

SHOULD THE UK SEND ITS RUBBISH TO OTHER COUNTRIES?



According to the Environmental Investigation Agency, the UK exported nearly 600,000 tonnes of plastic waste in 2024. Many countries send waste overseas for recycling: it is often cheaper than domestic processing and can help them reach recycling targets. The idea is that this rubbish is properly recycled upon arrival, with the countries on the receiving end getting an economic boost. However, due to contaminated materials or unscrupulous behaviour of “bad actors” in the industry, it can often end up in landfill or fly-tipped. Critics see this arrangement as a way for wealthy nations to shirk their environmental responsibilities, labelling it “waste colonialism”. For supporters, it is a mutually beneficial way of solving a persistent problem. Often the most passionate demographic on environmental issues, we wanted to know where young people stood on this topic.

Alex
Data Coordinator 

48,580

TOTAL VOTES

10,864

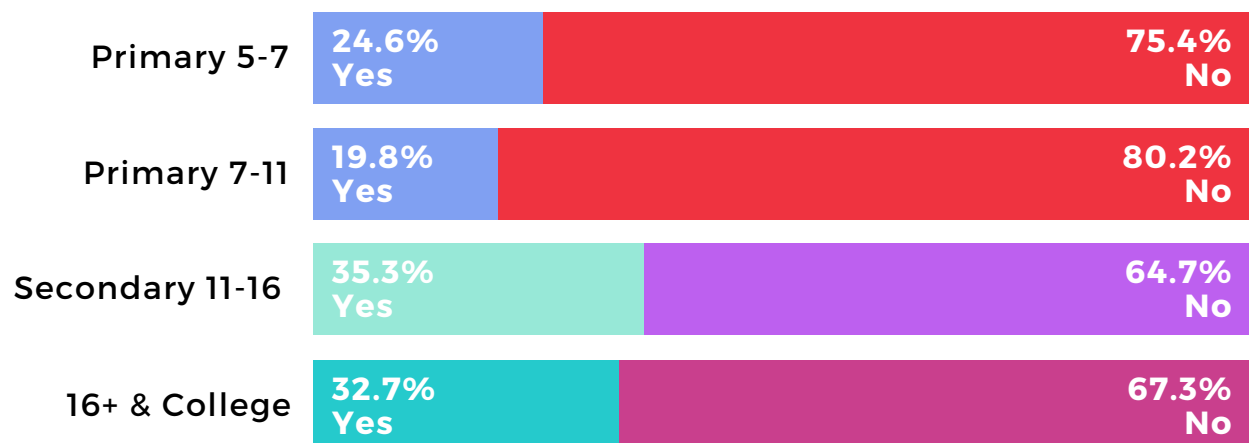
VOTES AGE 5-11

37,716

VOTES AGE 11-16+

The VoteTopic question, which was discussed amongst the different age groups:

Primary 5-11, Secondary, 16+ & College: “Should the UK send its rubbish to other countries?”



SHOULD THE UK SEND ITS RUBBISH TO OTHER COUNTRIES?

Voters of all ages were opposed to the idea of waste exportation with discussions focusing on the theme of “responsibility”.

Many Primary pupils shared concerns around the environmental fallout of exporting waste. They were worried it could hurt wildlife in the countries where it ends up. The idea that it is our waste and therefore our responsibility to deal with came up multiple times.

Secondary voters shared many of the positions of their younger peers. Voters thought it was unfair for us to export waste to other countries, instead arguing that we should take action in our own country to tackle the problem. Some suggested improving our recycling infrastructure or holding companies to account for their use of plastic packaging. “Yes” voters argued that some countries are better equipped to deal with waste (either through increased size or existing infrastructure). They said that, if both countries agreed to it, then exporting waste could be mutually beneficial. These thoughts were echoed by 16+ & College voters.

This week’s data revealed a slight gender split on the topic. Across all age groups, boys were more open to the idea than their female peers. The difference was greatest at Secondary with 25% of girls voting Yes compared to 45% of boys.

It is saving our country money when we recycle abroad.

Primary Yes Voter

No because it's your rubbish and you should sort it out. It's not other people's responsibility.

Primary No Voter

If both countries agree and are benefitting from it then it's ok.

Secondary Yes Voter

That rubbish should be dealt with ourselves and not sent to other countries.

Secondary No Voter