



# Raising Awareness of and Educating Consumers about Reusable Sanitary Products: Developing Strategies for the Promotion of Reusable Nappies, Wipes and Menstrual Items

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## Identifying pressures

Disposable single-use nappies, wipes and menstrual items have a significant environmental impact. While reusable alternatives exist on the Irish market, these are underutilised.

In 2022, 75,618 tonnes of nappies were deposited in kerbside residual waste bins, with nappies accounting for 10% of total residual waste, making them the third largest fraction of waste presented for kerbside collection. In addition, a recent life cycle analysis found that the carbon footprint of reusable nappies is 25% lower than that of single-use nappies across their full life cycles.

Disposable menstrual items can contain up to 90% plastic, and 49 billion single-use menstrual products are used each year in the EU. In addition, these products are a significant contributor to marine pollution, being one of the most frequently collected items in beach clean-ups.

Widespread use of disposable single-use sanitary items is causing harm to the environment, and strategies are required to encourage a move towards existing circular alternatives.

## Informing policy

The Single Use Plastics Directive (2019) requires Member States to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of single-use menstrual items, provide information on their reusable alternatives and incentivise responsible consumer behaviour with regard to menstrual items. This requirement is not currently reflected in national plans for Ireland. Ireland's Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy (2020) pledges to ban non-medical wet wipes in Ireland and introduce Extended Producer Responsibility requirements for wet wipes (those not subject to an outright ban) by the end of 2024.

There is no reference to the development of a strategy to reduce the use of either disposable menstrual items or nappies in the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy, the Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy (2022), the National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy (2024) or the Climate Action Plans (2021 and 2023).

To meet this gap, this research examined two strategies that could be utilised by relevant policy actors to promote reusable sanitary products: one that targeted new parents and aimed to increase use of reusable nappies and baby wipes, and one that targeted teenagers and aimed to increase use of reusable menstrual items.

## Developing solutions

This project focused on two aspects:

- nappies and wipes, through the development and piloting of the 'Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme';
- menstrual items, through the development and piloting of the 'No Plastic, Period' programme.

The research combined educational workshops and provision of reusable alternatives to raise awareness of and encourage more circular practices.

The nappy scheme included an online application for vouchers provided through local authority funding for a free starter bundle of cloth nappies. The scheme succeeded in achieving its aim of increasing the use of reusable nappies, and the scheme is ongoing following the completion of the research.

The 'No Plastic, Period' programme provided information posters for bathroom cubicle stalls on menstrual cups, cloth pads and period pants. Short animations were shared on social media to promote the benefits of using reusable menstrual items and a class on reusable menstrual items was piloted in all year groups. The students were offered free reusable menstrual items and information on their use.

The findings informed the development of four recommendations for further research and four policy recommendations to build further on and support an increased uptake of reusable nappies, baby wipes and menstrual items in Ireland.

