



Press Release

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## Return reusable containers everywhere: First cross-provider pilot successfully completed

Esslingen, 13. Dezember 2023

*The first pilot trial in Germany to implement this pioneering return concept for reusable containers for take-away food and beverages has been successfully completed. This milestone is the result of committed collaboration between various stakeholders and marks a significant step towards more sustainable packaging solutions.*

The campaign was funded by the 'Umwelt Bundesamt' (Federal Environment Agency) and the 'Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt' (German Federal Environmental Foundation). Running from August to October, the campaign was able to build on the broad support and great commitment of all those involved. The close cooperation with the municipality of Haar, the three reuse system providers reCIRCLE, RECUP and Relevo as well as the participating local businesses enabled the organizer ReFrastructure to achieve the goals set for this first cross-provider pilot.

In contrast to existing reuse systems, in this pilot project reusable containers were taken back across all providers. Participating distributors included five restaurants and two bakeries. Only the containers that they were unable to use themselves were collected by ReFrastructure and professionally cleaned by the Munich-based company 'Profimiet' before being returned to the cycle. This kept the distances short and the ecological impact as low as possible.

### Majority of restaurants want to continue

In a final survey, most restaurants were willing to continue taking back reusable containers across all providers if the project is continued.

"When the ReFrastructure Foundation explained to us what the pilot project was about, we agreed after a moment's consideration. Our restaurant has been using reusable food containers for a long time. We believe that everyone can and should do something to alleviate the waste problem. If the cross-provider return system is continued in the municipality of Haar, we would also be involved," says Giuseppe Montesano, owner of Ristorante Da Pino.

### Raising awareness about circular economy

The focus of the pilot was to test the digital infrastructure, which enables seamless collaboration between different reuse providers and thus cross-provider take-back of food containers, logistics and cleaning. Another central component was the "Haar geht den Mehrweg" (Haar adopts reuse) campaign, which was designed to inform and activate citizens about the project. Through these measures, the pilot not only provided a proof of concept for the digital infrastructure, but also served to educate and raise awareness among residents about circular economy, the packaging revolution and the benefits of reusable packaging.

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In an accompanying exhibition on site, almost 700 visitors informed themselves about the topics mentioned over the course of the three months. In addition, the opportunity to return reusable containers at this location was used with 80 returns. In total, over 550 containers were used, and more than 3,500 transactions were recorded on the digital infrastructure.

According to a survey at the end of the pilot, 60% of the citizens participating were aware of the pilot. The proportion of respondents who are satisfied with the offer of reusable packaging in Munich-Haar is also 18 percent higher at the end of the pilot period than before the pilot.

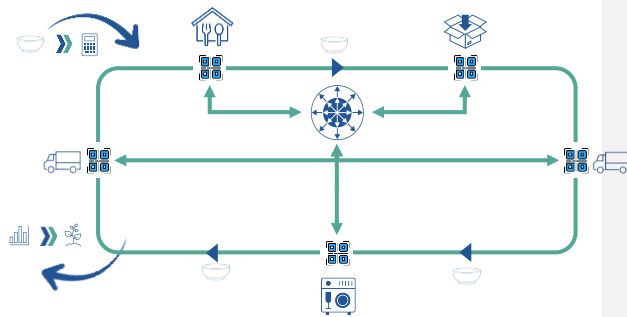
### Reusable take-away still in its infancy

Despite all the satisfaction with the progress and the findings of the pilot project, the awareness and use of reusable containers for take-away food and drinks is still in its infancy – despite the obligation to offer reusable packaging since January 2023.

"We are very satisfied with the results of the pilot test and were able to show that cross-provider returns are feasible and appreciated by consumers. Nevertheless, we had hoped to increase the share of reusable packaging for take-away food and drinks – but the three-month period was too short for this and the framework conditions were simply not right", says Tilmann Walz, one of the founders of ReFrastructure. "The obligation to offer reusable packaging has not yet been fully implemented by many distributors and, as a result, the use of reusable packaging is still far from being a real alternative to single-use options."

After completing this pilot, the mostly volunteer employees of ReFrastructure are not taking a break. Together with the Mehrwegverband Deutschland e.V. (German Reusable Packaging Association), Kühne Logistics University, the 'Initiative Plastikfreie Stadt' and the Wuppertal Institute, the findings and experiences from this pilot are now being reviewed and used to prepare and improve further projects.

The results and experiences from the pilot project in Haar will be published in the coming months and shared with industry stakeholders and the public.





### **ReFrastructure Foundation – the digital infrastructure for reuse systems**

ReFrastructure stands for a neutral digital infrastructure on which data from different reuse systems can be exchanged. It addresses system providers as well as service providers for logistics and cleaning.

The declared goal is to use resources more efficiently and thus reduce the ecological footprint. It also makes it much easier for end customers to return reusable packaging, as – for the first time – this can be done across all providers.

By focusing on the common good, ReFrastructure offers a neutral platform on which the data sovereignty of the participating companies is preserved. In contrast to conventional platforms, which are often geared towards profit-oriented models, ReFrastructure focuses on the benefits for society and the environment.

ReFrastructure was launched in 2021 as an initiative of the 'Mehrwegverband Deutschland' (German Reuse Association) and has been a registered non-profit GmbH since November 2022. With the support of numerous volunteer reusable enthusiasts, as well as funding from the Federal Environment Agency and the German Federal Environmental Foundation, ReFrastructure was able to carry out this initial pilot test.

#### **Municipality of Haar**

Haar is a municipality in the Bavarian district "Munich Region", bordering Munich to the east. With a population of around 23,000, the independent municipality has first-class infrastructure and transport links. The municipality of Haar is a member of the C2C NGO (Cradle to Cradle e.V.) and the Climate Alliance.

CO2 balance and climate protection measures have been on the agenda since 2009. Haar is already below the district's target of 6 tons of CO2 emissions for 2030.

In 2019, the municipality was awarded the nationwide "StadtGrün naturnah" label (urban green close to nature) in gold for species protection and near-natural areas.

Guidelines for sustainable planning and building were adopted by the municipal council in June 2020.

In 2023, the municipality of Haar signed the European Circular Cities Declaration (CCD) - the fifth municipality in Germany to do so. It has thus voluntarily committed itself to comply with the principles of a consistent circular economy.

If you have any questions, please contact us:

ReFrastructure gGmbH  
[www.refrastructure.org](http://www.refrastructure.org)

Niko König  
m. + 49 177 65 21 904  
e. [niko.koenig@refrastructure.org](mailto:niko.koenig@refrastructure.org)