



The role of local authorities in the fight against single-use plastics

Faced with the growing impact of plastic, local authorities have key levers at their disposal to reduce single-use plastics, notably through public procurement, support for deposit systems and awareness-raising initiatives. Feedback from local authorities supported by Zero Waste France as part of the ERIC project.

The fight against plastic production has become essential

Plastic production, which is omnipresent in our daily lives (packaging, textiles, various objects), is growing exponentially. Global use of plastics is set to triple between 2019 and 2060, rising from 460 million tonnes to 1,321 million tonnes if no significant action is taken. This massive proliferation is contributing to an unprecedented environmental, health and social crisis. From the extraction of the fossil resources needed for its production to its management at the end of its life, plastic generates major pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, disease and damage to human health that could be avoided.

Link to the End Plastic Pollution campaign:

<https://www.zerowasteurope.org/projet/en-finir-avec-la-pollution-plastique/>

Faced with this alarming situation, it is vital that all political and economic players take steps to curb the production and consumption of plastic. A global paradigm shift is needed to truly reduce this pollution and protect our environment and our health.

Against this backdrop, the Anti-Waste for a Circular Economy Act (AGEC), enacted on 10 February 2020, marks a decisive step in the fight against plastic in France. The law, which is the first to aim for a profound transformation in the way we produce and consume, sets ambitious targets for reducing waste and preserving natural resources, biodiversity and the climate. The AGEC law stands out for its major objective: it provides for the gradual elimination of single-use plastic packaging by 2040, thereby setting out a clear roadmap for the 'de-plastification' of French society.

While companies that market single-use products are the first to have to review their practices as part of this transition, local authorities, which are the first to be affected by the increase in plastic waste to be managed, also have a central role to play. They can take concrete, effective action against the use of single-use plastic in their areas. Whether this involves incorporating stringent criteria into public procurement, promoting reusable alternatives at local events, supporting reuse players and initiatives or running public awareness campaigns, their ability to apply the measures set out in the AGEC law and go beyond its requirements makes local authorities essential players in eliminating disposable plastic by 2040. Their contribution makes it possible both to translate the major national objectives into practical measures, adapted to local realities, and to mobilise all the key players in the regions - citizens, civil society, retailers and businesses - in the transition to reuse.



Adopt a plan to combat single-use plastic

At local level, Local Programmes for the Prevention of Household and Similar Waste (PLPDMA), which propose actions to reduce waste and develop alternatives (reuse, repair, etc.), are one of the tools that can help local authorities combat single-use plastic.

To take things further, local authorities – whether local or regional – can also adopt a specific action plan to combat single-use plastic, voted on by their governing body, which can be incorporated into the PLPDMA and reinforce it. The aim of such a plan is to target the plastic waste stream through various actions that we will describe below. By incorporating these strategies into their PLPDMA, local authorities are equipped with operational tools to take effective action against single-use plastics.

A relevant example of this approach is the European ERIC ('Elevating Reuse In Cities') project, led by Zero Waste Europe in 10 EU countries in conjunction with national organisations. In France, the project is being implemented by Zero Waste France in collaboration with three local authorities: Lyon, Bordeaux and Nantes. The project, which is part of the Zero Waste Cities programme, is currently helping around thirty European local authorities to draw up zero single-use plastic plans, with the aim of reducing their use and the associated impacts. The actions adopted and implemented by the participating cities within these plans vary in design, but are organised around three key sectors: events, public spaces and buildings, and a cross-cutting sector, public procurement. The project has led to the adoption of very concrete 'zero plastic plans' by the three participating French local authorities, including clear measures to promote reuse throughout the territory.

Metropolis of Lyon ([plan d'action](#))

City of Nantes ([plan d'action](#))

City of Bordeaux ([plan d'action](#))

Organising zero-plastic public events

Public events such as festivals, markets, fairs and local sporting events often generate large quantities of single-use packaging waste. As organisers or facilitators of such events, local authorities have the capacity to adopt ambitious policies to suspend the use of these products and promote or even make compulsory the use of reusable alternatives for the sale of drinks or takeaway food.

One of the first steps a local authority can take is to make the use of deposits systematic at these events. Reusable cups, bottles, plates and other utensils can be offered in exchange for a refundable deposit. This system, which has already been tried and tested at many large-scale events across Europe, makes it possible to drastically reduce waste while encouraging participants to adopt responsible behaviour. What's more, these returnable items can be reused at other events, reducing their environmental impact in the long term, in particular by reducing the carbon footprint associated with their manufacture.



Link to our zero waste event guide:

<https://www.zerowasteFrance.org/publication/mon-evenement-zero-waste/>

Local authorities can also support organisers by providing them with the resources they need to implement these solutions, such as 'zero plastic' organisation kits or platforms for sharing reusable containers. Rather than focusing solely on the management of waste after it has been produced, the aim here is to change perspective, by concentrating on more effective preventive actions over the long term, which will change the usual consumption practices of participants.

The city of Bordeaux, for example, is considering the possibility of putting together and making available a reusable crockery kit for events organised in the city. The Rouen metropolitan area has already called on deposit operators for its in-house events, and ran a first experiment in 2023 during the Armada, with stands using returnable crockery. The Rouen Normandie metropolis financed a food container deposit experiment in partnership with the 'La Consigne Havraise' association, with 6 volunteer food trucks offering returnable glass crockery in exchange for a deposit. As a result, 3,770 returnable containers were used, saving 40 kilos of plastic packaging.

Public procurement as a lever for action

Public procurement is a major lever for reducing the use of single-use plastics and democratising the use of reusable alternatives. As major purchasers, local authorities can influence the market by including demanding environmental criteria in their invitations to tender and contracts. For example, they can amend the specifications for occupying public land to ban single-use packaging from open-air and covered markets. Managed by local or regional authorities, these markets can become examples of sustainability. By working with the caterers present at these markets, the local authority can impose a ban on disposable containers.

In addition, local authorities can give preference to suppliers offering plastic-free solutions in public procurement contracts, such as the mandatory use of reusable or returnable stainless steel containers for the transport and storage of meals and drinks in public catering. Since 2019, the Nice metropolitan authority has been taking steps to eliminate certain single-use plastics from its public procurement contracts. In accordance with the AGEC law, it is encouraging the adoption of sustainable alternatives and offering practical support to public purchasers, in particular through training courses and a dedicated resource area. For example, a specific criterion has been included to encourage the use of reusable cutlery and crockery in catering contracts, notably for the Régie des Palais Acropolis/Nikaia.

Local authorities can also opt to purchase water fountains directly, thereby avoiding the use of plastic bottles. For example, the Rouen Normandie metropolitan area awarded a €45,000 public contract for the purchase of four fountains, which are made available free of charge to event organisers in the area. In addition, an investment of €13,302 has been made to install a permanent fountain in front of the Pavillon des Transitions, encouraging the use of water bottles in public spaces. These initiatives illustrate the commitment of local authorities to sustainable solutions and the promotion of eco-responsible behaviour.



A number of actions to be taken to reduce the use of single-use plastic in public procurement are set out in the [‘A Parisian administration without single-use plastic in 2024’ guide](#) (in French) published by the City of Paris.

See also:

<https://www.zerowastefrance.org/retour-matinee-technique-commande-publique-dechets-plastiques/>

Support for local economic players involved in reuse

To encourage reuse in their area, local authorities can adopt an integrated approach by initiating the establishment of associations specialising in this field. First and foremost, it is crucial to network these players with the local authority’s services – such as the circular economy, waste prevention, or local initiatives – to create synergies. Local authorities can also provide specific subsidies or calls for projects (AMI) to support these initiatives. Making premises or equipment available to associations can greatly facilitate their activities. Finally, establishing links with social innovation and social economy (SSE) incubators will boost the development of reuse projects, while strengthening the local economic fabric. These combined actions will contribute to a sustainable and innovative reuse dynamic in the region.

In addition, more and more restaurants and cafés are adopting deposit systems (particularly in glass) for drinks, takeaways and deliveries. Publicity campaigns promoting businesses that offer reusable solutions and/or accept their customers’ own containers help to raise consumer awareness, while raising the profile of these establishments.

The town of Fontenay-sous-Bois offers a home delivery service via its Centre Communal d’Action Sociale (CCAS). To comply with legislation, the municipality has replaced disposable plastic trays with stainless steel containers suitable for use in microwaves. At the same time, the city of Bordeaux has signed a contract with a service provider for home delivery of meals, with the aim of switching to reusable stainless steel containers.

See also:

<https://www.zerowastefrance.org/retour-matinee-technique-reduction-plastique-developpement-reemploi/>

Raising awareness and educating people about the environment

Local authorities play an essential role in educating and raising public awareness of the need to reduce waste and prevent plastic pollution. They can set up information campaigns and educational initiatives in a variety of formats: visual aids (posters, banners, signage), information stands at public events, or practical workshops to learn how to adopt eco-responsible actions. By placing prevention at the heart of these initiatives, they change the dynamic by reversing the traditional discourse of selective sorting to promote reduction at source, encouraging citizens to limit their waste production right from the point of purchase.



As part of this approach, local authorities can focus their communications on concrete actions. Rather than simply pointing out the importance of sorting, they can encourage simple, accessible practices such as favouring bulk products, using reusable containers and avoiding over-packaged items. By disseminating these messages in public spaces, local authorities are helping to reduce plastic consumption directly, while facilitating the adoption of sustainable alternatives as part of an overall reuse approach. The Nantes metropolitan area has launched a review of its communications, with the aim of creating computer graphics illustrating the impact of plastic throughout its life cycle.

Local authorities, thanks to their skills and proximity to citizens, play a central role in the fight against single-use plastics. The development of deposits for reuse represents a solid and ecologically viable alternative to the proliferation of plastic waste. Through a collective approach involving citizens, businesses and public authorities, the transition to a circular economy is becoming a tangible reality accessible to all.