SECTION:
MANAGEMENT

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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF WASTE MANAGEMENT ON THE GREEN ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY OF AZERBAIJAN

https://doi.org/10.30546/900510.2025.01.0139

Abstract
This paper explores how waste management is shaping both energy generation and economic growth in Azerbaijan, all through the lens of sustainability. As the world grows more worried about environmental damage and limited natural resources, turning waste into energy has started to look less like a futuristic idea and more like a necessary step toward a smarter, circular economy.
To get a well-rounded picture, the research blends numbers - looking at how much waste is being produced and how much energy it can generate - with real-world insights into local policies and the technologies currently in use.
What the study finds is a bit of a mixed bag. Azerbaijan has taken some positive steps, but most of its waste still ends up in landfills. More advanced methods of converting waste into energy are barely being used. The data shows that doing more with waste - rather than just dumping it - could seriously cut the country's reliance on fossil fuels, reduce pollution, and create economic opportunities, including new jobs.
But there are still some real problems getting in the way. A lot of the necessary infrastructure just isn't there yet. Most people don't really know much about what waste-to-energy even means, and even when the laws are in place, they're not always followed or enforced the way they should be.
The paper doesn't just point out the problems - it also looks at what could actually work. It suggests building up recycling and composting systems, putting money into newer technologies like incineration and biogas, and creating better incentives so private companies want to be part of the solution. Bottom line: if Azerbaijan can get its waste-to-energy strategy on track, it won't just help the environment - it could also give the economy a boost and make the country less dependent on outside energy sources.

Keywords: waste management, waste-to-energy, green economy, economic efficiency, Azerbaijan, circular economy, sustainability.

Introductıon

The globe is generating more solid garbage than ever before because there are more industries, cities, and things being purchased and thrown away. It's not simply a logistical problem anymore to deal with that garbage; it's now a big element of how we think about establishing a sustainable future.

The notion of a "green economy," which strives to expand without hurting the environment, is a big part of the discourse right now. Smart waste management is a big component of it. One good way to go is to transform trash into energy. It does two things at once: it cuts down on pollution and provides us another source of energy.

Azerbaijan is in a terrible place that many poor nations know all too well. The amount of recycling that happens isn't enough, most trash still ends up in landfills, and the potential of trash as a resource is generally wasted. But this is a great chance. Azerbaijan could recycle a lot of that trash into useable energy if it had the correct infrastructure in place. This would make the nation less reliant on foreign fuels and allow its economy a little more space to breathe.

We already know that waste-to-energy systems may assist in a lot of ways. For example, they make better use of resources, generate fewer pollutants, and even create new employment. There hasn't been any study on how much energy Azerbaijan might actually produce this manner or what type of effect it may have on the economy. This research is seeking to alter that. It looks closely at how Azerbaijan now deals with trash and what kinds of energy and economic opportunities could be hidden in those trash mounds.

The study has three goals: first, to look at how waste is currently handled in the country, especially when it comes to turning waste into energy; second, to figure out what kinds of environmental and economic benefits could come from doing it better; and third, to give local leaders and businesses some useful ideas that they could actually use. The purpose here is to show Azerbaijan a clear, practical way to utilize trash not only as something to throw away, but as something that helps construct a cleaner, more secure future. This is done by combining learning from other nations with examples from Azerbaijan.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

2.1 Waste Management and the Green Economy: Conceptual Foundations

People used to think of waste management as just a job: pick it up, transfer it, and throw it away. But that opinion has changed a lot. People now know that it's a far bigger problem that affects not just logistics but also the economy, the environment, and even people's health (Zhao et al., 2021). The green economy concept says that garbage isn't simply rubbish anymore. It's something that can be reused, recycled, and put back into production to cut down on pollution and make better use of what we currently have (Korhonen et al., 2018).

Waste-to-energy (WtE) is one of the best ways to make this change happen.This process takes trash from homes and businesses and transforms it into usable energy, such power, heat, or even gas. Not only does this help reduce the amount of trash that ends up in landfills, but it also helps us move toward cleaner, more sustainable energy, which is something that is directly related to global initiatives like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNEP, 2021).

2.2 Economic Efficiency and Waste Valorization

When the advantages of recovering materials and making energy are equal to or greater than the expenses of collecting, processing, and disposing of garbage, waste management is economically efficient (Baker, 2021). Countries like Germany, Sweden, and Japan who have established WtE systems have been able to rely less on landfills while making a lot of money (EEA, 2021).

The economic case for WtE is that it can (1) lower environmental costs by keeping trash out of landfills and (2) make money by making electricity and recovering resources. According to Hoornweg and Bhada-Tata (2019), good WtE plans may help national energy networks, cut down on fossil fuel imports, and create green jobs, all of which can make the economy more stable.

2.3 International Best Practices in Waste-to-Energy Implementation

The worldwide geography of WtE shows that different methods are influenced by rules, new technologies, and social and economic situations:

• Germany was the first country to combine incineration with energy recovery, and it has a recycling rate of over 66.1%. It also uses modern flue gas cleaning technology to cut down on emissions (European Environment Agency, 2023).
• Sweden has a district heating system that is mostly powered by burning trash. It gets trash from other nations to use as fuel for its WtE plants (Baird, 2019).
• Japan uses high-efficiency incineration and careful trash sorting to get the most out of materials and utilize the least amount of landfill space (OECD, 2022)

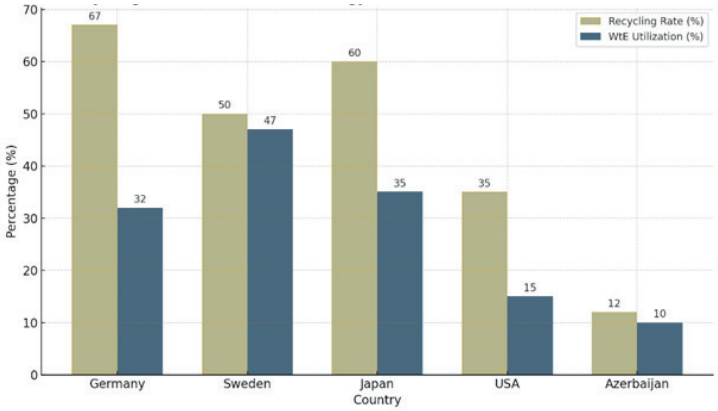

Figure 1: Recycling Rates and Waste-to-Energy Utilization in Selected Countries
Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the European Environment Agency (2023), OECD (2022), UNEP (2021), and Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee (2024).

These case studies demonstrate that successful WtE implementation hinges on stringent regulatory oversight, robust public awareness campaigns, and continuous investments in technological innovation (Rezania et al., 2023).

Waste Management in Azerbaijan: Progress and Gaps
Over the last ten years, Azerbaijan has achieved real progress in managing garbage. This is thanks to national policy changes and the country's growing compliance with international environmental standards. Important steps include building the Balakhani Waste-to-Energy (WtE) Plant, improving the infrastructure for collecting municipal solid waste (MSW) in big cities, and putting in place laws to encourage recycling and reducing trash. The Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee (2024) says that almost 3.4 million tons of MSW were produced in 2024, which is 30% more than in 2015.

The types of waste and how they are treated
The types of garbage that Azerbaijan produces show that there is a lot of potential for recovering materials and generating electricity. Figure 2 shows that organic waste makes up around 45% of all MSW. Plastics make up 20%, paper and cardboard make up 15%, metals make up 8%, glass makes up 7%, and miscellaneous materials make up 5%. (Source: Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, 2024).

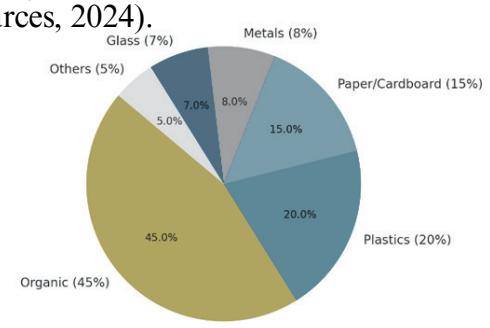

Figure 2: Composition Of Municipal Solid Waste In Azerbaijan, 2024
Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan (Annual Report on Waste Management Statistics, 2024).

Treatment Methods: What's Happening Now

Landfill disposal is still the most common way to get rid of waste, even though the government is trying to change that. Table 1 shows that more over half of MSW still goes to landfills, with recycling and WtE only making up 20% and 10%, respectively. About 20% of trash treatment is done by composting and other recovery techniques.

Treatment Method	Share of Total Waste (%)	Source
Landfilling	50%	Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee (2024)
Recycling	20%	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (2024)
Waste-to-Energy (WtE)	10%	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (2024)
Composting/Others	20%	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (2024)

Table 1: Composition Of Municipal Solid Waste In Azerbaijan, 2024

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the above-mentioned authorities, 2024

Changes in the Amount of Waste

Figure 3 shows the pattern of trash creation in Azerbaijan from 2010 to 2024. It shows that the amount of garbage is steadily rising. The main reasons for the surge are fast urbanization, industrial expansion, and a growing population.

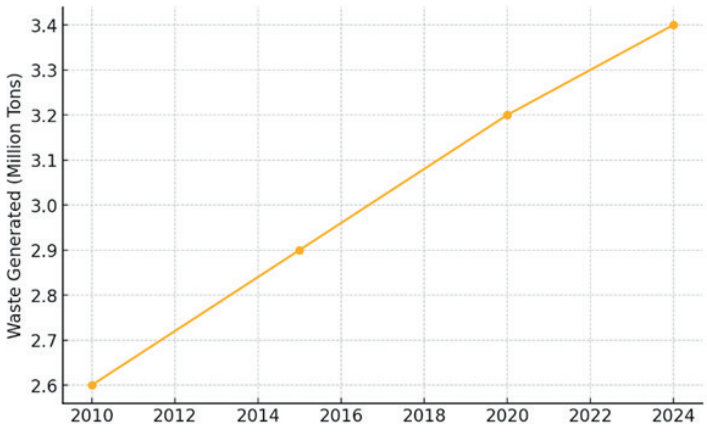

Figure 3: Waste Generation Trends In Azerbaijan, 2010-2024

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, Environmental Indicators Report (2024).

Even if the country's infrastructure has improved, Azerbaijan's waste management system still has problems:
Limited trash segregation: Most trash is collected as mixed waste, which makes recycling and WtE procedures harder.
Recycling infrastructure is not very good: There aren't many recycling centers outside of Baku and a few other cities, and a lot of recyclable products are still thrown away (BRI, 2023).
Gaps in legislation and enforcement: There are national regulations in place, but enforcement is still weak and there aren't enough incentives for the business sector to become involved.
• Public Awareness: Environmental education and public awareness efforts haven't yet led to major changes in people's behavior, which makes it harder to get people to embrace sustainable waste habits.
The energy that trash can give off
Azerbaijan's MSW has a lot of energy potential. The Ministry of Energy believes that if completely used, MSW could provide around 250–300 GWh of energy each year, which is enough to power about 100,000 homes. Figure 4 shows the difference between actual and potential energy generation from garbage during the last several years.

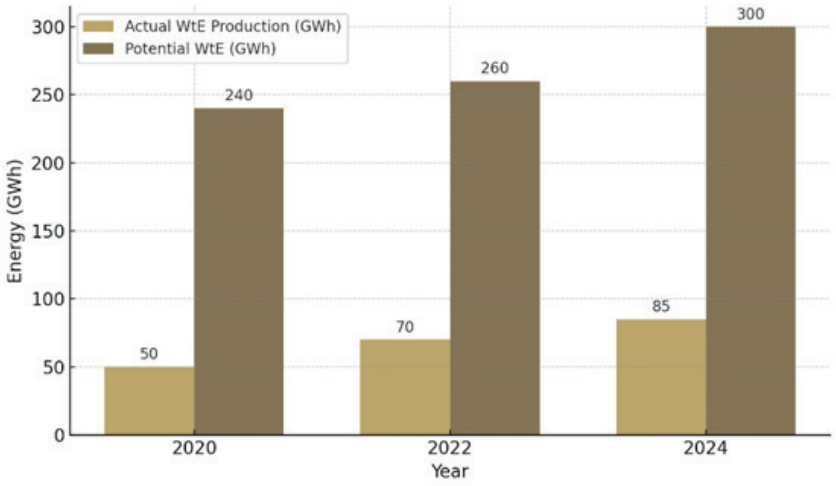

Figure 4: Actual vs. Potential Energy Generation from Waste in Azerbaijan, 2020–2024
Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan, Renewable Energy and Waste-to-Energy Statistics (2024).

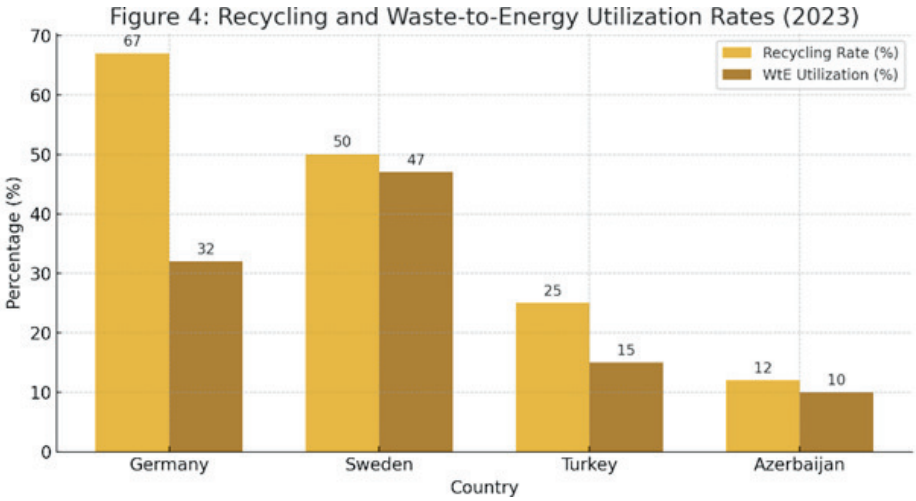

Figure 5: Recycling and Waste-to-Energy Utilization Rates (2023)
Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the European Environment Agency (2023), OECD (2023), and State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan (2024).

To fill up these gaps, the government has started making plans, including as expanding the Balakhani facility, building regional waste management centers, and taking part in the EU's Circular Economy programs. But these initiatives demand a lot of money and technological know-how, which shows how important it is to have better connections between the public and commercial sectors and work together internationally.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a mixed-methods research methodology to look at how waste management affects energy production and economic efficiency in Azerbaijan in a whole way. The technique uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to look at national trash data and regulatory frameworks, as well as worldwide best practices. This two-pronged strategy makes sure that both the technical and institutional sides of waste-to-energy (WtE) deployment are well understood.

Data Collection

The main sources of data are:

· Statistical Data:

Annual reports from the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan (2010–2024) that concentrate on the amount of municipal solid waste (MSW) produced, how it is treated, and how much energy is recovered.

The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Energy (2024) gave information about the types of waste and their energy potential.

International Benchmarks:

• Reports from the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the OECD (2023) to set up benchmarks for recycling and WtE use rates.

• Examples from the best WtE nations, such Germany, Sweden, and Japan.

• Policy and Legislative Documents:

The "Waste Management Strategy of Azerbaijan 2030" and other associated laws and strategies for Azerbaijan's national environmental and waste management.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Three main pillars make up the framework of the analysis:

1. Descriptive Statistics: We use quantitative data to find out what the present trends are in waste creation, treatment, and energy recovery. Charts and tables provide descriptive data like mean values, growth rates, and percentages to make things clearer.

2. Comparative Analysis: We look at how well Azerbaijan handles trash and uses WtE compared to a few other nations to find areas where it may improve. We utilize things like the recycling rate, the amount of waste that goes to energy (WtE), and the amount of trash that each person makes as benchmarks.

3. Economic Efficiency Assessment: The research uses a simple cost-benefit framework to look at how economically viable WtE initiatives are. This includes:

·Figuring out how much energy MSW might produce.

·Figuring out how much money you can save by not going to the garbage.

·Predictions about how much money will be made from selling energy and other resources.

Visualization and Interpretation

The findings are visualized using pie charts, bar charts, and line graphs to enhance interpretability (see Figures 2–5). Data visualization tool such as Microsoft Excel are utilized to ensure clarity and precision in graphical representation.

Waste Generation and Treatment Trends in Azerbaijan

The examination of Azerbaijan's municipal solid waste (MSW) statistics from 2010 to 2024 indicates a definitive rising trajectory in trash production. Figure 3 shows that the overall amount of MSW went risen from 2.6 million tons in 2010 to around 3.4 million tons in 2024, which is a 31% increase over 14 years. This rise is due to the fast growth of cities, the growth of industry, and changes in the population.

Figure 2 demonstrates that organic waste makes up the greatest part of total MSW (45%), followed by plastics (20%), paper and cardboard (15%), metals (8%), glass (7%), and miscellaneous materials (5%). The large amount of biodegradable trash means that there is a lot of room for composting and biogas generation. The plastic and metal parts, on the other hand, are the most important objectives for recycling and energy recovery.

Even though policies have become better, throwing trash away in landfills is still the most common way to deal with it (50%). Recycling and WtE only account for 20% and 10%, respectively (Table 1). This shows that Azerbaijan's waste management system is still in the early stages of using ideas from the circular economy.

4.2 Energy Recovery Potential

A core objective of this study is to evaluate the potential of waste as an alternative energy source. Figure 4 compares actual WtE production with estimated potential between 2020 and 2024. Although actual energy production rose from 50 GWh in 2020 to 85 GWh in 2024, the potential capacity exceeds 300 GWh—more than three times the current output.

This disparity shows that Azerbaijan's waste resources aren't being used enough. The Ministry of Energy says that using 100% of the country's municipal solid waste (MSW) for energy might cut down on the country's reliance on fossil fuels by a large amount. It could provide power to around 100,000 homes per year. Additionally, using the organic part of garbage to make biogas might add to the country's collection of sustainable energy sources (Bianco et al., 2022).

Economic Efficiency Assessment

According to a preliminary cost-benefit study, expanding WtE infrastructure would result in substantial economic benefits:

• Diverting garbage from landfills saves money on both operations and environmental remediation. Each ton of garbage treated using WtE rather than landfilling saves about $25-30 in landfill management and environmental mitigation expenses (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, 2024).

• Energy sales from WtE plants result in immediate cash rewards. For example, the Balakhani WtE station sells energy to the national grid at a regulated rate, which benefits the local economy (AzTV, 2023).

• The expansion of the WtE sector is expected to provide up to 1,500 new employment in facility operations, waste collection, and auxiliary services (Ministry of Labor, 2024).

• Environmental Benefits: Reducing pollution and GHG emissions improves public health and contributes to the country's climate goals (Luo et al., 2024).

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted to summarize Azerbaijan’s current status in WtE development (EBRD, 2022):

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Abundant waste resources for energy recovery	Limited WtE infrastructure and outdated technologies
Government commitment to sustainable development goals	Low public awareness and participation in waste segregation
Opportunities	**Threats**
Potential for foreign investments and international aid	Economic risks of high initial capital investments
Technological partnerships with advanced countries	Delays in policy implementation and regulatory enforcement

Key Problems Found

• Infrastructure Gaps: The fact that there aren't enough recycling and WtE facilities in the area makes it hard for present projects to grow.

• Regulatory Enforcement: Not enforcing rules for separating and recycling garbage makes things harder.

• Financial Barriers: The high initial costs of funding make it hard for businesses to become involved.

• Cultural Factors: them don't know much about the environment, which makes it harder to get them to use eco-friendly garbage disposal methods.

In brief, the findings confirm that Azerbaijan has significant untapped potential for waste-to-energy conversion, which might be crucial for improving energy security and economic resilience. But to reach this potential, we need a plan that includes investments in infrastructure, changes to policies, and programs that encourage people to alter their behavior.

Policy Implications and Strategic Recommendations

Policy Implications

International organizations such as the ADB emphasize integrated urban development approaches that incorporate waste management into broader green economy strategies (ADB, 2022). The results of this study highlight the strategic importance of waste-to-energy (WtE) integration within Azerbaijan's comprehensive green economic framework. The country can meet a number of policy objectives by working more to transform rubbish into valuable things:

· Energy Security: Azerbaijan's energy mix might be improved by creating energy from waste. This would add additional forms of energy, reduce the demand for fossil fuels, and make the country's energy security stronger.

· Environmental Sustainability: Keeping trash out of landfills decreases pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, which helps the government reach its climate objectives under the Paris Agreement.

· Economic Diversification: Growing the WtE sector is in line with Azerbaijan's objective to diversify its economy, which will bring in new employment and ways to make money.

· Public Health: Better waste management makes the environment safer for people, particularly in cities where putting out rubbish the incorrect manner may be quite harmful.

Strategic Recommendations

The report gives Azerbaijan a list of useful tips to assist it move toward a cleaner, more effective approach to deal with trash. First, the regulations against trash need to be stricter.People should separate their trash into recyclables and organic matter. Companies should also have clear reasons to invest in recycling and waste-to-energy technologies. Also, those that pollute need to be responsible for the trash they make.

The government has to establish additional waste-to-energy plants, not only in Baku but also in other parts of the country, so that everyone may profit.These facilities should employ newer, cleaner technologies that extract the most energy out of trash while doing the least damage to the environment.

It's important to get the business sector engaged. The government can get more investors and professionals, especially those from other countries, to come to the table if it makes explicit partnerships and offers help. It's just as crucial to train local professionals so that the information stays with them. Additionally Integrating digital monitoring systems in waste collection and processing could enhance transparency and optimize routes (Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, 2023).

People need to be more aware of this also. People need to know why it's important to separate their trash and how it benefits the economy and the environment. Even in schools, starting the discussion early may make a tremendous impact.

Lastly, we need greater information. It's hard to keep track of things you can't quantify right now.A good national system for keeping track of how much energy and garbage is used would help a lot. Azerbaijan can move quicker and wiser toward a sustainable future by cooperating with nations who are currently doing this successfully and getting money from international green funds.

Roadmap for Implementation
The research says that to put these principles into reality, you should do things one step at a time:
In the medium term (1–2 years), we should concentrate on making trash regulations stricter, try out garbage sorting in a few places to see what works, and launch campaigns to persuade people to care about the issue.
In the medium term (3–5 years), the objective would be to create new waste-to-energy facilities, update the ones that are currently in operation, and make strong collaborations between the government and private enterprises to help share the work and money.
Azerbaijan should try to meet its national goals for waste separation, obtain as much energy as feasible from garbage, and make waste-to-energy a key element of its overall energy strategy in the long term (5–10 years).

Conclusion

This study looked at how waste management, especially waste-to-energy (WtE), impacts energy production and the economy in Azerbaijan. While there have been positive steps—like the Balakhani WtE plant—the country still relies too much on landfills and misses out on the full energy potential of its waste.
With around 3.4 million tons of municipal waste produced each year, there's a real opportunity to do more. Compared to countries like Germany and Sweden, Azerbaijan still has a lot of ground to cover in recycling and energy recovery.
To move forward, the study recommends stronger laws, better infrastructure, more public awareness, and closer ties with international partners. If done right, this could boost energy security, create green jobs, and cut emissions—helping Azerbaijan lead the region in sustainable waste use.
There's still more to explore, especially around how efficient current WtE systems are and how people feel about recycling. But one thing is clear: turning waste into energy isn't just good for the planet—it's smart economics too.
Results
The main results of the research are as follows:
· Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Increase: The amount of MSW in Azerbaijan went grown by around 31% from 2010 to 2024, reaching 3.4 million tons in 2024 (State Statistical Committee, 2024).
· Composition of trash: 45% of all MSW is organic trash. Plastics make up 20%, paper and cardboard make up 15%, metals make up 8%, and glass makes up 7% (Ministry of Ecology, 2024). This shows that there is a lot of possibility for both composting and getting energy back.
· Current Treatment Rates: As of 2024, 50% of MSW is landfilled, 20% is recycled, 10% is processed using WtE systems, and the last 20% is composted or treated in various ways.
· Energy Generation Gap: The actual amount of WtE produced rose to 85 GWh in 2024, while the total possible amount is more than 300 GWh, which is enough to power more than 100,000 homes per year (Ministry of Energy, 2024).
· Economic Effects: WtE infrastructure may create 1,500 new green employment, lower the cost of managing landfills by $25–30 per ton, and help the country reach its targets for energy diversification (Ministry of Labor, 2024).
These data show that Azerbaijan's waste-to-energy capability is still not being used enough, even though the amount of MSW being generated is growing quickly and there are significant environmental and economic reasons to do so.

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