations. Sadly, there are big differences from town to towns, in the rural locations even bigger, and because of long-time basis corruption, the implementation of these rules, many times exists only virtually or poorly applied.

This is a game of cats and mouse, the administrations say they are doing what they can, the government of the country says they provide the basis for the local administrations but they are not taking it seriously, and yes, the individuals seeing all of this, are not taking it seriously because they think everything over their heads is mainly corrupt and as a result, they are looking it over.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

This is the classical question of what was in the first of all: the egg or the chicken?

In my opinion, the local administrations and most importantly the shops, economic players have to be examples to be followed, and only in very few countries with very high standards of living are normally assimilated by the citizens as normal things, done daily. In the other countries, I believe the economic players have to be the examples to be followed by the citizens and not only to be followed but to be the ones who are forcing them to change their habits, by forcing them to do in the right way, not to

have options to do it or not to. Mainly the normal people are addicted to their beliefs and it is a long process the change them.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

Firstly, the country by all the means, after that the local administrations and if all these players made their job well, then yes, all of the individuals can make their very serious roll of spreading the words, of doing it in the right way, of telling to others how to do it, what to do, etc.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

First of all, to make their inner functioning legal bases (regulations) more eco-friendly. After that, they have to implement what they changed on the board of commissions, etc. They have to use more eco-friendly wrapping, package during the complete production and packaging process, and via prompt eco-friendly marketing campaigns.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

Living in one of the most developed cities of Romania, I think it is relatively easy for me to be eco-friendly because we have eco-friendly waste disposal for almost everything (despite this my observations are that occasional all the garbage are taken with the same garbage truck, but not all the time). I think the bigger challenge is in the rural side where mostly is up to the inhabitants if they are disposing of the waste (more or less) eco-friendly or not. A part of our family is living in a rural area, and we have there a cesspool for biodegradable waste, we never burn the waste, we go to collection centers time to time with plastic and glass bottles, with paper and never leave in nature disposable waste if we are going to picnic or excursion. Most of my acquaintances are conscious of eco-friendliness and I think they are doing the best with their possibilities, but sadly my observations in my country are different if we are looking at the big picture.

*3<sup>rd</sup> interviewee: 24 years old male, sales manager, Hungary*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

This can only be achieved through the common belief of people, working together. Each individual must take responsibility for their own and their children's future. In my opinion, it is possible, only if in addition to the individuals, companies are also striving for this goal.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

As long as there are cheaper options for other methods of waste disposal, irresponsible individuals and companies will choose this option.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania? And in Hungary?**

Unfortunately, in my environment, both in Romania and in Hungary, I know very few people who use conscious waste management methods.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

On this issue, however, I have seen significant changes, 30-40% of my acquaintances have changed the use of woven bags for shopping instead of plastic bags. Stores would even have to contribute to

this with state support (withdraw the plastic bag from the market and take down the price of the woven bag, with a state contribution). Plastic is cheaper, but the woven bag can be used multiple times and is not as polluting. And for sure, this is true for plastic packaging in general.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

There is a lot of responsibility on both sides, but in my opinion, 80% of the waste produced is generated during production. I think the most important thing is for us all to think individually, whether it is the mayor of a city or the director of a company, if he realizes how much he can do for our environment and can make responsible decisions, then anything is available in this area.

*4<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 34 years old female, social worker, USA*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I am in favor of zero waste programs. It is a great goal, and even if they fall short of 100% success, it's beneficial for the planet.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think the main factors are convenience and reliance on existing habits/practices.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

Both are guilty. Consumers should show companies their values with buying decisions. But there are not a lot of plastic-free alternatives. So, companies need to do their part to produce products with lower waste and less packaging.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

Such a hard question. The people should voice their values about this to the government. But the government needs to act on waste reduction initiatives faster than their current rate of response.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

We need the option to be there. Just like how organic options are now available almost in every sector. Package free/recycled/bulk etc. buying options need to be available to consumers. Of the things I purchased, I can only choose package-free options on about 10% of the items. Mostly just fruits and vegetables, unless I go to a bulk store. The problem with those sources is that they don't tend to offer specialty or inorganic things.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

No, I do not have any inside knowledge of this, just try to minimize the amount of waste when possible and recycling it.

*5<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 21 years old male, student, Slovakia*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think they are good for the environment when they are done right.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

It is hard to combine all procedures to reduce waste production.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Slovakia?**

They give benefits to companies that have less waste.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

It is on both sides. Shops can design non-plastic and zero waste products, but consumers must be responsible for it too.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

The country has to promote it first to show its benefits, and then people will join.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

No plastic and usage of recyclable materials.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I try to recycle plastic, paper, glass and save what can be reused.

*6<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 35 years old female, owner of a media platform and proposal writer, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think zero waste programs are very important and should be taken more seriously. We are suffocating in rubbish, but everyone is just looking aside instead of facing the truth. My opinion is that is feasible, I believe the world is rich enough, economically speaking, to replace most of the single-use packages, tools, etc. to reduce the quantity of generated rubbish. The problem comes from the fact that the goods are distributed in a very exaggerated, unequal proportion, and are used for harmful, useless purposes (army, war, etc.). And yes, if everyone would take into consideration what matters, a zero-waste lifestyle would be achievable. Men on Earth lived for hundreds and hundreds of years without plastic and packaging every single object.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

If I say it is working, I am talking about very small, but successful initiatives that I know about. Certain shops and households, where people managed to reach zero waste/or close to lifestyle.

At the company level, it is not working because of economic interests. On the individual level, it is not working harder to achieve, because of comfort and lack of knowledge about one's eco-footprint and lack of attitude.

### **3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania? And in Hungary?**

I don't have a real picture about this, about how SMEs handle the question of waste management in ROM or HUN. What I see, is that non-profits put more accent on it (handling their rubbish, in the sense of quantity, quality, management) and that SMEs sometimes are not obeying even the most basic legislation given by the government/ministry, because of coppers – honestly speaking.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think the mistake is present on every level of the production-consumption cycle. My opinion is that change necessitates an attitude on all levels.

### **5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

This case is pretty much similar to the previous one: everyone should act like one in this sense. It is a common interest so everyone should promote it. Though, I would say, the bigger responsibility is on the individuals.

### **6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

I think they should change their mind about the priority list, and their way of thinking always about tomorrow, but think about a much longer term. And the solutions would come on their way to the problems. It would be no question anymore how they want to change, or what, or at what price.

### **7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I have, I use it, it works so far, I made myself and my household get used to it. Also, I know people, shops, who are living with this priority, and who believe that every small drop count.

*7<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 22 years old female, student, Brazil*

### **1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

From the moment that companies are concerned with this issue, it is possible to obtain good results to avoid waste, but I believe that it is also a cultural issue that needs time to be introduced into society.

### **2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

Because it is a cultural issue, which is only now becoming a major concern, so it will take time for this change to happen on a global level.

### **3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Brazil?**

Many new small companies in Brazil are being born already to sell products that reduce the environmental impact, such as shampoo, conditioner, and deodorant in a bar, washable pad, bamboo toothbrush, etc.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

The initiative, in this case, must be of the companies that produce this material. The consumer will buy products made with materials that replace plastic, once the industry offers it to them at a fair price compared to its value.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

Of course, each person has to have their responsibility, but the quickest way for this change to take place would be if the city and country government took regulatory measures.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

I believe that the most important step to take now is to reduce the use of plastics in general. And governments should take waste separation and recycling more seriously, and do everything they can to insert it into the culture of their people, as this is still not very common in most parts of the world.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I have a personal plan to always try to reduce plastic in my daily life. These are small actions, but they can influence other people and I believe to make a difference. Some examples: do not use plastic bags, use a bamboo toothbrush, solid toothpaste without packaging, washable pads, do not use disposable cups, etc. My next goal is to have a composter at home.

*8<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 28 years old male, engineer, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think we may never get to a zero-waste world, but we can slow down the problem.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think we generate more plastic trash than ever, and very little of it gets recycled. Plastics and their products are littering our cities, oceans, and waterways, and contributing to health problems in humans and animals. I think it wouldn't be so expensive for a company to become zero waste, but the change should be wanted by every stakeholder. Human bad habits and zero responsibility also come into play. Few people collect the garbage selectively.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania?**

The SMEs in Romania do the following: force the employees to collect the garbage selectively, recycle the scrap materials, and use biodegradable packaging solutions.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think we buy too many products with plastic package but the manufacturers can produce fewer products with plastic package. For example, soft drinks could be sold only in glass and could be packaged in cardboard boxes.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think people who live in rural areas have to promote eco-friendly things first, but people who live in an urban environment have a bigger responsibility.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

I think the solution to produce less garbage is to use more recyclable materials.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

Yes, I have. I buy soft drinks bottled in glass, I use only recyclable shopping bags, buy vegetables and fruits without packaging. I try to collect the garbage selectively.

*9<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 19 years old female, student, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

In my opinion, zero waste programs can motivate people to be careful of our planet. In my environment, I have the chance to know people who live their lives in a “zero waste” mentality.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

Difficulties come from people’s behaviors because it’s hard to change your lifestyle or to change anything for a beneficial aspect.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania?**

In our country, we try to make difference. With less plastic consumption or with green programs.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers’ habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think that customers won’t seem to resolve these problems with the current mindset. Customers must be more attentive about plastic products.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think that cities have the responsibility to change their perspective first. Then people follow their point of view.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

The solution for less garbage should be that not to consume that much plastic.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

In my environment, we try our best to be a little greener, with tree planting projects.

*10<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 20 years old female, student, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think it can be more or less achievable, the more people help and support the idea, the more waste recycles.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers’ habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

Neither of them. My opinion is that customers buy cheap products, which are in a plastic package, those that are in the recycled package, or port the sign of recycling is more expensive. People who buy things consciously are aware to avoid plastic packages, this means they buy more expensive things but healthier.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think this is a step-by-step process. The biggest responsibility is on the human, then on the city and then the country, like a pyramid, the basis is the human. If a person tries to think eco-friendly, the city gives them the opportunity for it, so it is an interaction.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

The companies should make innovations, and handle the separated waste collection, by investing in new ideas about recycling.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

For example, we (me and my family) make compost from bio-wastes, and we collect the waste selectively.

*11<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 24 years old female, photographer, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

In my opinion, zero waste programs are achievable. It is not the easiest thing to do but if we are really careful and we only allow recyclable or compostable products into our home or place of work it can be done.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think it is difficult to redesign waste production at a company level because at a company there are probably more than 50/100 people working and not all of them think the same, not all of them agree on these kinds of things, so even if like half of the company tries to redesign waste production, the other half will probably ruin it.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania?**

Unfortunately, I am not an expert in this matter and I'm sorry but I have no idea how they handle the issue if they even handle it in the first place.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think both, the consumers and the shops are at fault. The shops should try not to use this much plastic, but even if they do, consumers should try to find products that weren't made from plastic.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think the city should be the first one to promote eco-friendly things since many people have no clue about these things (like me) and the city should take the time and resources to educate the people because they have the bigger responsibility.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

The solution would be buying only eco-friendly products, composting at home, reuse and recycle old items, etc.

## **7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I just try not to use plastic at all, that's my plan, but I know other people who have similar plans too.

*12<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 40 years old female, teacher, a researcher in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Romania*

### **1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

In the long run, there is hope that it will be feasible, but in the short run, I don't think it can happen.

There are several reasons for this:

- There are not enough alternatives (e.g. goods without package) if yes, they are much more expensive than the traditional ones.
- The consumer, in most cases, is looking for a cheaper solution, especially in developing countries where wages are below the EU average.
- There are no government restrictions that would favor the products/services of local producers and distributors, shorten the logistics chain, and support the reduction of waste generation.
- Changing the mentality of consumers is a long-term process, we cannot talk about social expectations or pressure in Eastern European countries either.

### **2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

First of all, it would be necessary to apply the directives that the ECJ draws up, but we do less to apply them in practice. The flow of information is inadequate, existing good ideas are not put into practice, there is a lack of appropriate training for both companies and the final consumer.

### **3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania?**

SMEs in Romania are in most cases struggling with financial problems, there are a lot of fictitious businesses without activity. Research shows that managers do not lack the willingness to engage in philanthropic activities, they pay attention to the 3 important pillars of CSR (economy, society, environment) many times, but the goal is to not do it in a formalized way to be measurable.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

The literature distinguishes between conscious consumers and socially responsible consumers and describes the habits and attitudes that the above-mentioned perform/may perform.

In some cases, we may encounter boycotts and buycott, but these are negligible compared to past purchases. Fortunately, statistics also show that the social/environmental sensitivity of the rising generation is much higher. With this in mind, we can also hope for a change in mentality.

It would be important to be aware that the ecological footprint of developed countries can often be one hundred times bigger than those who live in third world countries (the ecological footprint of 1 US citizen corresponds to 61 Nigerian footprints). The promises of climate conferences (see 2006 in Paris) will not be met by countries/governments, industry changes would be needed primarily, legislative intervention, not the final consumer demand will solve this issue.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

As I mentioned earlier, change is also needed at the micro-level, but most countries/regions need to intervene, this can only be achieved by introducing a legal framework. Of course, NGOs and consumers can do/change a lot, but these initiatives never cover large social areas.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

Decisions embedded in strategy would be needed, proactive thinking because reactive adjustments only extinguish the fire, but they are not effective in the long run.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

The circular economy concept would be able to solve this problem and also the blue economy concept offers possibilities (Gunter Pauli: Blue economy).

*13<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 21 years old female, student, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think that for the next few years/decade it will not be achievable. Until all the big companies don't go zero waste, then the average people won't be able to live this lifestyle.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

Probably, the materials that these companies use are cheaper and until there is no consequence for them, they won't change.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania? And in Hungary?**

I don't know how Hungary handles it. I know that in Romania every bigger city has at least one zero waste shop.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

It goes both ways. The consumers should support those companies who try to make a change and the shops should not allow or at least reduce the plastic on their shelves.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

Everybody should be vocal about it. Doesn't matter what status you have.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

Recycling or be more aware of what they use/buy.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I am always aware of the things I buy or use. I try to be eco-friendly, but it is not easy. I have a few friends who also try to live a more plastic-free life, but I do not know anyone who lives a zero-waste life.

*14<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 40 years old male, English teacher, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

It very much depends on the cost. People need to be able to afford it, otherwise, no matter how useful it is, a costly alternative will continue to be prohibitive for people on a lower income. Also, people need to be educated from a very young age on how to live a zero-waste life if serious changes are expected. It is possible, but global coordination is required from higher authorities, including strict regulations.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

Because it requires a complete change in the industries' machinery. It is at present a very expensive and complex procedure. Also, while rules are lax, no one is willing to invest in them. Companies are interested in immediate profit, and if the change is expected, regulations need to change. Besides, there must be support offered by the government so that companies could afford the equipment required by the new approach. Individual-level comes after all this is done.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania? And in Hungary?**

If by SME you mean small and medium-sized enterprises (it should be made clear in the question), then I do not think that the majority handle such issues at all. Each company tends to do as much as requested of them to avoid confrontation and hefty fines. A complete change in mentality must be preceded by creating the means based on which everyone can start the process.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

Consumer behavior will not change overnight and certainly won't change as long as no rules coordinate it. As soon as supermarkets introduced fees for using plastic bags for fruit and vegetables, I, myself, started not to use them at all. I carry my bags from home, which are reusable. If people are forced, they can be re-educated. As soon as there is no plastic to buy, people will get accustomed to the change very easily.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

Once the higher authorities start the campaign, the individuals continue to promote eco-friendly products very soon. But, if it continues to cost an arm and a leg to produce and buy eco-friendly products, the majority won't buy them. Also, it's quite impossible to create eco-friendly products for 8 billion people. However, the reduction is still possible.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

Re-education of society. Heavy campaigns. Proper means offered to companies. Proper means are offered to neighborhoods for proper recycling. Strict recycling rules. A budget was created for all this so that recycling could be made usefully possible.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I don't. I can only say that as much as I can, I'm trying to be conscious of my consumer behavior and its consequences. But I still buy a lot of plastic when I buy products. If certain products keep having plastic containers, people will keep buying them.

*15<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 21 years old female, student, Czech Republic*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think that our Earth needs people to be more considerate. I think that the zero waste programs are good ideas. But I do not think that it is completely achievable.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think, that it is hard because people got used to their comfort and they do not think about the future and what will happen if we will behave still the same. Some children are not raised to take care of nature and it is harder for them to change their behavior. And for the companies, it is sometimes cheaper not to do the zero waste.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in the Czech Republic?**

I don't know. But some companies build their marketing on this program. And when some other companies have at least something like it, they are trying to attract customers by their little steps.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think that it is again about the comfort of customers. Some of them rather buy cut veggies in plastic, than cut them at home by themselves. And they rather buy water in plastic, because they do not take the water from home in some glass or eco-friendly bottle. But on the other hand, the shops should not offer things like peeled-off orange or tangerine in plastic, it is just waste. These fruits have their peel. And for example, also the candy and so on do not have to be packed in three packages one is enough. And they also could change the plastic to paper. There are so many ways to change.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think that everyone should start by themselves, everyone should realize what is right. But if the country would promote it and support it (maybe also financially), it would help to spread the idea.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

There are lots of solutions. Reusing plastic bags when shopping or better use fabric bags. Do not throw away papers that are used only from one side, use both. Use glass bottles instead of plastic. Don't buy more things than you can use. Everyone should sort the waste and don't throw the waste in nature. Sell your clothes which do not fit anymore to someone else, they can use it.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

My family is trying to live eco-friendly. So yes, we have something like a waste prevention plan.

*16<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 22 years old female, medical researcher, The Netherlands*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I believe it is a great initiative that might not seem achievable now, but with time the urge for implementation will keep increasing and the need will outweigh the money issue.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think it is harder to implement in companies as their job would not only be to not produce extra waste but to revolutionize the whole production system to create recyclable products and packages. If the purchased items are recyclable, it should not require that much effort from the individuals to not produce waste. Although, the government should also be included in it. Making new policies would force people to obey.

**3. How do SMEs handle this issue in the Netherlands?**

As far as I see it, the Netherlands is handling this matter quite well. I do not know much about companies, but at the University and in my workplace selective waste collection is possible, as it is in most places.

As for the homes, the plastic waste, and the green waste is taken away every two weeks, while the general waste and paper are only taken away once a month, to incite people to produce less garbage, and to collect it selectively.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

Usually, it is both. Nowadays it can be inevitable to buy products that are unnecessarily packed into plastic. Producers should try to use different materials to pack, which can be more expensive. And shops should not allow their customers to use plastic bags.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

Eco-friendliness should be promoted from all sides, children should get familiar with ecological lifestyle from a young age by learning it in their household, by seeing it advertised in the cities, watching educational videos and attending workshops. This way they would grow into ecologically aware adults. But the biggest responsibility is the government's, by implementing strict policies both the companies and people would have to obey.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

Companies should use alternative materials that can be recycled with less pollution, they should not produce disposable products, and promote items that can be used several times, not only once.

Institutes should ban the usage of disposable plastic products. While people should invest in products that last and do not need to get immediately replaced, which is more budget-friendly in the long run.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I do not have a specific plan. I am trying to produce as little waste as I can and to collect it selectively. I am trying to not throw out food. I make compost from the green waste. As for the shopping, I am using reusable bags and nets for the things that I buy. But I cannot omit buying products packed in plastic.

*17<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 21 years old male, student, France*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think they are feasible but not in the short term. It will take time before things change and we see a significant difference.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think that today companies and individuals, in general, are not aware of the challenge we will soon face if we don't change our habits. They have a short-term vision that shows them that it will be difficult at the beginning whereas according to the studies I have seen in the future it would be highly beneficial.

**3. How are SMEs dealing with this issue in France?**

Actually, in France, things are moving slowly from my point of view. Companies are making efforts, but the smaller ones that are not yet in the country's sights are not changing their habits for fear of losing a lot of money in the short term with a transition.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

Both have an appropriate role: stores must stop globally staying on plastic and customers must also stop taking plastic bags for example at each shopping and then throwing them away is a reflex to forget.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think it is the cities that have to take action but it has to be strongly supported by the country. I have the example of Paris which today is setting an example for the other city in France because it is beginning its transition in France.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

There are no miracle solutions in the short term, but just the fact of monitoring one's consumption and not using too many products for which there is no need. For companies, the best thing would be to forget certain habits with plastics and prefer cardboard for example which is a more ecological solution.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I don't have a plan but I think it's a collective effort on everyone's part that could make a difference.

*18<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 23 years old female, student, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think zero waste programs are a very good idea, but in my opinion, it is not feasible soon.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think it is hard to redesign, because in today's world, people don't pay enough attention to this and they don't care what will happen in the future, and I think for the companies is cheaper not to do the zero waste.

### **3. How are SMEs dealing with this issue in Romania?**

Unfortunately, I don't follow the information about these. But I think, both countries try to handle this.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

In my opinion, both sides are faulty, but most of all I think the consumers' behavior because they don't deal with their environment and they don't collect selectively.

### **5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think people have to promote eco-friendly things first because the state or a country imposes laws, but if people don't take responsibility, in my opinion, everything is unnecessary.

### **6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

I think the solution to produce less garbage, firstly is selective collection, because everything can be recycled, and wouldn't be so much waste.

### **7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I always try to be more eco-friendly, but I don't have a plan.

*19<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 19 years old female, student, Romania*

### **1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

In my opinion, the zero waste programs are quite feasible. If you ask me, the other day I've just read an article about that. Most specifically it was about the lifestyle, I guess. I think it is a great idea to limit all the waste that we usually leave behind us day by day to reduce the waste consumption, to avoid acquiring things that we do not need anymore and will end up in the trash - especially disposable and non-recyclable products.

### **2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

If I understand well, you mean how much trash do we leave behind us. I think it may be because of two reasons. Firstly, because (maybe) recycling does not bring a big amount of money. Secondly, people do not take it seriously.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think, maybe both. Because a lot of people, you know do not think logically when they are shopping. They just take the products put them in the basket and simply buy it. Before our current situation started to get that dangerous, people were afraid because the shops are going to close and because of the quarantine and everybody hurried to buy as many products as they can. If you ask me, I think those people did not consume all the products, maybe half of them end up in the trash. In the case of the shops, I think they should be more thoughtful. You know, maybe to make a survey and due to result, they should consider changing habits.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think the country should promote it. Maybe making strict votes about keeping the environment clean usually help.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

Some solutions:

- Recycling;
- The usage of reusable bags and forget about plastic bags;
- Only buy food that we know we can eat and not throw in the trash;
- The usage of containers (jars) to store food in it e.g. cereal, pasta, or just simply baking ingredients;
- To learn to repair and not to throw away and buy another one;
- Cancel junk mail;
- Stop using plastic cutlery and plates and cups;
- Stop buying plastic bottles.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I do not have, and unfortunately, I do not know people who have something like this.

*20<sup>th</sup> interviewee: 19 years old male, student, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I consider that the zero-waste programs are a good way to improve our environment and to reduce the daily produced waste but I think that they are hardly achievable because there is simply not enough interest in them yet.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think that recycling doesn't work because simply we have a bad, almost intuitive habit of throwing recyclable waste (like plastic bags or, empty water bottles) into the garbage can. Also, I think that food-producing companies don't have a strong focus on waste recycling and as a natural result, they don't produce many recyclable products.

**3. How are SMEs dealing with this issue in Romania?**

Sadly, I don't know enough about how the SMEs are handling this issue to give a good enough answer to this question.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I consider that the shops and the distributors must do a better job to make their products more eco-friendly, otherwise, the people won't feel the need for recycling and waste saving. All in all, I think that the mistake is in the distributing shops.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think that the biggest responsibility lies in the country when it comes to this issue: the more the country's leaders focus on this issue the more the people living in the country will do as well.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

I think they simply need to be more inventive and focused when it comes to recycling and waste redesigning. Frankly, there are a lot of good ways to reduce daily waste production (like saving plastic items like bags and bottles for other use).

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

Sadly, I don't have any better ideas on waste prevention other than the ones I mentioned above, and I don't know anybody who has one either.

*21<sup>st</sup> interviewee: 18 years old female, student, Romania*

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

In my opinion, releasing zero waste programs need much time and energy to fulfill but are achievable with the right patience level.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think because at the beginning of times people did not think about wastage or recycle so they didn't build a society based on these. They rather formed the world around avariciousness. Having this kind of base makes it hard to change the way people live and companies produce.

**3. How are SMEs dealing with this issue in Romania?**

I think the issue is not talked about enough and marketed on the media.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think the mistake is made on the customers' sides because they choose to buy certain products. If there would not be sellers the shops would not display them.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think firstly the country because it has a bigger responsibility.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

To buy products for example in glass jars or reusable material bags.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

Sadly no. But it is planned.

22<sup>nd</sup> interviewee: 20 years old male, student, Romania

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

Zero waste programs are awesome ideas. I think it can be manageable but if you try hard.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think you can reuse some things or with some modification use them again but the structure of that thing will be fragile, so you can't do it too many times.

**3. How are SMEs dealing with this issue in Romania?**

In SMEs these days you can get eco-friendly plastic bags or paper bags.

**4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

I think none of them the maker of the product should use less plastic.

**5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

People in the city, if they change the rest will change too.

**6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

Reusable and stylish packaging or smaller package at all.

**7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

My sister has a minimal waste plan, mine is just some small changes like a receipt in electronic form and minimal package for phones laptops, etc.

23<sup>rd</sup> interviewee: 22 years old female, student, Romania

**1. What is your opinion about zero-waste programs? Are they feasible or achievable?**

I think these programs are very good for our environment, but they are not so popular and this has to be changed. Everyone should know about them and follow them because they are achievable. We just have to believe it and do it.

**2. Why do you think it is not working or why is it difficult to redesign waste production at the company and individual level?**

I think the problem is that redesigning waste production requires a lot of money and time. Some companies are trying to avoid bankruptcy and maybe if they want to become eco-friendly, they don't have the possibility because they don't have the budget to do it.

### **3. How do SMEs handle this issue in Romania?**

The majority of the companies are not handling this problem so well, but there are smaller businesses that are trying to change this. For example, you can ask for an eco-friendly package if you are buying something online for an extra charge.

### **4. Who or what is to blame? - The consumers' habits (they buy too many products with plastic packaging) or must the shops do their best not to allow too much plastic on their shelves?**

In my opinion, the majority of consumers are buying products with plastic package, because they don't have other options. That is why shops should do everything they can to prevent the use of plastic packages. For example, when you are buying fresh fruits you can only put them in a plastic bag. The shops could replace the plastic bag with a paper bag or some other type of bag which can be recycled.

### **5. Do you think the city/country or the people are the ones who would have to promote eco-friendly things first? Which side has the bigger responsibility?**

I think the country should promote eco-friendly things first, because if people would see that the country is trying to change things then they would change things too. People have the bigger responsibility because if the whole country is changing everything bad for the environment and the people are still using plastic packages and throwing them everywhere then it's like the country has done nothing. If the world wants to change into a better place, then people should want this too and do everything they can.

### **6. What would be the solution for companies, institutions, or households to produce less garbage?**

The majority of plastic packages should be replaced with something that can be recycled or re-used. There are many interesting ways with which you can produce less garbage. You can find many videos and DIY's about this and they are very easy. For example, one time I made decorative flowers out of paper and plastic.

### **7. Do you have a waste prevention plan or do you know people who have something like that?**

I try to separate the glass, paper, and others so they can be recycled in the future. Sometimes I keep the package of a few things and I transform it into something that I can use every day. I usually watch DIY videos and if I like the idea then I'm doing it as soon as I can.