

Methodological summary on single-use carrier bags data

July 2026

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1. Summary

The period 7 April 2025 to 6 April 2026 is the tenth 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 2024 to 2025) with annual releases in July of each year (from 2018 through to 2025). Reports for the period 2020 to 2021 onwards can be found on the [Carrier bag charge: summary of data in England - GOV.UK](#) landing page.

For the 2025 to 2026 reporting period, a total of 94 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.

2. Data collection and reporting

Since 5 October 2015, large retailers (those with 250 or more full-time equivalent employees) in England have been required by law to charge customers for all single-use plastic carrier bags given out. This charge was originally set at 5 pence per bag. Large retailers are also required to report certain information to Defra, including:

- the number of single-use carrier bags sold under the charge
- the gross proceeds
- any costs incurred
- the use of the net proceeds

Retailers can provide additional information on donations and bags for life on a voluntary basis.

From 21 May 2021, the charge for single-use plastic carrier bags was raised to 10 pence and extended to all businesses, though the reporting requirements continued to apply to large retailers only.

Retailers who fall within the scope of the carrier bag charge are expected to submit their 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 do not submit records on time. Data for 2025 to 2026 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.

3. 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 include checking for consistency, outliers and data errors in relation to the 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 their data is as robust as possible. However, the data is self-reported, and we have no way of externally verifying that all in-scope retailers have submitted their data. We can check that retailers who have previously reported data have done so again in the current year, but we cannot establish whether newly in-scope retailers have reported for the first time. Moreover, we

cannot check that the data reported reflects the actual numbers of bags sold or distributed by a particular retailer.

Large retailers are required to submit their single-use carrier bag data, but others chose to do so voluntarily, so the sample population can vary between years. Therefore, direct year-on-year comparisons of annual totals is not appropriate – see section 5 on the direct comparison of data.

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 2025 to 2026 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 2025 to 2026 reporting year:

- 7 retailers provided data in 2025 to 2026 who had not in 2024 to 2025, 2 of these had provided data for the first time, and one was a merger of 3 existing companies reporting under a new name. These 7 retailers account for 1.6% of the total number of single-use bags reported for 2025 to 2026.
- 17 retailers who submitted data for 2024 to 2025 did not respond or report data for 2025 to 2026. In 2024 to 2025, these retailers accounted for 4.6% of the total number of single-use bags.
- 10 retailers not reporting in 2025 to 2026 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 2.7% of the single-use bags sold in 2025 to 2026.

4. Data coverage

The data coverage is mainly 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](#).

Retailers 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, although some report their data voluntarily

A total of 94 retailers reported single-use carrier bags data for 2025 to 2026, 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-use carrier bags sold may be relatively low in comparison to others where the retail element is a much more significant part of the business.

5. Direct comparison of data

A direct comparison between the total number of bags reported in 2025 to 2026 and 2024 to 2025 is not appropriate due to the differences in retailers submitting data, as detailed above. It is more appropriate to compare the results for the 87 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, and Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury's reported not selling any carrier bags in 2025 to 2026.

Also note that data on donations is provided voluntarily by a subset of the retailers that may change from one year to the next. Therefore, figures on donations are likely to be an underestimation of the true total, and annual totals are also not directly comparable across years. This is particularly the case where any of the main retailers have decided not to provide this additional information. In 2025 to 2026, voluntary data on donations was provided by 30 (32%) retailers who together accounted for 91% of all reported single-use carrier bag sales. The three main retailers who sold bags in the year (Asda, Morrisons and The Co-Operative) all reported this information. For 2024 to 2025, data on donations was provided by 33 (32%) retailers who together accounted for 90% of all reported bag sales. However, two of the main retailers, Asda and Sainsbury's (who sold single-use carrier bags in 2024 to 2025) did not report 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 2025 to 2026 or for 2015 to 2016 (the initial six months) to previous full years' data is **not** appropriate.

6. 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.

7. 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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