# RecyClass

ANNUAL REPORT



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## WELCOME

### Chairman of RecyClass, Paolo Glerean



As we look back to 2023, I am proud to say that RecyClass is another step closer to reaching its goals – enabling a circular future for plastics.

Value-chain support remains the quintessential element for the progress that has been made. It is with the help of network that RecyClass has become a reference in today's debate on material circularity.

The RecyClass approach is a unique case that shows how a professional and intense activity from the whole value

chain can create solid basis to support the path towards a truly circular use of a plastic. This proactive attitude is especially important in light of composites and items made of combination of materials gaining more and more market shares in different applications.

Throughout 2023, new Testing Campaigns were carried out and 50 novel technologies were evaluated via the Recyclability Evaluation Protocols. These have helped generate additional knowledge on the recyclability of different packaging components.

In parallel, RecyClass certification schemes are gaining more and more recognition. The interest from companies to get certified and from certification bodies to become recognized continued growing in the past year.

In this report, you will be able to explore the many different achievements of RecyClass and how they can benefit the industry.

The plastic industry has many challenges ahead, with the pending release of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR), as well as other legislative requirements – and RecyClass is ready to provide support in order to ensure the smoothest possible transition towards the set targets.

Going forward, I look forward to watching RecyClass grow into it's role as a European hub for certifying circular plastics and becoming a standard reference for plastic packaging recyclability.

With that, I would like to wholeheartedly thank our Members, Supporters, Testing Facilities and Certification Bodies for their commitment in helping RecyClass realize its vision of a circular plastic future. Lastly, let me thank the entire RecyClass Team who is passionately committed to this mission. I am extremely impressed by the professionality and the involvement each of them puts every day in this role. I am delighted to see this Team grow year by year and to see each member bring new energy to our common challenge.

### Welcome by the advisory board chair Mark Roberts



In today's rapidly evolving industry, the added value of RecyClass is clear – the scientifically generated knowledge on recyclability and promotion of traceability in the use of recycled plastic are what sets it apart from other similar initiatives.

As the Advisory Board Chair, in my first year of the mandate, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand the continuous efforts that all the partners put into carrying out the RecyClass

mission & vision. This has led to yet another successful year.

In 2023, RecyClass has reached 100 members. In addition, new Supporters, Certification Bodies and Testing Facilities have also joined the network, while RecyClass has continued its collaboration with important industry stakeholders such as the Association of Plastic Recyclers. Increasing value-chain involvement has further facilitated the fulfilment of commitments.

As a European hub for certifying circular plastics, RecyClass has worked on increasing the robustness of its schemes with the evaluations by the European co-operation for Accreditation, as well as the recognition of the Recycling Process Audit Scheme by the German ecolabel, Blue Angel.

In parallel, the continues scientific findings of standardized recyclability evaluations have led to new updates of the Design for Recycling Guidelines and the RecyClass Online Tool. The industry can now benefit from additional knowledge of how to pair functionality and recyclability of plastic packaging products.

Harmonizing design for recycling principles and calculation of recycled content remain high on the agenda, in light of market and legislative developments. Introduction of the Spanish Plastic Tax highlighted the need for a reliable, third-party certification scheme while the discussions around PPWR call for standardized methodologies and assessments of recyclability. RecyClass offers ready-made tools for those industry players who would like to get ahead of this transition.

While these achievements are certainly notable, the industry still has a long way ahead and for this we hope to see even more collaboration coming in 2024.

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# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

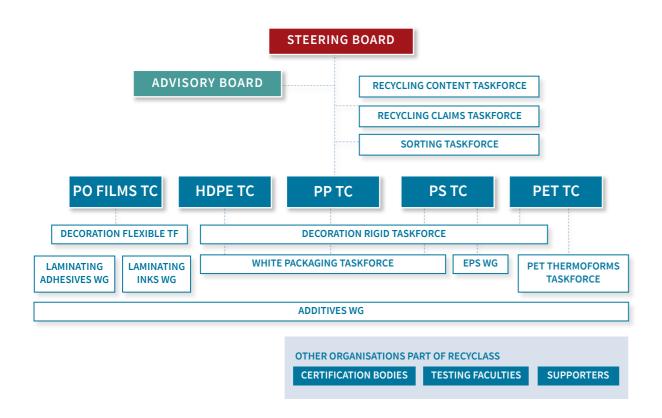
#### **STRUCTURE & GOVERNANCE**

Throughout 2023, the RecyClass Steering Board approved roughly 150 documents, including publications, press releases, Recyclability Approval Letters, and more. In line with RecyClass Internal Procedures, elections were held this year for the positions in the Steering Board, Advisory Board, Technical Committees and Task Forces. The new structure can be found on the RecyClass website.

At the same time, the network has grown to more than 100 members, majority of which are Platinum Members that actively participating in the Advisory Board. In addition to this, RecyClass counts with more than 23 supporters, including 5 EPR schemes.

Involvement of supporters is becoming more and more important for RecyClass activities. In this scope, for instance, the Association of Plastics Recyclers (APR) joined various RecyClass Technical Committee meetings to help align on common objectives.

Finally, 2023 has seen the creation of the White Packaging and PET Thermoforms Taskforces, as well as a Working Group dedicated to Additives in plastic packaging. The entirety of the plastic packaging value chain remains represented in all committees and working groups, to collaborate and progress toward circularity.



#### **INTERNAL MEETINGS**

In 2023, RecyClass organized more than 65 meetings focused on defining testing campaigns, assessing novel packaging technologies, as well as updating Design for Recycling Guidelines in line with latest scientific findings and reviewing and developing Testing Protocols. Task Forces supported the work on testing campaigns, revised the Sorting Protocol, and worked on improving the robustness of certification schemes and circular claims. Frequent meetings with Testing Facilities and Certification Bodies facilitated the total alignment on test campaigns, certifications and procedures.

#### **HARMONIZATION**

As in the previous years, RecyClass continued its collaborations with various industry stakeholders. Most notable is the cooperation with APR, through which the two entities have been accelerating the global alignment of design for recycling recommendations and testing procedures.

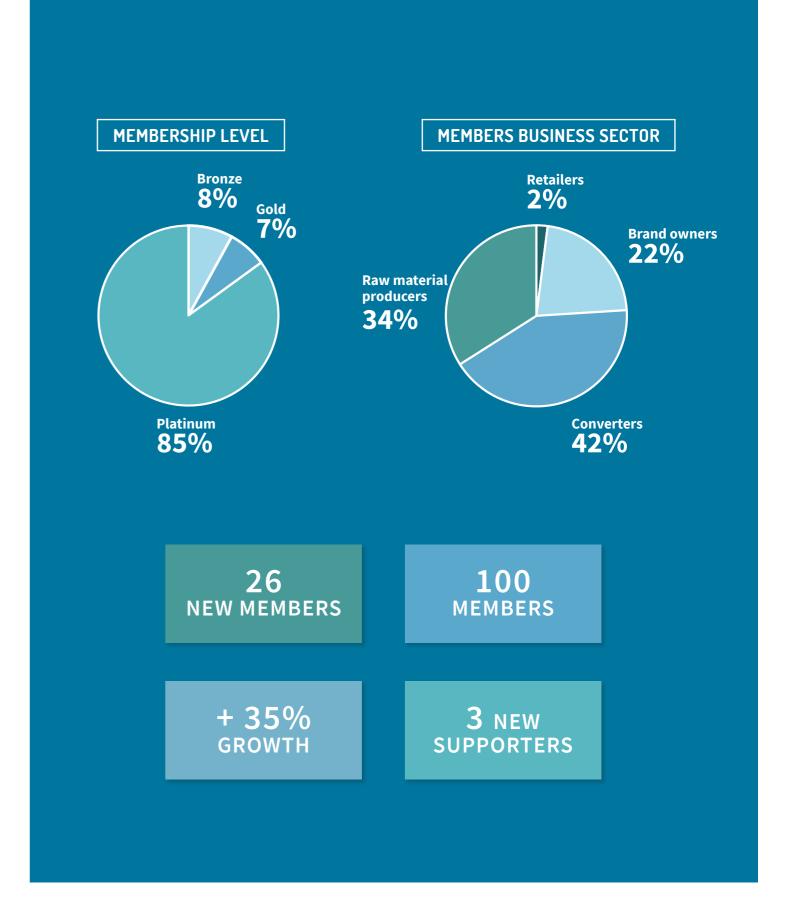
RecyClass has also collaborated with EPR schemes, in particular with Gront Punkt in Norway, FTI in Sweden, and Fostplus in Belgium to standardize Design for Recycling Guidelines. Moreover, RecyClass also collaborated with Deposit Return Systems like Infinitum and Returpack through test campaigns for PET bottles.

New testing facilities and certification bodies have been recognized, broadening the geographic presence of Recy-Class laboratories and auditors in Europe and beyond.

Harmonisation remains as important as ever in 2024, in anticipation of new legislative targets as proposed in the PPWR.

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# MEMBERSHIP & SUPPORTERS



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## RECYCLABILITY EVALUATION

#### RECYCLABILITY METHODOLOGY

RecyClass Recyclability Methodology was revised in February 2023, with wording clarifications and corrections to ensure full alignment with current Design for Recycling Guidelines and Recyclability Certification.

#### **TESTING PROTOCOLS & FACILITIES**

#### **Recyclability Evaluation Protocols**

In 2023 RecyClass revised all its existing Recyclability Evaluation Protocols, gathering the feedback of the different actors of the value chain and the RecyClass Recognized Testing Facilities.

In January 2024 the first version of the Recyclability Evaluation Protocol for PET bottles and the Recyclability Evaluation Protocol for adhesives and labels applied on PET bottles were published. In line with that, the development of a Recyclability Evaluation Protocol for EPS white goods and fish boxes has started and is expected to be released in early 2024.

#### **Sorting Evaluation Protocol**

During 2023, RecyClass reassessed its standardised Sorting Evaluation Protocol for all plastic packaging, with the revision of the compaction procedure and addition of a colour module for PET bottles. The revised Protocol will be published in January 2024. This protocol serves as basis for the Recyclability Certification Scheme, the Recyclability Approvals and for RecyClass sorting test campaigns.

#### **Recognized Testing Facilities**

Throughout the past year, the number of Recognised Testing Facilities, eligible to carry out tests in accordance with RecyClass Recyclability Evaluation Protocols, has grown. Three new laboratories have been added to the existing list for HDPE and PP rigids, PET bottles and PE flexibles. RecyClass also recognised the first laboratory for the PS Recyclability Evaluation Protocol. In total, RecyClass has 11 Recognized Testing Facilities for recyclability tests, and 2 for sorting tests.

























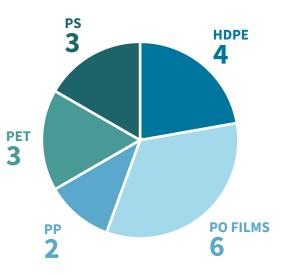
#### **TEST CAMPAIGNS**

RecyClass conducted eighteen test campaigns in 2023. Some of them were in the continuity of test campaigns performed in 2022 to get deeper analyses on sensitive topics such as laminating adhesives, inks or adhesives for labels. In addition to these campaigns, assessments were also performed on more specific topics like barrier plasma coating for the HDPE stream or PVOH primer for the PE film stream. Finally, the impact of the main contaminants of the major streams were studied, among others, printing inks for the PE films, laminating adhesives in the PP films, TPOs in the HDPE and PP rigid streams, but also EVOH and lidding films for the PS stream. A specific insight on plastic packaging sorting was done in 2023, with studies dedicated to rolling packaging, double perforated sleeves on PET bottles but also decorations on HDPE packaging.

Through the findings of test campaigns, RecyClass expanded on the design for recycling recommendations on more specific packaging features, as highlighted in the new versions of the Design for Recycling Guidelines.

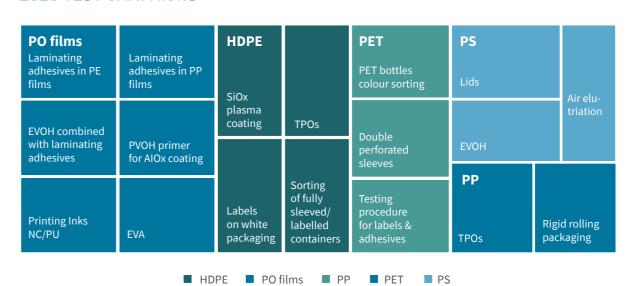
All these campaigns aim to increase the knowledge about the effect of the different components in plastic packaging. Overall, more than 60 different samples were tested according to RecyClass Protocols, complemented with about 30 additional analyses or characterisations.

### REPARTITION OF TEST CAMPAIGNS BY TECHNICAL COMMITTEES



#### **TESTING PROTOCOLS & FACILITIES**

#### **2023 TEST CAMPAIGNS**



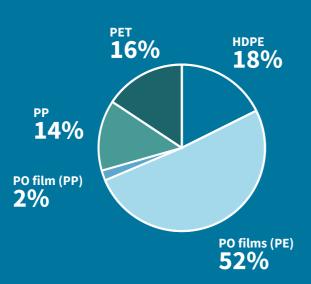
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#### **RECYCLABILITY APPROVALS**

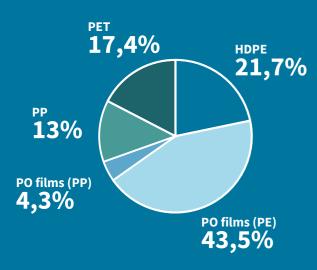
In 2023, RecyClass received more than 50 requests for performing recyclability tests in the context of a Recyclability Approval. This number remains constant compared to 2022 statistics. The repartition of the recyclability tests conducted according to RecyClass Recyclability Evaluation Protocols shows a 50/50 share between rigid and flexible packaging. Most of the recyclability evaluations were done on PE flexibles (52 %), while HDPE, PP and PET rigid packaging all represented between 14 and 18 % of the total tests.

In 2023, RecyClass published the first approvals for the PET bottle stream. First approvals for the PS containers and PET trays streams are expected for 2024. In total, 24 Approval Letters were delivered by RecyClass Technical Committees in 2023. Here again, the PE film recycling stream is the most represented with 10 Approval Letters delivered, followed by the HDPE (5) and PET (4) streams. Overall, the level of compatibility showed that 50 % of the innovations were endorsed as fully compatible, 38 % as limited compatible and 12 % not compatible with their respective recycling streams.

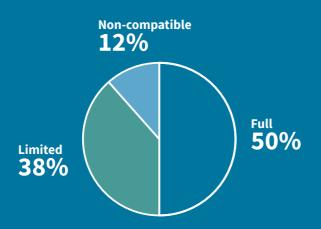
SHARE OF RECYCLABILITY
APPROVALS STARTED IN 2023



APPROVAL LETTERS
DELIVERED IN 2023



LEVELS OF COMPATIBILITY
OF APPROVALS IN 2023



#### **DESIGN FOR RECYCLING GUIDELINES**

The results of the above mentioned test campaigns and Recyclability Approvals were analysed by the respective Technical Committees, and subsequently resulted in updates of the RecyClass Design for Recycling Guidelines. The updated guidelines were published in January and July, except for PET bottles with an update in September. Given that many test campaigns ended in Q4 2023, a major update of all the Design for Recycling Guidelines will take place in January 2024.

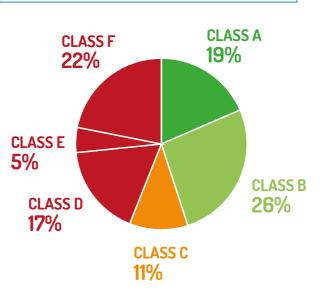
Apart from the Design for Recycling Guidelines, each Recy-Class Decoration Taskforce (Rigids and Flexible packaging) revised the Handbook on Decorative Technologies applied respectively on rigid and flexible plastic packaging. The RecyClass Design Book was also updated in October 2023 to reflect all the modifications made to the Design for Recycling Guidelines in 2023.

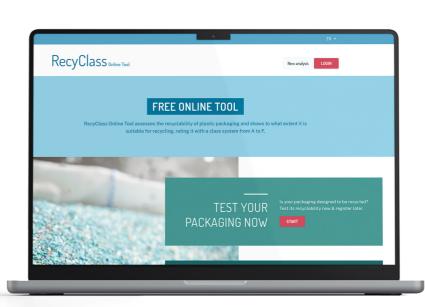
#### THE ONLINE-TOOL

The Online Tool was frequently updated in 2023, with the addition of new features and info boxes to facilitate the understanding of the Tool and provide more accurate results for the self-assessment. The Online Tool Mapping was updated with additional information about the collection, sorting and recycling of different plastic packaging waste streams in the European countries.

More than 9200 users are now registered on the Tool, representing a 10% growth with respect to 2022.

More than half of the analyses performed via the Recy-Class Online Tool achieved a positive recycling evaluation (56%). The total class repartition of the Online-Tool, for classes A, B and C, is equal to the audit results obtained with the Certification Scheme. DISTRIBUTION OF THE RECYCLABILTY RESULTS OBTAINED VIA THE ONLINE-TOOL





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04

# RECYCLABILITY CERTIFICATION

More than 5000 plastic packaging are now certified with the RecyClass Recyclability Certification Scheme.

This represents more than 130 companies in the plastics value chain. The total number of certificates released in 2023, including the Letter of Compatibility, Design for Recycling and Recyclability Rate, is more than 70.

In order to meet the growing demand for RecyClass certificates, a training course was organized in March for new potential auditors. In 2023, five Certification Bodies were recognized to assess the recyclability of plastic packaging: Bureau Veritas, KIWA IVAC, Ecogrant, InTechCentras and Almaland. Broadening the auditors pool will increase the possibility for companies to get certified and meet the needs of the plastics industry. Now RecyClass counts with 46 auditors from 15 Certification Bodies for Recyclability Certification.

#### RECYCLING PROCESS CERTIFICATION

The Recycling Process Certification focuses on certification of recyclers' origin of the waste and process following a controlled blending or segregation approach, as well as traceability principles as described in ISO 22095 and EN 15343:2007 respectively. Moreover, this certification includes requirements to assess the environmental impact of recycling processes. RecyClass Recycling Process includes also a specific add-on module for food contact application aligned with EC 2022/1616.

RecyClass signed an agreement with EuCertPlast to join forces to continue the development of certification for recycling processes under the RecyClass umbrella in



**2023.** This new way forward aims at the harmonisation of standards for the traceability of recycling processes and calculation of recycled plastics.

RecyClass Recycling Process Certification finalised the audit scheme evaluation procedure in line with ISO 17065 by the European Co-operation for Accreditation in June

2023, following the publication of the Audit Scheme Version 1.1. Certification Bodies can now apply for accreditation. Kiwa Nederland BV was accredited by RvA (Raad voor Accreditatie) in November 2023.

Recyclers can now apply for certification under Audit Scheme Version 1.1. Audit Scheme Version 1.0 is still available until July 2025. Main updates include clarifications regarding the structure of the audit requirements and definition and classification of non-conformities. Additionally, Module C: Corporate Social Responsibility was revised.

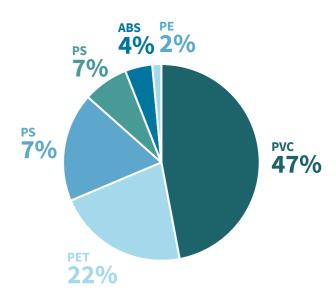
During 2023, the Certification received the recognition of the Blue Angel Label in Germany to prove the origin of post-consumer recyclates. More information bout the Blue Angel audit scheme requirements for "Environmentally friendly Recycled Plastic" can be found in the document **DE-UZ 30a.** 

The RecyClass Recycling Process Certification currently counts with 108 issued certificates and 98 ongoing evaluations. Certificates were issued in Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and United Kingdom. For the first time certificates were issued outside Europe in Turkey, Morocco and Indonesia. These certifications cover companies with recycling activities aggregated in the following polymers.

Finally, RecyClass organised two Auditor Training Courses in 2023 recognising a total of 42 new auditors, from 16 Certification Bodies, located in 14 different countries. This includes B-PACK BVBA from Belgium, PIEP, ACE-EG-PLAS LDA and Bureau Veritas from Portugal, ENVACIR, EQA and Gaiker from Spain, IntechCentras from Lithuania, QHSE Cert from Germany and CSI S.p.A. from Italy. For the first time RecyClass recognized auditor of European Certification Bodies in other part of the world: Turkey, South Africa for Kiwa Nederland BV, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Vietnam for Control Union and Brazil for ACE-EG-PLAS LDA.

RecyClass counts with 32 Certification Bodies and 73 recognised auditors. The full list of Certification Bodies can be found here.

RELEASED RECYCLASS
RECYCLING PROCESS CERTIFICATES
PER POLYMER TYPE



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### RECYCLED PLASTICS TRACEABILITY CERTIFICATION

The RecyClass Recycled Plastics Traceability Certification focuses on the use of recycled plastics along the plastics value chain focusing on a controlled blending approach and traceability principles as described in ISO 22095 and EN 15343:2007 respectively.

The Audit Scheme was revised by the European Co-operation for Accreditation in line with the procedures of ISO 17065, following the publication of Version 2.2 in June 2023. The new version included a review of the structure of the requirements and non-conformities classification. Certification Bodies may now apply for accreditation according to the new version. Certification Bodies will be able to issue certificates under the Audit Scheme Version 2.1 until July 2025.

During 2023, KIWA-IVAC was accredited to issue Recyclass Recycled Plastics Traceability Certification by the Spanish Accreditation Body (ENAC). In turn, Kiwa Nederland BV was accredited by RvA (Raad voor Accreditatie), the Dutch Accreditation Body. They join DQS in Greece accredited by The Hellenic Accreditation System (ESYD) who obtained accreditation in 2022. Other Certification Bodies have ongoing applications for accreditation.

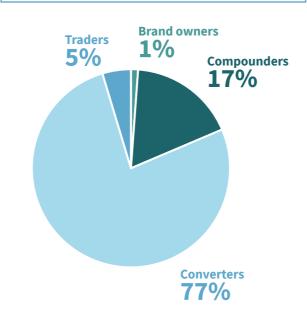
The accreditation efforts allow Certification Bodies to issue RecyClass certificates that can be used to demonstrate the use of recycled plastics in compliance with the requirements stated in the Spanish National legislation for the exemption from the Spanish Plastic Tax.

RecyClass issued 99 valid certificates for the Recycled Plastics Traceability Certification in 2023, while 72 certifications are still under evaluation.

These certifications cover different steps of the recycled plastic value chain, from compounding to converting companies, including traders and brand owners as depicted in the scheme below.



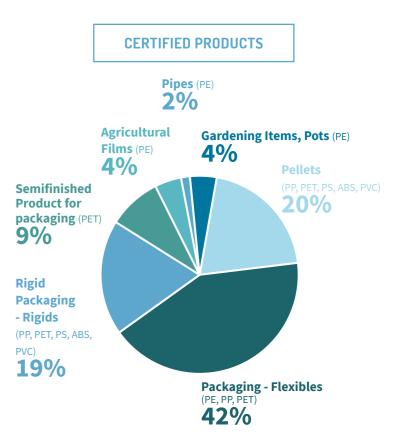
RELEASED RECYCLASS RECYCLED PLASTIC TRACEABILITY CERTIFICATES DIVIDED BY ACTOR OF THE PLASTIC VALUE CHAIN



The certified products include films, sheets, containers, preforms, bottles, bags, tubes and other possibilities as shown in the figure below with certified products.

Overall, RecyClass counts with 37 Certification Bodies for the Recycled Plastics Traceability Certification. In total, 123 recognised auditors from 25 countries can now issue certificates.

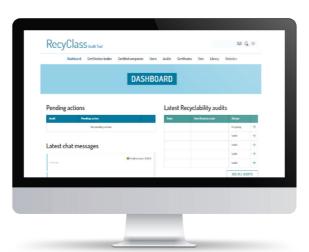
Two Auditor Training Courses took place in 2023 with the participation of 40 new auditors. The successful courses follow the addition of 11 Certification Bodies recognised to issue RecyClass Recycled Plastics Traceability Certificates, these include ENVACIR, Andaltech, EQA and Gaiker from Spain, InTechCentras from Lithuania, e.com Cert from Hungary, Silk Road Certification from Poland and PIEP and Bureau Veritas from Portugal. The full list of Certification Bodies for Recycled Plastics Traceability Certification can be found here.



#### **RECYCLASS AUDIT TOOL**

The Audit Tool was further developed in 2023 to optimize its use. The Audit Tool aims at facilitating the auditor's work and communication with RecyClass. The developments include updates to allow the collaboration between different certification bodies, signature of certificates and easier procedures for auditors to compile the Audit Report.

RecyClass developed user guidelines for the understanding of the Audit Tool for Certification Bodies and applicants.





Section 4: Stock management a

[30/07/2023/2238-50] Updated by Auditor Draft

Section 5: Process a

[30/07/2023/2238-50] Updated by Auditor Draft

Section 5: Output Composition a

[30/07/2023/2238-30] Updated by Auditor Draft

Section 7: Output Requirements a

[30/07/2023/2238-30] Updated by Auditor Draft

Section 8: Subcontracting a

[30/07/2023/2238-30] Updated by Auditor Draft

Annex I: Audit Checklist a

[30/07/2023/2238-30] Updated by Auditor Draft

Annex III: Audit Checklist a

[30/07/2023/2238-30] Updated by Auditor Draft

Annex III: Full list of conforming products a

[30/07/2023/224-30] Updated by Auditor Draft

Annex III: Full list of conforming products a

[30/07/2023/224-24] Updated by Auditor Draft

Audit applicant

Audit operations a

[30/07/2023/224-24] Updated by Auditor Draft

Reviewer and signatory selection a

[30/07/2023/224-23] Updated by Auditor Draft

Reviewer and signatory selection a

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Reviewer and signatory selection a

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Reviewer and signatory selection a

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# EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION



#### **PUBLICATIONS**

#### **Design Book**

RecyClass published the revised version of the RecyClass Design Book in October 2023. This document serves as a practical guide for the plastic industry, clarifying the concepts of recyclability and design for recycling. Additionally, the document includes step-by-step explanations into the different principles and elements that value chain players should take into consideration when designing plastic packaging. The revision of the document was carried out in order to align information with the latest available RecyClass Design for Recycling Guidelines.



#### **PRESS RELEASES**

A total of 21 press releases was published in 2023, announcing Recyclability Approvals, laboratory findings, as well as updates on the different certification schemes and RecyClass activities.

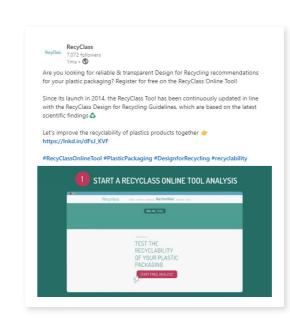


#### LINKEDIN FOLLOWERS

# 8000 7000 6000 5000 4000 3000 2000 1000 0 JAN FEV MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

#### **SOCIA MEDIA**

RecyClass LinkedIn page reached more than 7,000 followers in 2023, representing an increase of 52% compared to the previous year. With a total of 126 posts throughout the year, 200,000 impressions were generated with an engagement rate of 5 % - well above the industry benchmarks.





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#### **RECYCLASS WEBINARS SERIES**

RecyClass webinar series continued throughout the 2023, with the first session of Science behind Recyclability taking place in January 2023.

#### RecyClass Unwrapped

• How to build trust in circular plastic products?

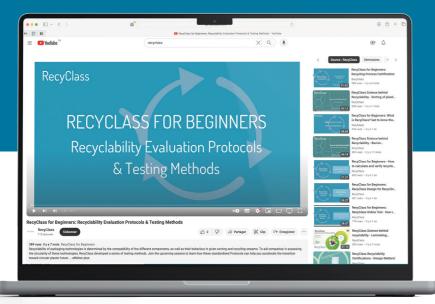
#### RecyClass for Beginners

- Recyclability Evaluation Protocols & Testing Methods
- Recycling Process Certification

#### Science behind Recyclability

- Barrier Technologies
- Laminating Adhesives
- Printing Inks
- Sorting of Plastic Packaging

Presentations of all webinars can be found on <u>the RecyClass website</u>. Additionally the recordings of the RecyClass for Beginners and Science behind Recyclability sessions are available via <u>the RecyClass YouTube channel</u>.



#### **CONFERENCES & WEBINARS PRESENTATIONS**

- **14 FEBRAURY.** FINAT Technical Webinar: *Update on Design for recycling and recyclability guidelines*
- **21 FEBRUARY.** Packaging Europe Webinar: What is the future of flexible film packaging in a circular economy?
- **16 MARCH.** Circular Plastics Summit by Svensk Plastatervinning: *Shaping the future of PET recycling*
- **19 APRIL.** Shrink and Stretch films AMI *Design and recyclability of stretch and shrink films*
- **25 APRIL.** RECOUP webinar: Recyclability: *From innovation to certification*
- **7 MAY.** Interpack Panel debate: Perspectives on Recycling: *Europe and US*
- **10 MAY.** PRSE: Recyclability and Recycled plastics: *the RecyClass approach*
- **16 MAY.** EuMBC Annual Conference: Closing the loop: *Circularity of plastics with RecyClass*
- **18 MAY.** ETMA Recyclability and Recycled plastics: *the RecyClass approach*

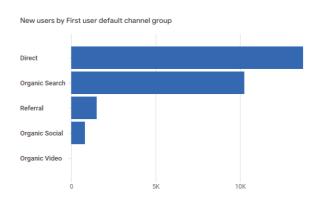
- **30 MAY.** Circ Pack Project by RISE: Closing the loop with flexible packaging: *Focus on Laminating Adhesives and Inks*
- **1 JUNE.** European Label Forum: Design for recycling of plastic labels and packaging materials 14 June Circular Plastics Conference: *How to improve and certify recyclability of plastic packaging?*
- **14 JUNE.** AMI Plastic Closure Innovations: *An overview of the design of closure solutions*
- 22 JUNE. Packaging and Recycling 2023: RecyClass: the European methodology to assess plastic packaging recyclability and calculate recycled plastic content
- 3 JULY. Circular by Purpose: From Plastic Pollution to Action by Veolia: How to improve and certify recyclability of plastic packaging?
- 28 SEPTEMBER. International Seminar on Plastics Characterization by Aimplas: RecyClass Recyclability Evaluation Protocols for plastic packaging
- **5 OCTOBER.** Medical Pacakging 2023: Recyclability and Recycled Plastic: *the RecyClass approach*

- **18 OCTOBER.** Sustainability in Packaging 2023: *panel debate* 'Circulariry and design for recycling'
- **9 NOVEMBER.** 'Optimizing Packaging Systems': *Safety for Reuse and Recycling in Compliance with the New PPWR: Different geographies, common purpose.*
- **15 NOVEMBER.** Sustainable Packaging Summit: *panel debate* 'Global insights on circular plastics'
- **15 NOVEMBER.** Sustainable Packaging Summit: *RecyClass: Certification for transparent and reliable claims of recycled plastics*
- **21 NOVEMBER.** Sustainable Plastics 2023: *Plastic Packaging Recyclability and recycled content: the RecyClass European Certifications.*
- **21 NOVEMBER.** Novo verde Uma Nova Visão de Responsabilidade: *RecyClass: Better and More Recycling*
- **30 NOVEMBER.** Master in Sustainability Transition Management | Business models and metrics for the circular economy: *The Science behind recyclability: a focus on plastic packaging*

#### WEBSITE

Throughout 2023, the number of users on the RecyClass website increased by 129 % while the page views went up by 93 %.





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## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

### **BRANDS AND RETAILERS**



















































### **CONVERTERS**

















































































### RAW MATERIAL PRODUCERS

































































### **SUPPORTERS**













































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