Summary of "Waste Reduction Strategy for the city of Suwałki (PL) and the city of Alytus (LT)"

1. Introduction and Objectives

This document, the "Waste Reduction Strategy for the city of Suwałki (PL) and the city of Alytus (LT)" outlines a new vision for a circular economy in these two partner cities. It addresses contemporary challenges, including changing consumption patterns, technological advancements in waste management, and the need for community-wide collaboration. The strategy aims to diagnose current issues, set new priorities for local authorities and communities, and propose an action plan, particularly for Suwałki, to achieve environmental goals set by the European Union.

2. Legal and Strategic Framework

Both Poland and Lithuania operate under the EU's legal framework for waste management, which mandates ambitious goals. Key objectives for both nations include:

- **Recycling:** Achieving municipal waste recycling rates of at least 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030, and 65% by 2035.
- **Landfilling:** Reducing the amount of municipal waste sent to landfills to less than 10% by 2035.
- **Circular Economy:** Implementing principles of the circular economy, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

While both countries share these goals, their implementation and progress differ. Lithuania has a well-established deposit-return system (DRS) and places a strong emphasis on bio-waste collection. Poland is still in the process of fully implementing key regulations like EPR and faces challenges with illegal landfills.

3. Current State of Waste Management

Suwałki, Poland

- **System Overview:** The system is managed by the Suwałki City municipality, with waste collection handled by the Municipal Services Company (PGK) and processing by the Waste Management Company (PGO). Five main waste fractions

are collected curbside, with additional types accepted at the Selective Waste Collection Point (PSZOK).

- **Waste Generation & Recycling:** In 2024, Suwałki generated 27,528.54 tonnes of municipal waste, a notable increase from the previous year. The city is struggling to meet recycling targets, achieving a rate of 28% in 2024 against a required 45%. This failure to meet targets risks financial penalties.
- **Infrastructure & Investments:** PGO operates a Mechanical-Biological Treatment (MBT) plant, a landfill, and a composting facility. A significant recent investment was a new, modern sorting line for selectively collected waste. A major upcoming project is the construction of a waste-to-energy (WtE) plant (ITPOK) to reduce costs and produce energy.
- **Challenges:** The primary challenges are the low quality of waste segregation, particularly in multi-family apartment buildings, and the rising overall costs of the waste management system.

Alytus, Lithuania

- **System Overview:** Waste management is handled on a regional level by the Alytus Region Waste Management Center (ARATC), which serves seven municipalities. The system is distinguished by its strong focus on waste prevention and reuse.
- **Innovation in Reuse:** Alytus has implemented highly successful initiatives, including **"Mainukas"** (exchange points for reusable items) and the **"TikoTiks"** center, which repairs and refurbishes items for reuse. In 2023, an estimated 532 tonnes of items were given a second life through these programs.
- **Waste Generation & Recycling:** In 2022, the region generated 79,228 tonnes of municipal waste. The material recycling rate was 39.8% (calculated using the new, stricter EU methodology), which is below the national average (49%) and the 2025 EU target (55%). The landfilling rate is 12%, slightly better than the national average.
- **Infrastructure:** The region's infrastructure includes a regional landfill, a composting plant, and an advanced MBT plant that utilizes anaerobic digestion to produce biogas and electricity.
- **Challenges:** The main challenge for Alytus is to improve the quality of collected materials to increase its material recycling rate and meet the upcoming EU targets.

4. Key Areas of Focus

Waste Monitoring in Suwałki

The current monitoring system relies on reports from waste companies, resident

declarations, and physical inspections of waste bins. However, it faces several challenges:

- **Data Reliability:** Issues with the national waste database (BDO) and the accuracy of company reports.
- **Low Segregation Quality:** Difficulty in enforcing proper segregation, especially in anonymous multi-family housing settings.
- **Identified Gaps:** A lack of detailed, publicly available data on the quality of collected waste and the actual efficiency of the sorting facilities.

Deposit-Return System (DRS)

- **Poland:** A national DRS is set to launch on October 1, 2025, for single-use plastic bottles, reusable glass bottles, and metal cans. This is expected to significantly improve collection rates for these items but may negatively impact the revenue of municipal waste systems and reduce the calorific value of waste intended for the new WtE plant.
- **Lithuania:** The Lithuanian DRS is a major success story, achieving return rates of over 90% for PET bottles and cans, demonstrating the effectiveness of a well-designed system.

Educational Activities

Both cities recognize the importance of public education.

- **Suwałki:** Runs campaigns like "Suwalczaki Segregują" (#SuwalkiSegregates) and offers educational tours of the PGO facility. Local preschools are actively engaged in hands-on ecological education.
- **Alytus:** ARATC conducts a comprehensive educational program targeting all age groups through various media, events, and the use of the "TikoTiks" reuse center as an educational hub.

5. Recommendations and Action Plan for Suwałki

The strategy concludes with a series of expert recommendations for Suwałki to optimize its waste management system:

1. **Improve Data & Monitoring:** Implement a robust system for collecting and analyzing detailed waste data to identify problem areas and measure the effectiveness of interventions.
2. **Enhance Collection & Sorting:** Launch pilot programs for challenging waste streams (e.g., food waste) and optimize the operations and accessibility of the PSZOK.
3. **Boost Public Engagement:** Develop a long-term, multi-channel educational campaign to improve segregation rates. Explore motivational systems, such as

gamification or rewards for proper sorting.

4. **Adopt Modern Technology:** Consider a phased rollout of smart technologies, such as sensors in waste containers, to optimize collection routes and costs.
5. **Strengthen Collaboration:** Establish a formal working group between the City Hall, PGO, and PGK to improve coordination and shared responsibility for meeting system-wide goals.
6. **Secure Funding:** Proactively seek funding from EU and national programs (e.g., FEnIKS, LIFE) to co-finance necessary infrastructure projects and initiatives.

By implementing these recommendations, Suwałki can move towards a more sustainable and economically efficient waste management system, aligning with the principles of the circular economy and meeting its regulatory obligations.