

Tackling the packaging waste crisis: prevention is better than the cure



EEB
European
Environmental
Bureau

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About the European Environmental Bureau



- The EEB is the largest network of environmental citizens' organisations in Europe
- 185 member organisations in 41 countries - representing around 30 million individual members & supporters.
- 50 years of EU environmental policy expertise.

Our vision: A better future where people and nature thrive together

Our mission:

We advocate for progressive policies to create a better environment in the EU and beyond

Project title: LIFE23-NGO-BE-101156997-EEB

This LIFE Operating Grant supports an 80 staff organisations working on 12 different work packages, including on circular economy (where plastic is identified as a priority sector).

EEB work on plastic & packaging is primarily supported by other grants and carried out as part of the Rethink Plastic alliance.

What issues does EEB focus on?



The EEB tackles Europe's most pressing environmental problems by agenda-setting, monitoring, advising on, and influencing, the way these issues are dealt with at global, European and national levels.

Our work areas:



Climate



Circular
Economy



European
Institutions and
Governance



Global and
Regional
Policies



Health
and
Environment



Environmental
Law and
Justice



Nature



Economic
Transition

A genuine Circular Economy: reconcile prosperity with planetary boundaries



Key activities:

- 1) Engage in policy debates & technical discussions on CE policies - including for high-impact sectors (*e.g. plastics and packaging*).
- 2) Raise profile of a genuine CE - including the need to drastically reduce waste & reduce resource use with rigorous implementation of waste hierarchy.
- 3) Developing EEB network of members & partners working on circular economy, providing regular updates and engaging them with EU and national CE initiatives.
- 4) Contributing to the development of CE policies outside the EU.

Prevention and reuse - the only genuine solution to record levels of waste



- Implement waste hierarchy: prevention and reuse, before recycling
- Any improvements in recycling struggles to keep up with growing levels of waste: recycling - on its own - will not reduce waste levels and is insufficient to reduce EU material & carbon footprints at the speed & scale needed to achieve our climate and env. goals.
- Also, simply substituting one single-use material for another is not a genuine solution.

Instead of marginal improvements in waste management, Europe needs a **comprehensive approach to circular packaging** which, alongside ensuring all packaging is recyclable (*in practice & at scale*), prevents the generation of unnecessary waste and scales up reuse.

Solutions:

- **Prioritise reduction in overall packaging waste generation**
- Prohibit overpackaging, restrict unnecessary & avoidable packaging formats
- Well-designed reuse systems can reduce waste at source, cut energy, emissions, resource and water use, and create jobs and business opportunities [see e.g.: EC, [Impact Assessment PPWR](#) (2022), Rethink Plastic alliance, [Factsheet on reusable packaging](#) (2023); EMF, [Unlocking a reuse revolution: scaling returnable packaging](#) (2023)...]

Prevention is better than the cure: EU Packaging regulation



Packaging & Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) adopted in 2024, including:

- Packaging **waste prevention targets**
- **Reuse targets** for certain packaging categories (including beverages & transport packaging)
- **Bans for unnecessary & avoidable single-use plastic packaging formats**
- Stricter rules on substances of concern and a ban on PFAs in food packaging.

Main remaining gaps in EU policy:

PPWR watered down by several exemptions & derogations adopted under the pressure of throwaway lobbies; e.g.:

- Deletion of reusable packaging targets for takeaway food & drinks.
- Cardboard packaging excluded from reuse targets for transport.
- Restrictions for unnecessary packaging limited to single-use plastics and not to all single-use formats as foreseen in the original proposal (*exemption for throw-away paper-based packaging in restaurants and for fruits & veg*).
- Loopholes for paper-based throwaway packaging risk undermining efforts & drive perverse material substitutions (see: [Disposable paper-based food packaging: the false solution to the packaging waste crisis](#))



Work & impacts in 2025 & beyond

- Rapid development of **PPWR secondary legislation** to apply new packaging rules.
- Support **ambitious implementation** of new EU packaging rules – focus on reuse systems
- Deep **revision of EPR regimes** to make them more effective for waste prevention, reuse, repair and high-quality *recycling (well beyond a narrow focus on harmonisation)*.
- Preparation of new **Circular Economy Act** – putting forward a **holistic strategy for sustainable resource management** (avoiding short-sighted approach focused only on recycling & waste management)

Working for credible EU prevention & reuse rules to stop the packaging waste crisis and end plastic pollution is an intense **coalition work** (e.g. with [*Rethink Plastic alliance*](#), *Break Free From Plastic movement* & many others)

- NGOs coalition will continue to advocate for high ambition at EU level and support proper implementation of the new rules to stop the growth of (plastic) packaging waste through prevention and reuse.