

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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Environmental Protection Agency

The EPA is responsible for protecting and improving the environment as a valuable asset for the people of Ireland. We are committed to protecting people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation and pollution.

The work of the EPA can be divided into three main areas:

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Knowledge: Providing high quality, targeted and timely environmental data, information and assessment to inform decision making.

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- > Urban waste water discharges;
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- > Sources of ionising radiation;
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1. Office of Environmental Sustainability
2. Office of Environmental Enforcement
3. Office of Evidence and Assessment
4. Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring
5. Office of Communications and Corporate Services

The EPA is assisted by advisory committees who meet regularly to discuss issues of concern and provide advice to the Board.

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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.

EPA RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2021–2030

**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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EPA Research Report

Prepared for the Environmental Protection Agency

by

VOICE Ireland

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This report is based on research carried out/data from April 2022 to May 2023. More recent data may have become available since the research was completed.

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Executive Summary

Disposable single-use nappies, wipes and menstrual items have a significant environmental impact, yet underutilised reusable alternatives exist. According to the 2022 Household Waste Characterisation Report (EPA, 2023), 75,618 tonnes of nappies were deposited in kerbside residual waste bins in 2022, and nappies accounted for 10% of total residual waste, making them the third largest fraction of waste presented for kerbside collection (EPA, 2023).

Disposable menstrual items can contain up to 90% plastic, and 49 billion single-use menstrual products are consumed each year in the EU (UNEP, 2021). 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. The objective of this research was to develop strategies and pilot programmes to promote and raise awareness of reusable sanitary items to an Irish audience, with the aim of increasing use and acceptance. The project focused on two aspects:

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

The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme offers new parents a voucher for the purchase of a reusable nappy and wipes starter bundle. A total of 109 families that participated in the pilot scheme were provided with the starter bundles, which contain enough reusable nappies to enable their use 50% of the time. The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme succeeded in achieving its aim of increasing the use of reusable nappies: 72% of the 71 participants who responded to a subsequent survey were still using cloth nappies at the time of the survey, and a further 24% were intending to use them once their baby was big enough. The remaining 4% tried the reusable nappies provided but chose not to continue using them. Over half (53%) of the participants who had tried the cloth nappies stated that they are very likely to continue using them, with the remainder (47%) stating that they were likely to continue their use.

Nappy care leaflets were distributed with the nappy bundles, covering washing and drying of the nappies. However, participants were dissatisfied with the information provided with the starter bundles, and expressed a desire for more educational resources. Changes are being made to the scheme to accommodate this.

The No Plastic. Period. programme combines educational workshops to raise awareness of reusable alternatives to single-use disposable menstrual items with the provision of reusable menstrual items. The focus of the workshops is on the reliability, convenience and comfort of reusable menstrual items, as these are the factors relating to menstrual products that are most important to young people. The programme was piloted in three different settings (post-primary schools, a third-level institution, a youth group) in four locations among 550 young people. Post-primary schools are the most effective setting for delivery of the programme to young people, as the workshop can be integrated into a class, ensuring that a large number of students attend, whereas, in third-level institutions, the workshops are necessarily held outside teaching hours, e.g. at lunchtime, and are optional, and in youth group settings there are small numbers in attendance.

The No Plastic. Period. programme resulted in 50% of young people who attended the educational workshop opting to trial a reusable menstrual item; however, many workshops were mixed sex, which, while contributing towards the programme's aims of reducing stigma and ensuring inclusivity, makes gathering accurate data on the impact of the programme more complex. When basing the calculations on the single-sex workshops that took place in Kinsale Community School (KCS), the percentage of young people attending the workshops who opted to take a reusable menstrual item is 56%. Overall, 22% of the KCS workshop attendees tried the reusable menstrual item, 11% of all attendees plan to continue to use reusable menstrual items in the future, and a further 7% may continue to use them.

The research has led to the development of four recommendations for further research and four policy recommendations to support the increased uptake of

reusable nappies, baby wipes and menstrual items in Ireland.

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

The objective of the research was to develop strategies and pilot programmes to raise awareness of reusable sanitary items among an Irish audience with the aim of increasing use and acceptance. The project focused on two types of products incorporating single-use plastics: (1) nappies and wipes and (2) menstrual items.

Disposable single-use nappies, wipes and menstrual items have a significant environmental impact, yet underutilised reusable alternatives exist. The aim of the research was to promote these reusable alternatives through a mixture of awareness-raising programmes and incentivisation, as well as identifying perceived barriers to such use. The target audiences for the programmes were parents of newborns, in the case of the nappies and wipes programme, and young people, in the case of the menstrual items programme.

1.1.1 Rationale for the research

Why promote reusable baby nappies and wipes?

In 2022, nappies accounted for 10.4% of kerbside-collected household mixed residual waste (MRW), an increase from 10.1% in 2018 and 8.4% in 2008. Across

all kerbside bins, nappies accounted for, on average, 6% of total household waste and were disposed of mainly in MRW (96%) or mixed dry recycling (3%) (Figure 1.1).

At the kerbside, there has been an increase in the weight of nappies presented, from the 2016 figure of 69,854 tonnes (EPA, 2018) to the 2022 figure of 75,618 tonnes (EPA, 2023).

Nappies and incontinence wear constitute the third largest fraction of waste presented for kerbside collection (EPA, 2023). In addition, although most nappies (96%) are correctly placed in the MRW stream, even the small percentages incorrectly placed in mixed dry recycling (3%) and organic waste (0.4%) streams lead to a large degree of contamination of recyclables and organic waste, owing to the nature of the material (Figure 1.2).

Despite the substantial contribution of single-use disposable nappies to household waste figures, there is currently no strategy for reducing their use nationally.

The use of single-use disposable nappies in preference to reusable nappies also has impacts in terms of carbon emissions (Figure 1.3). In 2023, the UK's Department for Environment, Food & Rural

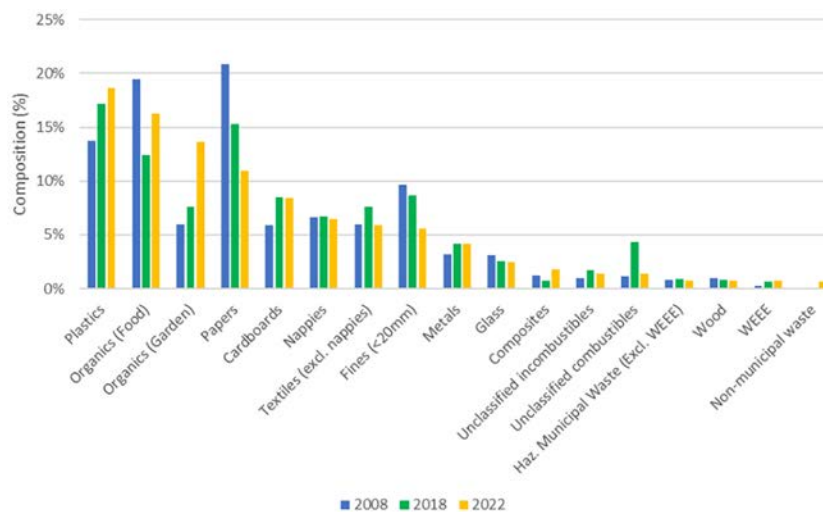


Figure 1.1. A comparison of national profile of waste composition in 2008, 2018 and 2022.

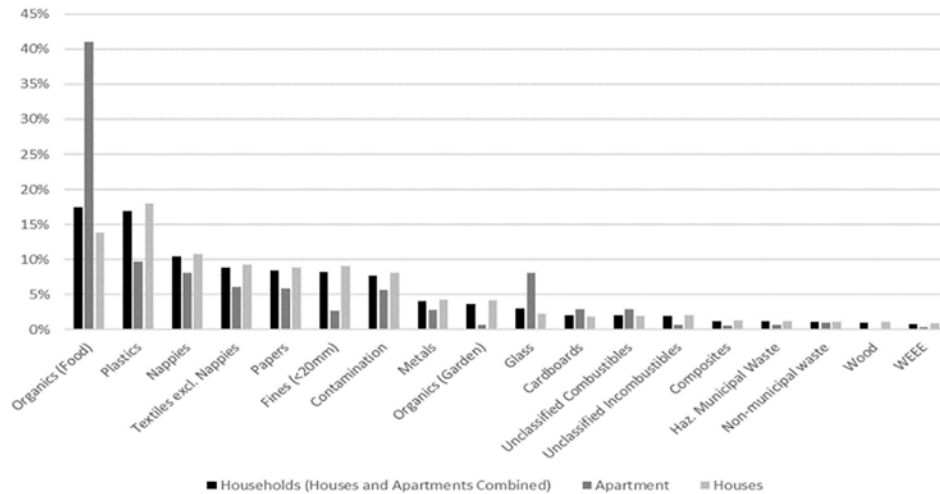


Figure 1.2. The composition of MRW kerbside collections for houses, apartments and households (combination of both) in 2022.

Affairs (Defra) published a life cycle analysis for disposable and reusable nappies (Defra, 2023). It found that the carbon footprint of reusable nappies is 25% lower than that of single-use nappies across their full life cycles. However, reusable nappies have a higher impact in other environmental categories, mainly due to the electricity used in prewashing, washing and tumble drying the reusable nappies, water used by the washing machine and in toilet flushing, and in the treatment of the wastewater and detergent.

The carbon footprint of reusable nappies has the potential to be lowered further, through the decarbonisation of the energy grid. The figures used in the life cycle assessment (LCA) for calculating the carbon footprint were based on the UK energy grid in 2020. Another impacting factor is age at potty-training. The Nappy Alliance cites a recent YouGov survey that found that the average potty-training age has increased from 2.5 years to 3.5 years since 2004 (Nappy Alliance, 2021). This results in an increase in the carbon footprint of both disposable and reusable nappies, but the increase is greater for disposables because the majority of the CO₂ emissions associated with disposables are emitted in the production phase, and delayed potty-training increases the number of nappies purchased per child. In contrast, the majority (85%) of CO₂ emissions attributable to reusable nappies are emitted in the use phase, and this can be lowered by educating parents on this phase, as outlined in Chapter 2, “Developing the scheme materials”.

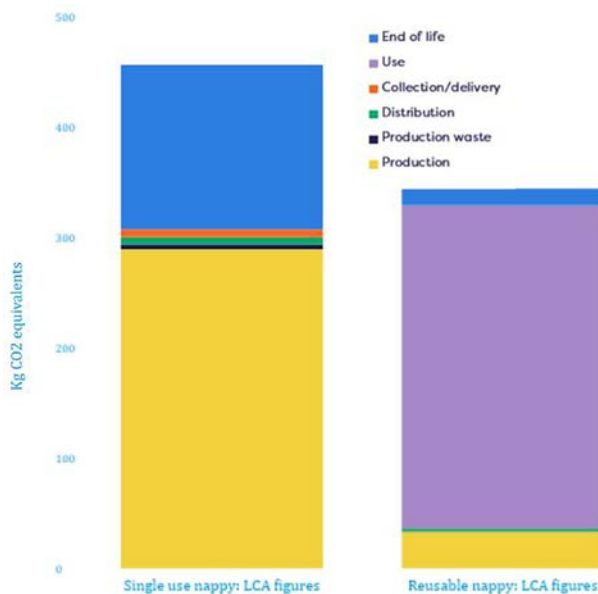


Figure 1.3. Comparative carbon footprint for disposable and reusable nappy systems over 2.5 years for one child.

In 2017, about 68 billion individual wet wipes were used in the 28 Member States of the EU, and baby wet wipes accounted for almost 70% of total wet wipe sales (ReZero, 2019). Wet wipes are a source of marine pollution, and are one of the “Dirty Dozen” products that, according to the Clean Coasts programme, aimed at educating citizens, should never be flushed down the toilet (Clean Coasts, 2023). The results of the 2019 autumn Coast Watch survey reported wet wipes on 12% of the shoreline of the island of Ireland (Hilliard, 2020); however, wet wipes

also include facial and toilet wipes, as well as baby wipes.

Why promote reusable menstrual items?

Single-use disposable menstrual items such as sanitary pads, tampons and tampon applicators are a significant contributor globally to single-use plastic waste. Disposable menstrual items can contain up to 90% plastic, and 49 billion single-use menstrual products are used each year in the EU (UNEP, 2021). When including the adhesives and packaging, the plastic in each menstrual pad is equivalent to around four plastic bags (Mahesh, 2021). In 2021, the United Nations Environment Programme conducted a meta-analysis of four LCAs of menstrual items. This meta-analysis found that in all circumstances reusable menstrual products have substantially lower environmental impacts than single-use options. The menstrual cup, in particular, has consistently lower impacts than other product options, both single use and reusable, making it a clear choice for consumers and policymakers (UNEP, 2021).

In addition, single-use menstrual products are an issue from a marine pollution perspective and are one of the most frequently collected items in beach clean-ups in the UK, with an average of five pieces of menstrual products waste picked up every 100m on UK beaches (UNEP, 2021). Menstrual pads, tampons and applicators are also included in the “Dirty Dozen” products that Clean Coasts says should never be flushed down the toilet (Clean Coasts, 2023).

The widespread use of disposable menstrual items also has impacts on period poverty. The “Period Poverty in Ireland Discussion Paper”, produced by the Period Poverty Sub-Committee, National Strategy for Women and Girls (2021), highlighted the value

of prioritising the provision of disposable menstrual items above reusable menstrual items to tackle period poverty in those experiencing inadequate housing conditions and lack of access to running water and washing facilities. However, while reusable menstrual items may be unsuitable for use in these scenarios, period poverty is not the sole preserve of the most vulnerable women in society. In 2018, Plan International Ireland undertook a survey of 1100 girls between the ages of 12 and 19 years in Ireland and found that approximately 50% of respondents occasionally experienced period poverty, with 10% using unsuitable products as a result of cost barriers (Plan International Ireland, 2018). In addition, 61% reported absence from school as a result of their period. A 2019 report into the environmental and economic costs of single-use menstrual products, baby nappies and wet wipes in Europe (ReZero, 2019) found that reusable menstrual items cost less than disposables over the time frame of a year (Table 1.1).

According to the report, a menstrual cup costs between €15 and €30 in Europe, and lasts up to 5 years, on average. Therefore, seven cups are required over the lifetime of a menstruator, resulting in an average lifetime cost of between €105 and €210, or between €3 and €6 annually. Although the upfront cost of a menstrual cup is expensive for women from low-income households, using a menstrual cup instead of single-use tampons or pads would result in annual savings of €18 to €119, and over a lifetime savings could exceed €4400.

Finally, disposable menstrual items have been found to contain high levels of toxins. Menstrual items are a considerable source of exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals, with links to cancer, reproductive and developmental disorders, birth defects, asthma and allergies. Absorption rates of these chemicals from

Table 1.1. Single-use menstrual product and menstrual cup cost

Product	Number of items used per year	Number of items used during a lifetime of menstruating by one woman	Cost per unit (€)	Annual cost (€)	Lifetime cost (€)
Single-use menstrual product (pad or tampon)					
Pad	416	14,976	0.05–0.15	20.8–62.4	748.8–2246.4
Tampon	416	14,976	0.05–0.30	20.8–124.8	748.8–4492.8
Menstrual cup	1	7 ^a	15–30	3–6	105–210

^aThe lifespan of a menstrual cup was assumed to be 5 years.

menstrual items are high, as the skin of the vagina is extremely absorbent (Gao, 2020; Gao *et al.*, 2020).

Addressing the current absence of a plan to reduce single-use disposable sanitary products and promote reusable alternatives in Ireland

While sanitary towels (pads), tampons and tampon applicators are listed in the EU's Single Use Plastics Directive (2019) as single-use plastic products covered by Article 10, on awareness raising, this is not currently reflected in national plans for Ireland.

Despite the clear environmental impacts of both disposable nappies and disposable menstrual items,

there is no reference to the development of a strategy to reduce their use in the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy (2020), the Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy (2022), the Draft National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy (2023) or the Climate Action Plans (2021 and 2023).

However, plans to reduce the use of wet wipes have been developed on a national level. In line with the requirements of the Single Use Plastics Directive (2019), the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy (2020) pledges to ban non-medical wet wipes in Ireland and to introduce Extended Producer Responsibility requirements for wet wipes (those not subject to an outright ban) by the end of 2024.

2 The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme

2.1 Overview

The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme for Ireland is an initiative developed as part of this research to encourage parents to try reusable nappies as an alternative to single-use disposables. Incentive schemes work by allowing access to reduced-cost or free reusable nappies to families participating in them (Warner *et al.*, 2015). This supports the use of reusables, as it takes the risk out of trying a product that parents may not have been exposed to before and removes or reduces the upfront cost barrier to using cloth nappies. Incentive schemes have been widely used to promote the uptake of reusable nappies in other countries and are a well-established method to increase their use.

2.2 Developing the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme

2.2.1 Research

Discussions with experts

While the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme is the first of its kind in Ireland, similar schemes have been in existence in the UK for over 20 years. During the research phase, a series of case studies of schemes in the UK were undertaken to ensure that lessons learned from their experiences were considered when developing a scheme for use in Irish local authorities.

The different forms of incentives offered by UK councils to encourage reusable nappy use are:

- cashback on submission of a receipt for cloth nappies;
- a voucher for the purchase of cloth nappies with specified suppliers;
- a cloth nappy trial kit available on loan from the council;
- a percentage discount on the purchase price of cloth nappies with specified retailers.

The value of the incentive varies from £25 to £200 between council areas (Nappy Lady, 2024). Broadly,

there are three approaches to the implementation of nappy schemes. Descriptions of each, with advantages and disadvantages, are given below.

Many UK local authorities offer a cashback scheme, whereby residents are wholly or partly reimbursed for the purchase of reusable nappies on providing proof of purchase, along with the application form and proof of address and of pregnancy/birth. Following discussions with local authorities offering this type of scheme, the advantages of the cashback scheme are that parents can buy second-hand as well as new nappies and can use any retailer/supplier, and, because parents buy directly and provide receipts, the local authority does not need to deal with public procurement and partnering with particular retailers/suppliers. The disadvantage is that applicants have to pay for the nappies upfront before being reimbursed, and this may be a barrier for low-income households. This form of scheme also requires the accounts department of local authorities to reimburse individual households.

Other local authorities offer a voucher scheme, in which a unique voucher number is issued to residents who fill out the scheme application and submit proof of location and of pregnancy/birth. Following discussions with local authorities offering this type of scheme, the advantages of the voucher scheme are that there is no upfront cost to parents, which removes a huge barrier, and the local authority is required to pay monthly invoices to the partner suppliers only for vouchers redeemed, reducing the administrative burden. The disadvantage is that public procurement is required to form partnerships with suppliers.

Local authorities in London provide an incentive scheme for reusable nappies using a third mechanism. The Real Nappies for London (RNfL) scheme is delivered externally by a charitable organisation, the Women's Environmental Network, on behalf of London local authorities. London boroughs can choose whether or not to take part in the scheme, and 10 did so in 2023. The advantage of this method of delivery is that it removes the administrative burden entirely from the local authorities. The scheme offers a voucher for £54.10 towards the purchase price of cloth nappies. The take-up level varies, with up to 6% of babies born

within some boroughs covered by the scheme. The RNfL carries out follow-up to examine the impact of the scheme. Its surveys have found that between 80% and 90% of participants use the nappies provided by the scheme, and 93% state that they are very likely to continue to use the nappies.

The research team met with the Nappy Alliance to discuss incentive schemes as a means of promoting cloth nappy use. The Nappy Alliance is a UK coalition of independent providers of reusable nappies, working to promote the use of cloth nappies as an alternative to single-use disposables. It was the recommendation of the Alliance that, to avoid the lack of cohesiveness seen in the provision of incentive schemes in the UK, a single coordinated national scheme is developed in Ireland and managed centrally by an independent body.

Discussions with the target audience

To establish realistic expectations of cloth nappy use and motivations and barriers, we surveyed parents about their experiences with nappies, both disposable and reusable. Eighty-two people responded to the survey; of these, 22% said that they use reusable nappies exclusively, 32% responded that they use disposable nappies exclusively, and 46% reported that they use both. The key findings from the reusable nappy users were that the majority had chosen to use cloth nappies prior to giving birth, and that environmental considerations were the number one reason to use cloth nappies, followed by reducing waste and saving cost.

When asking about care of cloth nappies, the majority reported that they wash the nappies two or three times a week, at 60°C, and air dry them. Those who said that they do not use cloth nappies were asked about barriers to their use. The number one reason given was the additional work involved in washing and drying nappies, followed by the upfront cost of buying nappies. These were also the top two barriers found in the UK in 2021 by the Nappy Gurus' Great Big Nappy Census, in which 3900 parents were surveyed (Nappy Gurus, 2021). The cost of washing the nappies was cited as a barrier by relatively few households, as this cost can be defrayed by the reduced costs of waste collection in moving from disposable to reusable nappies, and respondents believed that the use of cloth nappies would, in the longer term, save them

money. According to a nappy LCA carried out in the UK, a nappy pre-wash uses, on average, 0.5 kWh of energy and 30 litres of water, and the corresponding figures for a main wash are 0.62 kWh and 47 litres of water (Defra, 2023). The cost of this to the household varies, but, in 2023, Irish households paid, on average, 47.12c per kWh, including taxes, for electricity.

2.2.2 Development

Developing the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme

Following a series of meetings with local authorities and other organisations involved in cloth nappy schemes in the UK, further meetings were held with three Dublin area pilot local authorities to discuss the best way to proceed in an Irish context.

Working through the logistics and practicalities of the scheme led to a decision to provide a scheme based on the RNfL model and in line with the suggested approach proposed by the Nappy Alliance. In this model, the scheme is administered by an organisation external to the local authority, in our case by VOICE, and councils within the area of operation sign up to participate in the scheme and finance reusable nappy bundles for households living within their jurisdiction. The model ensures that no additional administrative burden is felt by local authorities interested in rolling out the scheme in their area and, instead, the information on the scheme and the applications to the scheme are managed by VOICE.

A voucher system was selected as the form of incentive. This was to ensure that the scheme was accessible to low-income families, which may be excluded under a cashback system, as well as to remove the requirement to gather sensitive information, such as bank details, from families participating in the scheme. Under the voucher system developed for the scheme, a family applies for a voucher through the VOICE website, is sent a voucher code if approved, and then uses this voucher to purchase a cloth nappy starter bundle from one of the two linked suppliers. The suppliers invoice VOICE monthly for the bundles and provide a list of voucher codes redeemed.

The content of the cloth nappy starter bundle was decided through discussions with the Cloth Nappy

Library and the two Irish reusable nappy suppliers taking part in the pilot. The priorities were to provide:

- cloth nappies in a style similar to disposable nappies to ensure that they are easy to use for parents who have no prior experience of reusables;
- cloth nappies that could be used for the maximum length of time possible;
- a sufficient number of nappies to allow the new parents to integrate them into their daily routine;
- reusable wipes alongside the reusable nappies.

The finalised bundle includes 10 birth-to-potty pocket nappies, inserts, 12 reusable wipes and a wet bag for storage of used nappies prior to washing. Cloth nappy experts state that 20 nappies are required for full-time cloth nappy use. By including 10 nappies in the bundle, parents are provided with enough nappies to enable them to replace half a week's worth of disposable nappies. The different bundles available as part of the scheme varied in the brand of birth-to-potty pocket nappies supplied, the type of fastening (Velcro or popper style) and the material used for the inserts (hemp, bamboo, cotton).

Eligibility for the scheme was based on the discussions with UK local authorities and the Irish pilot local authorities. To ensure that the nappies would get maximum use prior to potty-training, the upper age limit for eligibility was set at 12 months. To support the use of reusable nappies in families that would otherwise have chosen to use disposable nappies, families that were already using, or stated that they would definitely use, cloth nappies, were deemed not eligible. Applications were approved if the families stated that they would not or might not have otherwise considered cloth nappies.

Developing the scheme materials

To support the scheme, a number of materials were developed:

- a logo and colour scheme;
- a web page on the VOICE website, containing information on the scheme as well as an online application form to apply to take part (the website also holds the database of submissions, accessible only to VOICE staff, and tracks the distribution of codes and nappies);

- a how-to guide for local authorities, including all details needed by local authorities to adopt the scheme in their area;
- a poster, leaflet and social media toolkit for the promotion of the scheme;
- a media toolkit for local authorities to promote the scheme (including sample social media posts and a press release);
- an information leaflet on reusable nappies to accompany the nappy bundle.

The information leaflet was created with input from the Cloth Nappy Library and the two reusable nappy suppliers. LCAs have shown that, in the case of cloth nappies, CO₂ production is highest during the use phase of the nappy life cycle. The "use phase" of a nappy is the period in which the nappy is being used by the child, which in the case of reusable nappies encompasses the associated washing and drying of the nappy. The most recent LCA of nappies (Defra, 2023) found that 85% of the CO₂ emitted during the life cycle of a reusable nappy is produced during the use phase. The LCAs conducted by the Environment Agency (2008) and Defra (2023) highlight the role of user education in reducing the environmental impact of reusable nappies further. By educating users on the benefits of energy-efficient washing machines, full washing loads, lower washing temperatures, air drying and reuse of nappies after the baby has been potty trained, the CO₂ emitted can be further reduced.

The information leaflet also contained information on an Irish online forum specifically for parents using reusable nappies, the Cloth Nappy Chat Group (Ireland) on Facebook. The aim of the forum is to provide a space for new parents to discuss and troubleshoot any issues they encounter. With disposable nappies currently the norm, this source of external support is invaluable for new parents trying cloth nappies as a place to get advice from other parents more experienced in their use.

2.3 Piloting the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme

2.3.1 Promoting the scheme

Discussions were held with the local authorities taking part in the pilot on the best methods to promote the scheme. Although maternity hospitals were interested

in providing information on the scheme to expectant parents through their antenatal clinics, local authorities were concerned that the level of demand for the scheme if promoted in this way would far exceed the number of reusable nappy bundles (i.e. 110) available for the pilot. The use of local authority social media to promote the pilot was ruled out for the same reason. The decision was made to promote the pilot scheme through posters and leaflets in libraries and family resource centres. Six libraries or family resource centres in each local authority area were selected.

2.3.2 Applications to the scheme

The pilot scheme received 193 applications, of which 109 were approved. Voucher codes were provided on a first come, first served basis to applicants who were not already using cloth nappies, as the scheme aimed to increase the use of reusables by families that would not have otherwise used them. Many applicants were not approved because they were already using cloth nappies or their child's birth date was outside the time frame of the project.

2.4 Results of the Pilot

Participants in the scheme were surveyed on their experiences with the nappies, and 71 of the 109 participants responded. Among those who responded, 72% were using the reusable nappies at the time of completing the survey, and a further 20% were not using them at the time of the survey, but intended to use the nappies in the future. The majority of the respondents not using them at the time of the survey stated that they were either still pregnant or their baby was currently too small to use the nappies (the nappies are suitable for children who weigh > 10lb) (Figure 2.1).

The remaining 4% of respondents had tried the nappies but stopped using them because they felt they did not work for their family. Reasons provided included the additional work required in washing reusable nappies and a lack of space for drying nappies. However, although the majority of families using the nappies lived in a house, 22% of the respondents successfully using the nappies lived in an apartment.

Of the families that reported using the reusable nappies, 75% stated that they did so at least 50% of the time. The bundle provided sufficient nappies for use half of the time and, therefore, those who claimed to use them more than this would need to have bought additional nappies. There was a clear preference for times to use cloth nappies and disposable nappies. Participants reported that they preferred to use disposable nappies at night and cloth nappies during the day, except when out of the house for long periods of time, as participants disliked carrying around soiled nappies when out and about. When asked about the impact on waste, 65% of the families using the reusable nappies said that they had reduced their waste by one black bin bag per week and 13% said that they had reduced their waste by two black bin bags per week.

According to the Nappy Alliance, a baby uses between 5000 and 7000 nappies before they are potty-trained. Therefore, for each family that used the cloth nappies provided for at least 50% of the time, the scheme potentially removed 2500–3500 nappies from use. With 75% using the nappies at least 50% of the time, and taking total nappy use conservatively at 2500, the pilot scheme potentially removed 95,000 nappies from use. This figure does not take into account those families that had not yet tried the nappies (as their baby was not yet born or was still too small) but

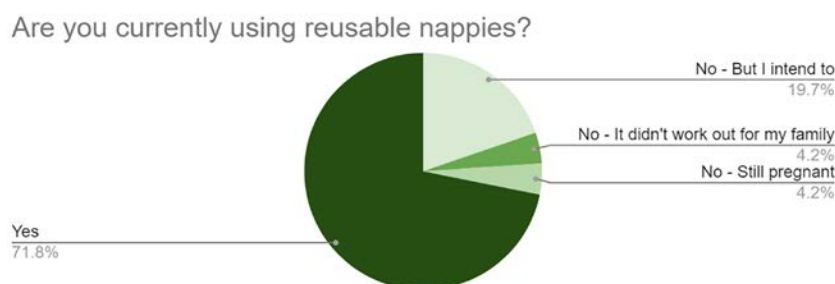


Figure 2.1. Results from the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme survey: “Are you currently using reusable nappies?”.

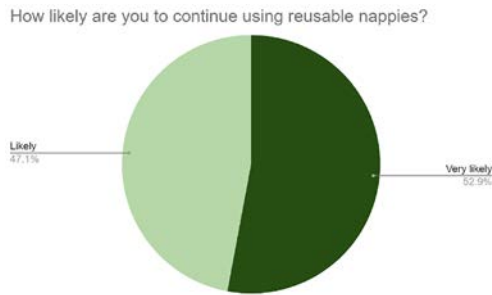


Figure 2.2. Results from the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme survey: “How likely are you to continue using reusable nappies?”.

intended to do so in the future. It also does not take into account the fact that some families, after trying the nappies in the bundle, may chose to purchase more to allow them to use cloth nappies more of the time or all the time.

All of those using the nappies said that they plan to continue using reusable nappies, with 53% saying that they are very likely to continue and 47% saying that they are likely to continue (Figure 2.2).

Participants were enthusiastic about the nappies received and are sharing their experiences with friends and family:

My sister-in-law just had a baby, and I shared my experience of cloth nappies with her. She is going to look into it.

I've said it to a few mum friends recently, they all thought (as I did before) that it would be very difficult/require loads of extra work, etc., and it really doesn't. Not sending a bunch of nappies to a landfill is amazing, and saving some money has been absolutely fantastic.

The families using the cloth nappies were asked about their use of the cloth wipes provided, with 84% stating that they used them. In general, parents were less receptive to cloth wipes, with 45% very likely to use them in the future and 25% likely, leaving 14% unsure and 16% unlikely or very unlikely to use them in the future. However, those who did like cloth wipes were very enthusiastic about them and have recommended them widely to friends and family:

I tell people cloth wipes are best thing we ever bought and they are less receptive to

the wipes than the nappies for a reason I do not understand. But I recommend them to whomever will listen.

2.5 Discussion

The objective of the research was to develop and pilot a strategy to increase the use and acceptance of reusable nappies and wipes. The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme succeeded in achieving this aim, with 72% of participants using cloth nappies at the time of the survey and a further 24% intending to use them once their baby was big enough. Only 4% of participants tried the reusable nappies provided but chose not to continue. In comparison, surveys carried out by the RNfL scheme found that between 80% and 90% of participants were using nappies provided by the scheme at the time of the survey (A. Walker, RNfL, personal communication, January 2023). The short time frame for the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme pilot required data to be collected before 24% of the participating babies had grown into the nappies. A follow-up survey was carried out in late 2023 to examine the longer-term use of the nappies. A total of 33 participants responded and, of these, 36% had continued to use the nappies more than 6 months after they had received them. Further follow-up surveys are planned, and the findings should provide crucial information on the impact on the use of reusable nappies by parents returning to work after parental leave.

In the surveys of both the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme and the RNfL scheme, parents using cloth nappies at the time of the survey were asked how likely they were to continue using cloth nappies. Participants in both schemes were keen to continue using cloth nappies in the future, with 53% of respondents in the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme very likely to continue and 47% likely to continue, and 93% of participants in the RNfL scheme stating that they were very likely to continue to use the nappies. Based on responses to a question asking participants for their thoughts on the bundle provided, participants in both schemes were enthusiastic about the bundle they received.

Based on the data collected, the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme is an effective way to encourage new parents in Ireland to use reusable nappies.

However, changes are needed to optimise the success of the scheme. Although information on washing and drying nappies was included in the nappy bundle, with the aim of reducing the carbon impact of the use phase, in line with recommendations from nappy LCAs, feedback on the scheme via the survey revealed that new parents require more information on the use of cloth nappies. Participants requested videos demonstrating how to put on nappies to ensure that they fit correctly, information on when to change the nappy and on the use of liners, and information on

troubleshooting issues such as leaks. As a response to this feedback, changes are under way, with additional information and demonstration videos planned for the scheme web page, with a QR code linking to this page to accompany nappy bundles in the future. In addition, to meet the need for further support in the use of cloth nappies, the dates of the Cloth Nappy Library's online monthly nappuccinos will be posted on the scheme web page and emailed to participants in the scheme. These online sessions cover all information on use of and types of cloth nappies and include a Q&A section.

3 No Plastic. Period.

3.1 Overview

No Plastic. Period. is an environmental education programme focused on reducing the use of disposable menstrual items. The programme raises awareness of, and normalises the use of, reusable menstrual items, with the aim of increasing the use of reusable and plastic-free menstrual items in Ireland, in place of single-use disposables, in line with the move towards a circular economy.

Menstruation is a healthy part of life that is experienced at some point during the lifetime of over 50% of the population of Ireland. Women and people who menstruate use more than 11,000 disposable menstrual products in their lifetime – based on an average of 38 years of menstruating, using 22 items of menstrual products per cycle and 13 cycles per year (WEN, 2023) – making disposable menstrual items a huge source of single-use plastic. Dependence on disposable menstruation items has led to stark environmental damage, as outlined in Chapter 1.

While reusable alternatives in the forms of menstrual cups, period pants and cloth pads are currently available for use, their uptake is low. The No Plastic. Period. programme was developed to increase the uptake of these reusable options and support the move away from single-use disposable menstrual items.

3.2 Developing the No Plastic. Period. Programme

3.2.1 Research

Discussions with experts

The research phase began with outlining case studies of programmes working on the promotion of reusable menstrual items as a circular alternative to single-use disposable menstrual items. These programmes were developed and are delivered by organisations such as national agencies, local authorities, universities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Through discussions with organisations delivering programmes on the topic, the research team aimed to establish

which strategies resulted in the greatest impact in terms of behaviour change, and then to use this information to develop a strategy for Ireland.

European NGOs have developed and delivered numerous awareness-raising programmes on the topic, tackling taboos and providing information on reusable alternatives through media campaigns, training programmes for teachers and students, participation in weeks of action such as Environmenstrual Week, and lobbying local and national government for policy to support reusables. NGOs in the UK have a long and successful history of promoting reusable menstrual items. The Women's Environmental Network in the UK has campaigned on menstruation since 1989. The organisation has delivered three decades of workshops, talks and outreach to tackle the taboos and stigma around period products, and promote safe, sustainable, affordable and healthy alternatives. In 2019, in conjunction with the environmental charity City to Sea, it delivered a programme aimed at creating widespread behavioural change to reduce plastic pollution from period products by running educational sessions in schools. The campaign reached its target of training 600 educators in schools and 47 environmenstrual ambassadors to deliver workshops and information about reusable/washable period products. City to Sea delivers the Rethink Periods programme, which involves training teachers and school nurses on menstruation and providing them with lesson plans, resources and a menstrual item demonstration box. The programme has so far trained 1500 teachers and nurses and reached 211,000 students (WEN, 2021).

The ongoing work on this topic has led to an increased awareness of reusable menstrual items and an increased uptake in their use in the UK. A 2022 consumer behaviour report (Mintel, 2022) into reusable menstrual items in the UK found that 19% of women had purchased period underwear in the previous year (and 33% said that they would be interested in purchasing period underwear in the future), 10% had used reusable pads, 7% had used menstrual cups and 5% had used reusable tampons.

Prompting behaviour change through awareness-raising campaigns takes many years. However, some campaigns promoting reusable menstrual items have led to rapid behaviour change through the provision of free reusables to their target audiences.

Trial Period was an initiative by Zero Waste Scotland in 2019 to encourage women to try reusable menstrual items by providing them for free. The development of this initiative involved a series of surveys and focus groups to establish women's perceptions of reusable menstrual products and the factors influencing their choice of menstrual protection. The survey was completed by 1015 women, and 59 people took part in focus groups, making this the most comprehensive study available of menstruation and perceptions of reusable menstrual items available (Zero Waste Scotland, 2019).

The key finding from the survey and focus groups was that menstrual product choices are based on how those products meet women's personal needs, with an emphasis on effectiveness (specifically leak prevention), convenience and comfort. These factors were important to all participants, regardless of the types of product used. Messages highlighting the effectiveness, convenience and comfort of reusable menstrual items were then used to promote the scheme, in line with the findings of the survey. The promotion acknowledged that reusables are not suitable for everyone and steered clear of preaching. During the course of the Trial Period initiative, 2000 menstrual cups, cloth pads and reusable tampon applicators were distributed to women across Scotland. Three months after receiving their free reusable menstrual item, participants were surveyed to establish the impact of the scheme. The survey found that 91% of participants were still using the reusables; 49% were using them in conjunction with disposables, and an additional 42% of participants were no longer using any single-use period products at all (C. Bozac, Zero Waste Scotland, personal communication, May 2022).

Belfast City Council is an example of a local authority that promotes reusable menstrual items by providing information and reusable menstrual items for free to people within the city. The council aims to reduce the amount of period waste going to landfill, to reduce plastic waste, to prompt behaviour change and to mainstream reusable menstrual products. It hopes

to encourage talking about reusable period products and to make them a more attractive offering to the general public, and has chosen to provide menstrual items for free to prompt behaviour change. The options available to city residents are a full cycle kit of cloth pads or a menstrual cup with steriliser. The city council promotes the reusables with an environmental message as the focus.

The scheme launched in April 2022 with one post on Facebook and one on Twitter, and within 24 hours the council had to close applications as it had received over 2750 in the course of a day. The majority of applications (84%) were for the pack of five pads. The success of the scheme was covered widely by the press. In September 2022, 5 months after receiving the menstrual items, participants were asked to take part in a follow-up survey, and 491 responded, 97% of whom were happy with the products. The survey also found that the scheme had prompted those who would not otherwise have done so to begin using reusable menstrual items: 76% said that they would not or might not have purchased the products if the scheme was not offering them. According to the survey, 58% of participants reported that they used reusable products all the time, with a further 37% using them occasionally. Most encouragingly, 43% of respondents reported that they had stopped using single-use period products completely (J. Greene, Belfast City Council, personal communication, December 2022).

In Scotland, Dundee and Angus College delivers a programme called Period Positive. Through this programme, the college issues free products, both single use and reusable, to all students as a period poverty initiative. The products are available in toilets within the college and at drop-off points and at various other locations such as the Students' Association, and products are also distributed at student events such as the Freshers' Fayre and during Wellbeing Week. In addition, period education workshops are delivered; however, owing to a lack of staffing, they are not run consistently. The Period Positive programme does not survey students on the reusable products, but informal feedback received by college staff has been universally positive.

Munster Technical University (MTU) in Ireland launched the Code Red programme in 2021 as a period poverty initiative. The programme is focused on period justice and breaking taboos by prompting

conversation on menstruation. Free plastic-free single-use disposable menstrual items are available to students in dispensers in bathrooms in the student union and at student events. Reusable menstrual items are also made available in the student union office. However, data on the take-up or use of these items are not collected.

While several of the case studies profiled above provided free reusables without educational training on their use, other case studies have focused on delivering educational workshops on reusables while not providing them for free.

Raising awareness of reusable menstrual items as an alternative to single-use items through the development and delivery of educational resources was central to a strategy for use in Ireland. Article 10 of the EU's Single Use Plastics Directive (2019) addresses awareness raising of single-use plastic. The items covered by Article 10 are listed in Part G of the Annex and include wet wipes as well as sanitary towels (pads), tampons and tampon applicators. Article 10 of the directive states that "Member States shall take measures to inform consumers of the single-use plastic products listed in Part G of the Annex of the availability of re-usable alternatives, re-use systems and waste management options for those single-use plastic products". To date, little progress has been made on this aspect of the Single Use Plastics Directive in Ireland, and this project represents a major step towards achieving compliance.

Follow-up surveys carried out by the case studies examined for this research show that the provision of reusable menstrual items to people interested in trying them leads to rapid take-up of the reusables. For this reason, the research team selected to develop a programme that incorporated this aspect.

The programmes outlined above all aimed to promote reusable menstrual items to menstruating people, but the target audience varied (university students, teachers and school nurses, over-18s or all menstruators). Following consideration of the potential target audiences, the research team decided that this programme should focus on young people aged between 12 and 23 years.

Young people were selected as the target audience for two primary reasons:

1. Environmental impact. A 2019 report (ReZero, 2019) estimated that each menstruating person

uses, on average, 419 disposable menstrual items a year. The sooner a change from disposables to reusables is made, the more disposables are avoided, thus reducing the environmental impact of menstruation.

2. Delivery pathway. There is a clear pathway for awareness raising among teenagers: education can be delivered in in school workshops within the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum or in workshops hosted by youth groups. In this way, the messages around reusable menstrual items can reach a large audience.

Discussions with the target audience

To inform the development of the programme, we surveyed 50 young people and held two focus groups, one in a secondary school and one in a youth centre, with 10 young people. The aim was to examine attitudes towards menstrual items and the choices young people make around what products to use. To provide comparable data, the questions used in the survey and focus groups were those used by Zero Waste Scotland in its Trial Period programme. Overall, it was noted that the attitudes of the respondents in the Irish and Scottish studies were similar.

One aim of the survey was to establish levels of interest in using reusable menstrual items among young people in Ireland. The respondents were asked if they would consider using a number of reusable menstrual items. Period pants were the most popular option, with 57% open to trying them; 50% said that they would consider a menstrual cup and 47% that they would consider cloth pads (Figure 3.1).

To enable us to develop a programme that would meet needs of the target audience with regard to menstrual products, respondents were asked to consider which factors are important to them in their menstrual items. The most important factor was the security and reliability of the menstrual item, followed by comfort (Figure 3.2).

The factor considered very important when considering which menstrual item to use by the smallest proportion of respondents was the environmental impact of a menstrual item and whether or not it is plastic free (Figure 3.3).

These findings mirrored those found by Zero Waste Scotland, which prompted it to develop a programme that highlights the reliability and comfort of reusable

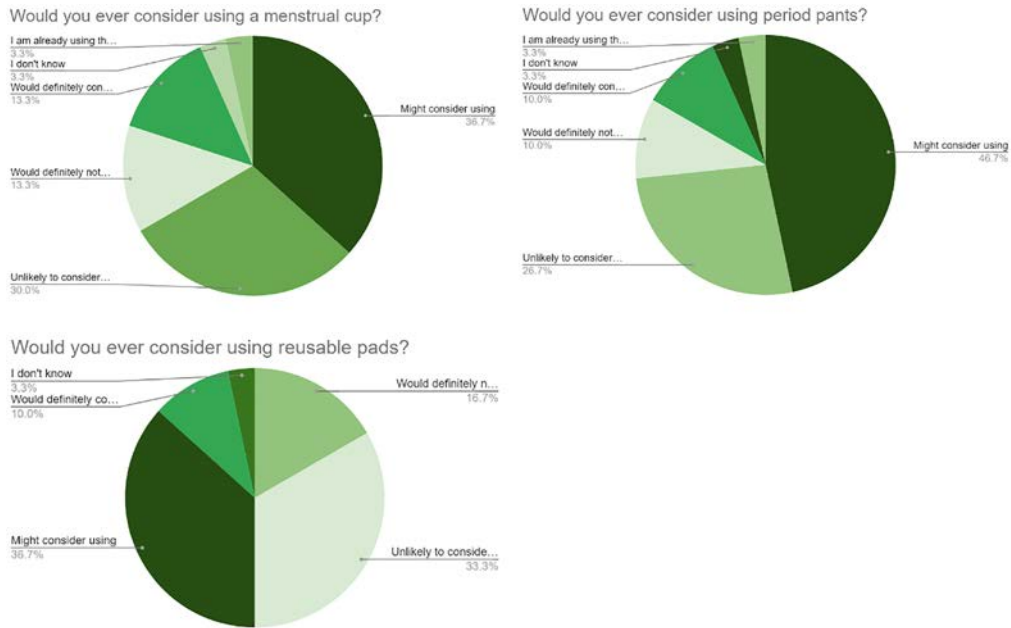


Figure 3.1. Results from the No Plastic. Period. survey: “Would you consider using a menstrual cup?”, “Would you ever consider using period pants?” and “Would you ever consider using reusable pads?”.

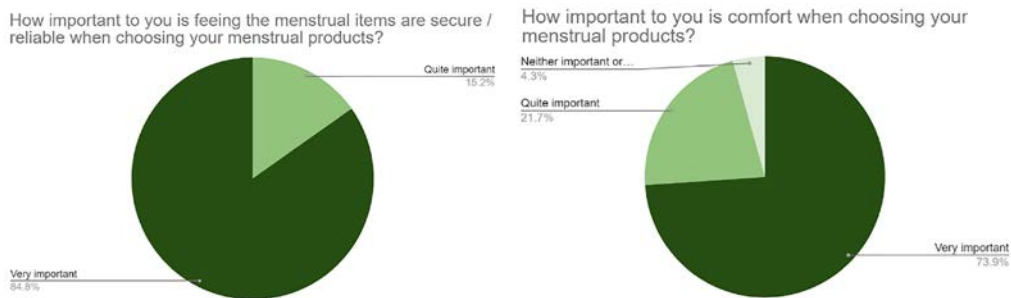


Figure 3.2. Results from the No Plastic. Period. survey: “How important to you is feeling the menstrual items are secure/reliable when choosing your menstrual products?” and “How important to you is comfort when choosing your menstrual products?”.

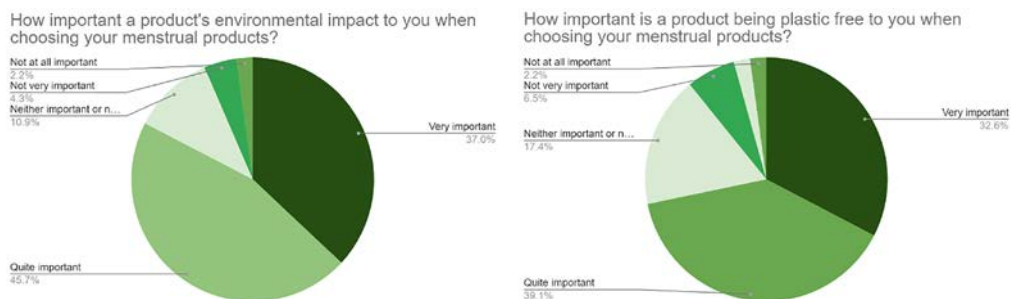


Figure 3.3. Results from the No Plastic. Period. survey: “How important is a product’s environmental impact to you when choosing your menstrual products?” and “How important is a product being plastic free to you when choosing your menstrual products?”.

menstrual items, rather than focusing on the environmental benefits.

The most important factors for respondents in our survey in choosing a menstrual item were reliability, comfort, convenience, hygiene and discretion (Figure 3.4).

Despite the low level of concern around plastic in menstrual items, the number one choice for a campaign name on reusable menstrual items was No Plastic. Period. (Figure 3.5).

Young people were also asked about their experiences of period poverty, and 13% said that they had struggled to afford menstrual items in the past 12 months.

3.2.2 Development

The programme was made up of an in-class workshop, posters to be displayed in bathroom cubicles and a series of animations. The content of the workshop, posters and animations was developed based on addressing the needs of the target audience when considering what menstrual item to use.

Three animations were developed, one on each of the reusable menstrual items that were the focus of the programme: menstrual cups, period pants and cloth pads. Each animation highlights the ways in which the product meets the needs of the target audience,

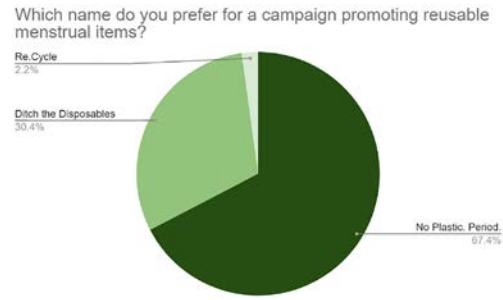


Figure 3.5. Results from the No Plastic. Period. survey: "Which name do you prefer for a campaign promoting reusable menstrual items?"

for example the comfort of period pants and the convenience of menstrual cups. The animations are only 90 seconds long, to facilitate their sharing on social media.

The posters and workshop presentation were developed from the animations, ensuring that they were in the same style, with the workshop including a greater level of information and the posters less information. The workshop was structured to fit within a 40-minute lesson and consisted of students passing around menstrual cups, period pants and cloth pads while learning about each item. The posters, to be placed in school bathrooms, were designed to raise awareness among students of reusable menstrual items and also to inform them that these items were available to them within the school as part of the No Plastic. Period. programme.

How important are the following factors to you when choosing your menstrual products?

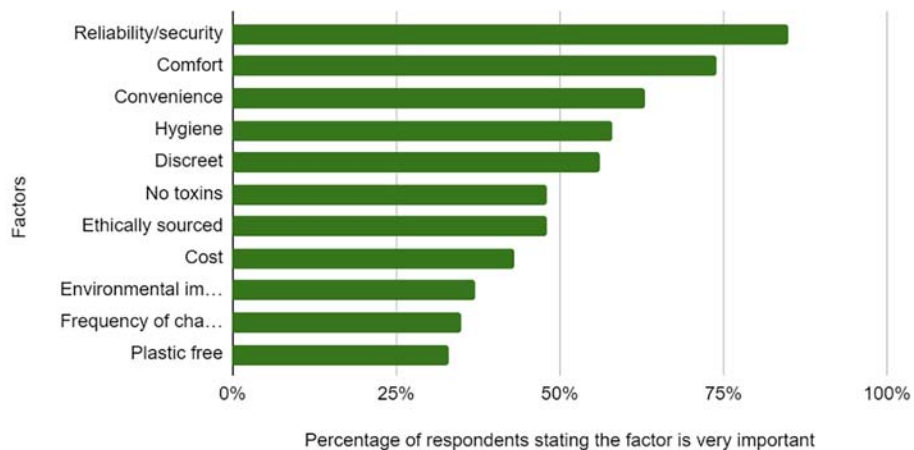


Figure 3.4. Results from the No Plastic. Period. survey: "How important are the following factors to you when choosing your menstrual products?"

3.3 Piloting the No Plastic. Period. Programme

3.3.1 Delivering the programme

The No Plastic. Period. programme was delivered in two post-primary schools (Kinsale Community School (KCS) and Cork Educate Together Secondary School), in one youth group (The Shack YMCA group, Clonakilty) and in MTU during Green Week.

In total, 22 workshops were delivered, and 550 young people took part in the workshops. The workshops were delivered in school, university and youth group settings to establish which was the most effective pathway for use in the strategy. Fourteen workshops were delivered in KCS to 322 female students, with all year groups except third year taking part. Six workshops were delivered in Cork Educate Together Secondary School to a mixed-sex group of 193 students, with all year groups except second year taking part. One workshop was delivered to The Shack YMCA youth group to six young people. One workshop was delivered to a mixed-sex group of 29 MTU university students.

3.3.2 Take-up of reusable menstrual items

All workshop participants were offered a trial reusable menstrual item. They could choose a menstrual cup, a pair of period pants or a pack of seven cloth pads with a travel pouch. Menstrual items offered to participants in the school workshops and the youth group workshop were provided by the No Plastic. Period. programme while those offered to participants

in the MTU workshops were provided by the Code Red programme.

Almost half (273/550, 49.6%) of the young people who attended the workshop chose to try a reusable menstrual item. However, many of the workshops were mixed sex and attended by young people who will never menstruate or need menstrual items. When basing the calculations on the single-sex workshops that took place in KCS, the percentage of young people attending the workshops that opted to take a reusable menstrual item is 56%.

3.4 Results of the Pilot

Of the 273 young people who received a free reusable menstrual item as part of the No Plastic. Period. programme, 176 completed a survey on their experiences. Prior to the free trial, 88% had normally used only single-use disposables for menstrual protection (Figure 3.6).

The respondents were asked why they chose to try a reusable menstrual item. The number one reason given was that it was free (Figure 3.7).

When asked the reason for their choice of menstrual item (menstrual cup, period pants or cloth pads), comfort and ease of use were the most commonly selected reasons (Figure 3.8).

The most popular choice was period pants, selected by 43% of respondents, followed by the menstrual cup (selected by 40%) and the pack of cloth pads (chosen by 16%. When asked if they had tried the reusable menstrual item provided to them, 57% of

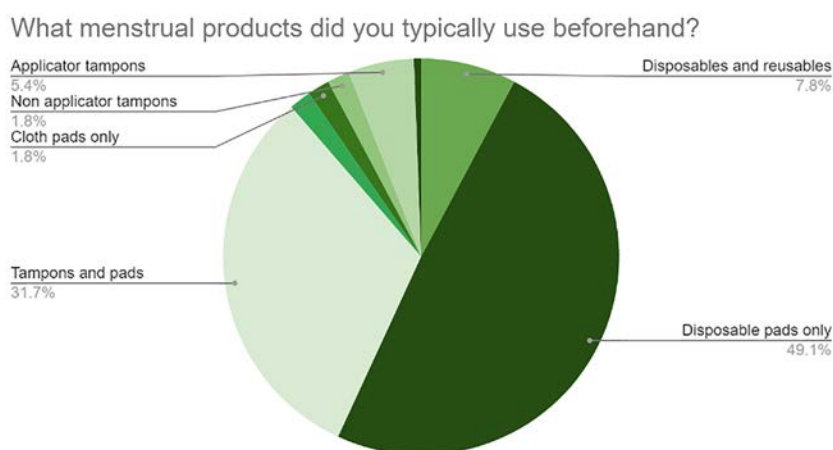


Figure 3.6. Results from the No Plastic. Period. Survey: “What menstrual products did you typically use beforehand?”.

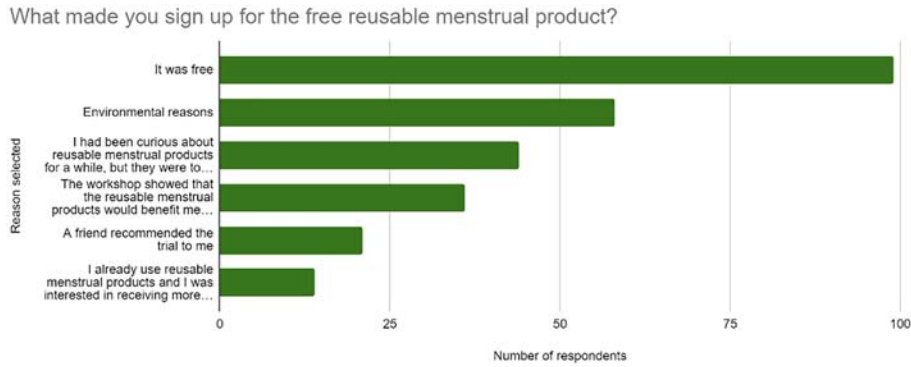


Figure 3.7. Results from the No Plastic. Period. Survey: “What made you sign up for the free reusable menstrual product?”.

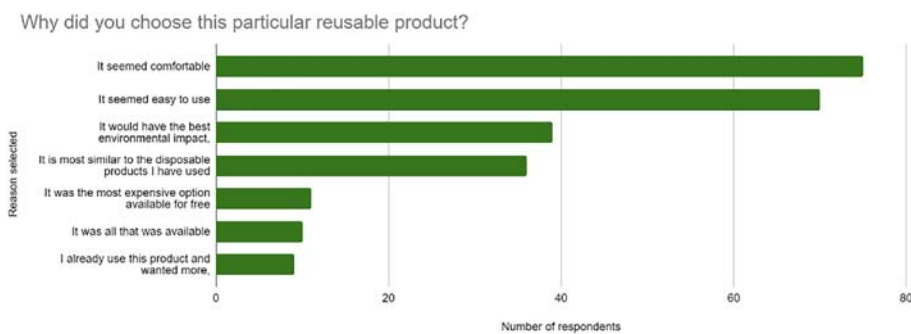


Figure 3.8. Results from the No Plastic. Period. Survey: “Why did you choose this particular reusable product?”.

the 176 survey respondents replied in the affirmative (Figure 3.9).

Of the 100 young people (57%) who reported in the survey that they had tried the reusable menstrual items, 45 were still using the reusables at the time of the survey (between three and six menstrual cycles after the workshop). Of these, 40 were continuing to use the reusables in conjunction with disposables and

five were exclusively using reusables. Of those who reported using both reusables and disposables, three (7%) stated that they have heavy periods and use both types of products at the same time. Others said that they choose to use reusables in certain circumstances, for example at night, and disposables in other situations, for example when doing sport, or one type of menstrual item on heavy-flow days and another on lighter-flow days.

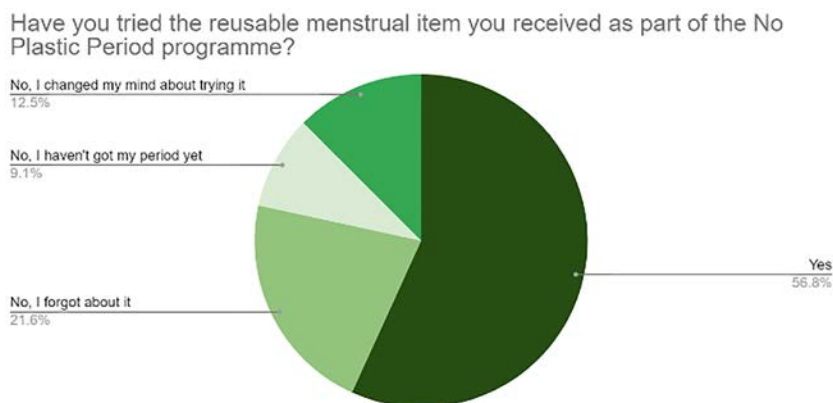


Figure 3.9. Results from the No Plastic. Period. Survey: “Have you tried the reusable menstrual item you received as part of the No Plastic. Period. programme?”.

The young people who had tried the reusables were asked whether or not they intended to use the reusable menstrual product in the future. The majority (63%) said they did, 25% were unsure and 12% did not plan to continue using them (Figure 3.10).

To determine the impact of the programme, in terms of the percentage of young people attending the workshops who plan to use reusables in the future, the calculations need to be based on only the numbers from the KCS workshops. This is because the workshops in Cork Educate Together Secondary School, MTU and The Shack YMCA group were attended by young people of both sexes, many of whom will never menstruate.

Based on the single-sex workshops that took place in KCS, the percentage of young people attending the workshops who opted to take a reusable menstrual item was 56%. Overall, 22% of the KCS workshop attendees tried the reusable menstrual item. Of these, half (11% of all attendees) plan to continue using reusable menstrual items in the future and a further 30% (7% of all attendees) may continue to use them.

3.5 Discussion

The objective of the research was to develop and pilot a strategy to increase the use and acceptance of reusable menstrual items, the No Plastic. Period. programme. Among young people who attended an educational workshop, 50% (273/550) took up the option of a free reusable menstrual item. Of those

who completed a follow-up survey (176/273, 64%), 57% (100/273) subsequently reported having tried the menstrual item (18% of the total workshop attendees). Of these, 45 (45%) were still using the menstrual items at the time of the survey. In total, the percentage of young people who attended the workshops and then went on to trial a reusable menstrual item, and planned to continue using it in the future, was 11%, with a further 5% potentially continuing to use it.

When basing the calculations on the single-sex workshops that took place in KCS, the percentage of young people attending the workshops who opted to take a reusable menstrual item is 56%. Overall, 22% of the KCS workshop attendees tried the reusable menstrual item, 11% of all the KCS workshop attendees plan to continue to use reusable menstrual items in the future, and a further 7% may continue to use them.

When comparing the results of the No Plastic. Period. programme with other initiatives providing free reusables, the No Plastic. Period. programme has had less success. Only 45% of survey respondents from the No Plastic. Period. programme were still using the reusables at the time of the survey, in comparison with 91% of those who participated in the Trial Period programme. Likewise, 87% of respondents in the Belfast initiative reduced their use of disposable menstrual items as a result of the scheme. The target audience for the Scottish and Belfast programmes was over-18s, while the target audience for the No Plastic. Period. programme was people aged between

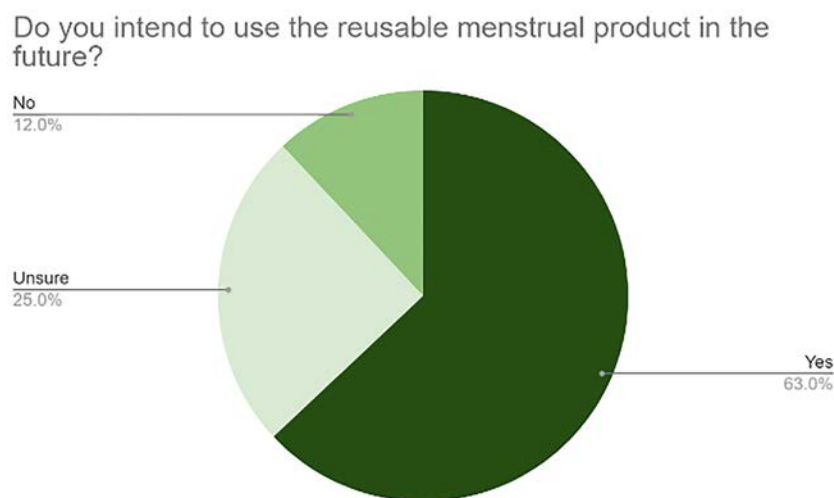


Figure 3.10. Results from the No Plastic. Period. Survey: "Do you intend to use the reusable menstrual product in the future?".

12 and 23 years. Because only a very small number of MTU students attended the workshops and replied to the survey, 98% of the young people who responded were in secondary school and so aged between 12 and 18/19 years. Feeling as though a menstrual cup did not fit properly and lack of comfort with the mess of reusable menstrual items were listed as the negatives of reusables. While adults can experience these issues as disadvantages too, it may be that young people are less familiar with their body and more sensitive to menstrual blood than adults, who are more accustomed to menstruation. Moreover, random school classes were selected for the initiative, meaning that respondents had not indicated any particular prior interest in trying reusables, whereas in the Scottish

and Belfast cases anyone from the population could take a free reusable and so many respondents may have been adults who already used reusables and were therefore more likely to continue using them.

Overall, 11% of attendees at the No Plastic. Period. workshops will continue to use reusable menstrual items in the future. To ensure that the programme can be scaled up in a cost-effective manner, unused reusable menstrual items should be returned in their original packaging to the school. This would allow young people who took a menstrual item at the workshop but changed their mind about trying it to return these items for redistribution, and ensure that money is not wasted on the provision of unwanted menstrual items.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Core Findings

4.1.1 *The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme*

- The scheme offers new parents a voucher for the purchase of a reusable nappy and wipes starter bundle. The bundle contains enough nappies to enable parents to use reusables 50% of the time.
- A total of 109 families were provided with the starter bundles.
- The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme succeeded in achieving the aim of increasing use of reusable nappies, with 72% of participants continuing to use cloth nappies at the time of the survey and a further 24% intending to use them once their baby was big enough. Only 4% tried the reusable nappies provided and chose not to continue.
- In response to the survey, 53% of respondents stated that they were very likely and 47% that they were likely to continue using cloth nappies, as they were satisfied with the nappies.
- Nappy care leaflets were distributed with the nappy bundles, covering washing and drying of nappies. However, respondents were dissatisfied with the information provided with the starter bundles and requested more information, for example on topics such as the correct fitting of nappies and different combinations of inserts. Changes are being made to the scheme to accommodate this.

4.1.2 *The No Plastic. Period. programme*

- The programme combines an educational workshop to raise awareness of reusable alternatives to single-use disposable menstrual items with the provision of reusable menstrual items.
- The workshops focus on the reliability, convenience and comfort of reusable menstrual items, as these are the factors that are most important to young people in their menstrual products. Information on the varying costs associated with use of different menstrual items is also covered, to highlight how the use of

reusables, and in particular, menstrual cups, can reduce the costs associated with menstruation and reduce period poverty.

- The programme was piloted among 550 young people in three different settings (post-primary school, third-level institution, youth group) in four locations.
- Post-primary schools are the most effective setting for delivery of the programme to young people, as the workshop can be integrated into a class, ensuring that a large number of students attend. In third-level institutions, in contrast, workshops are necessarily held outside teaching hours, e.g. at lunchtime, and are optional, and in youth group settings there are small numbers in attendance.
- The No Plastic. Period. programme pilot resulted in 50% of young people who attended the educational workshop opting to trial a reusable menstrual item; however, many workshops were mixed sex, which, while contributing towards the programme's aims of reducing stigma and ensuring inclusivity, makes gathering accurate data on the impact of the programme more complex.
- When basing the calculations on the single-sex workshops that took place in KCS, the percentage of young people attending the workshops who opted to take a reusable menstrual item is 56%.
- Overall, 22% of the KCS workshop attendees tried the reusable menstrual item, 11% plan to continue to use reusable menstrual items in the future, and a further 7% may continue to use them.

4.2 Ongoing Work

Work on the Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme is ongoing, to improve the information provided to support use of the reusable nappies and wipes. This work involves developing demonstration videos and further information to integrate into the scheme web page. A number of local authorities are adopting the scheme in their area for 2023/24, and discussions are taking place with maternity hospitals to promote the scheme through their antenatal clinics. The scheme

has now been rolled out by the Cork University Maternity Hospital, and 230 nappy bundles have been made available by Munster local authorities. The demand for bundles was huge and all were gone within 6 weeks of the scheme starting.

4.3 Recommendations

The findings from this research suggest the need to address the environmental challenges associated with plastic and the opportunities to increase the uptake of reusables through the schemes developed. The recommendations outlined may be considered in the context of research, policy and national campaigns to reduce plastic use.

4.3.1 *Recommendations on the topic of baby nappies and wipes*

- Further research into the use of reusable nappies in childcare settings and the development of pilot case studies are required to support the ongoing use of reusables once parents return to work after maternity leave.
- Midwives should be trained in the use of reusable nappies and their advantages, and this education should be integrated into antenatal classes for expectant parents in maternity hospitals.
- The Cloth Nappy Incentive Scheme should be included in the updated 2023 National Management Plan for a Circular Economy.

4.3.2 *Recommendations on the topic of reusable menstrual items*

- Develop and pilot strategies to support an increase in the use of reusable incontinence items. While the same switch is required, i.e. from single-use disposable pads to reusable pads or incontinence pants, the target audience differs from that in the No Plastic. Period. programme and therefore a different promotional strategy is required.
- Conduct research to compare the costs and impacts of providing free single-use disposable menstrual items and reusable menstrual items in a post-primary school setting as a period poverty measure.
- Include reusables in future policies to tackle period poverty.
- Provide disposable, plastic-free menstrual items free of charge in schools and public offices.
- Incorporate the No Plastic. Period. programme into the updated 2023 National Management Plan for a Circular Economy and implement a nationwide roll-out of the programme. This will help Ireland to meet its obligations under the EU's Single Use Plastics Directive to raise awareness of single-use plastics.
- Work with supermarkets to encourage them to remove plastic tampon applicators from their own-brand tampons, to reduce plastic throughout their menstrual item lines and to stock reusable menstrual items on their shelves.

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Abbreviations

KCS	Kinsale Community School
LCA	Life cycle assessment
MRW	Mixed residual waste
MTU	Munster Technical University
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RNFL	Real Nappies for London

An Gníomhaireacht Um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

Tá an GCC freagrach as an gcomhshaoil a chosaint agus a fheabhsú, mar shócmhainn luachmhar do mhuintir na hÉireann. Táimid tiomanta do dhaoine agus don chomhshaoil a chosaint ar thionchar díobhálach na radaíochta agus an truaillithe.

Is féidir obair na Gníomhaireachta a roinnt ina trí phríomhréimse:

Rialáil: Rialáil agus córais chomhlíonta comhshaoil éifeachtacha a chur i bhfeidhm, chun dea-thorthaí comhshaoil a bhaint amach agus díriú orthu siúd nach mbíonn ag cloí leo.

Eolas: Sonraí, eolas agus measúnú ardchaighdeán, spriocdhírthe agus tráthúil a chur ar fáil i leith an chomhshaoil chun bonn eolais a chur faoin gcinnteoireacht.

Abhcóideacht: Ag obair le daoine eile ar son timpeallachta glaine, táirgiúla agus dea-chosanta agus ar son cleachtas inbhuanaithe i dtaobh an chomhshaoil.

I measc ár gcuid freagrachtaí tá:

Ceadúnú

- > Gníomhaíochtaí tionscail, dramhaíola agus stórála peitрил ar scála mór;
- > Sceitheadh fuíolluisce uirbhig;
- > Úsáid shrianta agus scaoileadh rialaithe Orgánach Géinmhodhnaithe;
- > Foinsí radaíochta ianúcháin;
- > Astaíochtaí gás ceaptha teasa ó thionscal agus ón eitlíocht trí Scéim an AE um Thrádáil Astaíochtaí.

Forfheidhmiú Náisiúnta i leith Cúrsaí Comhshaoil

- > Iniúchadh agus cigireacht ar shaoráidí a bhfuil ceadúnas acu ón GCC;
- > Cur i bhfeidhm an dea-chleachtais a stiúradh i ngníomhaíochtaí agus i saoráidí rialáilte;
- > Maoirseacht a dhéanamh ar fhreagrachtaí an údaráis áitiúil as cosaint an chomhshaoil;
- > Caighdeán an uisce óil phoiblí a rialáil agus údaruithe um sceitheadh fuíolluisce uirbhig a fhorfheidhmiú
- > Caighdeán an uisce óil phoiblí agus phríobháidigh a mheasúnú agus tuairisciú air;
- > Comhordú a dhéanamh ar líonra d'eagraíochtaí seirbhíse poiblí chun tacú le gníomhú i gcoinne coireachta comhshaoil;
- > An dlí a chur orthu siúd a bhriseann dlí an chomhshaoil agus a dhéanann dochar don chomhshaoil.

Bainistíocht Dramhaíola agus Ceimiceáin sa Chomhshaoil

- > Rialacháin dramhaíola a chur i bhfeidhm agus a fhorfheidhmiú lena n-áirítear saincheisteanna forfheidhmithe náisiúnta;
- > Staitisticí dramhaíola náisiúnta a ullmhú agus a fhoilsiú chomh maith leis an bPlean Náisiúnta um Bainistíocht Dramhaíola Guaisí;
- > An Clár Náisiúnta um Chosc Dramhaíola a fhorbairt agus a chur i bhfeidhm;
- > Reachtaíocht ar rialú ceimiceáin sa timpeallacht a chur i bhfeidhm agus tuairisciú ar an reachtaíocht sin.

Bainistíocht Uisce

- > Plé le struchtúir náisiúnta agus réigiúnacha rialachais agus oibriúcháin chun an Chreat-treoir Uisce a chur i bhfeidhm;
- > Monatóireacht, measúnú agus tuairisciú a dhéanamh ar chaighdeán aibhneacha, lochanna, uiscí idirchreasa agus cósta, uiscí snámha agus screamhuisce chomh maith le tomhas ar leibhéal uisce agus sreabhadh abhann.

Eolaíocht Aeráide & Athrú Aeráide

- > Fardail agus réamh-mheastacháin a fhoilsiú um astaíochtaí gás ceaptha teasa na hÉireann;
- > Rúnaíocht a chur ar fáil don Chomhairle Chomhairleach ar Athrú Aeráide agus tacaíocht a thabhairt don Idirphlé Náisiúnta ar Gníomhú ar son na hAeráide;

- > Tacú le gníomhaíochtaí forbartha Náisiúnta, AE agus NA um Eolaíocht agus Beartas Aeráide.

Monatóireacht & Measúnú ar an gComhshaoil

- > Córais náisiúnta um monatóireacht an chomhshaoil a cheapadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm: teicneolaíocht, bainistíocht sonraí, anailís agus réamhaisnéisiú;
- > Tuairiscí ar Staid Thimpeallacht na hÉireann agus ar Tháscairí a chur ar fáil;
- > Monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar chaighdeán an aeir agus Treoir an AE i leith Aeir Ghlain don Eoraip a chur i bhfeidhm chomh maith leis an gCoinbhinsiún ar Aerthruailliú Fadraoin Trasteorann, agus an Treoir i leith na Teorann Náisiúnta Astaíochtaí;
- > Maoirseacht a dhéanamh ar chur i bhfeidhm na Treorach i leith Torainn Timpeallachta;
- > Measúnú a dhéanamh ar thionchar pleananna agus clár beartaithe ar chomhshaoil na hÉireann.

Taighde agus Forbairt Comhshaoil

- > Comhordú a dhéanamh ar ghníomhaíochtaí taighde comhshaoil agus iad a mhaoiniú chun brú a aithint, bonn eolais a chur faoin mbeartas agus réitigh a chur ar fáil;
- > Comhoibriú le gníomhaíocht náisiúnta agus AE um thaighde comhshaoil.

Cosaint Raideolaíoch

- > Monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar leibhéal radaíochta agus nochtadh an phobail do radaíocht ianúcháin agus do réimsí leictreamaighnéadacha a mheas;
- > Cabhrú le pleananna náisiúnta a fhorbairt le haghaidh éigeandálaí ag eascairt as tasmí núicléacha;
- > Monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar fhorbairtí thar lear a bhaineann le saoráidí núicléacha agus leis an tsábháilteacht raideolaíochta;
- > Sainseirbhísí um chosaint ar an radaíocht a sholáthar, nó maoirsiú a dhéanamh ar sholáthar na seirbhísí sin.

Treoir, Ardú Feasachta agus Faisnéis Inrochtana

- > Tuairisciú, comhairle agus treoir neamhspleách, fianaise-bhunaithe a chur ar fáil don Rialtas, don tionscal agus don phobal ar ábhair maidir le cosaint comhshaoil agus raideolaíoch;
- > An nasc idir sláinte agus folláine, an geilleagar agus timpeallacht ghlan a chur chun cinn;
- > Feasacht comhshaoil a chur chun cinn lena n-áirítear tacú le hiompraíocht um éifeachtúlacht acmhainní agus aistriú aeráide;
- > Tástáil radóin a chur chun cinn i dtithe agus in ionaid oibre agus feabhsúchán a mholadh áit is gá.

Comhpháirtíocht agus Líonrú

- > Oibriú le gníomhaireachtaí idirnáisiúnta agus náisiúnta, údaráis réigiúnacha agus áitiúla, eagraíochtaí neamhrialtais, comhlachtaí ionadaíochta agus ranna rialtais chun cosaint comhshaoil agus raideolaíoch a chur ar fáil, chomh maith le taighde, comhordú agus cinnteoireacht bunaithe ar an eolaíocht.

Bainistíocht agus struchtúr na Gníomhaireachta um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

Tá an GCC á bainistiú ag Bord lánaimseartha, ar a bhfuil Ard-Stiúrthóir agus cúigear Stiúrthóir. Déantar an obair ar fud cúig cinn d'Oifigí:

1. An Oifig um Inbhuanaitheacht i leith Cúrsaí Comhshaoil
2. An Oifig Forfheidhmithe i leith Cúrsaí Comhshaoil
3. An Oifig um Fhianaise agus Measúnú
4. An Oifig um Chosaint ar Radaíocht agus Monatóireacht Comhshaoil
5. An Oifig Cumarsáide agus Seirbhísí Corparáideacha

Tugann coistí comhairleacha cabhair don Gníomhaireacht agus tagann siad le chéile go rialta le plé a dhéanamh ar ábhair imní agus le comhairle a chur ar an mBord.

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