



REUSE SIDELINED

How global plastic commitments are failing to deliver — and why reuse must move from the margins to the mainstream

July 2026

reusefoundation.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

AFTER SIX YEARS OF PLEDGES, TOTAL PLASTIC IS STILL RISING

05

REUSE IS STILL LARGELY IGNORED, BUT THERE ARE SOME SIGNS OF CHANGE

08

UNDERSTANDING THE PHYSICAL AND STRUCTURAL LIMITS OF RECYCLING

09

FROM SUCCESSFUL PILOTS TO SYSTEM CHANGE

11

FIVE KEY LEVERS TO CREATE A REUSE-FIRST MODEL

13

SUPPORT OUR WORK



AFTER SIX YEARS OF PLEDGES, TOTAL PLASTIC IS STILL RISING

The Global Commitment — co-signed in 2018 by hundreds of the world's largest organisations, including many well-known consumer brand companies — was designed to be the definitive corporate response to single-use plastic packaging and the pollution it causes.

Now, in 2026, performance data give a learning opportunity. It shows total weight of plastic packaging used by brand and retail signatories has *grown*, rising from 12.0 million metric tonnes in 2018 to 13.0 million in 2024 (latest year available).

This is an increase of 8.3%. Let's look at why.

The Global Commitment aimed to unite “businesses, governments, NGOs, and investors behind a common vision of a circular economy for plastics.”

Its primary focus was on changing the *composition* of plastic packaging. For example, by making plastic more recyclable by removing non-recyclable or hard-to-recycle plastics. There was no target for total plastic use.

There was also no explicit target for reuse, widely acknowledged as the most effective plastic waste abatement option. Signatory performance data shows how reuse was sidelined:

- **1.2%:** average share of reusable packaging across all brand and retail signatories in 2024, *down* from 1.5% in 2019
- **20:** number of companies out of 35 major brand signatories reporting zero reusable content

This poor performance reflects lack of attention on reuse as the preferred abatement option.

This is a lost opportunity since reuse is the only strategy that prevents plastic waste from being created. Rather than focus on managing waste with recycling, we need systems and policies to boost reuse, with binding targets and supporting infrastructure investment.

Data summary:

+8.3%

TOTAL PLASTIC PACKAGING
GROWTH, 2018–2024

1.2%

AVERAGE REUSABLE PACKAGING SHARE
(BRAND AND RETAIL SIGNATORIES), 2024
DOWN FROM **1.5%** IN **2019**

20/35

BRAND SIGNATORIES REPORTING
ZERO REUSABLE CONTENT

83%

WEIGHTED AVERAGE SHARE OF PLASTIC
THAT IS VIRGIN FOSSIL-BASED
(BRAND SIGNATORIES), 2024

0%

COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING REPORTED
BY ALL BRAND SIGNATORIES

REUSE IS STILL LARGELY IGNORED, BUT THERE ARE SOME POSITIVE SIGNS

A primary target in the Global Commitment is the share of packaging that is “**reusable, recyclable or compostable**” (RRC).

In 2024, brands and retail signatories achieved an average of 78% RRC (weighted by total plastic used). However, this figure almost entirely comes from the recyclable metric. In round numbers:

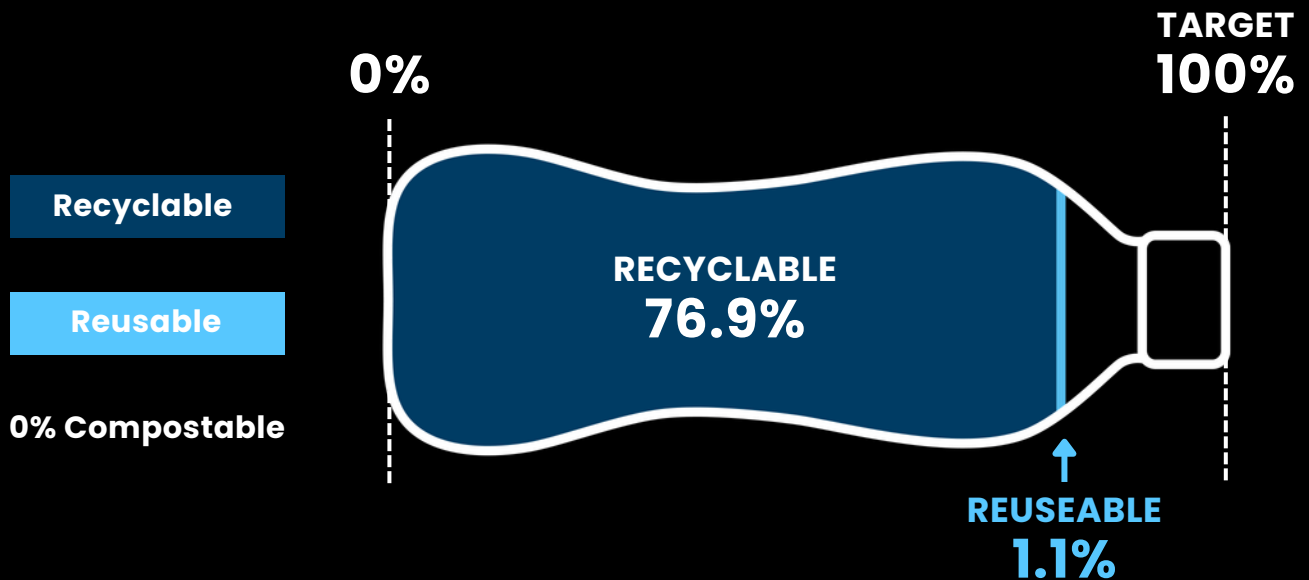
- **Recyclable** (in practice and at scale): accounted for 77 percentage points out of the total on a weighted average basis
- **Reuse** contributed just **1 percentage point**
- **Compostable** was zero

The Global Commitment target treats these options equally, so signatories can meet their 100% target through any combination. But they are very different solutions. Compostable is a solution without enduring waste; Reuse *prevents* single-use plastic but Recyclable is a waste management solution used to process plastic waste. Companies, of course, have focussed on the cheapest and easiest option which is Recyclable,. Unfortunately, it is a poor solution, as we show in a later section.



What 78% RRC looks like

Breakdown of reusable, recyclable and compostable content
– weighted averages, 2024



Source: Global Commitment 2025 Progress Report

Notes:

- 1.Categories may overlap where packaging meets multiple criteria
- 2.Figures shown in the chart are averages weighted by company plastic use and therefore differ slightly to those in the Global Commitment 2025 Progress Report

The market leaders demonstrating reuse viability

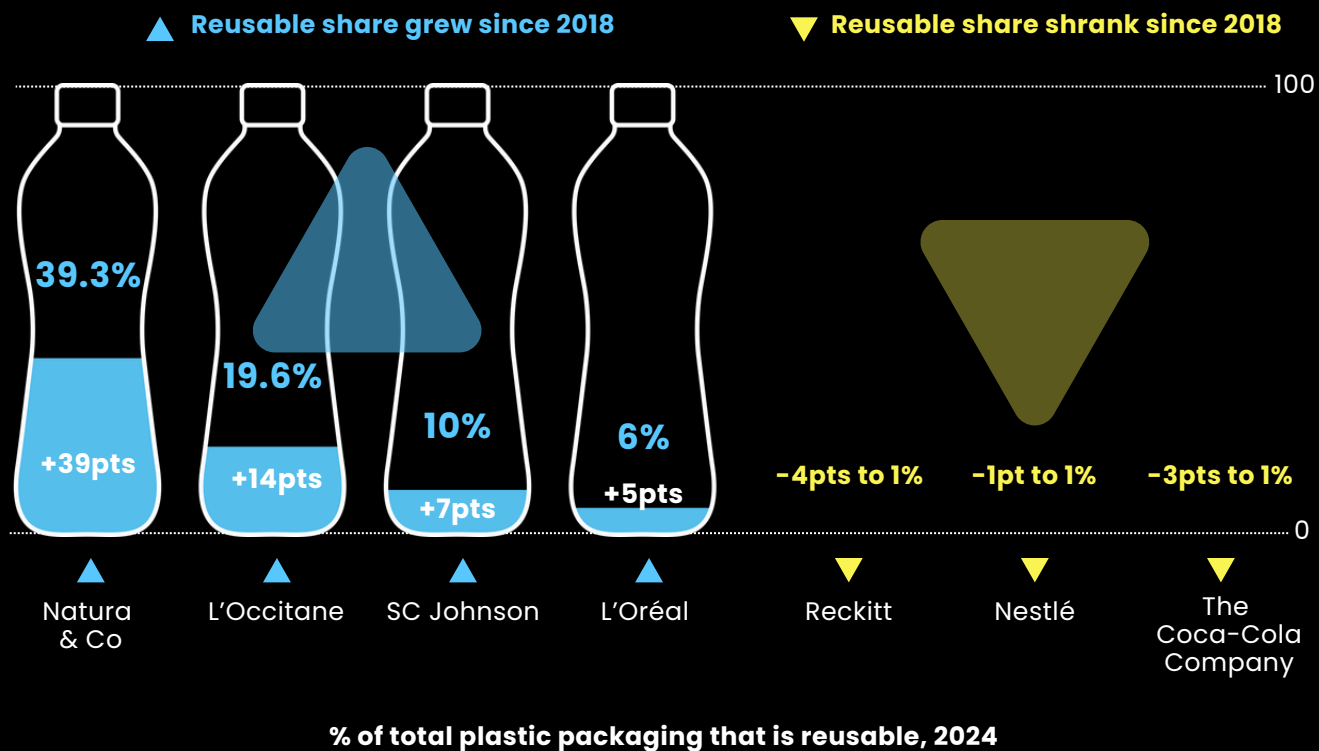
Three companies show that higher reusable content is achievable.

- **Natura & Co:** Achieved **39.3%** reusable content in 2024, rising from zero in 2018 – the most significant structural transformation in the dataset.
- **L'Occitane:** Reached **19.6%** reusable packaging.
- **SC Johnson:** Reported **10%** reusable packaging.

On the other hand, some market leaders, including The Coca-Cola Company, Nestlé and Reckitt, retreated from reuse. These companies saw their reusable shares fall below their 2018 baselines.

Reusable Packaging Share, 2024 (with direction of change since 2018)

Selected brand signatories – % of total plastic packaging



Source: Global Commitment 2025 Progress Report

UNDERSTANDING THE PHYSICAL AND STRUCTURAL LIMITS OF RECYCLING

Recycling is an important component of a circular economy, but it cannot solve the crisis in isolation.

Recycling infrastructure does not and will not have capacity

Recycling is failing because it cannot, by its physical and economic nature, keep pace with growing plastic production.

Global plastic recycling rates remain below 10% on average, while total plastic production is projected to **more than double by 2060** under a business-as-usual scenario.

No plausible expansion of recycling infrastructure can close a gap of that magnitude; only an absolute reduction at the source, driven by reuse, offers a structural response powerful enough to match the scale of the crisis.

Recyclability claims do not equal actual recycling

Technical 'recyclability' does not equal true circularity.

Flexible plastics, multi-layer laminates and coloured HDPE are frequently labelled as recyclable because they can technically be reprocessed, but there's a lack of municipal collection or processing infrastructure at scale in most markets.

This gap has led to rising consumer-protection and greenwashing litigation.

For example, Colgate-Palmolive faces US class-action litigation over marketing its monomaterial (HDPE) toothpaste tubes as "recyclable" when the vast majority of municipal facilities could not accept or process them due to equipment limitations and sorting constraints. Other companies face similar challenges showing the risk of overclaiming the benefits of recyclability are rising.

The Center for Climate Integrity: *"Fossil fuel and other petrochemical companies have used the false promise of plastic recycling to exponentially increase virgin plastic production over the last six decades, creating and perpetuating the global plastic waste crisis and imposing significant costs on communities that are left to pay for the consequences"*

"The Fraud of Plastic Recycling: How Big Oil and the plastics industry deceived the public for decades and caused the plastic waste crisis" (2024)

FROM SUCCESSFUL PILOTS TO SYSTEMIC SCALE

Reuse is not a theoretical alternative to single-use packaging. It's a highly effective, proven option, with a long history. Zero-waste reuse solutions worked successfully for decades but fell out of favour as companies promoted disposability and recycling as a solution.

But reuse is slowly making a comeback. Some of the more compelling examples come from outside the signatory group, but even amongst the signatories, multiple companies launched refill and reuse pilots that produced meaningful results. A couple of examples of how reuse is being tested:

- **L'Oréal's #JoinTheRefillMovement** campaign is a broad and global reuse initiative aimed at bridging the gap between consumer interest in reuse and their daily buying habits. It spans 18 brands and 28 products across its four business divisions, promoting accessible refill options for skincare, fragrance, makeup and hair care.
- **SC Johnson** is innovating on various fronts. For example, Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day offers concentrated hand soap refills paired with a reusable glass bottle; and Ecover's Refillution built a network of over 700 refill stations across the UK for dish soap, laundry detergent and toilet cleaner.

As mentioned, **Natura & Co stands as the most significant evidence of reuse at scale.** Starting from zero reusable content in 2018, the company reached 39.3% reusable packaging by 2024, demonstrating that a business can transform its packaging model over a relatively short period when a company commits to the change.

It's not that reuse doesn't work, it's that the groundwork hasn't been done to ensure reuse succeeds at scale. Some businesses are already succeeding with reuse and many want to do more. But it's hard for them to make large investments when their competitors are permitted within the Global Commitments to pursue lower cost but largely ineffective recyclability.

Move from incentives that focus on recycling

Because the Global Commitment's treats recyclable, reusable and compostable the same a company can active its RRC target with zero reusable or compostable packaging. This is an incentive for companies to focus on lower cost recyclability.

Closing this 'loophole' would ensure signatories start to shift to zero-waste solutions.

Bridge the consumer intention-action gap

Consumer research consistently identifies an intention–action gap: stated support from consumers for reusable packaging that is not reflected in purchase behaviour. Consumers are deterred by factors such as inconvenience, hygiene concerns and a lack of access to reusable infrastructure. These are difficult but not insurmountable problems.

Refill systems succeed when they match or beat the convenience of single-use, offer a better experience or win on price. This requires considerable innovation and investment, as well as support of behaviour change. Businesses are up to the challenge but need commitment agreements that point them in the right direction and require them to start selling their products without creating plastic waste.



FIVE KEY LEVERS TO CREATE A REUSE-FIRST MODEL

Evidence is clear: voluntary commitments framed around recyclability do not materially reduce plastic pollution and yet allow total usage to rise.

Our recommendations address the systemic failures identified in this report. They are directed at policymakers, corporate signatories, investors and organisations that design and govern voluntary plastic frameworks.

1

Introduce binding reuse targets

The agenda for the Global Commitment 2030, the successor to the 2025 Global Commitment, looks at reuse separately rather than as part of a RRC metric. While this structural separation is a positive step, the framework still does not require a shift to reuse. It lets companies set their own targets. **Frameworks must replace voluntary, self-regulated goals with binding, standardised reuse targets that encourage year-on-year infrastructure scaling.**

2

Cap total plastic use

The Global Commitment 2025 and 2030 frameworks permit signatories to self-select virgin plastic reduction targets without placing restrictions on absolute plastic volumes. This allows brands to hit composition targets while simultaneously increasing their plastic footprint. **To achieve reductions, we need caps on total plastic packaging weight.**

3

Fund reuse infrastructure investment

Reuse needs investment to be able to scale. Billions has been invested in end-of-pipe collection infrastructure and mechanical and advanced recycling technologies that manage waste produced. **Similar investment should be directed at true zero-waste solutions.**

4

Standardise reuse packaging formats to enable shared infrastructure

Fragmented, brand-specific reuse formats can work and be viable, but shared infrastructure could speed the transition to reuse and make it more financially viable. Industry bodies should develop **standardised reusable packaging specifications** for high-volume product categories — detergents, personal care, beverages — enabling shared logistics, return systems and consumer familiarity at scale.

5

Strengthen greenwashing accountability for recyclability claims

The active US class-action litigation surrounding **Colgate's "recyclable" toothpaste** tubes demonstrates that legal systems, regulators and consumers are starting to penalise inflated sustainability claims. Regulators must legally mandate that packaging claims reflect verified, real-world infrastructure capability, rather than theoretical or technical recyclability.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

Alongside our research and policy work, REUSE Foundation develops and supports projects that demonstrate reuse in real-world conditions.

One demonstrator project in India trains women from waste-picker communities to deliver household refills to rural villages — replacing disposable sachets and plastic bottles at source, and creating livelihoods directly aligned with plastic abatement.

The model is designed to be community-rooted, economically viable, and infrastructure-light: characteristics we believe are essential for reuse to scale in emerging markets.

We make our demonstrator data available to researchers, policymakers and framework bodies. To find out more or to support this work, visit **reusefoundation.org**

