

## THE CHANGE(K)NOW! POLICY BRIEF AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS

# MAKING REUSE WORK AT SCALE: FROM PILOTS TO SYSTEMS

2026


Across Europe, the transition from single-use packaging to reusable food delivery systems is gaining political momentum. New regulatory frameworks, particularly the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation, set clear expectations for reducing waste and scaling reuse. Yet, practical implementation remains fragmented. Despite numerous pilots and growing awareness, reusable systems have not yet become the default in everyday consumption.

The experience of the *Change(k)now! project* shows that the challenge is not a lack of solutions, but a lack of functioning systems. Reusable packaging works in practice – in schools, public events and take-away services – but only where governance, infrastructure, business models and user experience are aligned. Where these elements remain disconnected, reuse stays a niche.

This points to a fundamental shift in perspective. Reuse is not a behavioural issue alone, nor a technical fix. It is a system transition. Consumers do not change behaviour simply through awareness; they respond to convenience, availability and clear rules. Businesses do not invest without predictable demand and fair market conditions. Municipalities cannot act effectively without legal clarity and financial support. System change therefore requires coordinated action across all levels of governance.

At the same time, municipalities are already moving. Early policy uptake shows that cities are integrating reuse into strategies, introducing rules for public events and exploring procurement as a lever. However, progress is slowed by fragmented markets, insufficient infrastructure, unclear responsibilities and economic imbalances between reusable and single-use systems.





To move from pilots to systems, decision-makers need clear, actionable priorities. The following ten actions summarise what can be done now.

## 10 PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS

- 1. Mandate reuse at public events above a defined size**, ensuring clear rules and enforcement.
  - 2. Integrate reuse criteria into all municipal catering and procurement contracts** to create stable demand.
  - 3. Establish dense, visible return infrastructure** as part of urban planning and public space design.
  - 4. Ensure interoperability between systems**, avoiding market fragmentation and user confusion.
  - 5. Create economic incentives and disincentives**, including fees for single-use packaging where possible.
  - 6. Provide legal clarity on hygiene, responsibilities and deposit systems** to reduce uncertainty.
  - 7. Support public-private partnerships**, enabling cooperation between municipalities, businesses and providers.
  - 8. Use public procurement as a market-shaping tool**, linking policy goals to operational delivery.
  - 9. Design systems for convenience and default use**, making reuse the easiest option for consumers.
  - 10. Invest in monitoring and performance criteria**, ensuring systems deliver real environmental benefits.
- 



Delivering these actions requires a clear distribution of roles:

- At **municipal level**, cities act as system orchestrators. They regulate, procure, plan infrastructure and convene stakeholders. Their strength lies in shaping local conditions - introducing reuse in public events, embedding it in procurement, and ensuring that systems are visible, accessible and easy to use.
- At **national level**, governments provide the enabling framework. This includes legal clarity, economic instruments and financial support for infrastructure and scaling. Without this, municipalities and businesses face uncertainty and limited capacity to act.
- At **European level**, the role is to ensure ambition, coherence and standardisation. Interoperability standards, harmonised frameworks and strong regulatory signals are essential to avoid fragmentation and enable scaling across markets.

Looking ahead, the transition towards reuse will depend on recognising reusable packaging systems as **core urban infrastructure**, comparable to waste management or public transport. This requires long-term investment, coordinated governance and political commitment. It also requires addressing trade-offs - between short-term costs and long-term savings, between market freedom and regulatory intervention, and between innovation and standardisation.

The window for action is now. The building blocks exist, and early experiences provide clear direction. **The task for decision-makers is to move beyond pilots and connect these elements into coherent systems.** If this is achieved, reuse can become not only an environmental necessity, but a practical and widely accepted part of everyday life.

