

Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy, Annual Statistics 2023/24



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

***Sustainability** at the heart of a
living, working, active landscape
valued by everyone.*

Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy Annual Statistics 2023/24



An Official Statistics publication

Contents

Introduction	3
Overview	3
Seasonal Variation and Trends	4
Data Table	6
Carrier Bags Charge Regulations	7
Background information	8

Contact

Statistics and Analytical Services
Branch, Department of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs
Clare House, 303 Airport Road West,
Sydenham Intake
Belfast BT3 9ED

Statistician: Conor McCormack

Telephone: 028 9016 3343

Email: env.stats@daera-ni.gov.uk

Date of publication: 22 August 2024

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 eleventh year of operation, 59.7 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2023/24 was 8.1 per cent lower than in the previous year with 5.3 million fewer bags dispensed.
- The number of lower rate bags dispensed in 2023/24 (costing only the 25 pence) was 21.2 million, 26.2 per cent lower than 2022/23. The number of upper rate bags dispensed (those costing more than the 25 pence levy and up to five pounds) was 38.5 million, 6.2 per cent higher than 2022/23.
- In 2023/24, 36 per cent of the bags dispensed were lower rate compared to 64 per cent of higher rate bags.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2023/24 totalled £13.1 million.

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Frequency: Annual

Reporting Period: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, referred to as 2023/24

Next update: Data for 2024/25 will be published in August 2025

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

Introduction

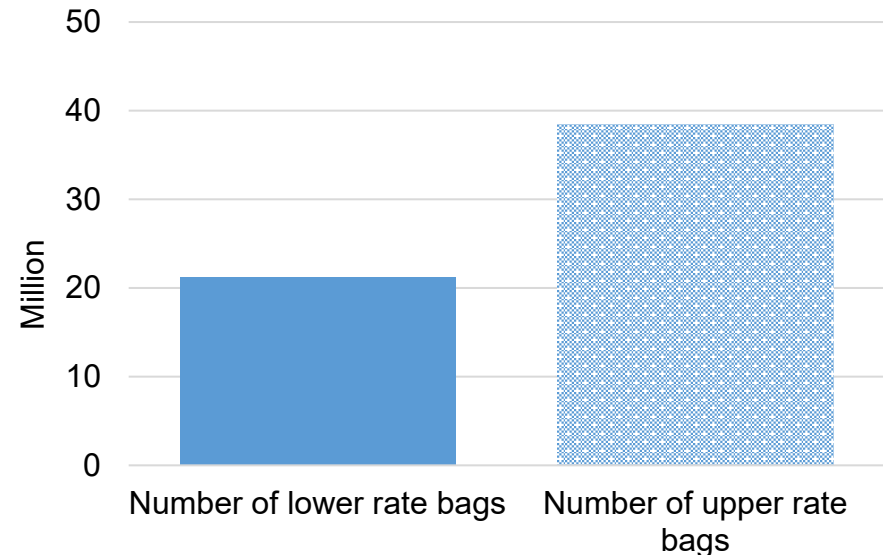
The purpose of this publication is to report on the number of carrier bags dispensed under the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2023/24. The figures relate to the number of bags dispensed by retailers between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 as notified to the Department by 30 June 2024. Users of this report include government policy makers, local government officials, retailers, general public, media and environmental organisations.

Overview

- During the eleventh year of operation, 59.7 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. In April 2022 the Carrier Bag Charge Regulations were extended so that the levy became 25 pence and applied to all new carrier bags with a retail price of five pounds or less. Prior to this 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 total number of bags dispensed was 8.1 per cent lower (5.3 million bags) than 2022/23. The number of lower rate bags dispensed in 2023/24 (costing only the 25 pence levy) was 21.2 million. The number of upper rate bags dispensed (those costing more than the 25 pence levy and up to five pounds) was 38.5 million, 6.2 per cent higher than 2022/23, see Figure 1.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2023/24 totalled £13.1 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 2023

and 31 March 2024, 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, 2023/24



Seasonal Variation and Trends

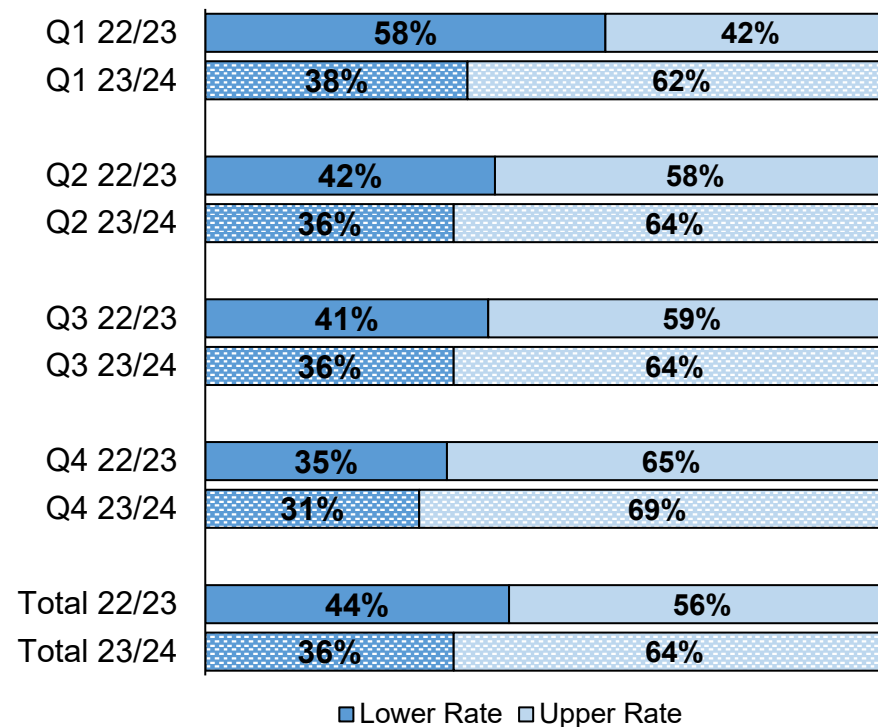
The total number of bags dispensed in 2023/24 was 59.7 million which is an overall decrease of 8.1 per cent and equates to 5.3 million fewer bags dispensed since 2022/23.

From April 2022 **lower rate** bags are defined as 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 2023/24, 36 per cent of the total bags dispensed were lower rate compared to 64 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 from 42 per cent in quarter 1 2022/23 to 69 per cent in quarter 4 2023/24.

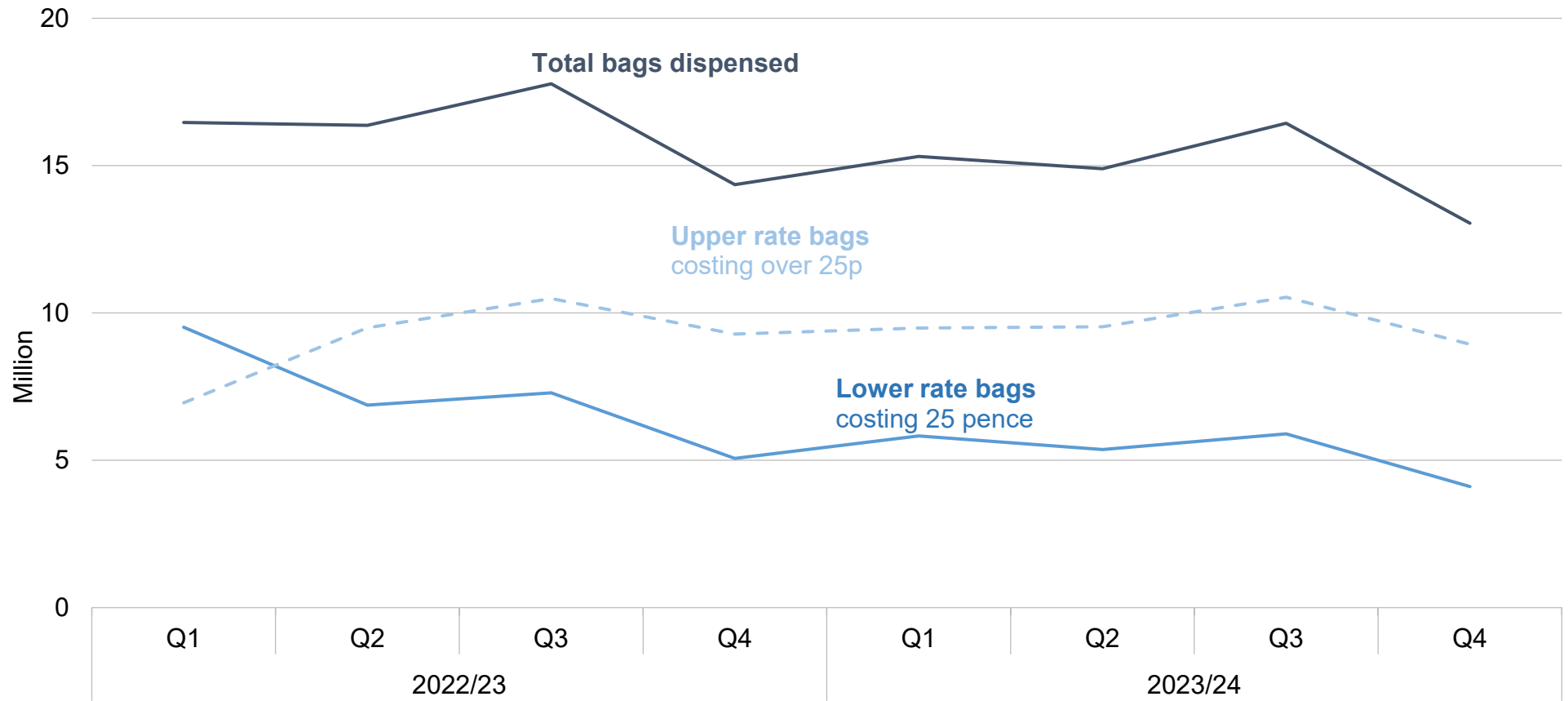
Figure 2: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and rate
Northern Ireland, 2022/23 – 2023/24



In 2023/24 retailers in Northern Ireland dispensed 15.3 million bags during quarter 1 (April to June 2023), 14.9 million during quarter 2 (July to September 2023) and 16.4 million during quarter 3 (October to December 2023). The number of bags dispensed during quarter 4 (January to March 2024) reduced to 13.0 million (Table 1).

The trend line for total bags is similar to 2022/23 with 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. Lower rate bags were greater than higher rate bags for only one quarter (quarter 1 2022/23) with an overall downward trend from 9.5 million bags dispensed in quarter 1 2022/23 to 4.1 million bags in quarter 4 2023/24. From quarter 2 2022/23 there has been a greater number of higher rate bags dispensed than lower rate bags.

Figure 3: Number of carrier bags dispensed by quarter and rate
 Northern Ireland, Q1 2022/23 to Q4 2023/24



Data Table

Table 1: Carrier bags dispensed by quarter and rate
Northern Ireland, 2023/24

	2022/23			2023/24		
Quarter	Lower rate	Upper rate	Total Bags	Lower rate	Upper rate	Total Bags
April to June	9,516,262	6,950,526	16,466,788	5,828,036	9,487,135	15,315,171
July to September	6,870,605	9,498,337	16,368,942	5,367,400	9,528,208	14,895,608
October to December	7,286,483	10,490,370	17,776,853	5,901,706	10,534,460	16,436,166
January to March	5,064,671	9,288,221	14,352,892	4,108,954	8,937,398	13,046,352
Total	28,738,021	36,227,454	64,965,475	21,206,096	38,487,201	59,693,297

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

Bags at the lower rate are those only costing the customer the revised 25p levy.

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 for 2022/23 and 2023/24 are 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 costing the customer 6 pence to 19 pence inclusive.

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.

Final results from the Continuous Household Survey environmental module are published [online](#) and show that 78 per cent of respondents in the 2023/24 survey were reported to be very/fairly concerned about environmental issues. This is similar to the 80 per cent of respondents concerned about the environment in 2022/23. 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. 2023/24 results show that 48 per cent responded that they did not buy a carrier bag, whilst 27 per cent bought bags costing 25 pence. A further 16 per cent bought bags costing 26 pence - 50 pence.

Background information

1. This is the eleventh year of the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These are the final official statistics for 2023/24. The statistics refer to all bags made of any material, not solely plastic bags. The Department intends to publish 2024/25 figures in August 2025. [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 2,347 retailers in Northern Ireland as notified to the Department by 30 June 2024. 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 official statistics are produced in compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Our [Statistics Charter](#) provides further details of how we apply the principles and practices of the Code in the production and publication of our official statistics. 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.
7. Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards by emailing conor.mccormack@daera-ni.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

Policy, Economics and Statistics Division
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
BELFAST BT3 9ED



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Róinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard