

A background image showing various textile items on a dark wooden surface, including spools of blue thread, several buttons in shades of blue and white, and a pair of blue-handled scissors.

RECOMMENDATIONS and GOOD PRACTICES for LOCAL USED TEXTILE MANAGEMENT

Executive Summary
October 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations and good practices for local used textiles management provides an overview of recommendations and good practices on textile re-use and textile waste management that could be identified in the literature. It is based on a study commissioned by Brussels Environment to prepare for the upcoming mandatory selective collection of textile waste in 2025.

**IN MANY TERRITORIES,
USED TEXTILE COLLECTION
MOSTLY FOCUSES ON
RE-USABLE FRACTIONS,
OPERATED BY
SOCIAL ECONOMY
ORGANISATIONS**

STATE OF THE ART AND CURRENT CHALLENGES REGARDING TEXTILE RE-USE AND TEXTILE WASTE

One of the first key challenges when investigating the end-of-life of textile products is the **general lack of data**. The management of used textile is operated by many different players who do not necessarily report the collected quantities. Few European countries have implemented sorting obligations or an Extended Producer Responsibility system (EPR), which also explains the lack of consolidated data. If some territories can be identified as frontrunners, there are less possibilities to benchmark local or regional performances than with other waste fractions.

In many territories, used textile collection mostly focuses on re-usable fractions, operated by social economy organisations. In France, the collection schemes encompass all textiles, including the non-re-usable ones (sometimes referred as “textile waste”, even though definitions and terminologies vary among the Member States), due to the EPR system implemented in 2007. In other countries, there seems to be a growing

trend of collection schemes aiming to collect all used textiles, especially in Denmark and the Netherlands.

There are various barriers limiting the circular management of textiles. As the (used) textile market is mostly global, these barriers are common to the different European territories:

- **The decline in quality of the collected textiles**, which limits the possibilities of re-use and reduces the value of the used textiles collected.
- **Competition** in the collection for re-use **with online exchanges or sales platforms**.
- **Competition of “fast fashion” products with second-hand textiles**.
- **Technical barriers for sorting and recovery**: lack of sorting capacity for recycling, lack of recycling routes with high added value, lack of eco-design for textile products for recycling.
- **Economic barriers for sorting and recovery**, linked to the decline in the quality of textiles and the lack of high value-added outlets.
- **Difficulties related to exports**, with uncertainties about the fate of exported textiles, possible negative impacts for importing countries, and possible reductions or even bans for export in different countries.
- **Lack of data and traceability**.

Other barriers could be identified, that are more related to specific local or regional territories, such as the difficulty to set an effective collection system in dense urban areas, with more limited space for textile containers (the most common collection model), or the lower collection performance associated with high-rise buildings. Another common challenge is the lack of local governance for textile collection, with sometimes a limited involvement of local authorities, lack of local strategies and targets, the presence of several collection systems organised by various local operational players with little coordination, etc.

The lack of data and information on non-household textiles makes them difficult to apprehend. The identified data are subject to caution, yet it seems that the generated quantities are limited compared to household textiles. Re-use and recycling of non-household textiles appear to be limited, also due to the lack of solutions and regulation.

GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS IDENTIFIED IN THE LITERATURE

Good practices have been identified in the literature and grouped into different themes: **collection methods, sorting and treatment technologies, governance, and extended producer responsibility**. A cross-analysis of practical cases and more general recommendations was conducted for each of these different themes. Following these cross-analysis, it is possible to propose these **key recommendations**:

- The need to **develop territorial governance** for textile waste management, which involves the coordination and supervision of the various local players, the collection of information via reliable reporting, the definition of clear objectives and their monitoring, the promotion of second-hand care, and the transparency on the destinations of the flows collected;
- The need to **consolidate and diversify collection methods** to optimise the capture

rate, which involves an efficient network of textile banks, but also the implementation of alternative collection methods addressing the constraints of certain types of housing or population;

- For the extension of sorting guidelines to non-reusable textile waste, **the implementation of an EPR system is necessary** to secure the economic balance of textile sorting and recycling, and to promote eco-design to limit the declining value of used textiles;
- The need to **monitor the development of new recycling routes** and to collaborate on a wider scale on the creation of an industrial textile recycling sector;
- For professional textiles, the generalisation of **calls for tenders taking into account criteria on the repair and end-of-life of products**, in connection with producers, rental and maintenance services, and users.

THERE IS A NEED TO DEVELOP A TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE FOR USED TEXTILE MANAGEMENT, INCLUDING CLEAR OBJECTIVES AND THE COORDINATION OF LOCAL PLAYERS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT OF USED TEXTILES

The initial study on which this report is based formulated recommendations addressing the context and challenges of the Brussels region. It is however possible to propose some more general recommendations for any local authority willing to improve textile re-use and recycling in its territory.

1. **Set up a real local governance on textile management, in consultation with the key local stakeholders**, with objectives on both performance and the collection system (density of collection points, etc.), multi-stakeholder agreements clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the various players and taking advantage of the experience and infrastructures of existing players.
2. **Strengthen existing collection methods, and identify alternative collection methods**, e.g. by completing the network of textile banks in underperforming areas, by analysing the reasons behind the underperformance in the areas concerned, and by setting up alternative collection methods to overcome the difficulties identified.

3. **Promote prevention of textile waste and second-hand purchasing** by supporting re-use and second-hand players, to help them develop their offer, and by communicating on the relevancy of second-hand and good practices for extending the lifetime of household textiles.

4. **Extend sorting instructions only when an EPR system is available** so as not to weaken the economic balance of current players.

5. **Promote circular tenders for professional textiles.**

It is also recommended to call for the implementation of a European EPR system, which is a key instrument to ensure the transition to a system collecting all textile waste before more recycling routes are available for textile waste. Several elements are important for the outlines of the EPR, including a reflection on eco-modulated fees and financial contributions to collection and sorting in connection with existing players, as well as on the inclusion of social economy organisations in the future system.

1. **ESTABLISH A REAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE ON TEXTILE MANAGEMENT**
2. **STRENGTHEN EXISTING COLLECTION METHODS, AND IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE COLLECTION METHODS**
3. **PROMOTE TEXTILE WASTE PREVENTION AND SECOND-HAND BUYING**
4. **EXTEND SORTING INSTRUCTIONS ONLY WHEN AN EPR SYSTEM IS AVAILABLE**
5. **SUPPORT CIRCULAR TENDERS FOR PROFESSIONAL TEXTILES**



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Author: Jean-Benoit Bel

Reviewers: Françoise Bonnet,
Gaëlle Colas, Tugce Tugran

Lay-out: Solène Padeletti

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www.acrplus.org

AISBL ACR+

Avenue des Arts 3-4-5

B-1210 Brussels

0455.424.995

RPM Bruxelles