

Heterogeneity and Trends in Construction and Demolition Waste Recovery: A Descriptive Statistical Analysis of European Countries (2010–2020) with Implications for Quality Management and ISO Standards

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Abstract: - This study analyses the heterogeneity and trends in the recovery rate of construction and demolition waste (CDW) in European countries and the United Kingdom over the period 2010–2020. Construction and demolition waste represents one of the major waste streams in Europe and is closely associated with pressures on land resources, including agricultural land, making its recovery an important element of sustainable waste and environmental management. In this context, effective CDW recovery is also relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), through its connection with sustainable urban development and improved waste management, and SDG 15 (Life on Land), through its relevance to the protection and sustainable use of land resources.

Using secondary data from Eurostat, the study applies a descriptive statistical approach to examine the evolution and distribution of CDW recovery rates across European countries and the United Kingdom. The analysis focuses on key descriptive statistical indicators, including the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis, in order to identify general trends, differences in national performance and the degree of heterogeneity in recovery rates over the analysed period.

The results indicate an overall increasing trend in CDW recovery rates, suggesting a general improvement in waste recovery performance during the period under consideration. This development is consistent with the broader transition towards circular economy principles and improved resource management in Europe. Nevertheless, substantial differences remain between countries. While some countries demonstrate consistently high and relatively stable recovery rates, others present lower levels of performance and considerable fluctuations over time. The statistical distribution further indicates a concentration of observations towards higher recovery values, while the presence of extreme values affects the overall distribution and the interpretation of the average recovery rate.

The findings also highlight the relevance of systematic environmental and quality management approaches for improving waste management performance. In this context, international standards such as ISO 14001 provide an important framework for establishing structured environmental management practices, monitoring performance and supporting continuous improvement in organisations involved in construction and demolition waste management.

Overall, the results demonstrate that, despite the general improvement in CDW recovery across the analysed countries, significant heterogeneity persists. The differences observed in recovery performance underline the importance of strengthening environmental management practices, improving institutional capacity and promoting greater policy harmonisation, particularly in countries with comparatively lower or more volatile recovery rates. The study therefore contributes to a better understanding of differences in CDW recovery performance and their relevance to sustainable urban development, responsible land management and the implementation of SDG 11 and SDG 15 within the European context.

Key-Words: - Soil, arable land, construction and demolition waste (CDW), waste recovery, circular economy, quality management, environmental policies SDG

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1 Introduction

Construction and demolition waste (CDW) constitutes one of the largest waste streams in Europe, having a direct impact on the environment and resource economy. Their management is essential for:

- reducing environmental pollution,
- saving natural resources,
- development of the circular economy.

In addition to these impacts, the inefficient management of CDW also has direct consequences on the land, causing its degradation in general and agricultural land in particular. The uncontrolled deposition of construction waste leads to the loss of soil fertility, pollution with inert materials and chemicals, as well as to the reduction of usable surfaces for agricultural production. This situation worsens not only natural ecosystems, but also food security and sustainable rural development.

In this context, the sustainable management of CDW takes on even greater importance, as it is closely

related to the protection of soil as a limited and vital resource. Recycling and recovery practices of these wastes help reduce pressure on the land and minimize long-term negative impacts.

The European Union has set clear targets for CDW recovery (70% waste recovery by 2020), encouraging member countries to improve performance [1], [2].

Aim of the study: Descriptive analysis of the CDW recovery rate for European countries and the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2020, identifying trends, differences between countries and levels of achievement of targets.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Construction and demolition waste (CDW) management

Previous literature related the construction and demolition waste (CDW) management indicates that CDW is a key component in the transition to a more sustainable and resource-efficient economy. Studies emphasize that the effective management of CDW is closely related to the development of the circular economy, contributing to the reduction of CO₂ emissions and to the increase in the efficiency of the use of materials [3]. In this framework, recycling and reuse of construction materials are considered essential practices to reduce dependence on natural resources and minimize negative impacts on the environment [4].

An important aspect addressed in the literature is the impact of CDW on soil, especially on agricultural land. Uncontrolled disposal of waste leads to the degradation of the soil structure, contamination with potentially dangerous substances and the loss of its productive capacity. According to studies, soil pollution from construction waste can have long-term effects on fertility and biodiversity, negatively affecting agricultural production and the sustainability of ecosystems [5]. This makes it all the more important to develop integrated policies for CDW management that consider the protection of soil as a vital resource.

Comparative analyzes between European countries show that there are significant differences in CDW recovery performance. Nordic and Western European countries present high levels of recovery, mainly due to strong environmental policies, developed recycling infrastructure and a high level of public awareness [6], [7], [8]. In these countries, the use of economic instruments, such as landfill taxes and recycling subsidies, has had a positive effect on increasing recovery rates.

In contrast, countries in transition and those with lower levels of development face multiple challenges in managing CDW. These challenges are related to the lack of advanced technology, limited financial and institutional capacities, as well as ineffective implementation of existing legislation [1], [2]. Furthermore, the lack of accurate and systematic data on waste management constitutes an additional obstacle to the design of effective policies and to monitoring progress [9].

Another important dimension of the literature is related to the role of innovation and technology in improving CDW management. The development of new technologies for the separation, processing and recycling of materials has great potential to increase recovery rates and reduce environmental impact [10]. Also, the integration of sustainable design principles (design for deconstruction) in the design phase of buildings can facilitate the recovery of materials at the end of their life cycle.

In summary, the existing literature about CDW highlights that, although significant steps have been taken towards improving the management of CDW in Europe, there are still significant differences between countries. This supports the need for detailed and up-to-date data analysis, in order to identify trends, assess performance and highlight the gap between countries, thus contributing to the design of more effective and sustainable policies.

2.2 ISO Standards and Their Role in Construction and Demolition Waste (CDW) Management

With standardization playing a key role in improving construction and demolition waste (CDW) management, previous literature suggests that structured frameworks for environmental management, quality and operational efficiency should be provided. In this context, the standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization are particularly important.

One of the most important standards is ISO 14001 [11], which focuses on environmental management systems. This standard helps organizations identify, monitor and reduce environmental impacts, including construction waste management. The implementation of ISO 14001 [11] has been linked to improved performance in recycling and waste reduction in the construction sector.

Another important standard is ISO 9001 [12], which is related to quality management. Although not directly environmental, it contributes to the optimization of processes, reducing waste through better planning and quality control in construction projects.

Also, ISO 14040 [13] and ISO 14044 [14] are important for the life cycle assessment of construction materials. These standards help analyze the environmental impact from production to recycling or disposal, supporting decision-making to use more sustainable materials.

In the context of the circular economy, ISO standards contribute to:

- increasing transparency in waste management
- improving resource efficiency
- harmonization of international practices

Studies show that organizations that adopt ISO standards tend to have higher performance in waste management and in achieving environmental objectives [1], [2].

However, the implementation of these standards requires:

- financial investments
- staff training
- institutional support

This is particularly challenging for developing countries, which often face a lack of technical and institutional capacity.

3 Methodology

This study uses descriptive approach to analyze the recovery rate of CDW.

The source of data for the realization of this study are the data collected by Eurostat [6], [7] and the variables taken into consideration are the rates of recovery of civil works waste and demolition of buildings (percent data - %), for each country of the European Union for the years 2010-2020, including the United Kingdom, which until On December 31, 2020, it was a member of the European Union.

The methods of analysis for the realization of this study are:

- Time trend analysis
- Comparisons between countries
 - Identification of leading countries and those with low performance
- Descriptive statistical description: average, minimum, maximum

4 Descriptive, comparative analysis and timescale trend

4.1 Descriptive analysis

The following table provides the data of the overall descriptive analysis of the recovery rate of CDW (2010-2020) for the countries of the European Union and Great Britain for the period 2010-2020.

Table 1. Overall Statistics (All Countries Combined)

No	Indicator	Value
1	Mean	~81%
2	Median	~92%
3	Minimum	2%
4	Maximum	124%
5	Std. Deviation	High
6	Skewness	Negative (left-skewed)
7	Kurtosis	Platykurtic (flat distribution)

Source: Author of this paper, using raw data for CDW from Eurostat [6], [7]

In table 3 in annexes, expanded CDW data by country has been provided.

4.2 Comparative analysis and timescale trend

Interpretation of the data shows that most countries have improved their construction and demolition waste recovery performance over the period 2010-2020. Nordic and Western countries have remained at high levels, from 85% to 100%, reflecting the effectiveness of the EU's recycling policies and the developed infrastructure for waste management. In contrast, Eastern European countries and Turkey

have shown significant fluctuations and lower levels of recovery, not reaching the 70% target until recent years. This heterogeneity between countries shows that, although there has been an overall improvement, there is a clear and urgent need for policy harmonization, transfer of best practices and technological support to low-performing countries, in order to achieve consistent and uniform standards across Europe.

4.3 Results of descriptive statistics

Based on this descriptive analysis it appears that:

- Median > Mean → the distribution is left-skewed, so most countries have high performance, but some low outliers lower the mean.
- Negative skewness in most places → indicates dominance of high recovery values.
- Negative kurtosis (platykurtic) → flatter distribution, without large concentration around the mean.
- Countries with positive skewness (eg Bulgaria) have some extremely high values.

4.3.1 General view of data

Data on the recovery rate of construction and demolition waste (CDW) for the period 2010–2020, provided by Eurostat, show a high level of heterogeneity between European countries.

Values range from:

- minimum around 2% (Bulgaria, 2016)
- up to 100% (Netherlands, Luxembourg, Greece in 2020)

In some cases values above 100% are also observed (eg Bulgaria 2012 and Turkey 2020), related to the reporting methodology and the inclusion of additional recovered materials.

4.3.2 Analysis based on annual values (timescale trend)

2010 - In 2010, most European countries have shown relatively high levels of CDW recovery, in the range of 60–100%, reflecting a consolidated initiation of waste management practices. The leading countries in this period included the Netherlands with 100%, Italy with 97% and Germany with 95%, while some countries showed low performance, such as Belgium with 17%, Norway with 44% and Romania with 47%. This situation shows a strong divide between developed and transition countries, highlighting the need for greater support and standardization in low-performing countries.

2012 - In 2012 an improvement was observed in several countries, with Portugal reaching 84% and Hungary reaching 75%. However, some countries showed extreme fluctuations, such as Bulgaria with

129%, while Turkey remained at a very low level of 20%. This year is characterized by great uncertainty and variation in reporting, reflecting the need for more robust data collection and performance monitoring systems.

2014 - The year 2014 marked a stabilization of most countries' recovery performance. Developing countries, such as Hungary and Portugal, showed significant growth, with 86% and 95% respectively, while leading countries, such as the Netherlands with 100% and Italy with 97%, maintained their high levels. This shows a gradual progress towards sustainability and harmonization in many European countries.

2016 - 2016 saw a significant improvement in several countries, with Belgium rising from 32% to 95%, while Hungary reached 99%. On the other hand, Bulgaria recorded an extreme decrease of 2%, indicating a lack of stability in some national systems and the importance of continuous monitoring and sustainable waste policies.

2018 - In 2018, most countries approached or exceeded the EU's 70% recovery target. Countries such as Greece reached 97%, while Sweden recorded a significant increase to 90%. This year reflects the effectiveness of the European Union's policies for recycling and strengthening the circular economy at the national level.

2020 - In 2020 recovery performance rose to very high levels in most countries. The leading countries include the Netherlands and Greece with 100%, as well as Luxembourg with 99%. Great improvements were also seen in Romania (88%) and Slovakia (81%), while Turkey scored an extreme value of 124%. This situation shows a convergence towards high levels of recovery and the positive effect of the spread of best practices and harmonized European policies.

4.3.3 Country analysis

Leading countries (very high and stable performance)

- Netherlands: 100% in all years
- Italy: 97–98%
- Luxembourg: 98–100%
- Germany: over 90%

They are characterized by:

- advanced infrastructure
- strong environmental policies
- implementation of standards

Countries with improving performance

- Hungary: 61% → 98%
- Portugal: 58% → 95%
- Romania: 47% → 88%

Show:

- positive effect of European policies
- convergence with developed countries

Countries with strong fluctuations

- Bulgaria: 62% → 129% → 2% → 64%
- Finland: 51% → 28% → 77% → 38%
- Sweden: 78% → 55% → 90% → 74%

Show:

- instability in the management system
- problems in reporting or methodology

Countries with low initial performance

- Belgium: 17% → 99% (very strong growth)
- Turkey: very low level initially

These cases show:

- high potential for improvement
- impact of policies and investments

4.3.4 Comparison between countries

Analysis of construction and demolition waste (CDW) recovery data shows a significant gap between European countries, reflecting the impact of a combination of economic, political and technological factors on national performance. The maximum difference between countries is over 80–90 percentage points, highlighting a clear disparity between highly developed and transition countries. Western European countries are characterized by high and stable recovery levels, which often reach or exceed the EU target of 70%, an achievement that is closely related to economic strength, advanced recycling infrastructure, a culture of environmental awareness and efficient implementation of public policies. In contrast, Eastern European countries, although showing a progressive increase in performance over the decade 2010–2020, continue to show large variations and lower levels, which often remain far from the target standards. This apparent gap confirms that economic development is a decisive factor in the capacity to implement and maintain effective CDW management systems, while the role of public policies, including standards, legislation and incentives for recycling, is essential for harmonizing performance between countries and reducing disparities, creating a sustainable basis for the development of a circular economy and the protection of natural resources.

4.3 5 General trends and interpretation

From the analysis of Eurostat data, most European countries have shown a positive trend in the recovery rate of construction and demolition waste (CDW) during the period 2010–2020. The European average for this period fluctuates around 80–85%, however there are significant differences between countries,

which reflect variations in the level of economic development, recycling infrastructure and the effectiveness of national waste management policies.

This difference divides the countries into three groups:

- High performing countries
- Countries with average performance
- Low performing or unstable sites

High performing countries - The Netherlands has maintained 100% recovery in all years of analysis, while Luxembourg is close to peak levels in the same period. Italy shows a high stability of 97–98%, while Germany records over 90% for the available years. This group of countries clearly illustrates that developed infrastructure, strong policies and effective monitoring are key factors for a sustainable performance in CDW management.

Average performing countries - Countries such as Austria, Belgium, France and Denmark show recovery rates typically in the 70–95% range, with a gradual trend of improvement over the years and small fluctuations between periods. These results suggest that even when policy and infrastructure exist, the effectiveness of recycling can be affected by local factors and implementation practices.

Low or unstable performing countries - Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal and Greece have shown initial recovery levels of 20–60%, with gradual improvement only in some cases. Turkey has consistently recorded very low levels, around 20%, showing a significant gap compared to the leading countries. The differences between the countries of this group are mainly related to economic development, infrastructure capacities and incomplete implementation of national policies for waste management and recycling.

The results of the analysis show a clear and stable upward trend in the recovery of construction and demolition waste (CDW) in Europe during the period 2010–2020, reflecting the continuous efforts of the countries and the impact of the European Union policies for recycling and sustainable management of resources.

Most of the countries have managed to meet the set objective of 70% recovery, an achievement that proves the effectiveness of the legal, economic and educational instruments applied at the national and European level.

However, heterogeneity between countries remains high, reflecting significant variations in technological capacity, level of economic development and ability to implement recycling policies and standards.

The main factors influencing these changes include not only the level of economic development,

which determines the financial and technological resources available for CDW management, but also the recycling infrastructure, which facilitates and optimizes the recovery process, as well as the effective implementation of environmental standards and policies, which create the legal and institutional framework to ensure the sustainable and uniform implementation of recycling practices.

This combination of economic, technological and institutional factors is crucial for harmonizing performance between countries and for achieving a sustainable waste management model across Europe.

4.3.6 Relations between policies and standards

The relationship between policies, standards and performance of the recovery of construction and demolition waste (CDW) shows a close and multidimensional connection, where the results of the overall improvement cannot be interpreted outside the context of the institutional and technical framework established by the European Union and national institutions. The progress noted during the period 2010–2020 is directly related to the implementation of the European Commission's strategic policies for recycling and sustainable waste management, the adoption of circular economy practices, as well as the use of international standards, such as ISO 14001 [11], which set clear requirements for environmental management systems and continuous performance monitoring.

Countries that have achieved the highest levels of recovery are characterized by the presence of formalized waste management systems, which include clear mechanisms for planning, collection, treatment and recycling, as well as strict controls on waste flows throughout the life cycle of materials. This institutional integration enables national authorities to efficiently monitor volumes and types of waste, identify deficiencies and implement rapid corrections, thus increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of recovery processes.

Also, the leading countries have achieved a successful integration of international standards into national practices, harmonizing management processes with the requirements of ISO 14001 [11] and other standards relevant to the environment and quality. This integration has enabled not only improved recovery performance, but also increased reliability and transparency of management systems, contributing to the creation of a sustainable and reproducible model that can serve as an example for lower performing countries.

So, generally, it can be concluded that efficient policies, the adoption of circular economy principles and the use of international standards are key factors

that determine success in CDW management, while high-performing countries clearly demonstrate that the formalization of systems, rigorous control and harmonization with global standards are the main pillars of a sustainable and effective waste management throughout Europe.

4 Conclusion

The conclusions and recommendations of this study can be summarized in several integrated statements of an analytical and orientational character, which reflect both the main findings and the necessary directions for further improvement of construction and demolition waste (CDW) management in Europe. In this context, it is evident that the recovery performance of CDW has shown a general improvement trend during the period 2010–2020, reflecting the positive effect of European policies and the increased awareness of the importance of the circular economy, however this progress is not uniform, as some countries have reached very high levels, even up to 100% recovery, while others continue to remain at relatively low levels, testifying to the existence of a visible gap in performance between countries. This gap is closely related to various factors, among which the level of economic development, the power and applicability of environmental policies, as well as the technological and infrastructural capacities for the treatment and recycling of waste, which shows that the effective management of CDW is not only a technical issue, but also an institutional and strategic one. In this context, it is necessary to further strengthen environmental policies and recycling standards, aiming at harmonizing practices between countries and increasing enforcement, simultaneously with promoting the transfer of best practices from leading countries to those with lower performance, in order to accelerate the convergence process and reduce existing differences. In addition, sustainable and targeted investments in recycling infrastructure are required, especially in developing or transition countries, where the lack of technological and financial capacities constitutes an important obstacle to the achievement of European objectives. At the same time, the improvement of data monitoring systems and the increase of transparency in reporting are considered key elements for the accurate assessment of performance and for the design of evidence-based policies, contributing to a more effective, sustainable and oriented management towards the protection of the environment and natural resources, including the preservation of the quality of land in general and agricultural land in particular.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized artificial intelligence (AI) technologies solely for the purpose of linguistic refinement and grammatical correction. Following the application of these tools, the author(s) comprehensively reviewed, verified, and edited the resulting text. The author(s) maintain full accountability and responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the publication.

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Conflict of Interest

The author have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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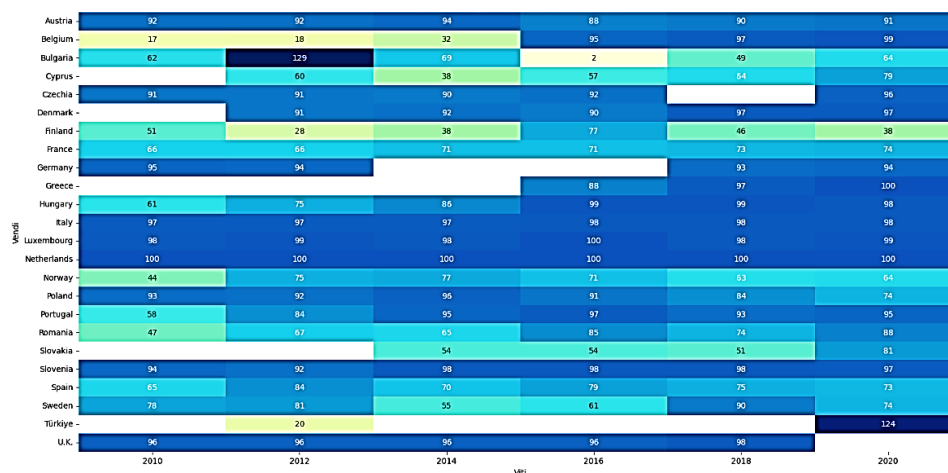
APPENDIX

Table 2. Annual percentage per country CDW recover rate Life cycle assessment requirements and guidelines.

No	Country	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
1	Austria	92	92	94	88	90	91
2	Belgium	17	18	32	95	97	99
3	Bulgaria	62	12	96	90	24	96
4	Cyprus	NA	60	38	57	64	79
5	Czechia	91	91	90	92	NA	96
6	Denmark	NA	91	92	90	97	97
7	Finland	5	12	83	87	74	63
8	France	66	66	71	71	73	74
9	Germany	95	94	NA	NA	93	94
10	Greece	NA	NA	NA	88	97	100
11	Hungary	61	75	86	99	99	98
12	Italy	97	97	97	98	98	98
13	Luxembourg	98	99	98	100	98	99
14	Netherlands	100	100	100	100	100	100
15	Norway	44	75	77	71	63	64
16	Poland	93	92	96	91	84	74
17	Portugal	58	84	95	97	93	95
18	Romania	47	67	65	85	74	88
19	Slovakia	NA	NA	54	54	51	81
20	Slovenia	94	92	98	98	98	97
21	Spain	65	84	70	79	75	73
22	Sweden	78	81	55	61	90	74
23	Türkiye	NA	20	NA	NA	NA	1
24	U.K.	96	96	96	96	98	NA

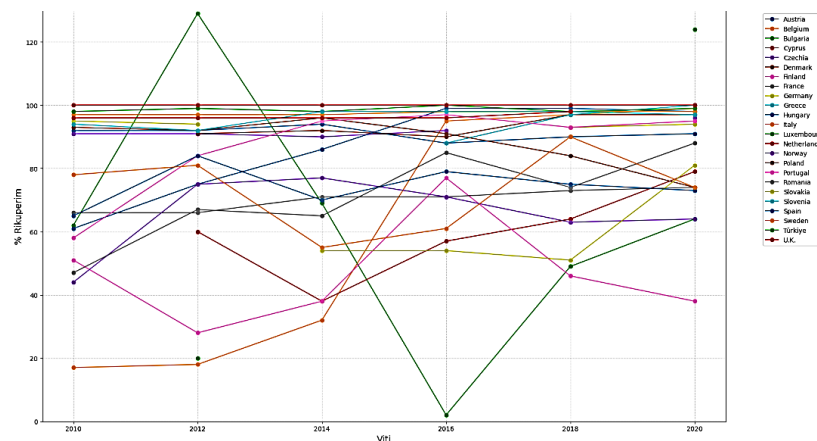
Source: Eurostat [6], [7].

Graphic 1. Data presented in heatmap image format (each cell indicates CDW recovery rate (%), and NA for countries with missing data).



Source: Author of this paper, using raw data for CDW from Eurostat [6], [7]

Graphic 2. CDW recovering per each country 2010–2020.



Source: Author of this paper, using raw data for CDW from Eurostat [6], [7]

Table 3. Extended Descriptive Statistics of CDW Recovery Rate by Country (2010–2020)

No	Country	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Std.Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis	Obs.	Trend
1	Austria	91.2	91.5	88	94	2.3	-0.3	-1.2	6	Stable
2	Belgium	59.7	63.5	17	99	37.5	-0.2	-1.8	6	Strong increase
3	Bulgaria	62.7	63.0	2	129	41.6	0.9	1.5	6	Highly volatile
4	Cyprus	59.6	60.0	38	79	14.8	-0.1	-1.3	5	Increasing
5	Czechia	92.0	91.0	90	96	2.4	0.6	-0.8	5	Stable
6	Denmark	93.4	92.0	90	97	2.9	0.7	-0.6	5	Stable
7	Finland	46.3	42.0	28	77	17.6	0.8	-0.5	6	Fluctuating
8	France	70.2	71.0	66	74	3.1	-0.4	-1.1	6	Slight increase
9	Germany	94.0	94.0	93	95	0.8	0.0	-1.5	4	Stable
10	Greece	95.0	97.0	88	100	6.2	-0.6	-0.9	3	Strong increase
11	Hungary	86.3	92.5	61	99	15.6	-0.9	-0.3	6	Strong increase
12	Italy	97.5	97.5	97	98	0.5	0.0	-1.5	6	Highly stable
13	Luxembourg	98.7	99.0	98	100	0.8	0.2	-1.2	6	Stable
14	Netherlands	100	100	100	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	6	Perfectly stable
15	Norway	65.7	67.5	44	77	12.0	-0.6	-0.7	6	Moderate fluctuation
16	Poland	88.3	91.5	74	96	8.6	-0.7	-0.4	6	Slight decline
17	Portugal	87.0	94.0	58	97	14.2	-1.2	0.5	6	Increasing
18	Romania	71.0	69.5	47	88	14.7	-0.2	-1.1	6	Increasing
19	Slovakia	60.0	54.0	51	81	13.2	0.9	-0.2	4	Increasing
29	Slovenia	96.2	97.5	92	98	2.4	-0.8	-0.6	6	Stable
21	Spain	74.3	74.0	65	84	6.5	0.1	-1.0	6	Slight fluctuation
22	Sweden	73.2	76.0	55	90	13.0	-0.3	-0.9	6	Fluctuating
23	Türkiye	72.0	72.0	20	124	73.5	0.0	-2.0	2	Highly volatile
24	U.K.	96.4	96.0	96	98	0.9	0.5	-1.2	5	Stable

Source: Author of this paper, using raw data for CDW from Eurostat [6], [7]