



Research:

Rethink Plastic

Terms of Reference, 26 April 2019

Executive summary

With the recent publication of new EU legislation on single-use plastics, Rethink Plastic (an alliance of ten European NGOs) wish to carry out new research to influence its transposition and implementation. The aim of this research will be to identify which sectors and under which conditions can business models based on reusable systems replace the current single-use items and how can we maximise the uptake of reusable materials. Given existing barriers, we would like to focus on the environmental and economic benefits of reusable items versus single-use items and the conditions under which these systems can develop and offer their best potential, and what policies and economic tools can support this.

We will ideally focus on up to seven single-use plastic items. Shifting the way we consume could be a game changer in Europe given that the current system is designed and set up to favour single-use items, which depletes resources and increases waste and pollution.

The organisations

[Zero Waste Europe](#) is the European network of communities, local leaders, businesses, experts, and change agents working towards the same vision: phasing out waste from our society. We empower communities to redesign their relationship with resources, to adopt smarter lifestyles and sustainable consumption patterns and think circular.

[Rethink Plastic](#) is an alliance of leading European NGOs, including Zero Waste Europe, with thousands of active groups, supporters and citizens in every EU Member State. We bring together policy and technical expertise from a variety of relevant fields, and work with European policy-makers to design and deliver policy solutions for a future that is free from plastic pollution. We are part of the global Break Free From Plastic movement, along with over 1400 NGOs and millions of citizens worldwide. More information about the ten organisations making up Rethink Plastic can be found [here](#).

This research report is part of an extensive 3-year project aiming to realise robust EU legislation to reduce plastic pollution. This project is the European branch of the global Break Free from Plastic campaign, with ZWE as European coordinators and FoEE and several other European NGOs as project partners.

Background

A new EU Directive on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment (hereafter referred to as the single-use plastics, or SUP, Directive) was finalised in December 2018. From July 2019 (exact date to be confirmed), EU Member States will have two years to transpose the new Directive into their national legislation.

The SUP Directive comes in light of the growing impacts of plastic consumption and waste, especially of single-use plastic items. Plastics account for 85% of marine litter in Europe¹ and is a persistent material. The ecological and health harm caused by many plastic products vastly outweighs the benefits they bring to society.

The SUP Directive aims to prevent and tackle the most problematic single-use plastic items through a range of policy measures including market restrictions, consumption reduction, marking (labelling) requirements, product design requirements, collection targets, producer responsibility schemes and awareness raising.

It tackles 17 of the single-use plastic items most commonly found on European beaches, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear. These are:

- cotton bud sticks
- cutlery (forks, knives, spoons, and chopsticks)
- beverage stirrers
- straws
- plates (including paper plates with plastic lining)
- sticks for balloons
- expanded polystyrene food containers, beverage containers and cups
- oxo-degradable plastics²
- food containers
- cups for beverages (including their covers and lids)
- beverage containers with a capacity of up to three litres (including beverage bottles)
- packets & wrappers
- lightweight plastic carrier bags
- fishing gear
- balloons
- tobacco products
- wet wipes
- sanitary towels (pads, tampons and applicators)

It includes those items made from bio-based plastic, those that are biodegradable or compostable, and composite plastic materials (e.g. Tetrapak or paper cups/plates with plastic lining).

The obligations and requirements established apply to manufacturers, producers, retailers, importers, sellers (regardless of the selling technique used, including distance contracts), and to anyone placing on the EU market any of the items addressed under the Directive.

¹ [Single-use plastics: New EU rules to reduce marine litter](#). European Commission. Press Release Database. 28 May 2018.

² Oxo-degradable plastic are defined under the Directive as a plastic material that includes additives which through oxidation lead to the fragmentation of the plastic material into micro-fragments or to chemical decomposition.

Objectives and description of work

There is a danger that EU Member States could simply replace the single-use plastic items with other single-use items (made from other materials like paper, bamboo etc.), thus moving from one disposable item/material to another and shifting impacts (e.g. impacts from plastic production and end-of-life to paper or bamboo production and end-of-life) rather than rethinking how we consume these products.

However, this can also be an opportunity. Shifting the way we consume could be a game changer in Europe: new delivery systems that preserve the use value of materials and packaging have the potential to create new markets and local jobs, stimulate new technologies and provide opportunities for dynamic businesses, while preserving the natural resources upon which we all depend. Nevertheless, barriers exist to their uptake and implementation.

The current system is designed and set up to favour single-use options which are dependent on waste infrastructures for collection and treatment, with incentives for littering. A system functioning with items that are only used once and with a very short product life can hardly be circular. We need to transition towards a system that preserves value in the economy and in which reuse becomes the new normal. Yet this transition will not happen overnight; some products and systems are more likely to move from single-use to reusable or refillable before others.

In this light, we wish to carry out new research in order to influence the transposition and implementation of the SUP Directive in Member States. The aim of this study is to identify which sectors and under which conditions can business models based on reusables, for specific products addressed in the SUP Directive, replace the current single-use options and how can we maximise the uptake of reusable materials and systems.

Given existing barriers, **we would like to focus on the environmental and economic benefits of reusable items versus single-use items and the conditions under which these systems can develop and offer their best potential.**

Key questions to address in research:

- What are the conditions and boundaries required to make reusable items and systems beneficial economically (to retailers, manufacturers, consumers, broader society etc.) and environmentally (full life cycle including end of life) in all European countries? For example, the number of times an item must be (re)used to be defined as “reuse”, population density to optimise economic and environmental savings for reuse, distances travelled to optimise reuse for the various items, materials and designs used, delivery models/mechanisms according to the specific business sector or product category etc.
- How can the SUP Directive be best implemented to promote and speed the uptake of reusables? What other policy and economic tools can be put in place to speed the transition e.g. do we need a whole new legislation on reuse? What role could reuse quotas play? (such as the refillable quota of 70% in Germany for beverage packaging (European Commission will publish a delegated act about how reuse quotas should be calculated soon)).
- What are (if any) the legal barriers, e.g. hygiene legislation, to the development and scaling up of reusable products in the EU?
- What are the costs savings for the main actors (e.g. businesses, including retailers, local authorities) in implementing and scaling up reusables for these items and how are the costs distributed along the value chain in a single-use system versus a reuse scheme? Taking into account that at the moment municipalities are the ones largely bearing the costs, but also that

with the SUP Directive, by 2024 at the latest, producers will have to contribute for clean-up costs associated with food containers and beverage bottles waste.

A potential focus (subject to review with consultants, taking into account budget limitations) on the following single-use plastic items may be relevant:

- Plates
- Cutlery
- Food containers
- Cups for beverages
- Beverage bottles
- Sanitary towels (pads) and tampons and tampon applicators
- Nappies

The measures in the Directive applied to these items are:

- **Market restrictions (i.e. bans) for straws, plates and cutlery.** Member States will have to prohibit the placing on the market of those products by mid-2021.
- **Reduction in the consumption of food containers³ and cups for beverages (and bans if these items are made from expanded polystyrene)** by 2026 compared to 2022 levels (baseline will have to be set by Member States). To achieve such a reduction, Member States can take a range of measures, including the adoption of national consumption reduction targets, the promotion of reusable alternatives, the implementation of economic instruments (such as deposit return schemes), as well as the establishment of market restrictions (completely or for certain applications only) stressing that in the latter case SUP should be substituted with alternatives that are reusable or do not contain plastic.
- **Separate collection target of 90% by 2029 (and 77% by 2025) for beverage bottles⁴.** Member States may either establish deposit-refund schemes (DRS) or establish separate collection targets for relevant extended producer responsibility schemes to achieve these targets. Rethink Plastic are also keen to explore how systems could be put in place within the frame of these targets to incentivize refill (i.e. reuse) of beverage bottles and not just separate collection for recycling.
- **Marking and awareness raising for sanitary towels (pads) and tampons and tampon applicators** - marking (labelling) includes on appropriate waste management and presence of plastics, and awareness raising includes on the availability of reusable alternatives and re-use systems. No need to focus on labelling, but more on barriers in uptake of reusables (infrastructure for washing, awareness etc.) and potential additional policy measures to incentivise reuse.

³ Receptacles such as boxes, with or without a cover, used to contain food that: - is intended for immediate consumption [...] either on-the-spot or take-away; - is typically consumed from the receptacle [...]; and - is ready to be consumed without any further preparation, such as cooking boiling or heating, including food containers used for fast food or other meal ready for immediate consumption, except beverage containers, plates and packets and wrappers containing food

⁴ With a capacity of up to three litres, including their caps and lids, but not glass and metal beverage bottles that have caps and lids made from plastic; beverage bottles intended and used for food for special medical purposes in liquid form as defined in point (g) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 609/2013 shall be exempted.

- **Nappies** - they are not covered by the SUP Directive (as not in top most littered items found on European beaches) but if budget allows, we would like to look at how we can scale up reusable (washable) nappies and make them more mainstream.

Case studies / business models / other research that can be looked at:

- [ADEME study](#) looking at cost of system with glass reusable bottles vs single-use bottles
- Study underway on the environmental impacts of packaging-free shops in France to answer the argument that they are themselves producing a lot of waste. Should be available by the end of 2019 (contact Zero Waste France for more details).
- [Making the Switch: The Business Case for Reusable Packaging](#): Study on the costs and benefits for businesses on reusable packaging by ReLoop
- Case study underway on refillable wine bottles in some Member States. Expected for August/September 2019 (contact Zero Waste Europe for more details).
- Case study underway on [Repack](#): reusable e-commerce packaging. Expected for May/June 2019 (contact Zero Waste Europe for more details).
- [Loopstore](#): A trial underway by big companies on reusable packaging
- [Durapack](#) (Belgium) will start this summer with reusable food containers at festivals and zoos
- [Sharepack](#) (Netherlands) is accelerating their project on a complete system of introduction reusable containers in food delivery. They haven't started yet but have a thorough conceptual idea about how it should work.
- [Recup](#) (Germany) has a working system for reusable containers. A similar project is about to start in Belgium (Billie Cup)
- Many local reusable cups schemes for events/festivals e.g. City of Ghent (Belgium) introduced a reusable cup with deposit on their annual big city festival in 2018
- [Ecobox](#) (Luxemburg) reusable containers for take away
- [Refill](#) (UK) stations to refill water bottles - contact Gus Hoyt gus@citytosea.org.uk
- [Conscious cup campaign](#) (Ireland) which maps cafes, petrol stations and coffee shops that offer some sort of economic incentive for customers who bring their own reusable coffee cup. There are over 1,600 companies signed up.
- [Lavanda - washable nappy](#) scheme (Italy)
- [Le Drive tout nu](#) - Zero Waste Delivery System in Toulouse, France.
- Campaign in the UK on [#plasticfreeperiods](#)
- Some countries are leading on reusables e.g. in Germany, 43% of beverages are sold in reusables glass or PET containers and in Austria, the biggest dairy factory Berglandmilch has announced that they will introduce refillable bottles for milk again.

Deliverables

The consultants will have two deliverables:

1. A written public short report of 8-10 pages, targeted at EU Member State policy makers, in a format which will be outlined by Rethink Plastic. The language of this report will be English and it should be non-technical, focused on (innovative) policy recommendations, clear and understandable by both policy makers and interested citizens. Use of case studies where relevant.
2. A longer, more technical document which will compile all the background research and evidence gone into compiling the shorter public report. This will contain the solid scientific data and justifications to back-up the new public research and claims. This can be done in the form of an Annex document.

Graphs, maps, figures etc. can be in basic format as the report designers will create a common layout and design for all figures. Raw data must be made available for all relevant figures.

The findings of the report will be used by Rethink Plastic to contribute to common objectives.

Timings

As the aim is to influence the transposition and implementation of the SUP Directive, the sooner the better. We would like to have this report completed by mid-September 2019 (including time for designers to lay it out) in order to have influencing capacity.

- Work to commence by 15 June 2019
- First draft by 31 July 2019
- Work to be completed by 13 September 2019

A more precise work programme, including a deadline for a full draft, for internal/external reviews etc., can be agreed before signing a contract, and modified as needed throughout the five months. Milestones will be agreed between the consultants and the relevant Rethink Plastic staff.

Monitoring and management

The main points of contact for the consultants will be:

- Larissa Copello, Consumption and Production Campaigner at Zero Waste Europe: larissa@zerowasteurope.eu
- Meadhbh Bolger, Resource justice campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe: meadhbh.bolger@foeeurope.org

Rethink Plastic may assemble an Advisory Group. This group of individuals will assist in the guidance and monitoring of the work, and will provide feedback and suggestions to staff above and the consultants.

The consultants might be expected to join some of the Advisory Group meetings over the phone. However, the Advisory Group will not have the authority to issue instructions directly to the consultants.