

The Austrian federal law on refill quotas

Waste prevention legislation

[Bundesgesetz über eine nachhaltige Abfallwirtschaft \(Abfallwirtschaftsgesetz 2002 – AWG 2002\)](#)

In November 2020, Austria became the first European country to introduce binding targets for refillable beverage packaging. Within a new national waste management law, binding quotas were set for the proportion of reusable packaging sold in retail, starting with a requirement of **25% in 2025 to at least 30% by 2030**. Further to this, the law introduced a deposit return scheme for recyclable aluminium cans and plastic bottles, as well as the introduction of a levy on plastic packaging

AUSTRIA

Level: National (Federal)

Population: 8,979,894

Key figures: Specific legally binding quotas were set as follows:

- From 2025, at least 25% of the drinks sold in Austria must be in reusable containers;
- From 2030, at least 30% of the drinks sold in Austria must be in reusable containers.

MINIMUM REUSABLE PACKAGING QUOTAS

As well as setting overall targets for beverage reuse, the law mandates that specific beverage categories provide a minimum reusable packaging quotas, ranging from 10% to 15%:

- Beer 15%
- Water, 15%*
- Juice, 10%*
- Non-alcoholic soft drinks, 10%*
- Milk, 10%

This means supermarkets are obligated to provide at least 15% of beer and water in reusable packaging, and a 10% reuse packaging quota for non-alcoholic beverages, juices, and milk. The requirement starts for all organisations offering beverages that are larger than 400 m². From 2024, at least every third store of a company must offer returnables, increasing to 90% of all stores by the start of 2025. By the end of 2025, the reusable quota will also apply to all remaining stores.

**When calculating the reusable quota for waters, juice and non-alcoholic soft drinks, beverages in plastic bottles and disposable cans up to and including 0.5 l are not included.*



BACKGROUND

In Austria, 900,000 tons of plastic waste are currently generated every year, with estimates suggesting it reached one million tons in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this law aims to tackle the flood of plastic waste, most notably by targeting plastic beverage containers. Back in the mid-1990s, Austria had a reusable beverage rate of around 80% – also due to a legally binding reusable quota that was removed – yet today it has a reuse rate of 19%.

This law was also influenced by the desire to reduce the amount of money Austria had to send to the EU as part of the bloc's plastic tax. From 2021, the EU will demand a levy on non-recycled plastic packaging from its member states. This plastic tax will cost Austria 160 to 180 million euros per year.

OPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE LAW

Retailers affected by these changes can choose between two options to abide by the law:

- **Option 1:** A company guarantees a specific range of reusable items. In all categories – from beer to juice – some of the products must be offered in returnable bottles (10–15%). For example, if you offer ten different types of beer, at least two of them must be refillable. The only exceptions are non-alcoholic drinks in small bottles or cans up to and including 0.5 liters. They will be bought by many people for immediate consumption and not taken home. This exception only applies if the products are covered by the deposit return system.
- **Option 2:** A company guarantees a certain minimum quantity of reusable drinks sold in liters. That would be 25% of the total volume sold per beverage category or every fourth liter sold. In all categories there must be at least one product in a reusable bottle.

DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME FOR SINGLE-USE ITEMS

The law also introduced, from the start of 2025, a national deposit return system for disposable (single-use) beverage packaging made of either plastic or metal. The DRS proposal includes:

- Setting a 0.25 EUR deposit for all plastic bottles and all cans ranging from 0.1l to 3l;
- Establishing a central organising entity made up of industry and supermarkets;
- Ensuring that the return of such items are possible in all supermarkets and shops that sell any of the bottles or cans; as well as in additional "neutral" places like train stations.



The main goal behind the Austrian law is to single-use plastic packaging reduced by 20% by 2025, compared to 2018 levels.



LEVY ON MANUFACTURERS OF PLASTIC PACKAGING

The law has also introduced a new levy on producers and importers of plastic packaging, who will in future be levied an average fee of 0.80 EUR per kilogram of plastic packaging placed on the market. The manufacturer levy is to be graded ecologically, charging less if packaging is particularly suitable for recycling or contains a proportion of recycled material. The price is also linked to the amount of EU plastic tax that Austria has to pay each year. For example, if Austria's recycling rate increases, the tax burden from the plastic tax will decrease and, therefore, these savings are passed on to producers and importers in the form of a reduced manufacturer levy.

LABELLING

To help consumers choose more sustainable options, sellers of beverage packaging are obligated to clearly and visibly label single-use and reusable beverage containers at the point of sale. To this end, the words "ONE WAY" and "REUSABLE" must be displayed in close proximity to the respective beverage containers. Beverages for sale through online retailers must also display the information on their website, but small stores that have less than 400m² of space are exempted.

For more good practices, check [Zero Waste Europe](#) and [Zero Waste Cities](#).

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Zero Waste Europe is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards the prevention and elimination of waste in our society. We advocate for sustainable systems; for the redesign of our relationship with resources; and for a global shift towards environmental justice, accelerating a just transition towards zero waste for the benefit of people and the planet.

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