

Mainstreaming reusable and refillable packaging in the UK

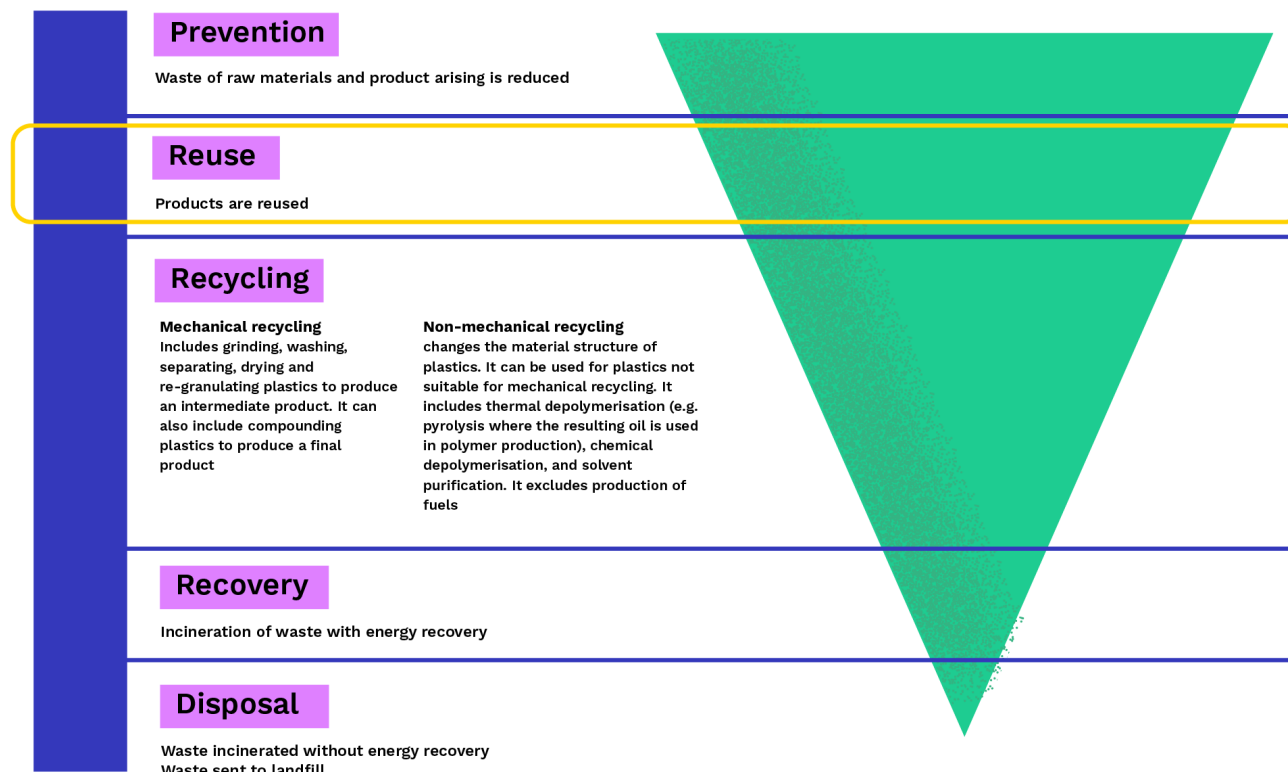
A practical guide for
business

Image courtesy of Abel & Cole





Working together to reduce the impact of plastic packaging



Increasing uptake of reusable and refillable packaging is vital if we are to reduce the impact of plastic packaging, and address plastic pollution.

In this document we give businesses a step-by-step guide, helping you to consider your packaging portfolio, and see where there are potential opportunities to move to reuse and refill.

Together we can move from single-use to reusable and refillable packaging, helping to reduce your plastic production and make your business more circular by keeping packaging in use longer.

It is estimated that scaling reuse models can cut annual plastic leakage into the ocean by 20% by 2040¹

Figure 1 – Plastic Waste Hierarchy

¹ [NC-2 negotiations for a UN treaty to end plastic pollution \(ellenmacarthurfoundation.org\)](#)



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1.0

Purpose and Key Takeaways





a. The case for increasing reuse and refill

The business case:

Transitioning away from single-use packaging can be challenging and requires a long-term business view, but benefits are becoming visible and quantifiable. Moving to reusable and refillable packaging can help your business to:

- Reduce your resource consumption and waste.
- Reduce your exposure to volatile raw material costs.
- Keep ahead of packaging regulations.
- Build brand loyalty among your customers.

The environmental case:

- To ensure plastic packaging is moving to a more circular approach, we need to move beyond packaging being used once.
- Reuse and refill are crucial in reducing the environmental impacts of single-use and short-lived packaging.
- Reduced leakage of fugitive plastics that currently contribute to habitat and biodiversity loss.
- Reduced overall resource consumption during plastic production, use and disposal

To keep plastic packaging out of the natural environment, recycling is not enough. Currently, 95% of the value of plastic packaging is lost after its first use¹. Although recycling helps to retain some of this value, to create a circular economy in plastic packaging we need to move beyond packaging being used just once.



It is essential that we mainstream reuse and refill in order to reduce the volume of single-use packaging placed on the market annually and its associated impact. WRAP and The UK Plastics Pact's new how-to guide contains an easy to follow self assessment process that will enable businesses of all sizes identify their short, medium and long term priorities in the transition towards reuse - what a great tool!

Catherine Conway, Reuse Lead, GoUnpackaged



¹ [Plastics and the circular economy \(ellenmacarthurfoundation.org\)](https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/)



b. What this document offers: a practical guide for businesses

You may already strongly support increased use of reusable and refillable packaging

But you may be struggling to see the practical steps that you need to take, to help bring this change about.

In this guide we offer you a starting point for your reusable/refillable packaging, and ideas for next steps if you have already begun. We suggest a process of self-assessment, enabling you to identify what you can achieve with your different products, and the different sales and

consumption environments in which you operate. This guide will help you to identify where to take action to increase reusable and refillable packaging.

Secondly, we set out the key short (2025), medium (2030) and long-term (2035) actions that are needed across the plastic packaging value chain, to deliver reuse/ refill at scale in the UK.

Together, these actions will bring about a large-scale transition to reuse and refill, and encourage widespread adoption of reusable and refillable packaging systems in the UK by 2035.

c. Is this approach relevant to you?

This document applies to:

- Reusable and refillable primary, secondary and tertiary packaging in the fast-moving consumer goods market (FMCG) market and similar consumption settings, such as the Hospitality, Restaurant and Café (HORECA) sector, public institutions, entertainment venues etc.
- All material and packaging formats, not just plastics.
- Everyone in the packaging value chain, including consumers.
- The UK, but our approach can be applied in countries and markets beyond the UK.

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Scaling reusable packaging models requires innovation, collaboration, and commitment across the entire value chain. That's why we welcome The UK Plastics Pact 'Mainstreaming reusable and refillable packaging in the UK' which helps to define and outline the actions and activities necessary for scaling effective reuse solutions for consumers.

Jolanda de Rooij, Senior Global Sustainability Manager, Unilever

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About The UK Plastics Pact

The UK Plastics Pact brings together businesses from across the entire plastics value chain to create a circular economy for plastic packaging, and transform the way that the UK makes, uses and disposes of plastic.

UK Plastics Pact members have committed to working to increase rates of reuse and refill.



d. Key takeaways

New to reuse?

- Increasing the uptake of reusable and refillable packaging can represent an exciting opportunity. You can create new, sustainable business models, while reducing the environmental impact of packaging.
- You may need to collaborate with other businesses (e.g. through standardisation and shared infrastructure) to achieve economies of scale, and deliver cost-effective and environmentally friendly reusable/ refillable packaging systems.
- You need to design reusable and refillable packaging systems to be easy for your customers to use.
- Effective measurement is vital for quantifying the impact of reuse/ refill systems, and making them more efficient.

Already on your reuse journey?

Reusable and refillable packaging is an option for most types of products, but it is easier to make the transition with some than others.

By working through the approach that we share in this document, you can assess the opportunities you have for moving to reuse and refill, to start or accelerate your reuse and refill journey, and to build robust action plans with concrete targets.

ACT now to move to reusable/refillable packaging

To assess the level of opportunity that your business has in reuse and refill:



1. Read this report.



4. Identify the product areas or categories where you may need to collaborate to deliver scale and system efficiencies.



2. Download our how-to guide: 'Assessing the opportunity of reusables and refillables in your business'.



5. Collaborate on the products you have identified by joining with other UK Plastics Pact members. Together we can move at scale to reusable and refillable systems for UK packaging by 2035.



3. Map your self-assessment in WRAP's Reusable/Refillable assessment matrix, which is part of our how-to guide.



6. Deliver on your action plans to mainstream reuse/ refill of the packaging you have prioritised.

2.0

Mainstreaming reusable and refillable packaging – what this means for you

Image courtesy of Dizzie





Our vision – which is shared by many UK Plastics Pact members – is for reuse or refill systems to be ‘mainstream’, part of the common shopping experience for citizens in the UK, helping to displace single-use plastic packaging.

Reusable and refillable packaging systems take multiple forms, and deciding whether a product or category of products is suitable for transitioning to reuse/ refill requires careful evaluation: there is no single solution/ model.

You need to work out, for your own business and your own products, where the opportunities are to help mainstream reuse and refill. This document can help with that journey.

a. What do we mean by ‘mainstream’?

‘Mainstream’ is generally understood to mean activities which are shared by most people, which are regarded as normal or conventional, and which are undertaken broadly rather than by small portions of a population. To help us begin to set targets, we could define ‘mainstream’ as: something that most people (>50% of people) do most of the time (>50% of occasions).

However while our overall aim is for more than half of us to reuse and refill more than half of the time, this is not a target that will work for every product or business.

b. Barriers

There are multiple operational, commercial and technical challenges in moving from a predominantly single-use packaging system to one where reuse/refill systems are mainstream. These are explored further in this document and include, for example, technical barriers for some food products where food safety could be an issue or where allergen contamination needs to be managed.

The scale and impact of reusable packaging in the UK continues to be challenging to quantify. However 3,340 tonnes of reusable primary packaging were reported in 2022 by UK Plastics Pact members, this represents less than 1% of the packaging placed on the market, making it clear that widespread reuse and refill models are not yet the normal or conventional model for packaging today, but are still at an early stage.

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For reuse and refill to become successful environmentally and economically it is essential that companies work together and look at standardisation within reuse systems. The UK Plastics Pact ‘Mainstreaming reusable and refillable packaging in the UK’ offers an ideal vehicle for this.

The Many Happy Returns project, Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, University of Sheffield

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c. Accelerating mainstream adoption

Circular reuse models have yet to be widely adopted (they account for only 1.2% of all packaging, according to Ellen MacArthur Foundation¹). Research shows that wider consumer adoption would need to overcome considerable barriers, including very low availability of reuse and refill options, higher prices, increased ‘workload’ for the shopper, concerns about hygiene and quality, and general mental overload in a shopping environment.

Until these barriers are effectively overcome, the likelihood of widespread adoption of reuse/ refill appears low. This gap between niche appeal and mass (self-sustained) adoption was originally labelled ‘the marketing chasm,’ and many studies have been published on ways to cross it.

The key principle is striving to reach critical mass, with increased demand driving increased availability, increased sales and increased investment in product performance and price competitiveness, in turn driving increased demand (see figure). At some point in this process the economies of scale kick in, making the new proposition as affordable and profitable (or more so) than the system being replaced.

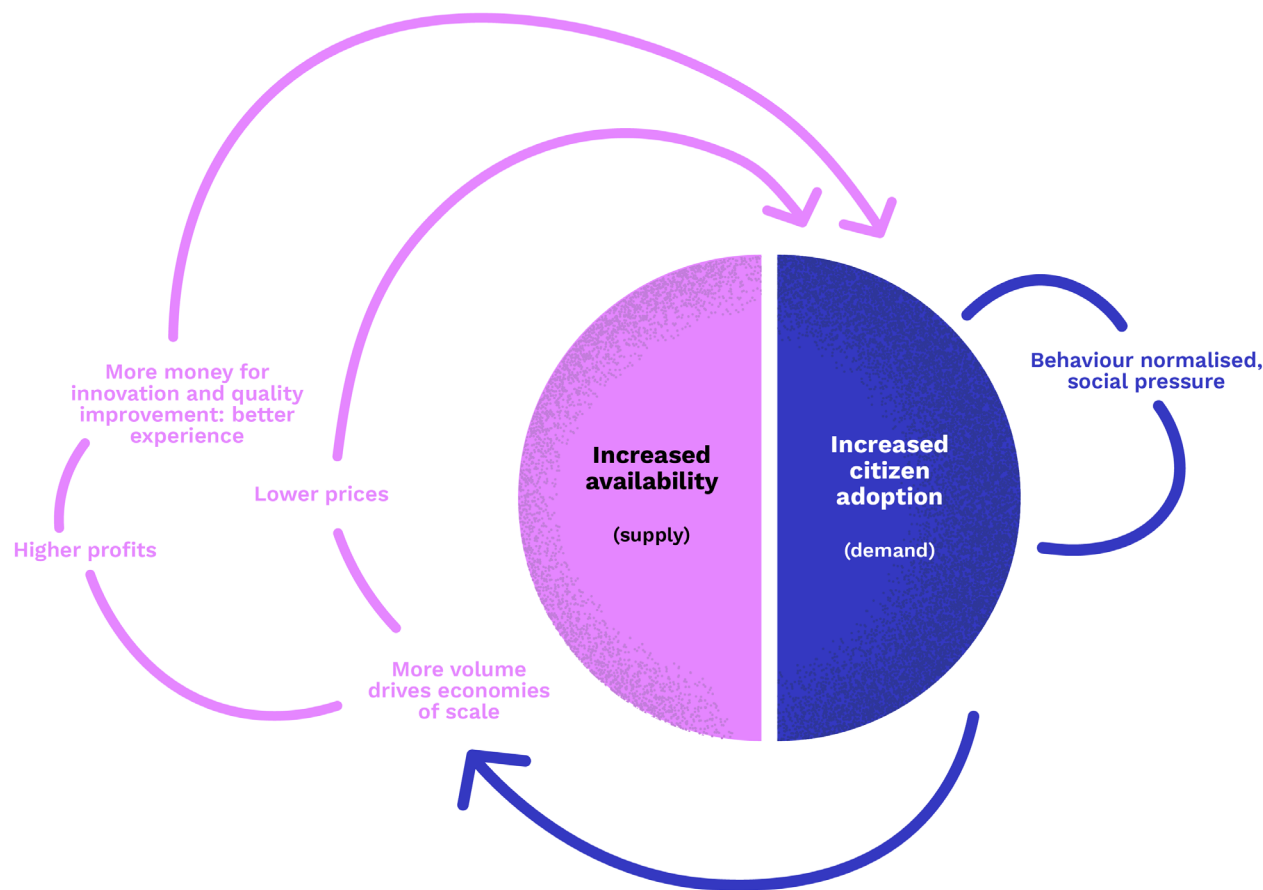


Figure 2 – WRAP - Critical Mass in Reuse/Refill supply and demand

¹ [The Global Commitment 2022 Progress Report \(ellenmacarthurfoundation.org\)](https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/)

d. Building reach and scale

In their report ‘Unlocking a reuse revolution – scaling returnable packaging¹’, Ellen MacArthur Foundation illustrates a range of scenarios in which systems move to using returnable packaging, and the potential impact that this would have.

Modelling suggests that each beverage bottle in a ‘fragmented effort’ (or low adoption) scenario is 35% more expensive than existing containers, but in a ‘system change’ (high adoption) scenario it is 21% cheaper. Unsurprisingly, operating in a small unstructured way is more expensive, while operating in a large, structured way is lower-cost.

This clearly demonstrates why we need to break out of our current ‘fragmented’ efforts and move towards ‘system change.’

Any one individual retailer or brand is limited in their ability to deliver system change on their own. While many can (and sometimes do) introduce bulk reuse or refill components into their ranges, this only reduces a certain proportion of their single-use packaging unless customers provide their own containers, or some form of returns infrastructure exists to collect containers.

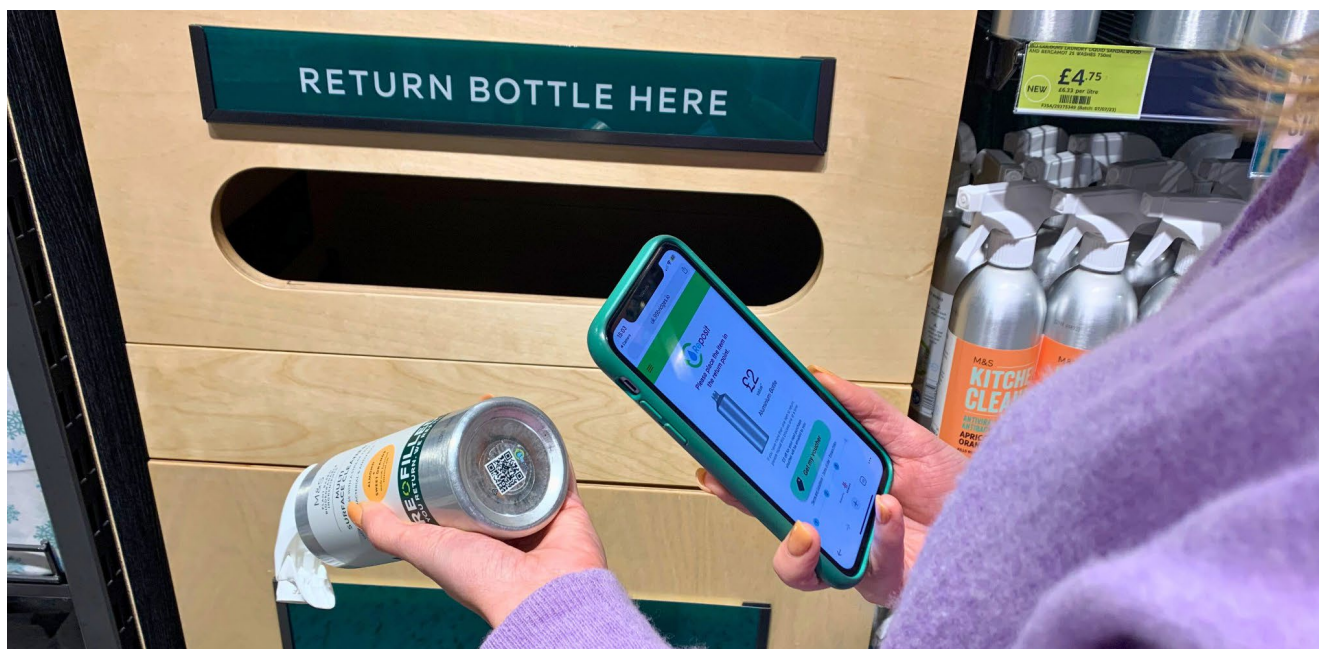


Image courtesy of Reposit & M&S

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Reuse will always be higher up the waste hierarchy for a reason - single use, be it plastic or paper, is putting an unsustainable burden on our environment. Reuse can provide huge impact reductions for pioneering brands and retailers and more loyal shoppers. As more commit, the transition gets easier.

Ben Patten, Dizzie

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¹ [Scaling returnable packaging \(ellenmacarthurfoundation.org\)](https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/scaling-returnable-packaging)



e. The need for self-assessment

For your own business, you need to work through your own process of self-assessment, to identify what you can realistically achieve with your different products, and in the different sales and consumption environments in which you operate.

This guide offers a starting point/ suggested approach for that self-assessment process.

As you assess your opportunities to move to reuse and refill as mainstream, it may help to learn from the extensive research that has been carried out globally into what helps innovations to be widely adopted.



A really useful guide, particularly if used to identify the best fit products in a portfolio and recognise the key remaining challenges. We need more viable reusable solutions.

Michael Archer, Collaborative Solutions Director, CHEP Europe



Behaviours which are most likely to be widely adopted are those which:



Offer a clear and direct advantage.



Come with a discount on a per-use basis.



Involve frequently executed habits – the daily coffee rather than products that are purchased less frequently.



Can be easily accessed.



Are relatively simple to understand, and low-risk.

To help build reach and scale for reuse/ refill beyond your individual products, it also helps if you can:



Increase access to reusable/ refillable packaging options.



Increase engagement with reusable/ refillable packaging.



Increase the number of repeat purchases of reusable/ refillable packaging that customers make.

3.0

Transitioning to reusable/ refillable packaging: why you need to act now



**By acting now, you can get ahead of new regulations in this area**

Switching away from single-use systems to reusable and refillable systems can reduce your production costs, ensure that you have security of supply for your packaging, and reduce your exposure to price volatility in raw materials

Moving early on reusable/refillable packaging can have a positive effect on your reputation and your customers' loyalty to your brands.

a. Impending changes

Along with other businesses in the packaging value chain, impending changes could have a significant impact on you. Policies are being developed globally which could result in significant change across the international packaging industry. The upcoming Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) in Europe will promote a transition to reuse and refill with specific targets from 2030-2040. Other changes may come from:

- The UK Government's reuse agenda.
- The UK Plastics Pact's post-2025 successor agreement.
- The Global Treaty to End Plastics Pollution (including in the marine environment).

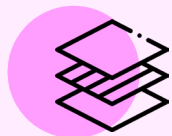
Resulting regulations may:

- Lead to product/packaging bans (e.g. on single-use plastics, problematic polymers, chemicals/ additives etc).
- Increase the cost of putting single-use/ short-lived packaging on the market (for example through extended producer responsibility (EPR) fees for packaging, deposit return scheme (DRS) charges, the Plastic Packaging Tax, a carbon tax, or the removal of fossil fuel subsidies).
- Influence packaging choices via mandated targets (around reuse, plastic reduction, or greenhouse gas reduction).
- Restrict the use of chemicals particularly in food packaging and other contact-sensitive plastic packaging.

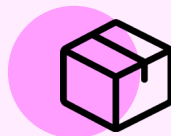


b. The need to act now

By acting now, you can keep ahead of any new regulations, and help to shape policy in this area. At the same time, switching away from single-use systems to reusable and refillable systems can be good for your business. It can help you to:



Reduce your need for raw materials and hence your production and waste-handling costs.



Ensure that you have security of supply for your packaging – at scale, reusable packaging systems will operate within a continuous loop, which will be predominantly local and kept within the UK (where feasible).



Reduce your exposure to price volatility in raw materials.



Reduce costs: shared reuse infrastructure and pooled reusable containers can be more cost-effective than single-use packaging in some cases.

There can be a first-mover disadvantage by acting early. However, by working collaboratively with other businesses, you may be able to influence and build shared reusable systems that are shaped to your requirements ahead of potential regulation.

By actively addressing the environmental, socio-economic, social and health impacts of packaging, you can have a positive effect on your brand loyalty and reputation. Consumer appetite for less harmful packaging is rising with 67% of UK citizens saying plastic waste is an important issue to them¹. Consumers are looking for new innovative solutions to the environmental challenges confronting them – they are ready to try something new.

69% of respondents indicated they are likely or very likely to try products in returnable packaging if they are available where they shop².

¹ [Plastics Tracker Report 2021.pdf \(wrap.org.uk\)](#)

² [Building a reuse and return model \(citytosea.org\)](#)

4.0

Increasing reuse and refill: benefits





Modelling¹ published by Ellen MacArthur Foundation in November 2023 demonstrated that increased use of returnable plastic packaging could reduce:

Greenhouse gas emissions by¹

35-69%

Water use by¹

45-70%

Material use by¹

45-76%

a. How you can help protect the environment

With increasing agreement that we cannot recycle our way out of the waste crisis, reuse/ refill has a vital role to play. The potential for reusable and refillable packaging to deliver genuinely beneficial impacts, reducing resource use and waste generation, is an important option to consider. According to the waste hierarchy, reuse/ refill is the most effective response, after reduction in use of materials.

The harmful effects of single-use packaging are well documented, from issues created by unsustainable resource use to negative impacts on people, animals and ecosystems resulting from 'leaked' plastic entering the environment.

Moving to reusable/ refillable packaging, you can contribute to protecting the environment. Reusable and refillable packaging can help to mitigate the effects of the triple planetary crisis – climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss.

Other environmental benefits and considerations include:

- Reduced overall resource consumption during plastic production, use and disposal.

- Reduction of chemical pollutants entering the environment through the full lifecycle of plastic.
- Reduced leakage of fugitive plastics that currently contribute to habitat and biodiversity loss.
- Reduced potential for undesirable changes in land use, through the production of bio-based alternatives to fossil-based plastic feedstocks for linear packaging applications.
- Shared infrastructure and standardisation are key to achieving impact in high-volume, fast-moving categories.
- Measurement of reuse/ refill is required to quantify the costs, benefits and impacts of system change. Businesses will need to identify when reusable or refillable packaging will be environmentally preferable to single use packaging, and determining the minimum number of returns/ refills needed will help demonstrate environmental performance.

b. Other benefits

Moving to reusable/ refillable packaging can help to mitigate the health impacts of plastic pollution: for example preventing plastics and chemicals from entering food systems, animals and people.

¹ [Unlocking a reuse revolution - scaling returnable packaging.pdf \(thirdlight.com\)](#)

5.0

Challenges you might face



Given the specific nature of your business and your products, you might face particular challenges around:

The design of reusable/ refillable packaging, equipment and infrastructure and financial costs.

The need to engage and collaborate: with your customers, with other brands and retailers, and with the wider value chain.

Regulation: for example around food safety, hygiene and competition, washing and cleaning packaging and costs to implement the reverse logistics.

Having consulted members through a series of category-focused roundtables, The UK Plastics Pact's 2023 Reusable Packaging Roundtables report¹ outlined some of the barriers and opportunities that you may come across, in moving towards reusable and refillable packaging.

These include:

- Technical: relating to reusable packaging design, equipment and infrastructure.
- Commercial: concerning your business case and your current trading environment.
- Engagement and collaboration: with your customers, retailers and the wider supply chain.
- System design: for example around standardisation and the role of deposits.
- Information/ knowledge: concerning the guidance that you may require.
- Legislation: for example around targets, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).
- Regulation: around food safety, hygiene and competition law for example.

We undertook further industry working group sessions in partnership with RePosit during 2023. Key barriers and opportunities that were identified, in building standardised, professional refillable/ reusable packaging platforms, are captured in the figure below, and inform the recommendations at the start of this guide.

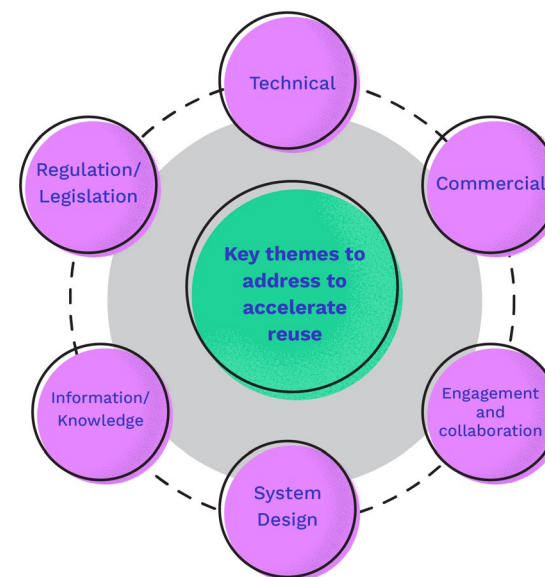


Figure 4 – Barriers and opportunities in accelerating uptake of reusable/ refillable packaging.

¹ [Reusable packaging roundtables report | WRAP](#)

6.0

Overcoming challenges: learning from our experience

Image courtesy of ASDA





With our wide experience in this area, we can make many practical suggestions to help you overcome your reuse/ refill challenges. They include:

- Ways of engaging with your customers, and making reuse/ refill easy for them by setting up a customer user journey.
- Designing and standardising your packaging to make your reuse/ refill systems efficient.
- Collaborating across the packaging value chain.

What have we learnt about making the move to reusable and refillable packaging?

a. Customers

- Customers must be at the heart of any reusable/ refillable packaging system, to encourage maximum participation in the system and ensure return rates are high.
- Reusable/ refillable packaging needs to involve minimal disruption to the customer's shopping experience.
- Pricing needs to be clear and attractive.
- The experience of reuse/ refill needs to be convenient.
- Reuse/ refill schemes need to be creative with incentives to maximise return rates.
- Customers need regular information to encourage and support their participation in reusable packaging systems.
- Citizen engagement campaigns must be national and enduring, reflecting similar nationwide behaviour-change campaigns such as those around mandatory seat-belt usage and drink driving.

b. Technical

- Packaging design and standardisation should lead to efficiencies in the system.
- Shared infrastructure will be required to provide associated system services (such as washing/ sanitisation, refurbishment and prefill).
- Transport/ distribution logistics need to support and optimise packaging recovery.

c. Commercial

- Return on investment (ROI) must be considered in the medium to long term.
- System costs can be offset by reductions in other cost areas (such as waste handling, materials, emissions and regulatory costs).
- Proximity to shared infrastructure is essential for businesses to realise the benefits of reuse and refill systems.
- Measurement of reuse/ refill is required to quantify the costs, benefits and impacts of system change.



d. Engagement/ collaboration

- Collaboration along and across the reusable/ refillable packaging value chain is key to achieving system efficiencies.
- Consistent and on-going marketing and communications are needed, to drive customer engagement and normalise reusable/ refillable packaging.
- Digital technology provides a rich foundation for end-to-end engagement with consumers and across the full value chain.

e. System design

- Standardised packaging, shared infrastructure and pooled logistics are needed to support large-scale reuse/ refill systems.
- System design should leverage existing standardisation across production and distribution channels.
- Paying deposits can be prohibitive – creativity is needed to incentivise system participants.
- In keeping with decentralising trends in the business landscape, there are opportunities for more localised packaging loops, which would help to offset some operational costs.

In partnership with Asda and Unilever and funded by Innovate UK, WRAP conducted research to explore citizen behaviour around reuse and refill. From this research we concluded that there are three strategies that retailers can apply in-store to help shoppers try reuse and refill - and keep them coming back.

1. Make price clear

2. Help people overcome uncertainty and apprehension

3. Make the experience fun and enjoyable

[Download the full report here](#)



Image courtesy of GoUnpackaged, Lucy J Toms Photography



7.0

Next steps





**Download our how-to guide:
'assessing the opportunity of
reusables/ refillables for your
business'**

Map your self-assessment in our Reusable/ Refillable Opportunity Matrix.

Identify the product areas or categories where you may need to collaborate to deliver scale and system efficiencies.

a. WRAP's Reusable/ Refillable Opportunity Matrix

An important element in our how-to guide is our Reuse/ Refill Opportunity Matrix. This enables you to identify the right way forward for your business, in refill and reuse.

The Opportunity Matrix reflects two key considerations:

1. The level of opportunity that there is for you in reuse/ refill. What are the particular drivers for change, for your business? For example, are you likely to be affected by current and impending regulations and legislative frameworks?

2. How easy/ feasible is it now to deliver your product(s) in reusable/ refillable packaging? What level of complexity is associated with your products, and how easily could your packaging systems be transitioned to reusable/ refillable formats?

By mapping your products on the matrix you can begin to consider what your next steps and appropriate level of ambition should be.

By sharing the results of your self-assessment with us we can help facilitate collaboration, so that we can help businesses across the supply chain to transition to reusable/ refillable packaging.

b. How we can work together

WRAP is here to help you on your reuse/refill journey.

- WRAP will undertake work with UK Plastics Pact members and stakeholders, and the expanding reusable packaging value chain to develop appropriate targets for reuse, aligned with and complementary to these wider influences.

- WRAP will also work across the stakeholder audience to identify a targeted reporting methodology and framework to capture the benefits and impacts of reusable packaging throughout the transition.
- We will continue to develop our work on focusing on specific products/ categories blueprint opportunities alongside UK Plastic Pact members.



A really useful guide, particularly if used to identify the best fit products in a portfolio and recognise the key remaining challenges. We need more viable reusable solutions.

Michael Archer, Collaborative Solutions Director, CHEP Europe



8.0

Action Plans





1



Retailer action plan

END 2025

Actions

- Retailers review their product categories to identify opportunities to move from single-use packaging to reusable/ refillable packaging (see WRAP's Reusable and Refillable Packaging Opportunity Matrix).
- Retailers identify (in agreement with current supply chain) at least 1 key category and relevant reusable/ refillable packaging model(s) to target for transition to reusable/ refillable packaging.
- Retailers participate in co-design to support the scaling-up of reuse and refill via blueprints (where applicable).
- Retailers collaborate with the supply chain and WRAP to identify and adopt best-practice data collection methodologies on tracking and reporting the impacts of reusable/refillable packaging systems.

END 2030

Actions

- Retailers are actively collaborating across the supply chain to deliver reusable and refillable packaging at scale.
- Retailers define and establish internal datasets on reusable packaging flows – these are calibrated to capture business and environmental data, to support industry reporting obligations, including on Scope 3 emissions impacts.
- Retailers continue to collaborate on mutually reinforcing communications strategies to raise awareness and increase participation in reuse and refill.
- Retailers deliver identified category in reusable/refillable packaging and increase availability and promotion.
- Retailers ensure staff are ambassadors for reuse/refill systems in store, providing confidence and building trust with shoppers to engage.

2035

Actions

- Retailers report product volume in reusable/ refillable packaging and reductions in single use plastics.
- Retailers deliver 30% of private-label product volume in reusable/ refillable packaging formats.
- Retailers actively collaborating across the value chain in key product categories to deliver scaled solutions.



Brands and Manufacturers action plan



END 2025

Actions

- Brands and Manufacturers review their internal product/ category lists to identify the opportunity to transition to reusable/refillable packaging (see WRAP's Reusable/Refillable Packaging Opportunity Matrix).
- Identify (in agreement with current supply chain) at least 1 key category and relevant reusable/ refillable packaging model(s) to target for transition to reusable packaging and setting an internal target on reuse/ refill based on selected product category.
- Brands and Manufacturers actively support the scaling-up of reuse and refill by engaging with blueprints.
- Brands and Manufacturers collaborate with the supply chain and WRAP to identify and adopt reuse/refill targets and best practice data collection methodologies on tracking and reporting the impacts of reusable/refillable packaging systems.

END 2030

Actions

- Brands and Manufacturers define and establish internal datasets to track reusable packaging flows – these are calibrated to capture business and environmental data, to support industry reporting obligations, including on EPR and Scope 3 emissions.
- Brands and Manufacturers deliver identified category in reusable/ refillable packaging through collaboration with retailers.
- Brands and Manufacturers continue to collaborate with retailers on communication strategies to raise awareness of reusable/refillable options.

2035

Actions

- Brands and Manufacturers report regularly including product volume in reusable/ refillable packaging and reductions in single use plastics.
- Brands and Manufacturers have established reusable/refillable systems that are operating successfully at national scale (with high return rates, economic efficiencies having been realised, and environmental benefits quantified). Brands and Manufacturers also report progress towards targets.
- Brands and Manufacturers continue to work in collaboration with the expanding reuse/refill value chain, identifying new categories and planning transition to reusable/ refillable packaging.



WRAP and The UK Plastics Pact action plan



END 2025

Actions

- Capture and incorporate feedback from the reuse/ refill value chain in developing The UK Plastics Pact's post-2025 successor agreement.
- Facilitate stakeholders in the reusable refillable packaging value chain to define reuse/ refill targets.
- Co-design product category blueprints.
- Convene an International Community of Practice to ensure learnings and insights are being captured across The Pact network.

END 2030

Actions

- Share summary of learnings on the current UK regulations supporting the adoption of reuse/ refill.
- Continue consumer research to identify and share learnings to support the transition to reuse/refill.
- Through collaboration identify and develop additional reuse/refill blueprints.

2035

Actions

- WRAP and The UK Plastics Pact report on the impacts and benefits of reusable/ refillable packaging systems and on delivery of a circular economy for packaging.
- Continue to drive and deliver reusable and refillable packaging in the UK and globally to support the transition to mainstream adoption.



Government and Policy action plan



END 2025

Actions

- Engage with industry on the proposed regulation for 'obligated reuse' from 2025 onwards.
- Agree definitions relating to reuse and refill.
- Input as required to the development of reuse/refill targets and best-practice data collection methodologies on tracking and reporting the impacts of the reusable/refillable packaging system.

END 2030

Actions

- Investigate policy tools to support delivery of reuse/refill systems (this could include EPR, DRS, Plastic Packaging Tax, single use plastic bans, and clarity on the VAT position on reusable packaging).
- Support ongoing citizen facing communication/engagement to deliver the transition to reuse/refill.
- Review the allocation of EPR/Plastic Packaging Tax revenues to support the transition to reusable/refillable packaging systems and infrastructure.
- Evaluate opportunities to incentivise reusable/ refillable alternatives through the Environment Bill.
- Work in collaboration with industry stakeholders to provide clarity on key issues around packaging hygiene standards, food safety, product migration and waste carrier regulations.
- Explore opportunities to include reuse/refill in public procurement specifications.

2035

Actions

- Continue to support delivery of national reuse/refill targets towards delivery of mainstream adoption.
- Support reuse obligation by managing national datasets around reusable/ refillable packaging including e.g. material/ resource efficiency and environmental indicators.
- Monitor the regulatory environment to evaluate the effectiveness of policy implementation.



5

Infrastructure, Transport logistics, Supporting technology action plan



END 2025

Actions

- Collaborate with other key stakeholders to map projected requirements for infrastructure, logistics and supporting technology.
- Share outcomes of mapping, identify gaps and develop action plan.

END 2030

Actions

- Collaborate to evaluate and optimise logistics for key primary packaging formats.
- Work with the supply chain to support the transition of agreed target categories to reuse systems.
- Quantify the carbon benefits of reverse logistics.
- Identify any regulatory barriers to the back-haulage of empty reusable containers. Work with the value chain to identify a strategy to overcome any regulatory barriers to back-haulage of empty reusable containers.

2035

Actions

- Collaborate to deliver infrastructure development for key categories in line with collaborative national roll-out strategies across the reuse/ refill value chain.
- Secure investment to support development of infrastructure where needed.



Citizens, civil society action plan

END 2025

Actions

- Consumers start to or continue to purchase products in reusable/refillable packaging and return packaging where appropriate.
- Consumers start to and/ or regularly use reusable water bottles, shopping bags and coffee cups.
- Consumers build knowledge and increase demand so that more products are provided in reusable/refillable packaging with a reduction in single-use packaging.
- Relevant organisations collaborate with WRAP and other civil society organisations to amplify consistent consumer communications on the benefits of reuse/ refill.

END 2030

Actions

- Consumers consistently return reusable packaging at the optimal return rate.
- Consumers increase regular use (habit formation) of reusable water bottles, reusable shopping bags and coffee cups, whilst adding new reusable products into their routines (habit stacking).
- Consumers demand that more products are provided in reuse systems, with less use of single-use packaging.
- WRAP and NGOs continue with collaborative and consistent advocacy and communications to support the move to reuse/ refill.

2035

Actions

- Consumers are adopting reusable and refillable packaging for most products and have integrated this into regular habits and routines.
- WRAP collaborate to deliver consumer campaigns to improve awareness of reuse/refill. This drives consumers to demand more reusable/refillable packaging, improving ease and convenience.

Appendix

**Supporting
material –
what our
advice is
based on**



a. ISO standards and definitions

The International Standards Organisation's Packaging and the Environment – Reuse standard defines a range of terminology relating to reusable packaging (ISO 18603:2013).

b. Ellen MacArthur Foundation's four models

Businesses in the packaging industry widely recognise the four models of business-to-consumer (B2C) reuse that were proposed by Ellen MacArthur Foundation in their 2020 report, 'Reuse – rethinking packaging' (ellenmacarthurfoundation.org). Our guide takes account of all four models, in relation to B2C and business-to-business (B2B).

Operating in isolation or through collaborative systems, the models proposed by Ellen MacArthur Foundation were designed with the end-consumer in mind. Aiming for high participation and return rates, the approaches are designed to make the customer experience frictionless. The widespread adoption of reusable/ refillable packaging depends upon the key link in the packaging value chain – the consumer.

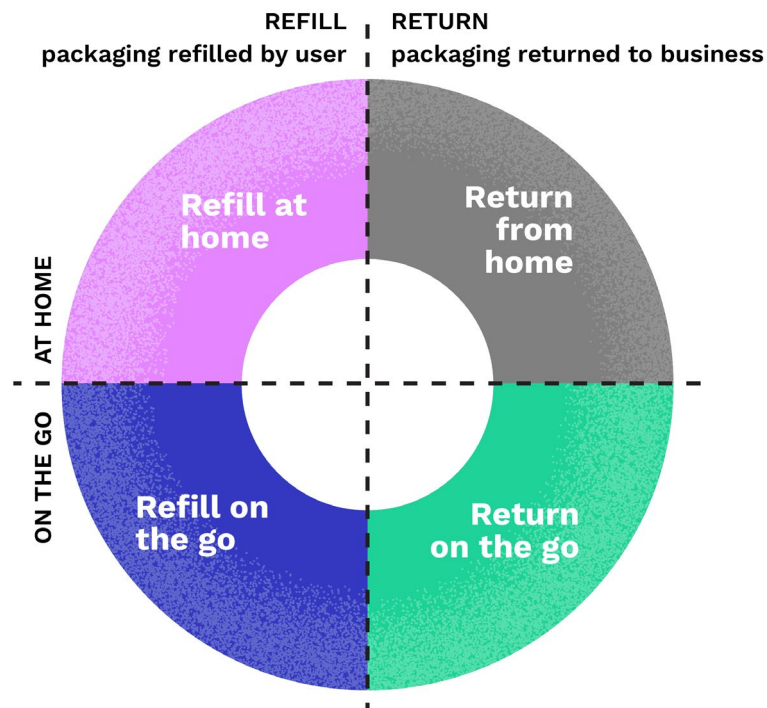
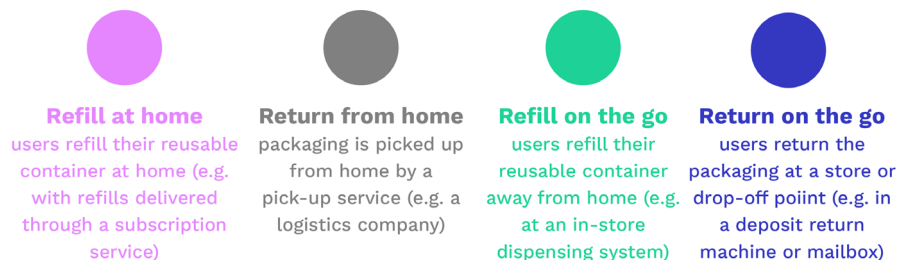


Figure 5 – Ellen MacArthur Foundation's four models

Business-to-consumer reuse models differ in terms of packaging 'ownership' and the requirement for the user to leave home to refill/return the packaging



c. Current linear system/ prefill system potential/ refill system potential.

The hypothetical scenario presented in our diagram demonstrates the potential reduction in plastic use by a household, if a product that is purchased weekly moves from single-use to reusable/ refillable packaging. This assumes that reuse is universally adopted, and that all consumers participate.

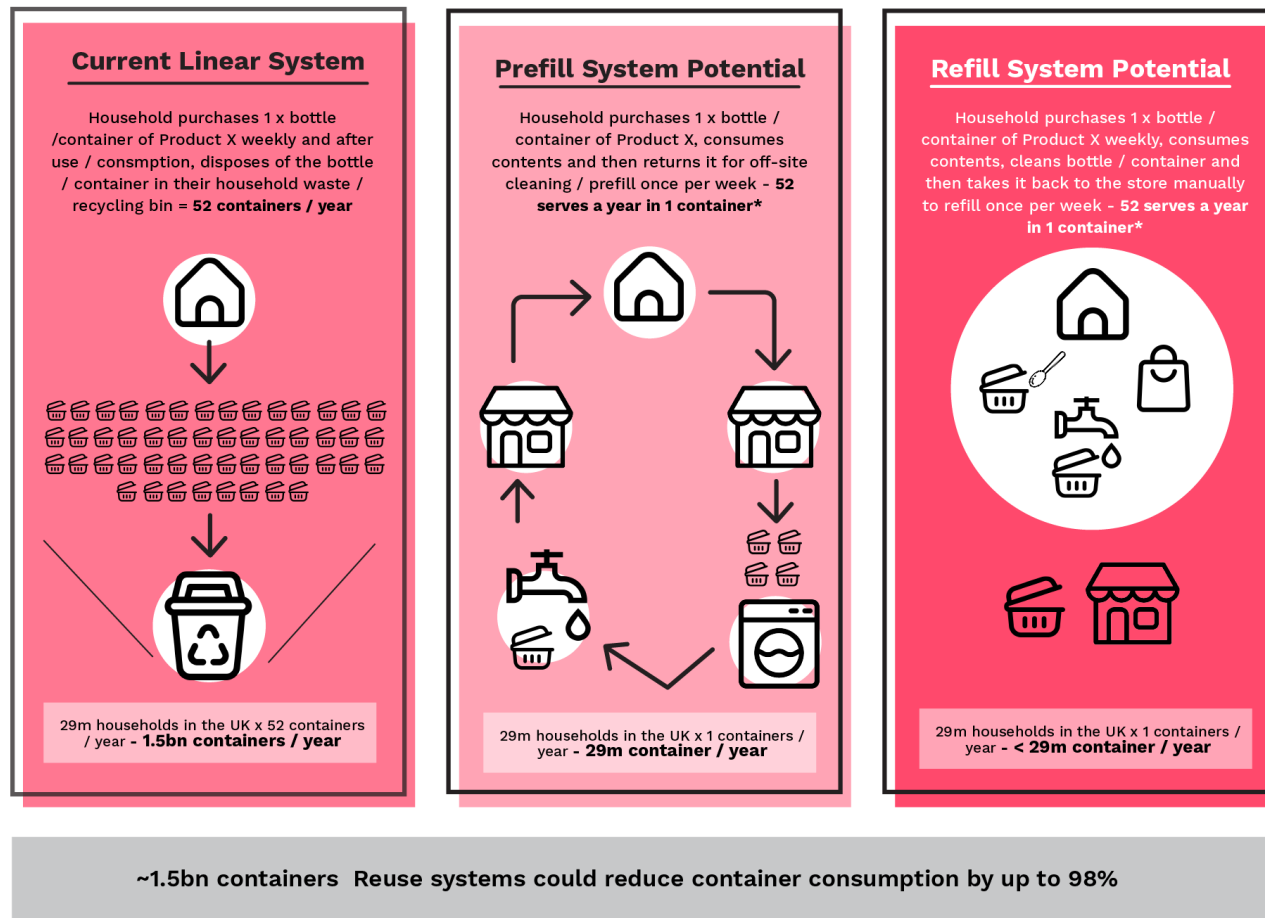


Figure 6: Hypothetical Scenario - Potential material reduction impact of reuse / refill

d. Making reuse 'mainstream'

According to the Diffusion of Innovations theory (see figure), the degree to which any new idea comes to be widely adopted depends upon how far along the Adoption Curve it travels. Studies over decades have demonstrated that new ideas develop within a niche Innovators group, typically representing just 2.5% of the population. These people are the most willing to try something new, and to take the associated risks of it failing. As these Innovators spread the word and help to improve the proposition, the Early Adopters begin to try it out: these represent 13.5% of the population, and are also enthusiastic to embrace new things when they appear to offer a benefit.

In order to keep growing, the trial of the new idea has to extend into Majority groups; people who may require more evidence, more reassurance, and more direct, concrete personal benefits in order to get involved. Together the Early Majority and Late Majority groups represent 68% of the population.

The Adoption Curve represents a helpful way to think about Mainstream adoption – when a reuse/ refill system reaches the Late Majority then over half of the population have tried it.

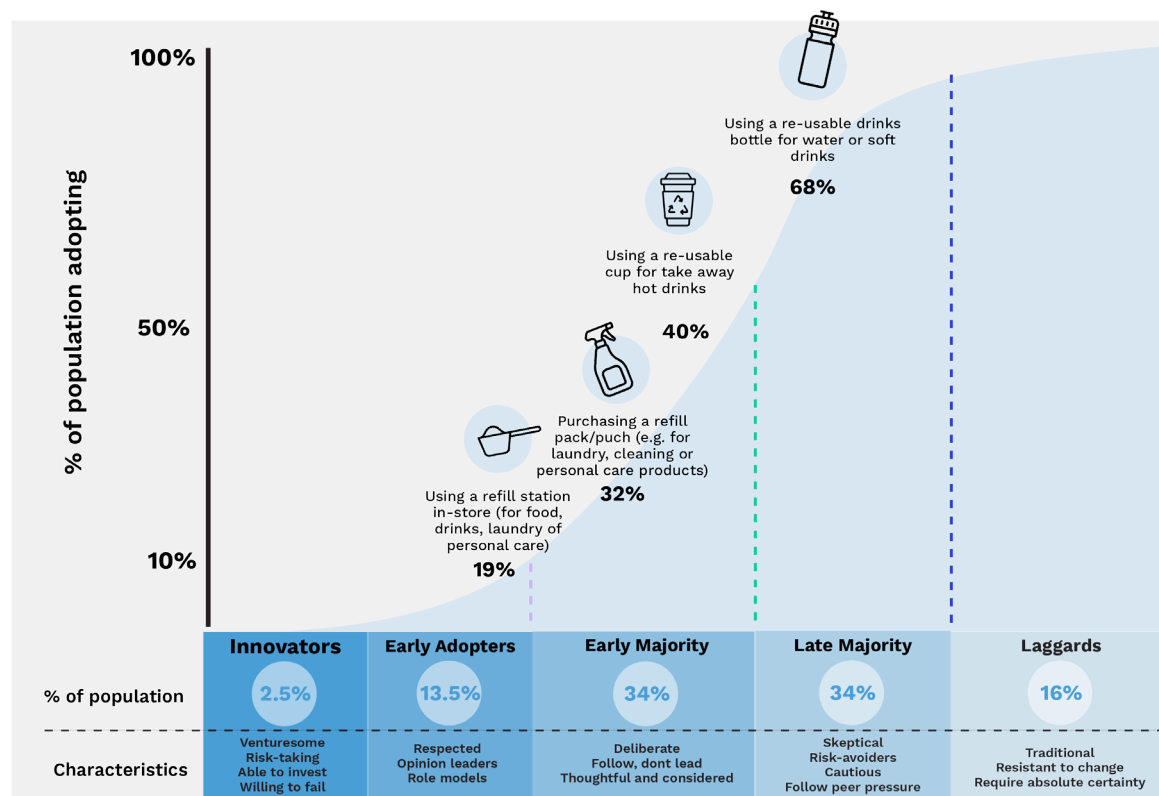


Figure 7: Adoption of reusable packaging applications¹

Some types of reuse behaviour are already 'mainstream,' while some are still nascent. In the WRAP 2021 Plastic Tracker, 68% of survey respondents said that they had used a reusable drinks bottle, while 19% said they had used an in-store refill station.

¹ [WRAP Plastics Tracker, % of respondents claiming to have used a reuse system within the last three months: 2021](#)



A reported 7.7 billion single-use plastic water bottles are still purchased annually in the UK¹ – more than three per week, per person. While many people may refill, clearly there are many who still buy single-use bottles more often than not.

To help us begin to set targets, we could define ‘mainstream’ as: something that most people (>50% of people) do most of the time (>50% of occasions).

Applying this target to any given brand or retailer is more nuanced. Arguably, in some settings customer behaviours are already well above this threshold: for example pints served in pubs, meals served in restaurants, drinks served in some sports and entertainment venues and hot food served in school canteens generally have reusable containers. Re-Gen Waste estimates that there are 200 specialist Zero Waste shops in the UK. Conversely, a typical corner shop may offer no refill or reuse options.

e. Increasing uptake of reusable/ refillable packing: drivers, benefits, challenges

A collective adoption of circular economy principles could potentially generate a net economic benefit of up to €1.8 trillion in Europe by 2030.

UK consumers do not think that enough is being done to address plastic waste, with 41% of people surveyed for WRAP’s Plastic Tracker 2021 report stating that they had seen some action, but that not enough progress had been made.

Citizens have tried (and are willing to try) reuse, and some reuse behaviours are commonplace. 68% of Plastic Tracker survey respondents said that they had used a reusable drinks bottle, and 40% had used a reusable cup for takeaway hot drinks in the previous three months.

Habits are quick to form: for example participants have been found to adapt to deposit return schemes within seven weeks, with a high proportion placing significantly greater value on plastic containers after participating in the new system.

Growing awareness of the environmental impacts of plastics and packaging are driving a strong global agenda to mitigate and reduce the perverse environmental outcomes caused by linear, single-use and short-lived materials.

All packaging has an environmental footprint. Plastic packaging is predominantly created from fossil-fuel-based feedstocks, and throughout its lifecycle (from the extraction of raw materials

to disposal) it has an impact: on greenhouse gas emissions, water use, contamination and the degradation of habitats, including in the marine environment. As increased scrutiny is applied to industry’s contribution to environmental impacts, it becomes more important to demonstrate improvements.

The exponential growth in plastics use in the past 50 years has also led to significant socio-economic and social impacts across the world, particularly in those economies that are least adequately resourced to manage packaging waste.

Unregulated and often unsafe informal waste management sectors have emerged in many economies that have been (or continue to be) receivers of plastic waste from developed countries, including the UK. As waste export pathways continue to disappear, the growing costs of managing waste on-shore bring low-waste reuse and refill systems into sharper focus from an economic perspective. This is accompanied by compelling educational and employment opportunities that the new systems create.

A growing body of evidence is also highlighting the connection between the ubiquity of plastics and their negative impacts on human and planetary health. Businesses need to consider this evidence and the possible impacts on their products and their brand.

¹ [Plastic bottles: Turning Back the Plastic Tide - Environmental Audit Committee - House of Commons \(parliament.uk\)](#)



If Just Transition¹ principles are applied in the transition from single-use packaging to reuse and refill systems, there are a range of potential socio-economic benefits. These include:

- New business models – small and medium-sized enterprises can easily slot into larger pooled reuse systems, increasing economies of scale and providing fairer access to market share.
- Employment types moving towards more skilled, knowledge-based roles.
- Increased job satisfaction, personal development and vocational skills in the workforce.
- Job opportunities being provided close to where people live, decreasing commutes and increasing spend in the local economy.
- The creation of new jobs – boosting reuse alone is expected to lead to more than 600,000 jobs in the reuse sector in Europe by 2030, many of them in small and medium-sized businesses.

f. What have we learnt about making reusable/ refillable packaging work?

Beyond the activities of individual businesses, we have learnt that:

Information:

- Industry needs support to move forward, in: developing the business case for reuse; measuring and reporting on impact; the design and implementation of reuse systems, and the development of relevant standards, to help with the adoption of new systems.
- It is becoming increasingly important to quantify accurately the impact of reusable/ refillable packaging systems, for comparison with single-use packaging.

Regulation:

- Existing and future policy must be designed to incentivise reusable/ refillable packaging systems and support their transition to being mainstream.
- Mandated operational and safety standards are needed to give confidence to system participants.
- Collaboration among competitors is key to making reusable/ refillable packaging systems efficient, and should not be impeded by competition law.

Legislation:

- Legislative frameworks must put a cost on the environmental effects of linear packaging systems, to create a level playing field for reusable/ refillable packaging models and incentivise/ accelerate the transition to reuse/ refill.
- Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging must include a price signal that encourages the transition to reusable/ refillable packaging systems.
- Deposit Return Scheme infrastructure can be used to support the transition to reusable/ refillable packaging.

¹ [Rethink Plastic Alliance 2022](#)

WRAP is a climate action NGO working around the globe to tackle the causes of the climate crisis and give the planet a sustainable future. Our vision is a thriving world in which climate change is no longer a problem. We believe that our natural resources should not be wasted and that everything we use should be re-used and recycled. We bring together and work with governments, businesses and individuals to ensure that the world's natural resources are used more sustainably. Our core purpose is to help tackle climate change and protect our planet by changing the way things are produced, consumed and disposed of.



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Image courtesy of Abel & Cole

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