

Press release

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Return Anywhere: First pilot project to boost collection of food and beverages reusable packaging in Germany

Esslingen, 03. July, 2023

In order to make the use of reusable containers more attractive for consumers and thus take an important step towards the turnaround to sustainable packaging, ReFrastructure Foundation is conducting a pilot project in the Munich region in cooperation with the municipality of Haar and locally represented reuse system providers.

With a share of less than one percent compared to single-use packaging, the use of reusable packaging for food and beverages in the German catering industry ekes out a niche existence, as WWF demonstrates in its reuse study for German catering "Mehrweg in der deutschen Gastronomie"¹ published in February of this year. According to WWF, a uniform and uncomplicated return logistics system, where containers can be returned anywhere after use, is indispensable to shift towards reusable packaging. "Return convenience is important because the change of course will only happen when consumers demand and use reusable containers at restaurants, cafés and delivery services [...]"², explains Laura Griestop, expert for packaging and circular economy at WWF Germany.

To ensure that laziness does not continue to win over sustainability, ReFrastructure, together with the reuse system providers, Recup, reCircle, and Relevo, the municipality of Haar and the local gastronomy sector, will be conducting Germany's first Return Anywhere project starting in July 2023. Residents will be able to return the reusable cups and trays from these providers to all participating gastronomy businesses. Since awareness for the benefits and the necessity of reuse is still very low among the public, this pilot will be accompanied by an extensive information and activation campaign. A keystone of this campaign is an Infopoint, where users can obtain information and return their containers from all providers.

"I am delighted that this pilot is taking place in our community. I call on all Haar residents to take advantage of the new offer and to take their food and drinks in reusable packaging as often as possible. The project is another step towards Haar becoming a Circular City," says Dr. Andreas Bukowski, mayor of the Haar municipality.

To ensure that this works easily in practice for all parts involved, ReFrastructure is working with its partners DPM (Die ProduktMacher) and the Technical University of Munich, to develop a neutral digital infrastructure that will enable cooperation between market participants and the management of local dishwashing and distribution logistics to keep the ecological footprint as low as possible. The project is financially supported by the German Federal Environmental Agency, the German Federal Environmental Foundation, and private donors. Scientific support is provided by Kühne Logistics

¹ Mehrweg in der deutschen Gastronomie - WWF/February 2023.

² <https://www.wwf.de/2023/februar/mehrweg-als-randerscheinung>



University and the Wuppertal Institute. Other partners such as the German Reusable Packaging Association, Initiative Plastikfreie Stadt and the Bavarian Hotel and Restaurant Association are supporting its implementation.

With Return Anywhere, ReFrastructure is not only pursuing the goal of testing the specially developed infrastructure but is also offering insights to promote the relevance of reuse systems for consumers on a national level and to make a sustainable contribution to climate change mitigation. This pilot project sets an important signal for the use of reuse solutions and for environmental protection.

About ReFrastructure - Foundation for digital reusable infrastructure.

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 aim is to use resources more efficiently and thus reduce the ecological footprint. In addition, the return of reusable packaging will be significantly simplified for consumers, as for the first time it can be done across providers.

Due to its common good orientation, ReFrastructure offers a neutral platform on which the data sovereignty of the participating companies is preserved. Unlike traditional platforms, which are often focused on for-profit models, ReFrastructure focuses on benefits to society and the environment.

ReFrastructure started in 2021 as an initiative of the Reusable Association of Germany (Mehrwegverband) and has been a registered non-profit GmbH since November 2022. With the support of numerous volunteer reuse enthusiasts and funding from the Federal Environment Agency and the German Federal Environmental Foundation, ReFrastructure is now able to conduct its first pilot test.

For enquiries, please contact

ReFrastructure - Foundation for Digital Reusable Infrastructure gGmbH

www.refrastructure.org

Niko König

m. + 49 177 65 21 904

e. niko.koenig@refrastructure.org