

Methodological summary on carrier bags data

31 July 2025

Summary

The period 7 April 2024 to 6 April 2025 is the ninth year of reporting for the data on single-use plastic carrier bags in England. An initial report was published in July 2016, which covered only a 6-month period from October 2015 to 6 April 2016. In July 2017, the first full financial year of data for April 2016 to April 2017 was published. This was followed in subsequent years (from 2017 to 2018 through to 2023 to 2024) with annual releases in July of each year (from 2018 through to 2024).

For the 2024 to 2025 reporting period, a total of 102 retailers provided data to Defra on single-use plastic carrier bags. They are required to report some of the information (number of single-use carrier bags sold under the charge, gross proceeds, any costs incurred and the use of the net proceeds), but reporting other, additional information is voluntary (amounts donated and the type of good causes in receipt of any donations plus information on the number of paper bags, bags for life or fabric bags issued). Not all retailers have provided the additional voluntary information; some have noted that they do not collect this.

It is important to note that the data for 2020 to 2021 cannot be directly compared with other years, due to unique circumstances related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Data for 2022 to 2023, and 2023 to 2024 have been updated to correct an error in the figures previously submitted by The Co-operative Group and to incorporate revised figures for Marks and Spencer. Incorporating this data has increased the total number of bags sold from 406 million to 434 million for 2022 to 2023, and from 340 million to 407 million for 2023 to 2024.

Data collection and reporting

Large retailers (those with 250 or more full-time equivalent employees) are expected to submit data for each reporting period (7 April to 6 April) on a central reporting website by 31 May of each year. Retailers can be fined if they don't submit records on time. Data for 2024 to 2025 was collected via an online survey tool, which included automatic calculations for some fields to assist in data entry.

In addition, retailers were asked to provide any additional information that might help with data validation. Some retailers provided information on their methods of data collection and any quality assurance carried out. For those retailers that provided this information, they recorded that their data came from information collected from their till transactions or electronic points of sale and were verified through their own internal management systems.

We asked retailers to specify whether they were a large retailer and so mandated to provide information on their single-use carrier bag sales or a smaller retailer providing information on a voluntary basis.

Data quality

We have undertaken checks and testing on the central reporting website used by retailers and carried out basic quality assurance of the data received. These have included checking for consistency, outliers and data errors in relation to charge per bag, gross proceeds, number of bags, amount of VAT recorded, costs incurred and net proceeds. We have also worked with some retailers to resolve data issues and errors to ensure this is as robust as possible. We will continue to keep the guidance and reporting website under review and consider any further feedback received from retailers.

Some specific notes on the data include the following:

- The minimum price per bag for the 2024 to 2025 reporting period was 10 pence, though some retailers charge more than 10 pence per bag and in some cases may use different rates where they sell different types or sizes of bags.
- Some retailers have chosen to donate the full gross proceeds to good causes – the amount donated to charity will therefore be larger than the net proceeds. Some retailers have also made additional donations.
- The standard VAT rate is 20% but retailers have the option to enter their own figures; in some cases, the retailer has a different rate.

For the 2024 to 2025 reporting year:

- 3 retailers provided data in 2024 to 2025 who had not in 2023 to 2024, 1 of these had provided data for the first time. These 3 retailers account for 0.3% of the total number of single-use bags reported for 2024 to 2025
- 9 retailers who submitted data for 2023 to 2024 did not respond or report data for 2024 to 2025. In 2023 to 2024, these retailers accounted for 0.5% of the total number of single-use bags
- 5 retailers not reporting in 2024 to 2025 notified us that they have stopped issuing single-use plastic carrier bags and are therefore no longer obligated to report data. These retailers accounted for 0.2% of the single-use bags sold in 2023 to 2024

Data coverage

The data coverage is for large retail businesses with 250 or more full-time equivalent employees in England. Retailers who fall within the scope of the carrier bag charge are [required to report their single-use carrier bag data](#).

They are not required to report on carrier bag use if they:

- do not distribute bags within the definition of single-use plastic carrier bags

- only distribute paper bags
- only sell bags for life, that is, bags which are thicker than 70 microns (these are exempt from the charge)
- are small and medium-sized businesses with less than 250 full-time equivalent employees

A total of 102 retailers reported single-use carrier bags data for 2024 to 2025, with 2 of these retailers reporting data on a voluntary basis.

It is possible that for some of the retailers, including those with 250 or more full-time equivalent employees and reporting on a mandatory basis, that the retail element may be a small part of the overall business, so the number of single carrier bags sold may be relatively low in comparison to others where the retail element is a much more significant part of the business.

Direct comparison of data

A direct comparison between the total number of bags reported in 2024 to 2025 and 2023 to 2024 is not appropriate due to the differences in retailers submitted, as detailed above. It is more appropriate to compare the 99 retailers who reported data for both of these periods, and to compare data reported by the main retailers (Asda, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Co-operative Group and Waitrose). Although it should be noted that two of the main retailers (Tesco and Waitrose) reported not selling any single-use carrier bags from 2022 to 2023 onwards.

Also note that data on donations is provided voluntarily. In 2024 to 2025, this information was provided by 32 (31%) retailers. For 2023 to 2024, it was provided by 40 (35%) retailers. The headline figures on donations are therefore not directly comparable. This is particularly the case where any of the main retailers have decided not to provide this information.

Additionally, the sale of single-use carrier bags may vary over the course of a year due to various reasons including seasonality of sales, and therefore, a direct comparison of the data for 2024 to 2025 or for 2015 to 2016 (the initial six months) to previous full years' data is **not** appropriate.

Access to data

The full single-use plastic carrier bags dataset detailing the information provided by each retailer can be downloaded from data.gov.uk.

Feedback

We are always interested in feedback from users on any aspect of the carrier bags report and data in general. In particular, we would welcome hearing about what users do with the results and data. Comments may be sent to the Carrier bags team using the following contact details:

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