



Briefing
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Deposit Return Scheme

Explainer – February 2026

What is a Deposit Return Scheme?

- A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) is sometimes referred to as a bottle collection scheme. It is a system where a small deposit is placed on an eligible drinks container at point of sale to a consumer. Schemes are set to launch across the UK in October 2027.
- The deposit is redeemable by the consumer when they return the container to an authorised return point. This deposit may be repaid via cash, a voucher, as a digital payment or able to be offered as a charity donation.

How are containers collected?

- Deposit Return Schemes usually follow a 'return to retail' model. This means that empty drinks containers can be returned to retail outlets that sell eligible beverages. The containers do not have to be returned to the exact location from which they are purchased but to a collection point that is part of the scheme.
- Containers can be returned via a reverse vending machine (RVM) (automated collection) or manually (over-the-counter) inside a store. Some deposit systems offer larger RVMs which can accommodate the return of a large number of drinks containers in one go, rather than one by one.

Who runs a Deposit Return Scheme?

- Deposit Return Schemes are generally run by industry – drinks producers and retailers – underpinned by legislation and delivered by a separate entity called a deposit management organisation (DMO).
- The DMO is responsible for:
 - collecting empty drinks containers from return points and for channelling the deposit funds so that they flow through the system
 - refunding deposits to retailers/return points
 - paying handling fees to retailers/return points
 - public education, communication and awareness campaign
 - reporting data to the government
 - meeting any legislated targets
- the UKDMO currently appointed to run DRS in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland has recently announced its new brand name as Exchange for Change

- In some schemes – such as the ones planned for the four nations of the UK - the DMO owns the collected material, which can then be sold back to industry on a first refusal basis.

How many Deposit Return Schemes are there?

- Deposit return systems (DRS) continue to expand worldwide, driven by strong public support.
- As of October 2025, 59 jurisdictions have DRS in place, covering over 395 million people.
- By the end of 2028, this is projected to exceed 70 jurisdictions covering 635 million people, a 61% increase in global coverage.

Why do we need Deposit Return Schemes?

- An estimated 31 billion single-use drink containers are purchased annually by consumers in the UK, including 12 billion plastic drinks bottles and 14 billion drinks cans. However, Government statistics show that only 70–75% of these are being collected; indeed Reloop estimates that more than 20 million plastic and glass bottles, and metal cans are wasted (littered, landfilled or incinerated) in the UK every single day.
- Our ‘Littered with evidence’ report published in June 2025 demonstrates how deposit systems can dramatically reduce beverage container litter, often within the first year of implementation. For example:
 - In the first few months of the scheme starting in Ireland there was an immediate impact on litter
 - In the first two years of operation the Re-turn deposit return system in Ireland has now collected two billion drinks containers



More information on how deposit return schemes reduce litter can be found here:

reloopplatform.org/litter