



CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME

Annual Report
for 2023

The Driving Force for Ireland's
Move to a Circular Economy



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

FOREWORD

The EPA-led Circular Economy Programme is a key enabler to support the Government's policy ambitions in relation to circular economy implementation.

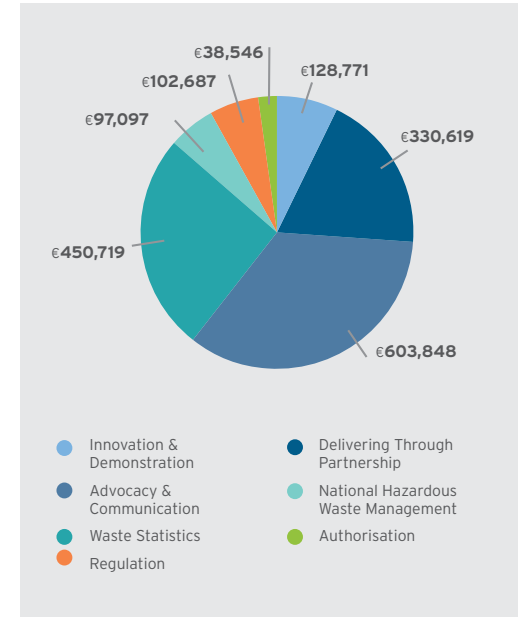
In 2023, the Circular Economy Programme delivered a diverse range of activities including producing national circular economy and waste statistics and surveys, implementing the national food waste prevention programme for consumers and businesses, regulating for circularity through end-of-waste and by-products decisions, supporting Green Public Procurement implementation, licensing nationally important waste infrastructure, providing innovation & demonstration funding and delivering a behavioural insights and evidence programme.

This report sets out our key activities and highlights for 2023.

Warren Phelan

Programme Manager
Circular Economy Programme

CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE 2023



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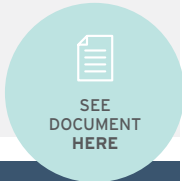
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- > In November, a new format *Circular Economy and Waste Statistics Waste Highlights Report 2021* was published.
- > The report shows how Ireland's economy remains predominantly linear with waste generation continuing to rise. Recycling levels for Municipal and Packaging waste streams cannot keep pace with waste generation levels.
- > Ireland is on course to miss EU waste recycling targets for Municipal, Total Packaging and Plastic Packaging wastes for 2025.





A total of 17.6 million tonnes of waste was generated in Ireland in 2021. This equates to 3.5 tonnes per person per year or 9.6 kg of waste per person per day.



1.2 million tonnes or 38% of all Municipal waste was exported for treatment in 2021. This includes 800,000 tonnes of municipal waste exported for recycling and 382,000 tonnes exported for energy recovery through incineration. 69% of all Packaging waste recycled was sent abroad for recycling.



9 million tonnes of Construction and Demolition waste was generated in 2021. An increase of 10% since 2020.




Packaging waste generation increased by 9% to 1.2 million tonnes in 2021. The recycling rate for Packaging waste decreased from 62% in 2020 to 58% in 2021.




3.17 million tonnes of Municipal Waste was generated in 2021, this is relatively unchanged from 3.2 million tonnes in 2020. 41% of Municipal waste was recycled in 2021, the same level as in 2020.



A total of 1.84 million tonnes of household waste was generated in Ireland in 2021. This equates to just over one tonne, or 200 black bags worth of waste generated per household per year.



A record 72,000 tonnes of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) were collected in 2021. This was increase of 10% overall with Business to Business (B2B) Collection up 43%.

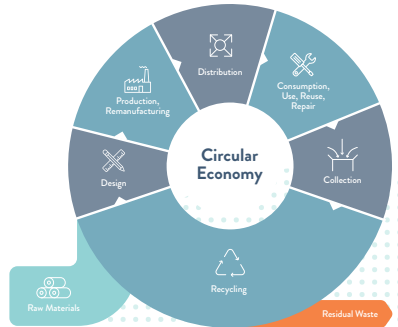


In 2021, the collection rate of End-of-Life Vehicles (ELVs) increased by 22.5%.



Ireland has a Reuse rate of 10.6 kg per person per year. An estimated 11.4 million items of secondhand clothing were bought or exchanged in 2021.

“ In a circular economy, the aim is to minimise the consumption of new and virgin materials and increase reuse and the use of secondary or recycled materials. ”





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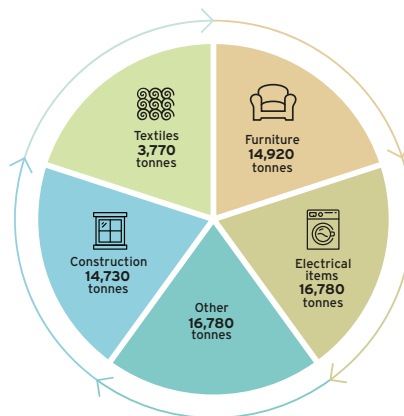
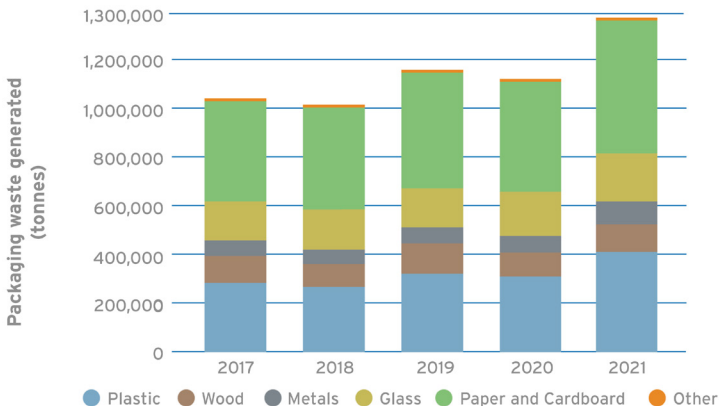
Ten waste statistics releases were published, including statutory reports on Food, End-of-Life Vehicles, Packaging, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Construction and Demolition and Municipal Wastes.

Non-statutory waste data was also published: Household, Compost & Anaerobic Digestion and Waste Generation.

Data on the landfilling of Biodegradable Municipal Waste and Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment was reported for both 2021 and 2022 reference years, signaling the shift towards timelier, reference year +1 reporting.

National statistics on reuse (tonnages) were reported for the first time with the data showing approximately 54,800 tonnes of second-hand products were bought or exchanged in Ireland in 2021, equating to an average annual reuse rate of 10.6 kg per person. Reuse across five product types was reported (Textiles, Furniture, Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Construction Materials and Other Products).

For further details see the EPA National Waste Statistics web resource: [National Waste Statistics | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/national-waste-statistics)

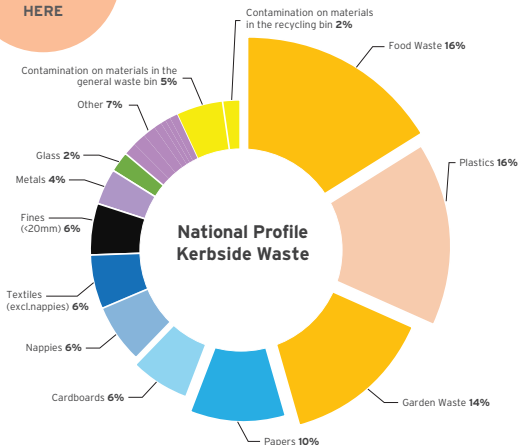


The average annual Reuse rate in Ireland is **10.6 kg** per person.

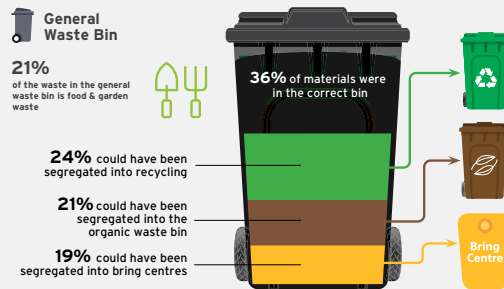


MUNICIPAL WASTE CHARACTERISATION REPORT

- > In September, a report on municipal waste characterisation (2022 study) was published.
- > Segregation of waste was found to be poor in both household and commercial settings. For example, just 36% of the waste in household general bins was in the correct bin.
- > Organic waste and plastics made up 46% of household waste.
- > The report highlighted the need for the full national roll-out of the organic bin to enable proper segregation of food waste and other organic municipal waste.



What should not be in the General Waste Bin



What is in the commercial general waste bin?



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By-products (Regulation 27)

459
notifications
received



447 notifications closed out:
414 determined as by-product
15 determined as waste
18 withdrawn

By-product notifications and associated documentation are available to view on our By-product Register [here](#)

Development of two national decisions continued in 2023.

A national by-product decision for site-won asphalt was published in November. This will eliminate up to 40% of the inflow of single-case notifications.

The [By-product Register](#) has been re-developed to accommodate registration of by-product activity in accordance with the [national criteria](#).

A national by-product decision for greenfield soil and stone progressed substantially in 2023, with completion of stakeholder consultation on [draft national criteria](#). Once published in 2024, it is estimated that such a decision will eliminate up to 40% of the inflow of single-case notifications.

End-of-waste (Regulation 28)



5 applications received

The national-end-of-waste decision relating to recycled aggregates was published in October. This is the first national end-of-waste decision published in Ireland. By year end, 15 operators had registered production of recycled aggregates in accordance with the [national criteria](#), on the [End-of-waste Register](#).

End-of-waste decisions are available to view on our [website](#) and an [End-of-waste Register](#) has been developed.

The publication of the national end-of-waste decision on recycled aggregates is considered to accommodate approximately half of all end-of-waste applications on hand relating to this material, which have subsequently been deemed closed. Previous single-case end-of-waste decisions for recycled aggregates are now considered to be accommodated by the national criteria and as such are considered to be withdrawn*.

*in certain circumstances, withdrawal of a previous single-case decision will be formalised in early 2024.



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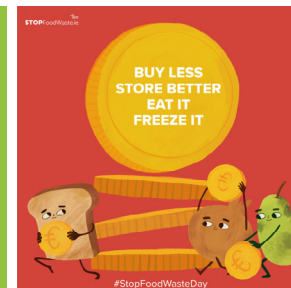


STOPFoodWaste.ie

Stop Food Waste is the consumer-facing national food waste prevention programme. In 2023 the theme for communications was “the foods we waste the most” i.e. bread, fruit & veg and leftovers, as informed by national behavioural insights research.

On National Stop Food Waste Day on 1st March the call to action was to “Take the Stop Food Waste Challenge” asking consumers to record food waste for a week and then take simple actions to reduce food waste and save money.

A national campaign highlighting the meaning of Best Before dates ran in October and the annual Festive Food campaign ran in December promoting the use of leftovers.



STOPFOODWASTE.IE on social media:

Facebook

Twitter

YouTube

Instagram



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The new Food Waste Charter was launched in June, providing an opportunity for businesses and industry operating across the food supply chain to demonstrate their commitment to reducing food waste.

Two Government Departments (DECC and DAFM), five State Agencies (Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Enterprise Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Teagasc) have pledged to support the Food Waste Charter which is led by the EPA. At year end, there were 24 members signed up.



Guidance on food waste prevention in [seafood](#), [bakery](#) and [prepared foods](#) sectors was published to support the Food Waste Charter.



The biennial **Forum on Food Waste** took place in November as an online event.



WATCH ON YOUTUBE

Countdown to 2030:
Together against
food waste

Thursday 9th
November 2023

9.30am – 1.00pm
Online



GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

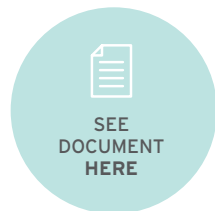


Green Public Procurement Monitoring and Reporting by Government Departments

for reference year 2021 was published - the second in the series.

Of the total reported spend of over €528 million on contracts over €25,000, only 10% included green criteria (lower than reported in 2020).

Five recommendations were made: assigning senior level resources to GPP implementation, staff training, setting up tracking systems and including GPP in Corporate Procurement Plans and annual reports.



€528 million
on contracts over €25,000
only **10% (€52 million)**
included green criteria.



In November, the EPA hosted an inaugural '**GPP in Practice**' event.

An audience of **141** of public sector procurers & specifiers across **72** public sector organisations heard nine practical case studies and about tools and resources for GPP implementation.



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The Circular Economy Programme's behavioural insights work is informing policy and supporting evidence-based national communication campaigns. In 2023, reports on repair, reuse, food and textiles were published.

REPAIR

Key finding: There is a low awareness of repair services available for products people own (only 15% strongly agree) but there is a high appetite to grow repair skills and to access services. Those who have used repair services had a very positive experience.

Experience of professional
repair service is very positive



80+%

of users say the service provided
from professional repairers is
good across a range of criteria.



SEE FULL
SURVEY
HERE

REUSE

Key finding: Cost savings are a key motivation for reusing products and materials but concerns about quality remain a barrier.



SEE FULL
SURVEY
HERE

Cost savings are a key
motivation



64%

of people bought or received
a second-hand item for cost
reasons.

FOOD

Key finding: 43% of people say leftovers from the fridge are thrown out most often. After leftovers, bread (41%), fruit (39%), vegetables (38%) and salad (37%) are the most common types of food that people say are thrown out in the home.

The most common food types
we throw out



43%

of people say leftovers from the
fridge, then bread (41%) and fruit
(39%).



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In April, the EPA ran a 5-day social media campaign focussing on textiles and the circular economy, informed by the behavioural insights survey findings.

21% of people buy clothes several times a week.
65% of these High Frequency Purchasers are women mostly under 50.



#EPATextiles

gpc

#EPATextiles

“
**BUY LESS.
CHOOSE WELL.
MAKE IT LAST.**
”
Vivienne Westwood

TEXTILES BEHAVIOURS & ATTITUDES

Key finding: 21% of people buy clothes often on a weekly basis; these high frequency purchasers buy clothes four times as frequently as the low frequency purchaser group.


**SEE FULL
SURVEY
HERE**

Buying clothes but not using them



55%

of High Frequency Purchasers buy clothes they wear only a few times and 46% buy items they never end up wearing.

TEXTILES: CIRCULAR RETAIL PROPOSITIONS

This nationally representative survey evaluated the awareness, use and interest in clothing take-back schemes, rental service, clothing items made from recycled fibres and brands selling second hand clothing.

Strong willingness to try clothing take-back schemes



58%

of people would be likely to try a take-back scheme for clothes and peaks among women 35-49 years.



**SEE FULL
SURVEY
HERE**

TEXTILES: UNDERSTANDING SECOND HAND CLOTHES

Qualitative study to understand the needs, influencers and barriers of women (up to 35 years) to buying second hand clothes/preloved clothes in preference to new clothing.


**SEE FULL
SURVEY
HERE**

Opportunities to buy new clothes are everywhere. There is an initial 'default' to buy new clothes instead of considering buying Second Hand.



CIRCULAR INSIGHTS SERIES

CIRCULARITY IN CONSTRUCTION



The Circular Insights Series focusses on emerging and priority topics to build evidence and fill knowledge gaps to support circular economy policy.

A Comparative Study of Waste Recovery Taxes/ Levies in Europe was published to provide insights to support the introduction of a waste recovery levy in Ireland which came into effect on 1st September 2023.



To trial implementation of the *Best Practice Guidelines for the preparation of Resource & Waste Management Plans for C&D Projects* a competitive funding call for local authorities issued.

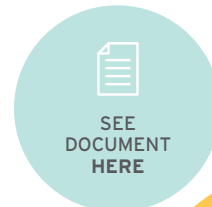
Two projects were awarded funding:

- > Waterford City & County Council (protected structures on 37 Merchant's Quay).
- > Donegal County Council (remediation of 43 social housing units).

EPA grant-aid **€49k**



“ This study examines approaches taken by other EU Member States in implementing behaviour change around waste recovery to achieve their EU waste targets ”



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Through partnering with the **Rediscovery Centre**, activities to scale and embed reuse and repair were funded including:

Circular Conversation webinars:

- > Reuse in home retrofit
- > Insurance for Repair Cafés

Quarterly **repair cafés** at the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun.

Mentoring members of the **Circular Economy Academy**.

Social media showcases:

- > Rediscovering Repair
- > Second Life Stories

EPA grant-aid **€149k**



In 2023, the programme provided funding support to **Community Resources Network Ireland**, the representative body for community based re-use, repair and recycling organisations (**45** members including 2 new).

EPA grant-aid **€100k**

The funded activities included:

- > Delivering guidance on bulky item reuse in university campuses and delivering associated workshops
- > Publishing an events calendar with an emphasis on CRNI member events
- > All-island training between CRNI and their equivalent in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Resources Network.



The Circular Economy Programme supported **Repairmystuff.ie**, Ireland's national online repair directory. The funding supported the maintenance, development and promotion of the website.

At the end of 2023, **1,278** repair businesses were registered.

EPA grant-aid **€23k**



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**CAMPUS
LIVING LABS**

An EPA-IUA Sustainability Project

The Campus Living Labs partnership programme with the **Irish Universities Association** concluded with a webinar on the role of universities in driving a circular economy.



Resources developed include findings from a [reusable coffee cup trial](#), roll out of [‘The Waste Game’](#), a step-by-step [guide to design and trial behavioural interventions](#) and [recommendations for universities on bulky item reuse](#).



CIRCULÉIRE

CIRCULÉIRE is Ireland’s first Industry-led circular innovation network and aims to assist manufacturers and their supply chains to switch from linear to circular business models. The EPA, as a strategic partner, funded the platform from 2020 to 2022 and sat on the steering committee.

In 2023 the platform was publicly funded by DECC but the EPA continued its participation in the CIRCULÉIRE steering committee, along with Irish Manufacturing Research (secretariat), the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and industry members.

Projects undertaken by CIRCULÉIRE in 2023 include:

- > Delivery of the 4th Circular Venture cohort, a first of its kind accelerator to supporting circular ventures to scale.
- > Delivery of a 9th Thematic Working Group on ESPR, Digital Product Passports and Measuring Circularity.
- > Co-delivery of the international Dublin-City Region Circular Economy Hotspot with ecosystem partners.
- > Delivery of the DECC commissioned Strategic Roadmap for the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence for Circular Innovation

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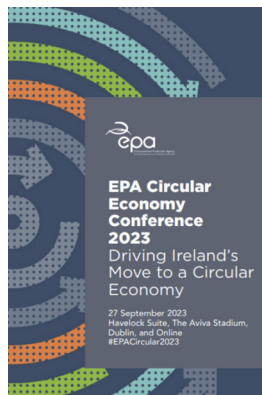


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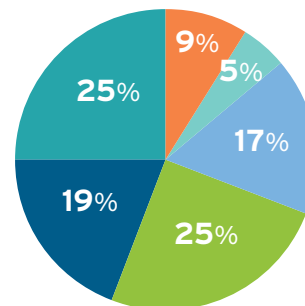
The annual **Circular Economy Programme conference** was held as a hybrid event on 27th September.

SESSIONS

- Setting the Scene.
- Reuse, Repair and Circularity.
- Measurement Matters, Consumption.
- Behaviour Change and Local Circular Solutions.



What attendees learned from this event



- The role of consumption and behaviour change in the context of circular economy.
- Insight into developments around circular economy policy & legislation.
- Increased my understanding of reuse, repair, and circularity.
- Expanded my knowledge on local circular economy solutions.
- Made new contacts.
- Identified opportunities for circularity in my organisation.



WATCH CONFERENCE
RECORDINGS HERE

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The EPA has a wide remit and responsibilities for the licensing and permitting of activities which could impact on the environment and human health. This includes activities in the industrial, agricultural, water, wastewater, waste and energy sectors.

The circular economy and waste authorisation team licenses certain activities in the waste sector. These include landfills, transfer stations, composting, anaerobic digestion, waste combustion facilities, hazardous waste facilities and other significant disposal and recovery activities. Other team responsibilities include Article 11, Certificates of Registration and Certificates of Authorisation.

Article 11

declarations which support public or private organisations in their decision making on the type of waste authorisation which they may require.

Certificates of Registration

issued to the local authorities carrying out specific activities listed under Part II of the Third Schedule of the Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) Regulations 2007, (S.I. No. 821 of 2007) as amended.

Certificates of Authorisation

issued to local authorities specifying measures and controls for the remediation of closed historic landfills.

The EPA publishes regular updates on licensing and authorisation activities (including for the waste sector) and these can be found at <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/licensing/>.



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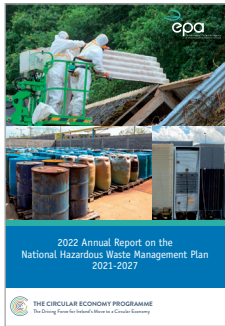
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An annual report for 2022 on progress achieved under the National Hazardous Waste Management Plan 2021-2027 was published in June 2023.

Actions in the Plan that were progressed through the support of the Plan's Working Group included the following:

- > Farm hazardous waste collection
- > Collection of unused/ waste medicines
- > Collection of household hazardous waste.

SEE DOCUMENT HERE



The plan sets out the priorities to be pursued over the term of the plan to improve the prevention and management of hazardous waste.



The local authority sector finalised work on development of a guidance document titled *Best practice guidance for handling asbestos*.

Work commenced on a business continuity assessment of hazardous wastes to identify at-risk waste streams and associated infrastructure. This project will continue until late 2024.

SEE DOCUMENT HERE



78%

of cancers recognised as occupational cancer in the EU are asbestos-related.



4.1 to 7.3 Million

workers are currently exposed to asbestos.



70.000

workers in the EU died from past exposure to asbestos, in 2019.



Over **220 Million**

building units were built before the ban. It is therefore likely that a significant part of today's building stock contains asbestos.

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SIX GREEN ENTERPRISE PROJECTS WERE FINALISED

Hexafly

Identifying suitable waste streams for conversion to protein by Black Soldier Flies; this project led to product optimisation and increased output in sustainable protein.



Irish Green Building Council

Development of a [Carbon Designer tool for Ireland](#) and raising awareness of the potential for circularity within the construction sector.



Carey Building Contractors

Exploring cradle to cradle opportunities on four small-to-medium sized construction projects; project highlighted the challenges for SME contractors when trying to embrace cradle to cradle opportunities.



Polymer Alloy Technology Teo

Developed and delivered recycled plastic livestock drinker as a demonstrator product.



Sea Synergy

Raising awareness of waste prevention opportunities for fishing gear within the industry and public in coastal communities and exploring opportunities for micro-enterprise innovation.



Community Resources Network Ireland

To support developing a Circular Textiles System for Ireland, existing textile initiatives were reviewed, textile collection systems were trialled, and post-consumer textile solutions were identified.



11 ONGOING GREEN ENTERPRISE PROJECTS AT YEAR END



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SEE OUR [CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME 2021-2027](#)



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