

Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy, Annual Statistics 2022/23



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Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy Annual Statistics 2022/23



An Official Statistics publication

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Key points

- From 1 April 2022, the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations were extended so that the levy is 25 pence and applies to all new carrier bags with a retail price of five pounds or less.
- During the tenth year of operation, 65.0 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- The number of lower rate bags dispensed in 2022/23 (costing only the 25 pence) was 28.7 million while the number of upper rate bags dispensed (those costing more than the 25 pence levy and up to five pounds) was 36.2 million.
- In 2022/23, 44 per cent of the bags dispensed were lower rate compared to 56 per cent of higher rate bags.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2022/23 totalled £14.4 million.

Coverage: Northern Ireland
Frequency: Annual
Reporting Period: 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, referred to as 2022/23
Next update: Data for 2023/24 will be published in August 2024

URL: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics

Introduction

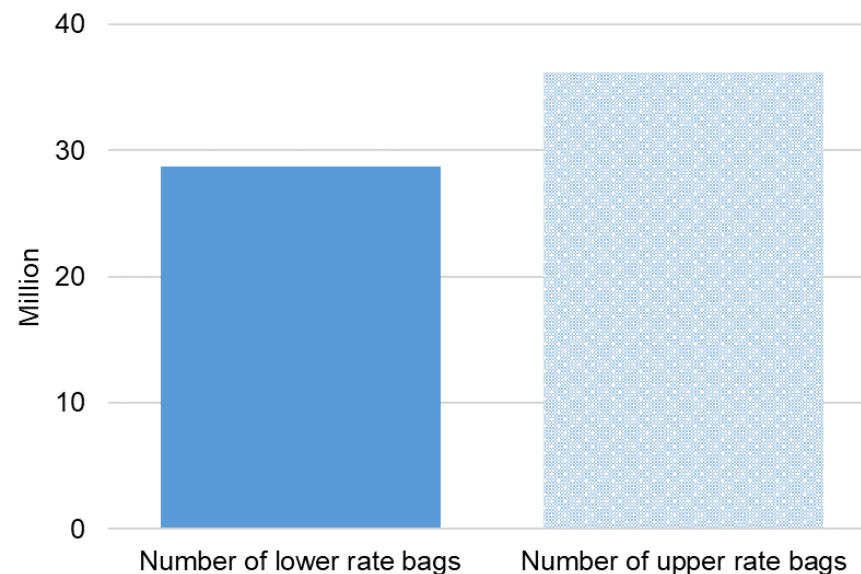
The purpose of this publication is to report on the number of carrier bags dispensed under the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2022/23. The figures relate to the number of bags dispensed by retailers between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 as notified to the Department by 30 June 2023. Users of this report include government policy makers, local government officials, retailers, general public, media and environmental organisations.

Overview

- During the tenth year of operation, 65.0 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. The Carrier Bag Charge Regulations were extended so that the levy is now 25 pence and applies to all new carrier bags with a retail price of five pounds or less. Comparisons with the number of bags dispensed in previous years are not made as the scope of the levy has changed greatly. In previous years the annual statistics only included carrier bags sold by retailers for less than 20 pence. Historical carrier bag statistics are available on the DAERA website at the following link: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics>
- The number of lower rate bags dispensed in 2022/23 (costing only the 25 pence levy) was 28.7 million while the number of upper rate bags dispensed (those costing more than the 25 pence levy and up to five pounds) was 36.2 million, see Figure 1.
- In 2022/23, 44 per cent of the bags dispensed were lower rate compared to 56 per cent of higher rate bags.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2022/23 totalled £14.4 million. They cannot be directly calculated from bag usage figures due to differences in timing and recording. Proceeds are taken from audited departmental financial accounts which include money actually received into the department between 1 April 2022

and 31 March 2023, whereas the number of carrier bags dispensed refer to declarations made by retailers for the same period.

Figure 1: Carrier bags dispensed by rate
Northern Ireland, 2022/23



Seasonal Variation and Trends

The total number of bags dispensed in 2022/23 was 65.0 million.

From 2022/23 **lower rate** bags are those costing the customer only the 25 pence levy whereas **upper rate** bags are those which are priced at more than the 25 pence levy but five pounds or less.

In 2022/23, 44 per cent of the total bags dispensed were lower rate compared to 56 per cent of higher rate bags.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of lower rate and upper rate bags dispensed per quarter. The chart illustrates how the proportion of upper rate bags have increased with each quarter from 42 per cent in quarter 1 to 65 per cent in quarter 4.

Quarter 1 was the only quarter to have more lower rate bags dispensed (with a cost of 25 pence exactly) than higher rate bags. Some retailers amended their bag pricing policy to over 25 pence in subsequent quarters with the largest change occurring between quarter 1 and 2.

In 2022/23 retailers in Northern Ireland dispensed 16.5 million bags during quarter 1 (April to June 2022), 16.4 million during quarter 2 (July to September 2022) and 17.8 million during quarter 3 (October to December 2022). The number of bags dispensed during quarter 4 (January to March 2023) reduced to 14.4 million (Table 1). Although we cannot compare figures directly with bag numbers for the previous levy, similarities occur as there is a defined peak in bags dispensed under the levy in quarter 3 (October to December). This coincides with the peak Christmas shopping period, see Figure 3.

Figure 2: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and rate
Northern Ireland, 2022/23

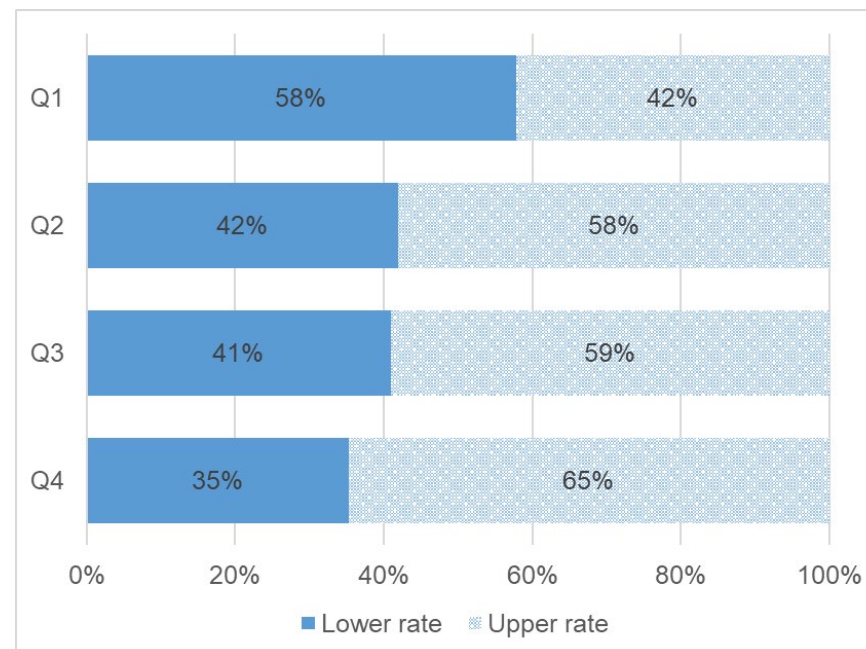
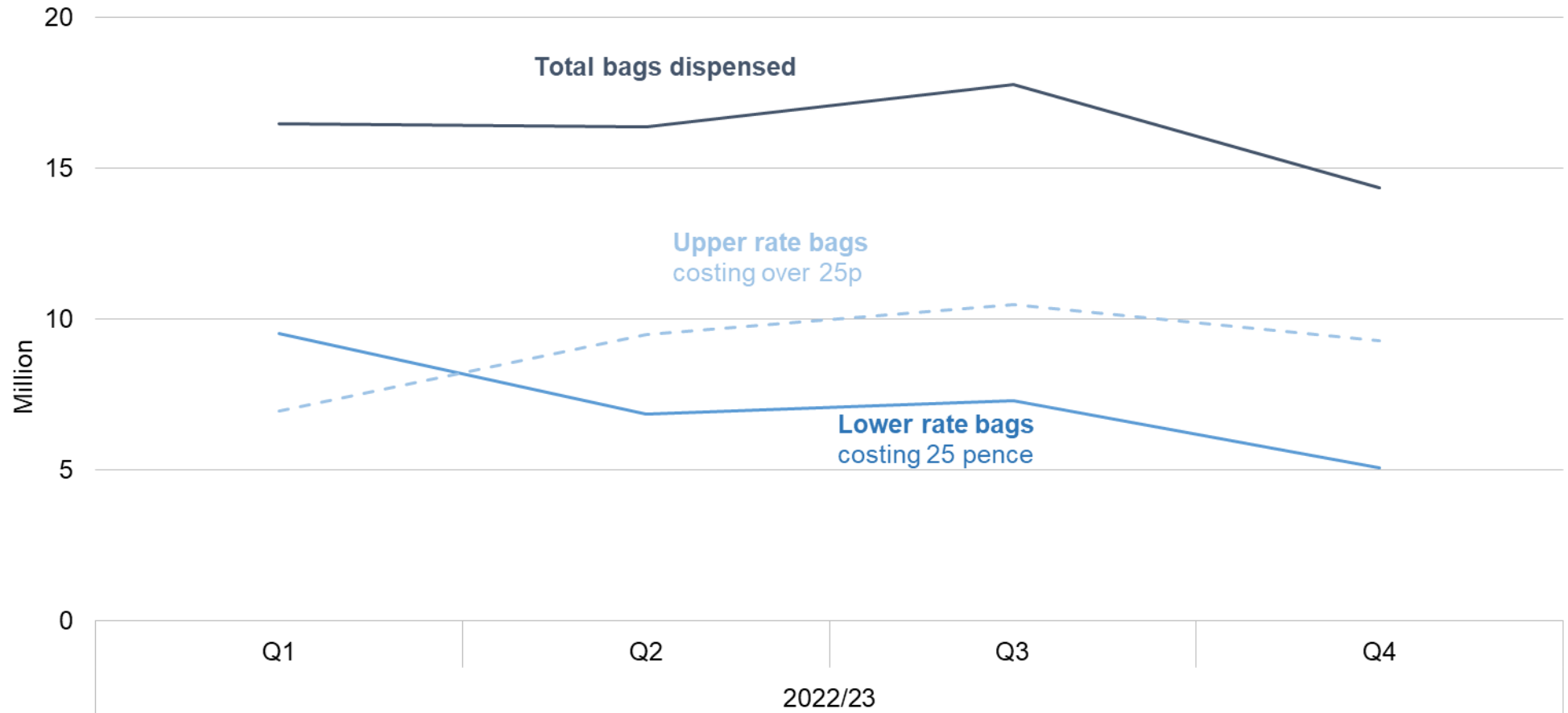


Figure 3: Number of carrier bags dispensed by quarter, year and rate
Northern Ireland, Q1 2022/23 to Q4 2022/23



Data Table

Table 1: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and rate
Northern Ireland, 2022/23

Quarter	Lower rate		Upper rate		Total bags	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
April to June	9,516,262	58%	6,950,526	42%	16,466,788	100%
July to September	6,870,605	42%	9,498,337	58%	16,368,942	100%
October to December	7,286,483	41%	10,490,370	59%	17,776,853	100%
January to March	5,064,671	35%	9,288,221	65%	14,352,892	100%
Total	28,738,021	44%	36,227,454	56%	64,965,475	100%

As notified to the Department by 30th June 2022/23.

From 2022/23 bags at the lower rate are those only costing the customer the revised 25p levy.

From 2022/23 bags at the upper rate are those which have had a price added by the retailer and costing five pounds or less.

Tables providing information on 2022/23 are also provided in spreadsheet format online:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics.

The 2021/22 Carrier Bag Levy publication provides details on historical bag numbers dispensed under the 5 pence levy and can also be found online: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/carrier-bag-levy-annual-statistics-202122>

Carrier Bags Charge Regulations

The Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 were made on 15 January 2013 and came into operation on 8 April 2013. From that date, all sellers of goods in Northern Ireland had to charge their customers at least 5 pence (“the levy”) for each single use carrier bag supplied new. From 19 January 2015, the levy was extended to all carrier bags with a retail price of less than 20 pence, whether they are considered single use or reusable.

- Bags at the **lower rate** were those costing the customer only the 5 pence levy.
- Bags at the **upper rate** were those which have had a price added by the retailer in advance of the 5 pence levy being applied.

Prior to 19 January 2015 the levy covered single use carrier bags, typically costing 5 pence. Retailers could charge more than 5 pence however this was uncommon with upper rate bags accounting for just 3 per cent of total bags dispensed. After the levy was extended the numbers of upper rate bags increased as more bags fell within the scope of the Regulations. The extension specifically targeted all carrier bags with a retail price of less than 20 pence, which included lower-priced reusable bags. It should also be noted that a number of retailers, as part of their internal pricing policy, increased the price of their low-cost reusable bags to 20 pence or above, thereby such bags were outside the scope of the levy as time progressed.

On 1 April 2020, the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations across Northern Ireland were temporarily amended to exempt carrier bags used for home grocery delivery in line with the other UK administrations and in seeking to ensure retailer and customer safety. This exemption expired on 30 September 2020.

From 1 April 2022, the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations were extended so that the levy is 25 pence and applies to all new carrier bags with a retail price of five pounds or less. This is regardless of the material bags are made of and whether they are single use or reusable. With the introduction of the revised levy:

- Bags at the **lower rate** are those costing the customer only the 25 pence levy.
- Bags at the **upper rate** are those which have had a price added by the retailer and costing five pounds or less.

Provisional results from the Continuous Household Survey environmental module are published in the [Environmental Statistics Report](#) and show that 80 per cent of respondents in the 2022/23 survey were reported to be very/fairly concerned about environmental issues. This is a decrease from the 82 per cent of respondents concerned about the environment in 2021/22. The survey also showed that most respondents selected that they had reused, recycled and disposed of waste products appropriately which would include the reusing of carrier bags.

Questions regarding carrier bags were introduced to the Continuous Household Survey in 2020/21. Household respondents were asked how much they paid for the last carrier bag they bought. 2022/23 results show that 45 per cent responded that they did not buy a carrier bag, whilst 37 per cent bought bags costing 25 pence. A further 13 per cent bought bags costing 26 pence - 50 pence.

Background information

1. This is the tenth year of the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These are the final official statistics for 2022/23. The statistics refer to all bags made of any material, not solely plastic bags. The Department intends to publish 2023/24 figures in August 2024. [Statistical reports](#) from previous years can be accessed online.
2. Bags which are exempt from the levy, such as those used solely to contain unpackaged raw food or hot foods / hot drinks, are not included in the data. Retailers are not required to record this information. The main exemptions are listed on carrier bag levy section of nidirect and the full list is available from Schedule 1 of the Regulations.
 - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/carrier-bag-levy>
 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2013/4/regulation/1/made>
 - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/7/pdfs/nia_20140007_en.pdf
 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2022/33/contents/made>
3. The figures are based on data supplied by 2,300 retailers in Northern Ireland as notified to the Department by 30 June 2023. Note that this is not the number of actual premises at which carrier bags are dispensed, as one retailer can submit returns for more than one outlet.
4. The figures presented in the release will not equate precisely to the total bags dispensed in the year due to the 30 June cut-off date applied for the production of Official Statistics. Using recent declaration figures for comparison, it is estimated that the number of bags notified by 30 June is on average 3 per cent lower than the actual total number of bags dispensed in that year.
5. Retailer returns are audited by Carrier Bag Levy Team, which has responsibility for administration and collection of the levy and ensuring that sellers comply with the Regulations. Guidance on carrier bag levy enforcement is available [online](#). Initial validation checks are carried out by Carrier Bag Levy Team with further validation by Statistics and Analytical Service Branch in DAERA. Any discrepancies are queried with Carrier Bag Levy Team. More information on the quality assurance of these statistics is available in the [data quality report](#).
6. These statistics are released according to the [Statement of Compliance](#) with the Pre-release access to Official Statistics Order (NI) 2009. Official Statistics are produced to a high professional standard. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. As we want to engage with users of our statistics, we invite you to feedback your comments on this publication. Contact details are included on page one.

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