

Cut Single-Use Cups Near Schools: A Reusable-Cup Pilot for Bogotá Cafés

FOR: Bogotá cafés near schools/universities • **PARTNERS:** UAESP, District Education Offices, Student Groups • **SDGs:** 12 • 11 • 9 • 17

One-sentence summary. Bogotá should partner with clusters of cafés near schools to pilot a returnable-cup deposit system—reducing litter and costs from single-use cups while aligning with Colombia’s Law 2232 on single-use plastics and the city’s circular-economy goals.

Why it matters

Bogotá’s waste services are under stress; cutting avoidable waste at high-footfall nodes (café clusters near schools) is a practical first step. National policy is moving the city in the same direction: Law 2232 (2022) is phasing out classes of single-use plastics. International evidence (UNEP; Ellen MacArthur Foundation) shows that well-designed reusable systems can significantly reduce plastic leakage and climate impacts. Life-cycle reviews of beverage cups find reusables outperform disposables after a certain number of uses, especially with efficient washing and high return rates.

Evidence (key points)

- Waste system stress in Bogotá suggests near-term relief by reducing avoidable packaging at source.
- Policy tailwind: Law 2232 phases out categories of single-use plastics beginning July 2024.
- Reuse works with enabling design: deposits, convenient return points, and shared washing logistics.
- Breakeven uses for reusables are driven by washing and return rates—variables a pilot can control.
- Local circular ecosystem: mixed paper-plastic cups are hard to recover—cut the stream at source.

Options considered

Option	What it looks like	Pros	Cons
Status quo (single-use cups)	No behavior change; occasional BYO discounts	No setup costs; simple for cafés	Continues litter & hauling costs; lined cups hard to recycle; no policy alignment

Bring-Your-Own (BYO) push)	Discounts; on-site rinsing for personal mugs	Low cost; engages loyal users	Limited uptake; inequitable for spontaneous buyers
Reusable-cup deposit system (pilot)	Small deposit (e.g., COP \$2,000); return to any partner café; centralized washing	Highest waste reduction; inclusive; builds habit data	Needs cup pool, washing logistics, simple tracking

Alt text (for accessibility): Comparison table of three options—status quo, BYO, and reusable-cup deposit—summarizing setup, pros, and cons.

Recommendations

1) Launch a 90-day pilot in one café cluster (5–10 cafés) near a university or school zone. Owner: café consortium + supporting NGO; Partners: UAESP, district education office. Steps: sign MOU; select standard cup; secure washing partner; set deposit and return points; configure simple QR tracking. Run weekly data checks and loss audits.

2) Co-brand with the city's circular economy and Law 2232 compliance. Owners: UAESP + cafés. Steps: decals, deposit on receipts, posters linking to the policy context and a student challenge. Why: align with national policy and make public benefit visible.

3) Build a shared washing & logistics micro-hub. Owner: café consortium; Partner: commissary kitchen/caterer. Steps: evening pickup, HACCP-aligned wash protocol, morning redistribution. Why: centralizing washing cuts per-cup impacts.

What to do next (30-day plan)

Week 1: choose pilot block, recruit cafés, pick cup and deposit. Week 2: sign MOU, secure washing, print decals and scripts. Week 3: training; soft launch with student volunteers; start data collection. Week 4: public launch; weekly dashboard of returns, losses, and litter observations.

How we'll measure success

- Cup return rate $\geq 85\%$ by week 4; $\geq 90\%$ by week 8.
- Single-use cup purchases by partners $\downarrow 60\text{--}80\%$ vs. baseline.
- Litter observations $\downarrow$ in pilot block vs. baseline photos/week.
- Customer acceptance $\geq 70\%$ satisfied/very satisfied (1-minute intercept survey).
- Cost neutrality by week 12 (disposable savings = pilot costs).

Implementation notes

- Cup choice: durable PP or stainless insert with silicone sleeve; avoid heavy ceramic and glass.
- Deposit UX: keep deposit small and consistent; refund in cash or as credit.
- Data: track issued, returned, lost, washed weekly; photo public bins before/after.
- Equity: allow waived deposit via return-within-a-day pledge; keep BYO discounts.
- Scale: if indicators met, expand by cluster; more return points improve return rates.

Credits & sources

- Law 2232 (Colombia) — single-use plastics phase-out (official & summaries).
- UNEP — Life-Cycle Initiative (beverage cups LCA; SUPP matrix).
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation — Returnable/reusable models and city pilots.
- World Bank/IDRC — Policy brief format guidance (short, focused, plain language).

- Bogotá waste-service context — recent reporting on service stress.