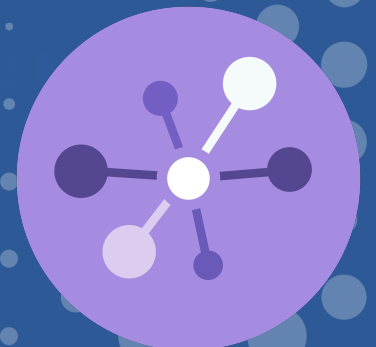




#LeydeResiduosYA campaign as enabler of change in Spain

December 2024



Background and context

In March 2022, the Spanish government passed a new waste law. This legislation bans hazardous chemicals (BPA and phthalates) in packaging, promotes reusable packaging, and sets ambitious waste reduction targets: 13% overall by 2025 and 50% for single-use plastics by 2026. New rules for plastic beverage containers require higher recycled content and attached caps. The law also mandates separate collection of plastic bottles, aiming for a 90% recycling rate by 2029, with a potential deposit-return system if targets aren't met. Producers of single-use plastics will fund awareness, litter cleanup, and data collection efforts.

While ambitious, the law lacks detailed implementation guidelines. In recent years, significant progress had been made at the regional level, with notable success in [Navarra](#) and the [Balearic Islands](#), thanks to strong advocacy efforts from the platforms "[Navarra por los retornables](#)" and "[Per una mar sense plastics](#)". However, despite these successes, many provisions in these laws remained unimplemented across the country, and there was increasing resistance from the industry, particularly regarding laws on waste reduction and packaging reuse.

By October 2023, several NGOs, especially the [Alianza Residuo Cero](#) and its members, concluded that without strong and visible pressure from civil society, progress on waste management would stagnate. This led to the launch of the **LeydeResiduosYA platform**, aiming to hold the government accountable for implementing existing waste management laws, particularly focusing on reuse targets and the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).

This is the story of how organisations and groups worked together to build and deliver an incredible campaign in Spain for a true implementation of the waste law.

Launching the movement

Initially, the small group behind the initiative carefully selected and contacted directly the first 50 organisations they wanted on board from the start. Once this first cohort came together and started working collectively, each entity was then allowed to “invite” trusted or like-minded organisations, with some clear boundaries to ensure alignment with the campaign’s values and goals. Throughout the process, 90% of key players contacted agreed to participate. Over time, as the campaign gained visibility and the momentum increased, new groups requested to join the movement spontaneously. Each organisation contributed its own unique expertise, resources, and networks, which collectively amplified the campaign’s impact and helped secure broad support.

Today, the #LeydeResiduosYA movement consists of over 128 entities spanning environmental groups, journalists, consumer associations, trade unions such as USO, Comisiones Obreras, and UGT, researchers, political organisations, influencers, and even the [Nature Protection Service \(SEPRONA\)](#).

Organisations like [Retorna](#) and [Alianza Residuo Cero](#) (ARC) took on soft leadership and coordination roles, ensuring that responsibilities were shared and that all members had the chance to participate. A small but active group of members dedicated significant staff hours to driving the campaign.

When it came to the Deposit Return Systems (DRS), Retorna and ARC took the lead, a role that was widely appreciated. As the campaign evolves, the aim is to pass on leadership to other NGOs as attention shifts to new priorities such as textiles, bio-waste, and toxics for example. The alliance-building efforts of ARC helped unite a wide range of voices, ensuring the movement presented a strong, united front on key environmental issues.

The ongoing motivation for partners to remain active and committed to the campaign’s goals stems from several factors. Inclusivity, authenticity, and a work system which allows everyone to feel empowered to propose ideas and engage freely, fostering a collaborative environment. Smaller NGOs, often unaccustomed to having a prominent movement, appreciated the opportunity to amplify their voices through the campaign. Furthermore, there was shared frustration over the lack of enforcement of waste laws, which drove sustained engagement. The sense of belonging to a supportive “community” and the feeling that real action was being taken to counter industry pressure further solidified partners’ commitment to the campaign’s mission.

Xavier Curto, [Surfrider Spain](#) coordinator: *“It has been a true pleasure to be part of this movement, to contribute, and to work together with such a passionate and diverse group of people. However, none of this would have been possible without the voluntary efforts of many of the entities involved. It would be great to secure economic support moving forward, to ensure the sustainability of this important work.”*



Strategy and internal coordination

When the campaign was starting up, the main concern was how to coordinate such a diverse and evolving movement, composed of organisations with different types of expertise and involvement, while fostering inclusivity and maintaining momentum.

Despite these challenges, the campaign successfully built a strong sense of belonging and purpose. A key hurdle, however, was encouraging less active partners to take on a more engaged role. With 130 diverse members and limited financial resources, different levels of participation were inevitable. The campaign addressed this by managing differences and setting realistic expectations, ensuring cohesion and steady progress. Leadership needed to be both firm and respectful, guaranteeing that every organisation, regardless of size or experience, had a meaningful role. This inclusive approach was crucial to keeping partners motivated and engaged.

The campaign's primary goals were clear: push for the full implementation of Spain's waste law and the Royal Decree on Packaging Waste. The focus was on measurable outcomes, like achieving reuse targets and introducing DRS, ensuring real, enforceable progress. Therefore, the #LeydeResiduosYA movement aimed to become a reference point for waste management advocacy in Spain.

To achieve these goals, a well-planned strategic approach was crucial. The following sections detail the key strategies and actions that successfully transformed these objectives into tangible results.

Identify and prioritise the objectives

By identifying and prioritising the most important goals, the movement ensured that resources were allocated efficiently, driving meaningful outcomes. Given the wide scope and multiple measures in the waste law, two first goals were identified due to the strategic relevance and time sensitive factors: Deposit Return Systems (DRS) process to start by end of October 2024 and reuse measures to be implemented by 1 January 2025. In addition to these two goals, which will take ongoing commitment, the platform will agree on next measures to be enforced.

Coordination among diverse entities

Coordinating the diverse entities required efficient communication tools. The movement used email groups and instant messaging tools for sharing information, while regular meetings were held at various times to accommodate the different organisations involved. In addition, a number of dedicated working groups focused on areas such as communications and campaigns, ensuring effective collaboration and maximising productivity.

During [the first conference on the implementation of the Waste Law](#) in May 2024, the 128 organisations part of the coalition participated in open debates and active participation to build consensus and drive the movement forward. The agenda and participant list were openly discussed, with feedback collected at each stage to ensure transparency and inclusivity. Leadership was shared, allowing members of the movement to take on meaningful roles, including participation as speakers, which strengthened the sense of collective ownership.

To keep those who were unable to attend informed, discussion papers and meeting minutes were generated and made available for further input, fostering ongoing dialogue. Additionally, space was created to support

local campaigns and address specific concerns, ensuring that all members of the movement were heard and included. These collaborative efforts laid a strong foundation for sustaining momentum, advancing the movement's goals and building a sense of trust and community.



Unified communication

A harmonised communication strategy was launched, involving both national and local media to maximise the campaign's reach and visibility. Bigger organisations hit the big media outlets, but the role of local entities was also important because they spread the word through regional media so we could reach a vast type of audience. Alongside this, the movement built a strong online presence, using social media to raise awareness and rally public support. Emphasising collective strength, the campaign avoided the branding of any single organisation, presenting a unified, unbranded front. Relationships were built through a combination of in-person meetings and online tools, ensuring regular contact with active members to maintain engagement. Strategically engaging influential stakeholders proved essential, amplifying the movement's impact and broadening its support.



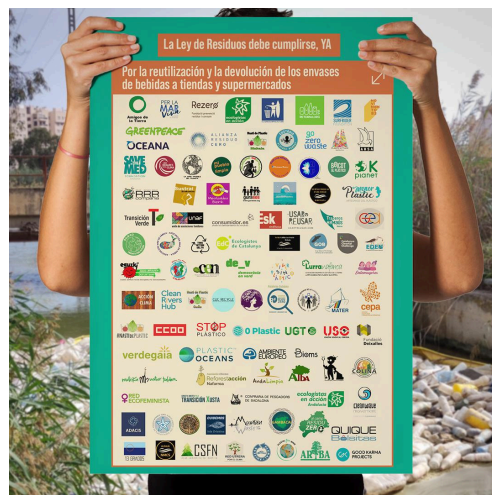
"When committed people with common objectives and fights come together, strong movements are born. The common work of bringing those objectives and goals together of #LeydeResiduosYA has been authentic, and everyone has had the space to share their own views and proposals. These big alliances have their own way of being, with a unique identity and soul".

Miquel Roset, [Retorna](#) coordinator

Campaigns and tools for awareness

To raise awareness, the campaign used a combination of strategies, including:

- **Manifesto:** The manifesto was published and delivered to the Spanish Minister of Ecological Transition, gaining widespread media coverage.
- **Data and publications:** The campaign used data from studies and publications to strengthen its messaging. Reports, such as [the analysis of the separate collection rate of plastic beverage bottles in Spain](#), commissioned by Zero Waste Europe and Alianza Residuo Cero to the consultancy Eunomia, were shared with the public. These reports not only bolstered the campaign's credibility but also strengthened the case for more robust policy enforcement.
- **Social Media buzz:** The campaign spread shared content, generating buzz across multiple platforms, and garnered public complaints against retailers failing to meet legal obligations regarding packaging reuse. The group shared the same templates and materials so everyone could use or adapt them.
- Coordinated **public complaints** against major retailers failing to comply with the waste law, alongside traditional and social media efforts, increased pressure on both local governments and businesses.
- **Movement engagement:** Members of the coalition and the Alianza Residuo Cero (Spanish Zero Waste Alliance) actively participated in the campaign, helping to amplify its reach.
- **Ambassadors:** Movement ambassadors actively invited other organisations to join the movement, expanding its reach.
- **Support from municipalities:** Municipalities across Spain issued support statements, amplifying the campaign's legitimacy.



Tupa Rangel, coordinator of [Save the Med's Plastic Free Balearics Programme](#), emphasised the importance of data in driving the campaign:

"It has strengthened hope and confidence in the strength of the entities. [The report by Eunomia](#) is a clear and valid instrument to provide data to the public. This for me is the crucial point, information has to reach the people. The responsibility must lie in the hands of policy makers and the companies producing it."

Community engagement

Public engagement

Public engagement was a cornerstone of the #LeydeResiduosYA campaign. The movement strategically leveraged the vast audiences of its 130 member organisations to spread key messages about the waste problem in Spain, both as a collective and through individual efforts. Collaborative videos, particularly with international NGOs, were used to expand and merge these audiences, fostering greater public engagement. The visual impact of 130 logos representing the coalition also projected an image of empowerment and trust, allowing the campaign to quickly connect with the public. In addition to digital outreach, the campaign organised events like the Manifesto presentation and the Waste Law implementation conference, which further attracted public attention and support.



Local community engagement

Active members of the Platform also worked within their local communities to raise awareness and mobilise efforts in support of waste reduction laws, leveraging their existing contacts and knowledge of the local context. These members, already deeply embedded in their communities, were instrumental in driving local engagement and tailoring outreach efforts to resonate with the specific needs and concerns of the people they interacted with. Their familiarity with the local context made them key players in effectively mobilising support for the campaign at the grassroots level. These public-facing activities were complemented by in-person gatherings that brought together representatives from different entities.

All these events, along with coordinated actions with public administrations, were essential in maintaining momentum, ensuring continued engagement, and aligning strategic priorities across the campaign. In addition, members of the platform got directly in touch with municipalities across the country and achieved a growing number of adherents to the campaign, from a very different range of political views.

Major milestones

The movement experienced several key milestones that marked its progress and helped solidify its impact. The publication of [the manifesto](#), which focused on reuse and the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), served as the public starting point, laying out the movement's core demands and setting a clear direction for advocacy.

Another significant turning point was a **meeting with the Secretary of State for the Environment (15.02.2024)**, Hugo Morán, which elevated the movement's credibility and opened a direct line of communication with government officials. This was followed by the **first conference on the implementation of the Waste Law**, held at the headquarters of [Fundación Biodiversidad](#). The event provided a platform for open discussions, shared leadership, and collaboration among stakeholders.

In May 2024 [the press conference at Greenpeace Spain's headquarters](#) also played a pivotal role, [addressing false reporting from industry-backed groups](#) such as Producer Responsibility Organisation (PRO). During this time, it was agreed that the Retorna director would serve as the spokesperson for the movement, ensuring a unified and clear voice for the movement moving forward. The press conference was in collaboration with Zero Waste Europe (ZWE), Alianza Residuo Cero, and the coalition, and presented a report from Eunomia for ZWE and ARC, further boosting visibility and credibility for the campaign's cause. At the same level, a few months later, the Pinocchio's action in front of the EU Commission with all the colleagues from ZWE and [BFFP Europe](#), helped us to raise the bar and influence the Minister Teresa Ribera at an international level, exactly at the moment when she has to make a decision about DRS in Spain before going to Bruxelles as VP of the new European government.



Policy impact ad successes

The #LeydeResiduosYA campaign has become a key opinion leader on waste management in Spain, influencing public discourse and gaining recognition from both the government and media. While the Alianza Residuo Cero was already a key player and reference in the waste field in Spain, the Alianza's role in the creation and co-ordination of the platform and the first successes obtained have further cemented and given more visibility to the Alianza as a voice within a wider civil society sector.

Specific successes include:

- **Public endorsement of DRS:** Spain's then Minister for Ecological Transition Teresa Ribera publicly addressed the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for the first time, signalling support for this important initiative.
- **Legal enforcement of DRS process:** The Ministry of Ecological Transition finally declared non-compliance with separate PET bottle collection soon, initiating the process for a nationwide DRS. The system will include PET bottles, cans and beverage cartons. This has been one of the main goals of the platform and has meant a significant success.
- **Enforcement of reuse targets:** The movement has been vigilant in monitoring reuse targets for 2025. Though this measure is to be implemented in 2025, the platform and the ARC have had various meetings with relevant economic stakeholders to push for effective implementation.
- **Supermarket refill obligations:** A dedicated group within the movement has effectively campaigned against supermarkets that do not comply with refill obligations, leading to fines for certain retailers who failed to allow the use of customers' own containers.

Xavier Curto, Surfrider Spain coordinator, reflected on the collective strength of the movement:

"This campaign has shown that many entities are actively concerned about the implementation of the national waste law and the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). Despite their differences, all entities share the same objective and challenge, united in raising one collective voice. In our case, we've seen that many people comment on our social media videos expressing their desire for a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). This further reinforces the notion that society is aligned with the need to move towards this goal."



Future directions for the #WasteLawNOW campaign

The #WasteLawNOW campaign has set clear short- and long-term objectives to continue driving progress in waste reduction and sustainable resource use in Spain.

Short-Term Goals (2025): The immediate focus of the campaign is on achieving key milestones by 2025. This includes the implementation of a Deposit Return System (DRS) and a targeted reuse goal. Additionally, the campaign is addressing the one-year delay in the mandatory separate collection of bio-waste, which is critical for meeting broader sustainability targets. The introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for textiles and other material flows is also a key priority, ensuring producers take responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products.

To maintain momentum and engagement among members and the broader public, the campaign plans to keep open and consistent communication about the evolving situation. Regular updates will be shared to highlight progress, identify needs, and encourage specific actions that support the campaign's objectives. Another strategy is to pinpoint opportunities and delays in implementation where members can rally and take coordinated action.

The campaign already has strong networks across different sectors and regions, making it crucial to stay closely engaged with relevant administrations. Coordinated advocacy and organising events that bring together representatives from across the campaign will help keep the movement unified and focused.

Long-term goals: Beyond the immediate legislative changes, the platform's long-term focus is on ensuring the effective implementation of existing legislation. While legislative change is important, the real challenge lies in putting existing laws into practice, with deadlines that range from the short to the long term. The campaign will continue to monitor and push for these laws to be enforced, ensuring that the goals of the circular economy are fully realised.

By staying focused on both immediate and long-term goals, the #WasteLawNOW campaign aims to drive meaningful progress in waste management and resource efficiency.

Lessons learnt

The campaign brought together a diverse coalition of organisations and groups working towards a common goal, demonstrating the power of collective action in tackling complex issues. Throughout the journey, valuable lessons were learned about sustaining momentum, navigating challenges, and fostering collaboration. **These insights provide a roadmap for future efforts and similar movements:**

- **Sustaining the movement:** keeping the movement active and engaged over time was essential in making the campaign a success. This took ongoing attention and efforts to think about how members contribute at different paces and with different levels of engagement.
- **Respect-based coordination:** Leadership rooted in respect for shared principles and collaborative decision-making played a vital role in sustaining momentum and fostering trust among members.
- **Collective strength and diversity:** The collaboration of 130 diverse entities, from grassroots groups to large trade unions, feminist and consumer groups, highlighted the power of collective action. However, this also led to slower decision-making processes, reflecting the complexity of managing such a broad coalition. In retrospect, it became clear that more involvement from health and sports associations could have strengthened the campaign. The coalition also recognised that recruiting new groups takes time, but the process is smoother when local or trusted partners take the lead in outreach.
- **Setting the goals:** while the campaign never faced a crisis of near-failure, there were moments of disengagement and occasional misalignment of priorities. Some members wanted to focus on tangential issues, which at times diverted attention from the core objectives. To maintain momentum, the coalition regularly re-engaged its members and refocused efforts on the main shared goals.
- **Open participation:** Continuous opportunities for involvement and information sharing helped maintain engagement.

These lessons offer valuable insights for other NGOs and groups tackling similar challenges, demonstrating the importance of collective action.

María Durán, [Alianza Residuo Cero](#) coordinator

“For organisations that work with local authorities, many times it is frustrating to listen to the same kind of justifications from municipalities: ‘our hands are tied because this goes beyond our jurisdiction’. Thanks to this platform, we have managed to put together little causes and elevate them to a national level.”



Conclusion

The #LeyDeResiduosYA campaign has become a powerful force in advocating for the enforcement of Spain's waste laws. Through coordinated efforts, strategic partnerships, and a shared vision, the movement has made significant strides toward holding the government and businesses accountable for their environmental responsibilities. This campaign exemplifies the impact that a united civil society can have on driving meaningful change.

The first goal of the platform has been achieved. DRS is now on the path to implementation. Next steps will include ensuring the process is on time and delivers a system which is good from all aspects.



“The Alianza Residuo Cero is a great example of what movement building means for Zero Waste Europe. 6 years back we planted a seed when we organised a meeting bringing together a few key NGOs in the country to get organised and we harnessed this alliance in its first steps. Today that seed has grown into a tree with many branches and roots which is bearing fruits for society and the environment.”

Joan Marc Simon, Zero Waste Europe funder



Use #LeyDeResiduosYa on social media to discover the organisations and citizens supporting the campaign.



Contact



[Zero Waste Europe \(ZWE\)](#) is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards a better use of resources and the 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.



[Alianza Residuo Cero](#) (Spanish Zero Waste Alliance) is composed of Friends of the Earth, Ecologists in Action, Greenpeace, Retorna, Rezero, Surfrider, CECU and Per la Mar Viva. Their fundamental objectives are to build a shared strategy to promote the Zero Waste model in Spain, to develop joint projects to promote prevention, reuse, repair, composting and sustainable and responsible waste management and to promote environmental policies that help the implementation of zero waste.



ZWE's [Blueprint for Movement Building project](#) aims to capture and analyse the patterns that lead to effective movement building for climate justice. Through this project, ZWE is collaborating with five national zero waste alliances to build and strengthen their national platform. The learnings and stories from this project will turn into a manual for movement building – the Blueprint – designed to inspire and guide emerging and existing groups in becoming stronger movements. The Blueprint for Movement Building project is supported by the UMI Fund.

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