Waste management country profile

with a focus on municipal and packaging waste

Ireland

March 2025

© European Environment Agency

European Environment Agency

Key messages

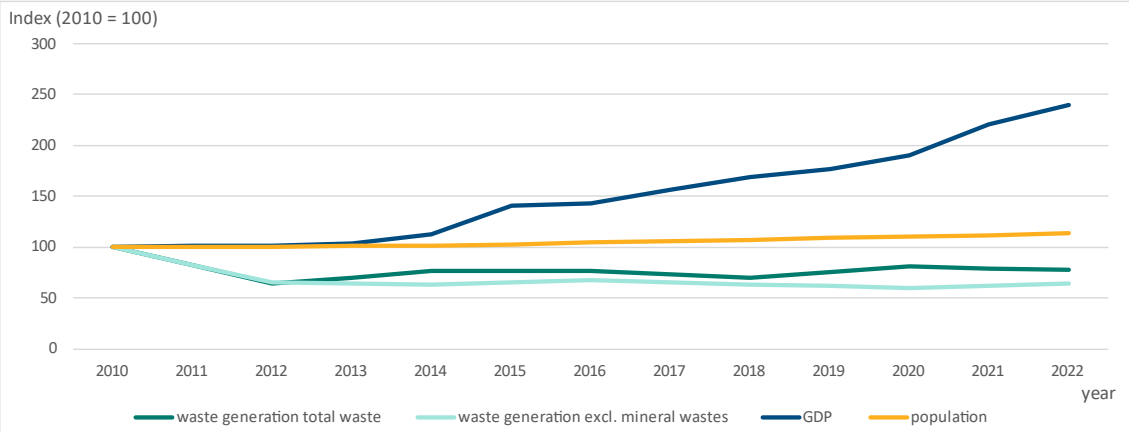
- Ireland's GDP significantly grew over the last 10 years while total waste generation decreased in 2012 and only slightly increased thereafter, indicating a decoupling of waste generation from economic development.
- Ireland's rate of preparing for reuse and recycling of municipal waste has stagnated since 2010, which puts the country at risk of not meeting the 2025 preparing for reuse and recycling targets. Landfill rates have decreased, getting closer to the 2035 target, although with signs of stagnation since 2019 and due to the diversion of waste to incineration with energy recovery.
- Increasing packaging waste generation volumes and decreasing recycling rates of total packaging as well as some packaging fractions point to the need to improve separate collection systems and waste prevention.
- The country also needs to further foster the diversion of reusable products and recyclable waste from landfilling and incineration. The impact of the recently introduced waste recovery levy which aims to incentivise segregation of waste for recycling remains to be seen.

Trends in waste generation and treatment

Total waste generation

The total amount of waste generated in Ireland decreased from 2010 to 2012 but then remained rather stable, slightly increasing from 2018 onwards for total waste and stagnating when excluding major mineral wastes (Figure 1). Ireland's GDP has significantly grown over the last 10 years, especially since 2013, while waste generation decreased in 2012 and stabilised thereafter, indicating a decoupling of waste generation from economic development. However, the Gross National Income (GNI) might better reflect the actual economic activity in Ireland as it excludes the incomes sent to or received from abroad, which are considerable. However, the (corrected) GNI also increased between 2010 and 2022, by 44%, but less than GDP (Central Statistics Office of Ireland, 2024).

Figure 1 Generation of waste (total and excluding major mineral wastes), population and economic development, 2010-2020



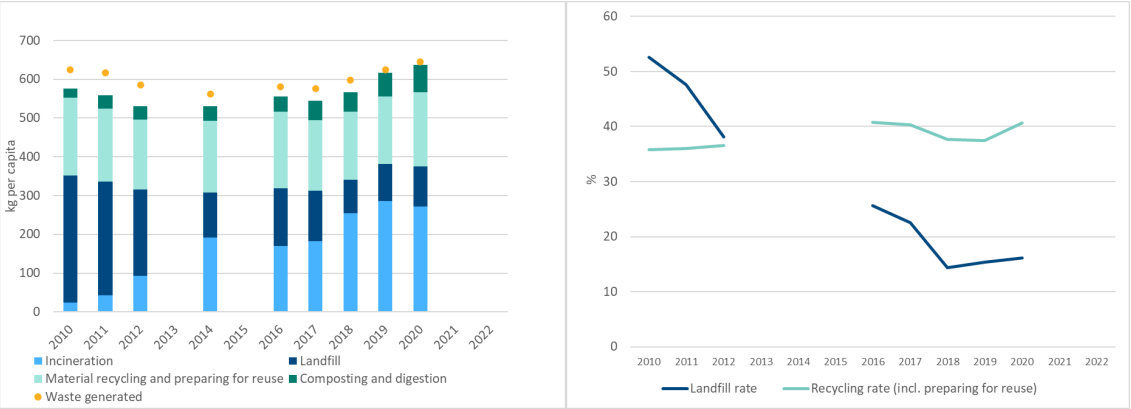
Source: Eurostat (2024b, 2024a, 2024f)

Note: Waste generation data for odd years are interpolated.

Municipal waste

After a decline between 2010 and 2012, Irish municipal waste generation per capita showed an increase between 2014 and 2020 (Figure 2, left). Waste composition analysis done in 2018 and 2022 indicate that the increase is mainly due to growth in packaging waste (EPA Ireland, 2024). In 2020, Ireland generated 644 kg/cap of municipal waste, which is significantly above the (estimated) EU-27 average of 520 kg/cap in the same year.

Figure 2 Municipal waste management (left) and rates of recycling (incl. preparing for reuse) and landfill (right), 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat (2024d)

Note: There is a break in series in 2020. There are no data available for 2013, 2015, 2021, and 2022. As of the reference year 2020, new reporting rules apply for calculating recycled municipal waste pursuant to the targets laid down in Article 11.2(c-e) of Directive 2008/98/EC. Ireland has applied the new reporting rules for the reference year 2020 and onwards, which led to the break in series in 2020.

The rate of preparing for reuse and recycling of municipal waste shows a stagnating trend in Ireland (Figure 2, top right), around 41% in 2020, which is slightly below the EU-27 average (48%) in the same year.

According to the Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the rate of preparing for reuse and recycling calculated according to the reporting rules related to the 2025 preparing for reuse and recycling target (as defined in Commission Implementing Decision 2019/1004) was 41% in 2020 and it stayed the same in 2021. When adjusted to the previous rules that were applied for 2019, the recycling rate was calculated at 39%, i.e. an increase of 2 percentage points between 2019 and 2020. (EPA Ireland, 2024)

Ireland's landfill rate steadily decreased between 2010 and 2018 (16%) and remained stable afterwards. This decrement corresponds almost entirely to the diversion of waste to incineration (ETC/CE, 2022), where the incineration rate in Ireland has increased significantly over the past years, reaching 42% in 2020. According to information provided by the Irish EPA, the recycling rate in 2021 remained at the same level as in 2020 (EPA Ireland, 2024).

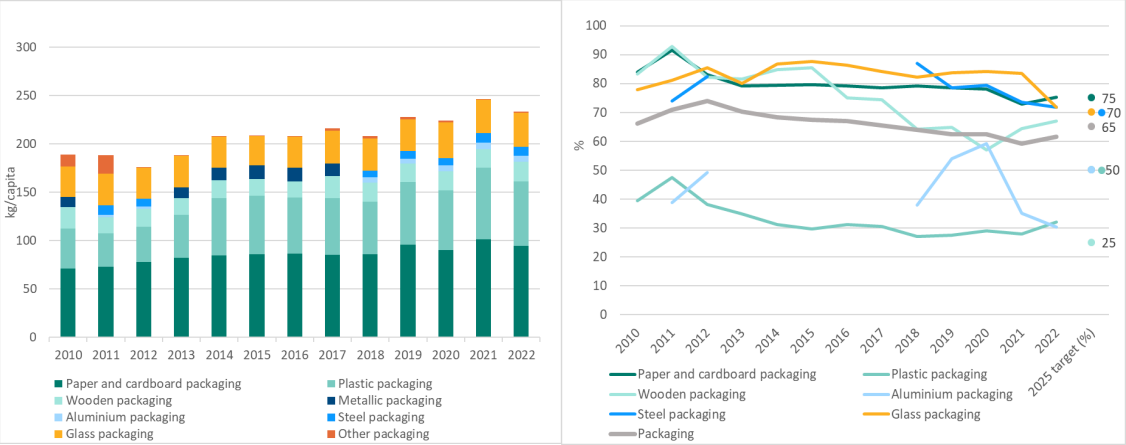
The data shown in Figure 2 might differ from the data reported by the Irish authorities to show compliance with the preparing for reuse and recycling target of 55% to be met by 2025, as laid down in the Waste Framework Directive. Ireland reported a (provisional) preparing for reuse

and recycling rate in response to the target of above 40% for the reference year 2021 while such data are not yet available for the reference year 2022 (Eurostat, 2024c).

Packaging waste

Packaging waste generation in Ireland significantly increased from 189 kg/cap in 2010 to 234 kg/cap in 2022. This is significantly above the (estimated) EU-27 average of 186 kg/cap in the same year ([1]). Plastic and paper and cardboard packaging were the biggest fractions, and the ones growing the most.

Figure 3 Packaging waste generation (left) and recycling rates (right), 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat (2024e)

Note: There is a break in series for plastic and paper and cardboard packaging recycling rates in 2019. As of the reference year 2020, the rules for calculating recycled packaging waste have changed, pursuant to Article 6a of Directive 94/62/EC. Ireland has applied the new calculation rules since the reference year 2019 (Eurostat, 2022).

Ireland's overall packaging waste recycling rate decreased by 4 percentage points between 2010 and 2022, however, the decrease in 2019 is likely due to the application of the new and stricter calculation rules related to the 2025 targets, and due to an increase in packaging waste generation without recycling keeping up with this growth. The recycling rate was 62% in 2022, indicating a trend change compared to 2021. The distribution of the material categories in packaging waste has varied considerably over the last 12 years. The overall Irish packaging waste recycling rate is mainly driven by paper and cardboard, as well as plastic. The recycling rates of both packaging waste fractions moderately decreased compared to 2010. In 2022, the recycling rates of plastic and aluminium packaging waste were below the 2025 targets, while they were above the targets for paper and cardboard, glass, steel and wooden packaging.

([1]) The EU-27 average might be influenced by the situation that not all Member States already fully apply the reporting rules for packaging waste as defined in the Commission Implementing Decision 2019/665.

Policies in place to encourage waste prevention measures and to increase recycling

Legislative framework and waste management plans

Ireland's main legislative framework in the area of waste is the Waste Management Act 1996 and the Environmental Protection Act 2003 with their amendments, complemented with various waste-related regulations.

Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020–2025, 'A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy' (Government of Ireland, 2020) provides a roadmap of measures for Ireland transitioning to a circular economy. Key measures are to introduce a waste recovery levy to encourage recycling (which entered into force in September 2023) and to ensure all packaging is reusable or recyclable by 2030. In addition, in 2021, Ireland set its first 'Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023. Living More, Using Less' (Government of Ireland, 2021) with the aim of setting a course for the country to transition towards circularity across all sectors and at all levels of government.

The National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy 2024-2030 was published in March 2024 (Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, 2024).

Waste prevention policies

The 'Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy' initiated the reconfiguration of the National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) into the strategic Circular Economy Programme (CEP), and since 2021, Irelands' NWPP is integrated into the CEP 2021-2027 (EPA Ireland, 2021). The vision for the programme is an Ireland where the circular economy ensures that everyone uses less resources and prevents waste to achieve sustainable economic growth. No financial budget for the implementation of the NWPP is specified (EEA, 2023b).

The current CEP has four pillars: Advocacy, insights, data & coordination (including production of national statistics and behavioural insights research); Innovation and demonstration (including funding initiatives that develop and showcase best practices); Delivering through partnerships (collaborating with other national organisations); and Regulatory framework for circularity (waste sector licensing, responsible for end-of-waste and by-products regulation). The priority focus areas are aligned to the seven priority focus areas of the EU Green Deal. (Government of Ireland, 2021; EEA, 2023b)

Ireland's National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy, which was produced by the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, also supports waste prevention activities. The current Plan, published in 2024, has established quantitative targets related to waste prevention (EEA, 2023b):

- 1% reduction per capita and per year for the quantity of household waste,
- 50% reduction in food waste by 2030, and
- a reuse target of 20kg/cap/year.

The Irish Government published the National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025 in November 2022 (Government of Ireland, 2022b), to support Ireland's commitment to UN SDG 12.3. The Roadmap sets out key actions, timelines, and lead and supporting organisations to

reduce food waste. The consumer-facing National Food Waste Prevention Programme is 'Stop Food Waste'. There is a voluntary agreement initiative for the food & drink supply chain: the 'Food Waste Charter' in which food & drink businesses pledge to reduce their food waste through measuring, setting an evidence-based reduction target, and annual reporting. The EPA also leads the 'Forum on Food Waste' that brings together actors from the food and beverage sectors in Ireland to discuss challenges and issues related to food losses and food waste in the food supply chain. (Government of Ireland, 2023b; EEA, 2023b)

Ireland is regularly tracking the progress of the implementation of current waste prevention programmes in its Circular Economy Programme annual reports, including insights on waste prevention measures implemented (EPA, 2024). The EPA also publishes an annual Circular Economy and Waste Statistics Highlights Report (EPA Ireland, 2023).

According to 2021 data reported to the EEA according to Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/19 (EEA, 2024), Ireland reused:

- 3771 tonnes of textiles,
- 16778 tonnes of electrical and electronic devices, and
- 14915 tonnes of furniture

It should be noted that these data have been reported for the first time. As the reporting process matures, it is expected that these data will strengthen but for now, caution is advised in drawing insights from the dataset. More information about the interpretation and limitations of the dataset is available (EEA, 2024).

Policies to encourage separate collection and recycling

Paper and cardboard, plastics, metals and composite packaging are usually collected door-to-door (kerbside collection) and co-mingled, and packaging and non-packaging are collected together. Glass is mostly collected at bring points (including at local authority managed recycling centres). Bio-waste is also collected door-to-door. From 1 January 2024 onwards, all waste collectors are obliged to provide all their household customers with a food and garden waste collection service (Government of Ireland, 2023a), and from 1 July 2023, all waste collection companies are required to provide a 3-bin system (residual, mixed dry recyclables and bio-waste bin) to all their commercial customers as well (Government of Ireland, 2023c). From September 2022, there has been a policy change in that soft plastics were added as a target material for the kerbside household and commercial recycling bin (previously they had been directed to be placed into the residual bin). In addition, in the whole country, all material fractions can be dropped off at a civic amenity site. The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy 2020-2025 includes measures to improve waste sorting at source in high-rise buildings. The Food Waste Recycling Working Group established actions to improve household food waste segregation and awareness (ETC/CE, 2022). The National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025 incorporates existing national activities on food waste, including food waste segregation.

In Ireland, all households are covered by pay-as-you-throw charging systems (ETC/CE, 2022). Ireland removed flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection in 2018, and household waste collectors are now obliged to apply pricing structures for residual waste collection that contain a weight-based and/or per-lift fee (EEA, 2023a). Moreover, the fees for the collection of recyclables, food waste and bio-waste should be lower than those for the residual household waste. A Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group monitors the implementation of

the pay-as-you-throw systems (ETC/CE, 2022). Incentivised waste collection charging obligations for the commercial sector came into effect in July 2023, with the aim of increasing the segregation of recyclable materials (Government of Ireland, 2023c).

Regarding packaging taxes, Ireland has a national levy of EUR 0.22 per plastic bag, which however has not had an impact on reducing total packaging waste generation. The Circular Economy Act 2022 enables the activation of a range of measures envisaged in the legislation, such as levies and bans on a range of single-use items. Levies and bans will be implemented through secondary legislation with the initial focus on the introduction of environmental levies to single-use disposable cups for hot beverage drinks. Draft regulations were published in 2022 and subjected to public consultation but the levy is not yet in place (Government of Ireland, 2022a).

On 1 February 2024, Ireland's deposit-return scheme (DRS) for aluminium/steel beverage cans and PET plastic beverage bottles went live.

Local government has a statutory role in waste management and leads national communication campaigns regarding waste management/waste segregation. The Regional Waste Management Planning Offices develop and manage MyWaste.ie as Ireland's official guide for waste management, with information for citizens and businesses.

Repak is the Producer Responsibility Organisation (PRO) within the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system for household, commercial and industrial packaging in Ireland (ETC/CE, 2022). Repak has introduced a fee modulation for all packaging based on recyclability criteria (Repak, 2024). It has also developed a packaging design guide to provide insights into the impact of the design on recycling processes and to support its members in improving packaging recyclability. This corresponds to the European Commission's recommendations to introduce new policy and economic instruments to make reuse and recycling more economically attractive (EC, 2022).

Policies and instruments to discourage landfilling or incineration

Ireland's landfill levy is currently EUR 85 per tonne of waste, which is considerably higher than the average of landfill taxes applied across EU-27 Member States (EUR 39-46 per tonne). Waste arising from the biological treatment of the biodegradable fraction of municipal waste is exempted from the tax. There is no ban on the landfilling of residual municipal waste or biodegradable waste in place (EEA, 2023a). However, Ireland has committed to ban textiles from the general waste bin, landfills, and incineration (EEA, 2023a).

The Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy commits Ireland to introduce a waste recovery levy at EUR 5 per tonne, to be applied to recovery operations at municipal solid waste landfills, waste-to-energy plants and co-incineration plants and to the export of municipal waste. This levy was enacted in 2022 under the Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022. As committed to under the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, the existing landfill levy was increased to EUR 85 per tonne and a separate new levy of EUR 10 per tonne was introduced, applying to recovery operations at municipal solid waste (MSW) landfills, waste-to-energy plants and co-incineration plants and to the export of MSW for same. These measures have been in place since September 2023. (Government of Ireland, 2023d) There is an exemption in place for recovery of construction and demolition material, however, this exemption will be phased out in 2026. (EPA Ireland, 2024)

Prospects for meeting the targets on recycling and landfilling

In 2020, Ireland's municipal waste preparing for reuse and recycling rate was 14 percentage points below the 2025 target for preparing for reuse and recycling. Provisional data reported for showing compliance with the 2025 target indicated a recycling rate above 40% (Eurostat, 2024c). Based on these data, Ireland must speed up its progress towards reaching the target, e.g. by making separate collection more effective as recommended in the European Commission's Environmental Implementation review (EC, 2022). Moreover, attention is needed towards increasing the recycling of plastics and aluminium packaging waste, as well as total packaging waste. Finally, according to the data shown in Figure 2, it seems that Ireland could reach the 2035 landfill target if its decreasing landfill rate trend continues.

Consequently, the European Commission issued a number of policy recommendations to improve Ireland's waste management performance (EC, 2023):

- Support preparing for the reuse of municipal waste and reuse systems for packaging.
- Improve separate collection of municipal bio-waste to increase capture rates, prioritising door-to-door collection and promoting high-quality bio-waste to maximise potential for recovery.
- Further develop waste treatment infrastructure associated with the higher steps of the waste hierarchy, including increasing the capacity for treating bio-waste and supporting home composting.
- Implement economic instruments, such as incineration taxes, to incentivise recycling and reduce dependency on waste incineration.

References

Central Statistics Office of Ireland, 2024, 'Modified GNI' (https://www.cso.ie/en/interactivezone/statisticsexplained/nationalaccountsexplained/modifiedgni/) accessed 17 October 2024.

EC, 2022, *Environmental Implementation Review 2022 Country Report-IRELAND*, No SWD/2022/260 final, Directorate-General Environment (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0260).

EC, 2023, *The early warning report for Ireland*, COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT No SWD (2023) 181 final (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=SWD%3A2023%3A181%3AFIN) accessed 7 December 2023.

EEA, 2023a, *Technical note accompanying the EEA briefing 'Economic instruments and separate collection – key instruments to increase recycling' — European Environment Agency*, File (https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/economic-instruments-and-separate-collection/technical-note-accompanying-the-eea/view) accessed 18 January 2024.

EEA, 2023b, *Waste Prevention Country Profile - Ireland*, EEA (https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/waste/waste-prevention/countries/2023-waste-prevention-country-fact-sheets/ireland_waste_prevention_2023) accessed 15 December 2023.

EEA, 2024, *Reuse flows according to the implementing decision (EU) 2021/19 Information on the database structure and use*, No Database version 1, European Environment Agency (EEA)

(https://sdi.eea.europa.eu/catalogue/srv/api/records/50b2430b-8218-471c-86ea-65236a870a28/attachments/Reuse%20metadata%20annex%20Version%201.pdf) accessed 5 March 2024.

EPA, 2024, *Circular Economy Programme Annual Report for 2023*, Irish Environmental Protection Agency (https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/national-waste-statistics/EPA-Circular-Economy-and-Waste-Statistics-Highlights-Report-2021-Printable.pdf) accessed 16 July 2024.

EPA Ireland, 2021, *The Circular Economy Programme 2021-2027*, EPA Ireland (https://www.epa.ie/publications/circular-economy/resources/EPA_Circular_Economy_2021_Programme_Apr22_Web.pdf) accessed 15 March 2023.

EPA Ireland, 2023, *Circular Economy and Waste Statistics Highlights Report* (https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/waste/national-waste-statistics/EPA-Circular-Economy-and-Waste-Statistics-Highlights-Report-2021-Printable.pdf) accessed 29 April 2024.

EPA Ireland, 2024, Information provided during the Eionet review of the draft EEA country profile on waste management for Ireland, Environmental Protection Agency (Ireland).

ETC/CE, 2022, *Ireland-Early Warning Assessment Related to the 2025 Targets for Municipal and Packaging Waste*, European Environment Agency (EEA) (https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/many-eu-member-states/ireland/view).

Eurostat, 2022, *Country-specific notes referring to data on Packaging and Packaging Waste, 13/07/2022* (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/342366/13429143/Country+specific+notes+for+packaging+and+packaging+waste.pdf/59ea2d73-3416-b40b-1771-2eb33e0b8486?t=1648204996107) accessed 24 May 2024.

Eurostat, 2024a, 'GDP and main components (output, expenditure and income) [nama_10_gdp]' (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama_10_gdp__custom_9301905/default/table) accessed 15 October 2024.

Eurostat, 2024b, 'Generation of waste by waste category, hazardousness and NACE Rev. 2 activity (env_wasgen)' (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_wasgen/default/table?lang=en) accessed 22 October 2024.

Eurostat, 2024c, Information provided by Eurostat on provisional data in response to the reporting obligation in Art. 37(1) Waste Framework Directive related to the target on the preparing for reuse and recycling for municipal waste (Art. 11(2c)).

Eurostat, 2024d, 'Municipal waste by waste operations [env_wasmun]' (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASMUN/default/table) accessed 22 October 2024.

Eurostat, 2024e, 'Packaging waste by waste management operations (env_waspac)' (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ENV_WASPAC__custom_842634/default/table?lang=en) accessed 28 October 2024.

Eurostat, 2024f, 'Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level [demo_grind]' (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/demo_gind__custom_9301558/default/table) accessed 15 October 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2020, *A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy. Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025* (https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/86647/dcf554a4-0fb7-4d9c-9714-0b1fbe7dbc1a.pdf#page=null) accessed 16 October 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2021, *Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022 – 2023 'Living More, Using Less'* (https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/207622/bd90130d-494e-4d32-8757-46d36c77b912.pdf#page=null) accessed 16 October 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2022a, *Consultation on draft regulations to introduce an environmental levy on single-use disposable cups* (https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/7fb23-consultation-on-draft-regulations-to-introduce-an-environmental-levy-on-single-use-disposable-cups/) accessed 17 October 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2022b, *Ireland's National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025* (https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/824c3-national-food-waste-prevention-roadmap-2023-2025/).

Government of Ireland, 2023a, 'Brown bins to be rolled out to all households in Ireland, Press release, 21 December 2023' (https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/ccc12-brown-bins-to-be-rolled-out-to-all-households-in-ireland/) accessed 17 October 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2023b, *Food waste charter* (https://foodwastecharter.ie/) accessed 29 April 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2023c, *Introduction of incentivised waste collection charges will increase sustainability in the commercial sector, press release 20 March 2023* (https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/6b4cd-introduction-of-incentivised-waste-collection-charges-will-increase-sustainability-in-the-commercial-sector/) accessed 17 October 2024.

Government of Ireland, 2023d, *Introduction of new environment levies will incentivise recycling and help Ireland meet our EU waste targets, Press release 10 August 2023* (https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/75262-introduction-of-new-environment-levies-will-incentivise-recycling-and-help-ireland-meet-our-eu-waste-targets/) accessed 17 October 2024.

Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, 2024, 'National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy 2024-2030' (https://mywaste.ie/sustainability/circular-living/national-waste-management-plan-for-a-circular-economy-2024-2030/) accessed 16 October 2024.

Repak, 2024, 'Members Benefits' (https://repak.ie/members/benefits/) accessed 17 October 2024.