

voice

VOICE OF IRISH CONCERN
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



End of Year Newsletter 2025

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2025 IN NUMBERS

70%

of waste items in the average recycling bin in Ireland originated from the supermarket (NRBS Report)

1,453

Number of Primary School Classrooms signed up to Picker Pals Programme

64%

Increase in the amount of people bringing their own coffee cups (Fingal Reusable Cup Project)

183

Youth Leaders given our Sustainable Menstruation Training

SUPPORT VOICE

- Please Donate Today



A LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE TAD KIRAKOWSKI

Welcome friends,

In these pages you'll read about the work that **VOICE** has been up to over the last year, from cups to jumpers, from the International to the neighbourhood. 2025 I believe, really exemplified what VOICE is about, linking action and policy formation, and linking the local to the global.

In our national **Recycling Bin Survey** we once again heard participants say 'enough!' with over 90% saying they want to reduce the amount of packaging waste coming into their homes. We showed that there are alternatives, reducing packaging by 65% in our own shopping basket using existing solutions.

So, what is holding us back?

2025 was also a year in which we looked to the international community to develop a new approach to plastics; however the Plastics Treaty ended without agreement, with many countries saying 'enough' to plastic waste, and plastic pollution while a minority voice pushes for the status quo.

Our own choices are important, but the system we work within shapes and supports those choices. This is why VOICE has always called for the change to come from the top, why we ask retailers to examine alternatives, why we look for policies that support reusables, and why we support individuals to take on the reusable options. Often, the answers come from communities and groups on the ground, the people working all over the country to do things differently, better or more sustainably. In so many cases the reasons are not even environmental but simply good business sense.

We've seen time and time again that will power and energy is there, it just needs to be brought together, the work of the Waste Not Want Not project particularly shows this off and gives a **toolkit** for reduction in food waste.

To implement change takes strong leadership. With the time counting down to 2030 and the country backsliding on many of the SDGs including SDG12: responsible consumption and production, this new government will need to take some strong stances and show real leadership to bring about the change needed. We've shown that people want these changes, and the answers are there, it is now the job to implement them.

This year we have said goodbye to members of our team (thank you for all your work on the WNNW project Allison) and welcomed new faces to our team. We've also partnered with new organisations and groups. Their help in supporting our work has been invaluable, and we hope that we have supported them in turn.

We will continue to push for less waste generation in the first instance, better re-usability, better health, better environment and a better future for us and future generations. Thank you to our members and supporters; we would not be able to continue on our journey without your support.

Your's Sincerely,

Tad Kirakowski
CEO of VOICE



Lyndsey O'Connell
Community Liaison Officer

FINGAL REUSABLE CUP PROJECT

#SmallCupBigChange

Disposable coffee cups (and lids) are one of Ireland's most visible litter problems. It's time to build on the success of the Deposit Return Scheme and take bold action on single-use cup waste.

Inspired by the phenomenal success of the **Killarney Cup Project**, which stopped over 1 million disposable cups from entering the bin in just one year, Fingal County Council has set an ambitious and exciting goal - make Fingal the first single-use cup free county in Ireland.

To deliver this vision, **Fingal County Council** partnered with VOICE. After researching successful models across Europe, Fingal also teamed up with Vytal, a not-for-profit social enterprise operating a proven "tap to borrow" cup system.

On the 17th March we launched, piloting in Malahide and Rush.



Minister Darragh O'Brien and Fingal Mayor Brian McDonagh helped to Launch our project in May, in Malahide.

How it works:

Each cup has a QR code so Fingal Co.Co. can track usage and report how many cups are being saved from incineration, turning every coffee into climate action!

But what truly powered this project was the community.

We brought together Tidy Towns volunteers, sports clubs, café owners, baristas, schools, parish councils and local residents; a whole network of passionate people driving sustainability from the ground up.

Looking Ahead: What We've Learned and What's Needed

As we enter the final month of the pilot, it has become clear that uptake of the 'tap to borrow' element has been lower than expected.

A key barrier appears to be the lack of legislative support. This project, like the Killarney Cup Project and similar initiatives nationwide, was launched with the understanding that a levy on disposable cups was imminent. Instead, legislative progress has stalled, and the current proposals suggest a diluted version of the levy rather than the strong policy signal originally promised.

The introduction of the Levy on disposable cups would offer a powerful incentive to both businesses and customers to choose reusable solutions. It would help projects like this reach their full potential and accelerate the transition away from single-use culture.

That said, there are real wins.

Several businesses have reported a significant increase in customers bringing their own reusable cups; one saw an increase of over **64%**. Another business, although stepping out of the pilot, has chosen to introduce its own sustainability measures, including branded reusable cups, and will continue encouraging customers to bring their own. This shift in behaviour is a clear success of the project.



Local Café - New Street Coffee Shop in Malahide now stocks reusable cups

Next Steps

After the pilot ends, we intend to fully evaluate the project and explore new ways to increase participation.

Working with Fingal County Council has been a fantastic experience. Their leadership and commitment to tackling cup waste is truly inspirational; it is our hope that other local authorities across the country will follow their lead, and the government will bring in the levy on disposable cups (as promised).



Malahide Volunteers with Grainne Carroll from Fingal County Council



Lyndsey (VOICE) with Rush Tidy Towns Volunteers, and Michelle and Conor from VYTAL



Solene Schirrer
Project Lead

fabricofchange.ie



FABRIC FOR CHANGE

Launched in September 2024, **Fabric of Change** is VOICE's online hub for sustainable fashion: a space that explores how we engage with clothes and the systems that produce them. Over its first year, the platform has grown steadily, publishing monthly articles, regular social media features, and collaborating with partners such as RTÉ on their fashion video series.

Since launch, the website has reached over 20,000 new users worldwide, spreading awareness and supporting the dissemination of values of transparency, sufficiency, and circularity. With more than 28 media appearances on fashion and textile issues, Fabric of Change has participated to the national conversations on how Ireland can move away from fast fashion and toward a fairer, more sustainable system.

Our goal remains clear: to educate, raise awareness, and inspire change: both individual and collective, in how we design, produce, and consume fashion.

In 2025, Fabric of Change led its first investigation: **Threads of Truth**, in collaboration with the **Global Shapers Dublin Hub**. The investigation followed 24 garments over 11 months, providing a rare look into the hidden journey of our discarded textiles.

The results were striking:

- 90% of the clothes deposited in Clothes banks went outside of the EU

- We've only been able to establish a clear fate for 9 items: 5 reused (entered a shop or a residential area); 2 were downcycled; 2 were dumped (one in Togo, one in Nigeria).

These findings are raising crucial questions around accountability and transparency in the textile industry and about who truly bears responsibility for the textile crisis we are facing worldwide. This research also contributes to the national conversation on Ireland's upcoming textile strategy and the future of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), a policy area where VOICE is actively working to provide evidence based recommendations towards a fair and sustainable future, away from fast fashion and focused on circularity and sufficiency.

As we move into 2026, Fabric of Change wishes to continue expanding both as a digital platform and a learning space. Plans include community workshops, engagement events, and new multimedia content to deepen public understanding of sufficiency and circularity. We also look forward to expanding our collaboration with changemakers in the field, with the aim to support and highlight their work and diverse incarnations of sustainable fashion.



IRISH CLOTHES TRAVEL THOUSANDS OF KILOMETRES AFTER COLLECTION NEW LIVE TRACKER MAP REVEALS HIDDEN JOURNEYS

Most of us think that once we drop clothes into a bring bank or hand them to a shop's take-back scheme, they'll quickly find a new home nearby. But a new investigation by VOICE Ireland and the Dublin Hub of the Global Shapers (an international youth organisation) shows that many of our discarded garments travel thousands of kilometres, sometimes ending up in far-flung places like Kenya, Pakistan, the UAE, or Libya.

A live, **public Clothing Tracker Map** now lets anyone see, in real time, where Irish clothes go after collection. The results so far raise questions about transparency, waste, and environmental justice.

In December 2024, the team sewed trackers into 38 clothing items: a mix of brand-new pieces and used but reusable garments. These items were then placed into private clothing banks and shop take-back schemes in Ireland, avoiding charity-run banks to focus on the less transparent, commercially operated routes. From there, the locations have been monitored every week or two, revealing the long and unexpected journeys our discarded clothes take through the global second-hand and textile waste trade.

We are tracking the truth

With this project, the two organisations wanted to test brands claims while also shining a light on commercial clothing banks, which handle most of Ireland's collected textiles and still don't provide any public information about their supply chain and what happens to the clothes.

Eleven months into the project we have clothes across 12 countries, showing how global this trade and the issue is:

- 2 in Germany
- 2 in Ireland
- 1 in the Ivory Coast
- 5 in Jordan
- 2 in Kenya
- 1 in Lybia
- 1 in Nigeria

- 2 in Northern Ireland
- 2 in Pakistan
- 4 in Poland
- 1 in Togo
- 1 in UEA

We've only been able to establish a clear fate for 9 items: 5 reused (entered a shop or a residential area) ; 2 were downcycled ; 2 were dumped (one in Togo, one in Nigeria). This live data confirms what VOICE's 2023 **Threads of Transparency report** was pointing at: clothing discarded through bring banks or take-back schemes enter an opaque global supply chain. The end-of-life stage of clothing is in fact an international trade that most people are unaware of, raising many questions about the real fate of textiles that go into the system.

The biggest blind spot lies with bring banks, where transparency is almost non-existent. What is emerging is a clear need for harmonised regulation across the sector, rather than leaving oversight to voluntary, self-reported standards set by private companies. A fuller picture, and concrete recommendations will be revealed in VOICE's final report this November 2025.

An Industry Without Accountability; Why it Matters

The fashion industry is one of the most environmentally damaging globally: ranked 4th for climate impact, 3rd for water and land use, and 5th for raw material use and greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, it remains barely regulated.

In Ireland we discard 35kg of clothes each per year. Only 35% of that is collected through donations, textile banks etc... But 80% of what is collected is eventually exported.

However, awareness is growing and a recent EPA national survey revealed that 73% of people want assurance that their unwanted clothes do not end up in 'clothes mountains' abroad. Despite users concerns, private collectors and exporters rarely disclose what happens after collection. With no mandatory reporting, even exporters themselves may lack full visibility.

What the data shows so far

VOICE's investigation focuses on private clothing banks and take-back schemes, which handle most of Ireland's used textiles. Early findings show a significant share of items quickly leaving Ireland

for European countries like Poland or Germany, known to be sorting hubs for second-hand clothing. Now, at the end of this experiment, 90% of the clothes deposited in Clothes banks went outside of the EU, including countries in Africa and Asia where second-hand imports can create serious environmental and social challenges. At this point, it is only fair to question whether companies profiting from the trade can really guarantee reuse.

A Call For Change

The live tracker map will end this Nov '25, offering the public and policymakers unprecedented visibility on the fate of Irish clothing. The final analysis will support concrete recommendations to increase transparency and environmental standards in the used textile collection and trade.

"This map shows what the industry hasn't been willing to: our clothes have a long journey after we're done with them, and that journey often ends with uncertainty, in someone else's backyard," said Campaign Lead Solene Schirrer.

Explore the Clothing Tracker Map [here](#).

The Global Shapers

The Global Shapers is an international network made of 3,989 young experts across 142 countries. The initiative of the World Economic Forum empowers young people with real opportunities to learn, lead, and innovate, to become a transformative force for change, locally and globally.



Picture of unwanted clothing and their tags





Abi O'Callaghan-Platt
Coordinator of the Sustainable
Menstruation Project



SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUATION (MENSY) PROJECT

The **Sustainable Menstruation** (Mensy) Project stands as a powerful example of how environmental and social goals can come together to drive systemic change. We began in January 2024, facing a two-year Erasmus+ funded initiative and have had the joy of watching as it blossomed into a European-wide movement for menstrual equity, sustainability, and empowerment.

At its heart, the Mensy Project recognises that reducing waste is not just an environmental imperative, it is deeply connected to issues of health, reproductive rights, gender equality, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. By addressing menstruation through the lens of sustainability, the project highlights how circular resource use and social justice can reinforce one another.

Over two years, the project:

- Conducted in-depth research on menstrual education, product costs, and legislation across eight European partner countries.
- Engaged directly with 135 young people through a dynamic Youth Advisory Council.
- Developed a comprehensive training manual for youth leaders, alongside a suite of interactive resources, activities, and games focused on menstruation, empowerment, and sustainability.
- Delivered training to 186 youth leaders across Europe, equipping them with knowledge, confidence, and tools to lead menstrual education and advocacy in their own communities.



The partnership brought together eight inspiring environmental and eco-feminist organisations across Europe, each contributing their expertise and unique perspective. Led by VOICE (Ireland), the consortium included: the Women's Environmental Network (UK), Zero (Portugal), Rezero (Spain), Women Engage for a Common Future (Netherlands), Greenzone (Hungary), Friends of the Earth (Croatia), and Zero Waste Lviv (Ukraine).

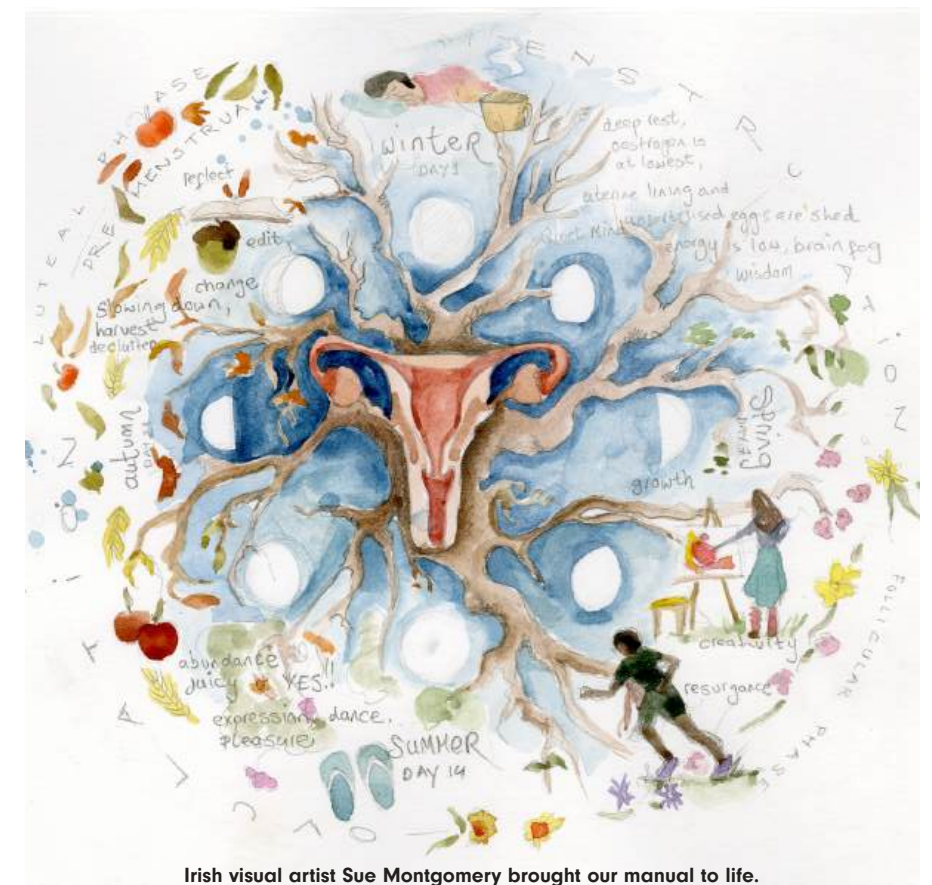
Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Youth leaders described the training as "excellent, engaging, and empowering," praising the manual as "comprehensive, beautifully illustrated, and full of practical insights."

Through this training, youth leaders gained knowledge on:

- The biological and social aspects of menstruation.
- When and how to seek medical advice.
- The environmental and health impacts of different menstrual products.
- How to tackle stigma and open up conversations that promote dignity, understanding, and equality.

Menstrual education is a key step toward breaking taboos, reducing discrimination, and paving the way for gender equality. Mensy shows that when young people are empowered with knowledge and supported by sustainable solutions, real change happens, for communities, for the planet, and for future generations.

The training **manual** is freely available on the VOICE website, and additional educational resources can be accessed by interested youth leaders upon request.



Irish visual artist Sue Montgomery brought our manual to life.





Solene Schirrer
Project Lead

**THE NATIONAL
RECYCLING BIN
SURVEY**



2.0: LIFTING THE LID (AGAIN!)

This spring, for the second time, households across Ireland opened their recycling bins and helped us gather data for a unique citizen-led research project: the National Recycling Bin Survey (NRBS). The goal? To find out where our packaging waste really comes from and to shine a light on who's responsible.

Recycle Bin Survey/Report

50 households across 14 counties took part: sorting, counting, and recording every item that went into their recycling bin over two weeks. The results were strikingly consistent with last year's findings, confirming what many of us already feel in our daily lives: nothing has changed.

Despite growing public awareness, supermarket aisles remain flooded with single-use packaging. Our research shows that 70% of all recycling-bin waste originates from supermarkets, and plastic alone accounts for nearly half of what we find inside. On average, each of us manages 73 packaging items every two weeks. 80% of respondents are Sick of the amount of unnecessary packaging in our recycling bins.

Supermarket Basket Comparison

To add depth and value to this year's NRBS, we included deep dive into the supermarket packaging presence, comparing a standard weekly shop across five major Irish retailers to a zero-waste alternative.

The baskets were as expected: full of (avoidable) plastic. For just 30 everyday grocery items, supermarkets generated an average of 40 pieces of packaging, 67% of which was made of plastic. When the same basket was sourced from zero-waste or low-packaging shops, that number dropped to 14.



Supermarket Basket Items



Unpackaged Goods

That's a 65% cut in packaging waste without any need for fancy new technologies, only slight changes in the way things are operated. If every Irish person was able to make that switch, we could eliminate 4 billion pieces of packaging every year. Yet, these solutions remain inaccessible for most people due to time, affordability, and availability. The zero-waste shop cost 19% more than the supermarket average, but was the same price as the SuperValu shop, even though 40% of its products were organic. The results highlight that reuse and refill systems are not only possible they are cleaner and healthier and could very well be competitive in prices if supported at scale.

Looking to France for Inspiration

In the last 10 years, France has emerged as a frontrunner in legislating against

packaging waste, introducing an ambitious legal framework to phase out single-use packaging, promote reuse, and foster a circular economy. This case study explores the country's legislative actions, their implementation and impact on industry.

While the many of the NRBS findings were pointing towards a status quo, they've also sparked a momentum and hope. The NRBS attracted widespread attention from citizens and media, proving that people across Ireland are ready for a change in how we shop and consume. Participants' comments on their experience with all that plastic reflected that: "I don't understand why fruit and veg can't just be loose!"

"Supermarkets need to lead the change," That's what we believe too: the responsibility shouldn't be on households alone to change their habits: the system and context within which they shop should also adapt to provide healthier and plastic free food. The NRBS is part of VOICE's ongoing Sick of Plastic campaign, which calls for stronger legislation, real accountability from retailers, and a shift away from our throwaway culture.

Looking Forward: From Waste Data to Real Change

The NRBS comes at an important time as new EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) measures are set to reshape the rules for packaging across Europe. Building from the findings in the NRBS, VOICE are examining alternatives and ways to improve access to packaging-free and reuse options at scale, to eliminate unnecessary packaging and transition toward reuse and refill systems. Thanks to your engagement in this project, VOICE is now helping design practical pathways that turn policy ambition into real life actions.



Gary Jones
Programme Manager

**PICKER PALS
PROGRAMME**
@PICKERPALS WORLD



Sandra Glynn
Finance Lead



**Picker Pals 2025:
What a Year!**

Over 1,450 classrooms across Ireland took part in Picker Pals this year, making it our biggest year yet. We worked with every kind of school, from large urban primaries to small rural & island schools, special schools & Gaelscoileanna, bringing the programme to life in both English and Irish. Our classes received a Picker Pack, that each child then took home in order to lead their family on litter-picking adventures. Once back at school, they shared their experiences before passing the pack to the next classmate. This year-round rotation made environmental issues a regular topic in the classroom, helping students become deeply engaged with their local area and empowered to create positive change.

We loved hearing stories from everyone who took part, whether it was a proud family showing off full litter bags, teachers sharing their students' environmentally themed stories, or parents telling us how their children now notice every crisp packet on the street!

**The results of Picker Pals
speak for themselves:**

- Thousands of litter-picking adventures completed and LOTS of litter collected.
- More families getting involved and chatting about the environment at home.
- More schools joining the programme than ever before.

VOICE Ireland support this hands-on work with a full programme of fun and educational content throughout the year too. Our teachers beam into classrooms with live, interactive lessons and competitions so teachers can focus on the rest of the curriculum, safe in the knowledge that Picker Pals is making a big impact on their students' attitudes towards environmental awareness and care.

	2019-2024	24-25	TOTAL	Equivalent To:
Children Participating	105,450	36,325	141,775	2.5 Capacity Crows in Croke Park (82,300kg capacity)
Total Participants (2.5 people incl. child)	263,627	90,813	354,438	Combined Population* -Co. Carlow - 61,968 -Co. Donegal - 167,084 -Co. Laois - 91,677 -Co. Leitrim - 35,199 (*Census 2022 - Difference of 1,690)
Time Outdoors Litter picking (1.5 hours per person)	395,428	136,219	531,656hrs	170 Tidy Towns Groups (Yearly average of 20 volunteers on weekly 3hr clean-ups)
Waste Removed kg (2.6kg per person)	685,427	236,113	921,538kg	12 x Carriage-loads of freight. (75,000kg per carriage)



As ever, Picker Pals is completely free for schools, thanks to the support of the Department of the Environment, local authorities and sponsors like BMW Ireland, CFI, Sky, Deloitte & ESW.

These partnerships work both ways too, as we can help organisations to advance their environmental goals. This year, we enhanced our company litter-pick events by adding citizen science and structured litter-counting.

In one event, esw. volunteers cleaned a 400-metre stretch of coastline in Dublin, collecting and categorising 626 litter items, mostly hard plastics that are typical of litter in coastal areas. The results,

shared in an impact report and social media video contribute to national litter data and support esw.'s sustainability objectives.

As we look ahead to this new school year, we're excited to welcome new schools and keep growing this movement of young environmental heroes. To everyone who's taken part, teachers, students, parents, funders and other supporters, we say thank you. You're helping create cleaner streets and a generation of children who care about making the world better. You can find out more about the work of Picker Pals and how to get involved on our new website too - voiceireland.org/picker-pals/home



Abi O'Callaghan-Platt
Project Lead



THE CLOTH NAPPY INCENTIVE SCHEME 2025

Yet again this year the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme has proved popular with new parents across Munster. Reusable nappy starter bundles were made available to families living in Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary and Clare with maternity hospitals promoting the scheme to expectant parents. In each local authority area the starter bundles were all allocated within a week, demonstrating the need for the scheme. Families keen for a place on the scheme let us know why they were interested in the application.

"Because I'm frustrated about modern consumption and I'd like to do something tangible for the environment" said one Cork based parent.

A Kerry based family said "I don't want to be contributing to the ever increasing number of disposable nappies in the world. Their lack of biodegradability worries me."

And "I loved the idea of cloth nappies on my first but couldn't afford to get started

as money was tight. I would really love to use cloth and reduce my disposable footprint on landfill." said a Clare based parent.

The scheme was promoted this year through Cork University Maternity Hospital, University Maternity Hospital Limerick and Tipperary University Hospital.

"We're delighted to offer our parents the chance to try cloth nappies. This initiative puts sustainable healthcare at the heart of our hospital, helping reduce the carbon footprint of nappy use" noted Dr Cathy Burke, Consultant Gynaecologist / Obstetrician, Cork University Maternity Hospital.

Eileen Ronan, Director of Midwifery at UMHL said the maternity hospital was delighted to support the initiative. "It is a practical way for families to reduce waste and embrace sustainability. It provides the opportunity for families to make the eco-conscious choice while at the same time saving money."

This year the scheme has partnered with the Cloth Nappy Library Ireland (CNLI) and they will offer support to parents taking part through online workshops on the use of the nappies and through facilitating a WhatsApp group and Facebook group on reusable nappy use.

The aims of the scheme are to support the use of reusable nappies in families that would otherwise have used disposable nappies, and to normalise the use of reusable nappies. Participating families in previous years of the scheme have taken part in a survey on their experiences of the scheme to see if it is achieving these aims.

Key findings from the participants in the Munster 2023/24 scheme are that **76%** of participating households more than halved their reliance on disposables, over **90%** of participants stated that they are likely to continue using cloth nappies and over **80%** of participants stated that they would recommend cloth nappies to other parents.



Left to right, Karen Foley EAO Clare CoCo, Helen Kenneally EAO Limerick City and County Council, Abi (VOICE), Eileen Ronan Director of Midwifery at University Maternity Hospital Limerick, Fiona Flynn EAO Tipi CoCo.



CNIS images: CUMH launch - Dr Cathy Burke Consultant Obstetrician CUMH, Claire Kelly EAO Cork City, Abi (VOICE), Michelle Green and Katherine Corkery EAOs Cork County Council



Abi O'Callaghan-Platt
Project Lead



Allison Roberts
Community Liaison Officer



Solene Schirrer
Comms Assistant



WASTE NOT, WANT NOT – Clonakilty's Community Food Waste Revolution

The **Waste Not, Want Not (WNWN)** project is a shining example of how climate action can thrive when an entire community comes together. Over two transformative years, this initiative brought the people of Clonakilty on a shared journey to understand, reduce, and rethink food waste, from farm to fork.

Rather than working from the top down, WNWN took a grassroots approach, engaging directly with farmers, food producers, retailers, hoteliers, homeowners, and schools to uncover where food waste was happening and how to stop it. By learning from the community and applying insights as the project evolved, WNWN built lasting trust, genuine buy-in, and a set of food waste reduction tactics that truly work.

Through hands-on engagement with over 2,000 residents, the team delivered more than 70 workshops, collaborated with six local festivals, and worked alongside every primary and secondary school in Clonakilty. Partnerships flourished with local groups such as Tidy Towns, the Community Resource Centre, the Men's Shed, the Women's Shed, and Friends of the Asylum Seekers, demonstrating that food waste reduction is a shared mission that connects everyone.

This collaboration sparked a range of innovative community-led initiatives:

- **The Clonakilty Apple Festival & Apple Mapping Project** – A joyful annual celebration of local heritage, promoting apple pressing, preservation, and replanting of traditional varieties with support from Tidy Towns and the Men's Shed.
- **Sachet-Free Clonakilty** – A bold campaign to make Clonakilty Ireland's first sachet-free town by June 2025. With over 90% of businesses already on board, local enterprises are leading the way in cutting single-use plastics,

supported by WNWN through practical grants for sustainable alternatives.

- **The Green Wedding Initiative** – Encouraging local venues to offer "green wedding" options to tackle food waste at events. Five venues have already adopted the model, showing that celebrations and sustainability can go hand in hand.
- **The Clonakilty Community Social & Free Box** – Monthly inclusive social events where surplus food is shared, and a "Free Box" at the Resource Centre provides preserved goods for those in need, building community solidarity and ensuring no food goes to waste.

While WNWN was rooted in Clonakilty, its impact extends far beyond. The project has created a comprehensive **Food Waste Reduction Toolkit**, freely available on the Resources Section of the VOICE website, to empower other towns, villages, and communities to replicate the model.



Women's Shed Clonakilty



Caitlin Ruth workshop. Credit: Thady Tra



At local food market in Clonakilty

The toolkit includes:

- Ready-to-use videos and social media templates (including Canva versions) for raising awareness.
- Lesson plans and slide decks for schools.
- Guides and surveys for community groups.
- Practical toolkits on topics such as community composting, green weddings, and sustainable business practices.

By combining creativity, collaboration, and local pride, Waste Not, Want Not has turned Clonakilty into a beacon of community-driven climate action, proving that when people come together, small changes can grow into something extraordinary.



Noreen Moynihan Representing Tidy Towns - Stop the Sachets

DOUBLED CHECKED AGAIN - THIS IS ALL THE SAME SIZE - THINK YOUR SEEING SOME KIND OF OPTICAL ILLUSION



Tad Kirakowski
CEO of VOICE



Abi O'Callaghan-Platt
Policy Director

POLICY WORK

At the end of 2024, we saw the 5th session of the Global Plastics treaty extended into a 5.2 session to take place in 2025.

VOICE worked tirelessly in 2025 to advocate for an ambitious treaty, we worked with master's students in UCC to develop a **legal analysis of the treaty**, and how our asks could be implemented ahead of the meeting in Geneva in August. Ultimately the talks ended without an agreement once again.

We continue to advocate for an ambitious treaty in 5.3 calling for limits on plastic production and a treaty that respects health, planet and society.

Brexit became an issue for VOICE, when a **consultation on furniture design** was opened up, VOICE working with our partners in the Chemtrust, called for furniture design regulations to reflect a more sustainable and circular approach, particularly as regards chemical flame retardants.

VOICE also fed into the **Waste Collection Market Feasibility** Study emphasising the need for standardised communication, better data, and stronger regulation to support national waste reduction targets.

Cups continued to be a focus this year as well, with the provision for the single use cup levy stripped from the Environment Bill in late September. VOICE worked

with the businesses and communities around us to respond to the Regulatory Impact Assessment and call for the swift reintroduction of the measure. However, this is an ongoing battle, and one we will continue to call for as single use cup waste grows year by year in our environment, and growing evidence of the impacts of the microplastics they shed on our health, soil and water.

2025 also saw the drafting of a new Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy, 2026-2028 to which VOICE fed into as part of the consultation process, with the strategy covering issues such as reuse, repair, textiles, food waste and packaging.

VOICE is a member of the **Irish Environmental Network** and also sits on the steering committee of its advocacy arm, the **Environmental Pillar**, representing the concerns and thoughts of the circular economy in Ireland.

As Ireland will assume the six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2026, a lot of our work in this group is shaping itself in this direction – i.e. how we can make sure that our respective concerns are articulated in such a way as to be represented on Ireland's agenda.

To this end, IEN members were recently invited to Brussels to speak with Commissioner McGrath, Irish MEPs, as well as the Irish officials in Brussels, who are preparing the ground for our presidency next year. It is through these meetings, as well as the chance to compare notes with colleagues from other organisations, that we can develop strategies which ensure that matters pertaining to circular economy get the attention they require.

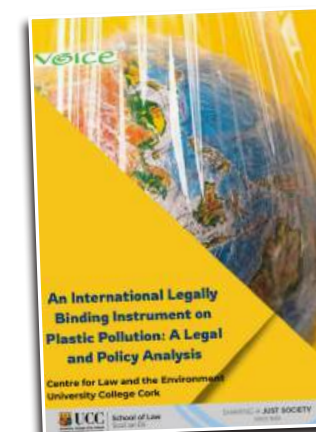


Colin O'Byrne
Project and Policy Lead



REPORTS

These three reports released in July, by Solene Schirrer are part of the National Recycling Bin Survey (see page 8). It's second year running, we were able to build on the success of last year and add two very important elements; a supermarket basket price and packaging comparison and a detailed look at what is happening legislatively in France.



An International Legally Binding Instrument on Plastic Production: A legal Analysis and Policy Analysis written for VOICE by Master Students at the Centre for Law and the Environment in University College Cork. In the run up to this year's Treaty Negotiations our report on the ILBI negotiations, written by Environmental Law students at University College Cork, gives deep insight into how the treaty has developed and where it still falls short and recommendations on how it can be improved by negotiators.



VOICE estimates that following current trends, Ireland is in significant danger of failing to achieve targets for packaging waste as set out in the PPWR, on track for a 64% increase by 2040 rather than the targeted 15% decrease, 98% of people we surveyed are frustrated with the quantity of waste that needs to be segregated, while the EPA has highlighted increasing levels of contamination in bins, and decreasing recycling rates over the last 5 years, warning of impending missed municipal and packaging recycling targets.



Post Brexit, we believe it is timely to examine this area of regulation (which is based on UK standards) and align with EU methodology. We, at VOICE, call for the department to follow option 2 as outlined in the call; Repeal the Irish Furniture Fire Regulations, and Rely on the General Product Safety Regulation. We do this for three reasons; a) more sustainable design, b) reduces conflicting regs and c) due to the adverse effects, and questionable effectiveness of many of the existing flame retardants and testing regime used in the UK.

2025 ACHIEVEMENTS



20,000 new users worldwide have visited our Fabric of Change Website to learn about and/or act against fast fashion.



Developed a comprehensive **FREE Training Manual** for youth leaders focused on menstruation, empowerment, and sustainability.



We have a **FREE Food Waste Reduction Toolkit**, available on the VOICE website, to empower other towns, villages, and communities to reduce food waste.



90% of participants in our Cloth Nappy Scheme stated that they are likely to continue using cloth nappies.



921,538kg of waste removed to date through our Picker Pals Programme.



Colin O' Byrne
Project Lead

WORKING WITH BUSINESS: Lunch & Learns and Waste Audits

Lunch & Learns:

It has been another busy year for our **Lunch & Learn** workshops. In offices and places of work up and down the country, businesses are dealing with more and more waste (as evidenced by VOICE's National Recycling Bin Survey), even as they make greater efforts to segregate their waste properly. The simple truth is that, although most people want to use the different bins properly, it can be very confusing. Mistakes are made.

The issue is that when these mistakes are left unaddressed, they become habits, and habits left unchecked rarely change. What does that look like? People putting plastic soup containers into recycling bin, without giving them a clean and shake first! Putting a single-use coffee cup into the recycling bin, but it still has some coffee in the bottom. Again, half right!

This is where the Lunch & Learn workshops come into their own. VOICE has developed them in such a way as to be informal yet informative. Participants come away from these workshops better informed about waste management at home and in the office. It's a lunchtime well spent!



Colin during Lunch & Learns and/or Waste Audits

Waste Audits:

Another option that businesses are increasingly looking to engage with is our **Waste Audit**. Going by the mantra that you can't manage that which you don't measure, VOICE's Waste Audit is an incredibly effective tool for unearthing data that, otherwise, is literally going to waste.

A cursory glance into a bin will give you some idea of whether or not people are using it correctly at that point in time. A full waste audit, however, allows us to examine, in detail, all the waste a business has produced over the course of three days. By doing so, we can characterise the behaviour of a workplace in how successfully or otherwise it segregates its waste in the respective bins.

We can literally see whether or not people are using the bins properly. With this knowledge to hand, we develop a report for the company which outlines the details of our audit, discusses the findings of our visual inspection of canteens, kitchenettes and other shared areas, and finally presents a suite of recommendations to address the issues which are specific to that company.



VOICE wants to see impact, we want to help people and businesses make and sustain positive change. Therefore, we always suggest that companies engage us to carry out a second (sometime a third) audit 8 - 12 months later. By doing so, they keep the pressure on themselves to improve waste management on-site, with our Waste Audit determining the success or otherwise of their subsequent actions.

List of just some of the Logos from different companies availing of our Waste Audits and/or Lunch & Learns this year:



A message of thanks 2025 a year of change!



Pictured left to right; Leonard, Aileen, Abi, Allison, Solene, Colin and Tad (Missing; Lyndsey, Gary and Sandra).

As the year draws to a close, we all naturally reflect on the year gone by. And as I read through these pages, I can't help but reflect on all the work that we (that includes you, our supporters) have achieved together. Looking ahead, Ireland has a great opportunity to be a leader once again in Europe, with the presidency of the EU falling to us, and as we expect the next Circular Economy Act in the EU to come to the table.

From all of the VOICE team and me (Tad), we want to say thank you for your continued support and to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Peaceful New Year filled with hope, change, and the continued joy of making a positive impact.

A heartfelt thank you to all of our amazing volunteers and interns this year! Griffin Thompson and the students of the Environmental Law

Clinic in UCC: Cathy McFadden, Feriha Beyza Eryavuz, Lobsang Tabatabai-Asbaghi, Siqi Li, Srijita Chakraborty, Tayla Diana Cox, Treasa Maria Thomas. We are so lucky to have had such dedicated, passionate people by our side.'

Warm regards,
The VOICE Team x

WASTE FREE CHRISTMAS TIPS

Gary's Waste Free Christmas Tip

"My top tip for a waste-free Christmas is to host a Christmas Jumper or Decoration Swap with your friends or neighbours! It's a brilliant way to give old jumpers and decorations a new home while keeping things festive and fun. You get that 'new' Christmas feeling without spending a cent or creating extra waste. Since we are all getting together over December this is a great way to see people and have fun!"



Gary with a new tree decoration swapped at last years get together.

Abi's Waste Free Christmas Tip

"I believe that, for most adults, we already have what we truly need. Many gifts end up being symbolic rather than meaningful, so choosing to donate to charity instead can make a far more lasting and appreciated impact."

Lyndsey's Waste Free Christmas Tip

"One of my favourite traditions is making our own wreaths and decorations using natural materials from the garden. This time of year, many of us are trimming hedges, ivy, and bushes - and those offcuts are perfect for festive crafting! We gather fallen branches, pine cones, and conkers, lay everything out on newspaper, and slowly build a wreath together. I use twigs to form the base, layer on greenery, and tie it all with natural twine. Every year, our wreath looks a little different, and when the holidays are over, it all goes straight into the compost bin. It's creative, waste-free, and a wonderful way to spend time with kids/family/friends/cats!"



Expert Wreath Makers; Lyndsey with her twin daughters Jane and Martha.

Solene's Waste Free Christmas Tip

"My top tip for a waste-free winter holiday is to move away from physical gifts. I've started giving and asking for experiences instead, like event tickets or memberships to cultural centres. I also love supporting innovative ideas that promote circular living, such as a Change Clothes membership, which lets you swap outfits all year long. It's a great way to keep things fresh while reducing waste and rethinking how we consume."



Solene is sick of all the packaging waste this time of year!

TOGETHER WE ARE ELIMINATING WASTE IN IRELAND

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