Position Paper

Ensuring a Business Case for Repair

MAY 2026

This policy paper was prepared in the aftermath of RREUSE Secretariat's exchanges with European Commission representatives, to support evidence-based policymaking with on-the-ground experience and expertise. Beside providing concrete examples of how social enterprises in our network are keeping products in use longer through repair, the paper focuses on key barriers that currently prevent repair from being a viable business model, including policy and regulatory gaps as well as consumer-related obstacles. The paper concludes with recommendations across relevant EU frameworks to help establish a business case for repair in a competitive circular economy.

Introduction

Repair is, after reuse, positioned at the top of the waste hierarchy as a key waste-prevention activity.[1] It delivers clear and substantial environmental benefits by extending product lifetimes and reducing resource extraction, emissions, and waste generation. As such, it is a cornerstone of the circular economy, with unique potential to slow material flows and retain product value for longer. Repair activities are inherently local, supporting resilient local economies and contributing to job creation that cannot be offshored.[2] Social enterprises have played a pioneering role in developing the repair sector and continue to act as critical enablers of the circular transition: they provide hands-on circular skills, facilitate the integration of workers in labour-market insertion pathways into mainstream employment, and empower citizens with practical knowledge that supports more sustainable consumption patterns.

Despite these well-documented environmental, social, and economic benefits, repair remains largely marginalised in legislative efforts to promote circularity, and in many cases lacks a viable business case. This is driven by a combination of structural and economic barriers. The prevailing linear model of production and consumption is deeply embedded in supply-chain logistics optimised for the sale of new products, making systemic change difficult. Most critically, repair is frequently not price-competitive with replacement, with cost consistently identified as the primary barrier to consumer engagement.[3] High repair prices are the result of multiple reinforcing factors, including artificially inflated spare-part prices set by manufacturers and comparatively high labour costs in the EU, which together tilt consumer choices toward premature replacement rather than repair.

[1] European Commission (2008) Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste (Available here).
[2] European Environment Agency (2025) Jobs in B2C repair sector (Available here).
[3] Joint Research Centre (2026) Preparatory study for the setting of horizontal ecodesign requirements on repairability (Available here).

Examples of repair activities in the RREUSE network

RREUSE members are actively engaged in repair activities, operating at multiple levels and scales. They deliver consumer-facing repair services, including business-to-consumer repairs, and manage dedicated repair infrastructures such as repair cafés, tool libraries, and community repair centres. Many members also organise paid repair workshops and training sessions for citizens, thereby strengthening repair skills and awareness at the local level.

Beyond direct services, RREUSE members are also involved in the repair ecosystem through their preparing-for-reuse activities. Although direct reuse does not necessitate repair operations, repair can constitute a step of the preparing-for-reuse and refurbishment processes. Across the network, the most frequently repaired product categories include electrical and electronic equipment, bicycles, textiles, and furniture, reflecting both the practical repair potential and the demand for these services.

Technical innovations

BELGIUM: ***Kringwinkel Antwerpen*** *is a social enterprise that collects, sorts, repairs, and reuses items ranging from textiles to electronics and household items. As part of the Horizon project CISUTAC, Kringwinkel Antwerpen collaborated with other project partners to create an innovative repair workstation for zipper removal and replacement. The workstation has significantly improved the zipper repair process, reducing time and costs. It was installed in one of the Kringwinkel locations, conveniently located next to one of their second-hand shops, and is now fully operational. It is used to offer customers an efficient textile repair service, as well as to repair and prepare for reuse donated and collected items.*

Innovative repair cafés

SLOVENIA: ***Centar Ponovne Uporabe*** *opened the first Repair Café in Slovenske Konjice, constructed from abandoned residential containers. The repair café now runs on a monthly basis and forms part of a growing European network of community repair initiatives.*

IRELAND: ***Change Clothes*** *provided extensive training and educational opportunities on textile repair and other topics. Over 200 workshops were organised in 2025, ranging from in-studio sewing trainings, open community workshops, and vocational programmes. In total, these initiatives saw over 1,700 attendees. Change Clothes also provided continued support to several repair café initiatives across Ireland. On the occasion of Irish Design Week, they also ran an open repair relay to raise awareness and teach basic textile repair skills.*

B2B partnerships

SCOTLAND: ***Grantown Remakery at Strathspey Works*** *is a charity providing access to work through skills development. Covering a wide area of the Highlands, the Remakery has supported tourist accommodation providers to make their business more sustainable by providing a furniture repair service. A wide variety of items were repaired through the project, 68 items in total over the year, for hotels and guesthouses. The project has been a catalyst for change in the area, with a general increase in repairs, with one hotel commissioning regular repairs.*

SPAIN: ***Fundaciò Deixalles*** *ran a project with the hospitality sector in Mallorca and Ibiza, collecting items such as furniture and textiles, repairing them, and preparing them for reuse. Revenues from resale are used to fund workshops and social integration activities, including training on repair and preparing for reuse. Fundaciò Deixalles signed agreements with around 50 hotels for this project.*

BELGIUM: ***Atellje VZW*** *repairs a wide range of items as part of their preparing-for-reuse activities, including electrical and electronic equipment (EEE). They collaborated with BSH to collect discarded household appliances and items and perform repairs aimed at preparing for reuse. Despite challenges linked to limited spare parts availability and access, the initiative has been successful. With a recovery rate of 30-40%, VZW Atellje offered an alternative to direct recycling or disposal, with significant environmental and social benefits.*

Public-private partnership

ITALY: ***Reware Società Cooperativa*** started a collaboration to provide local public schools in Rome with repaired and refurbished IT equipment, notably laptops and computers. These items were collected from companies, repaired and refurbished, and given to schools for use in classrooms. This successful collaboration with both private and public sectors brought significant benefits in terms of reduced waste generation and environmental impact, as well as positive social outcomes and educational opportunities. It also highlights the potential of public efforts to support the repair sector, notably through public procurement.

Barriers to repair as a viable business model

Barriers linked to product design

Many barriers to repair and reuse are embedded directly in product design choices. A widespread issue is the lack of design for disassembly and reparability, for instance, through the extensive use of permanent adhesives instead of screws or clips. This makes products difficult or impossible to open without damage. This is reinforced by “fast tech” business models and planned obsolescence, where hardware or software is intentionally designed to become outdated quickly. Manufacturers often design their products so that disassembly requires proprietary or specialised tools, and restrict repairs to authorised service providers, while withholding repair documentation and procedures.

At the same time, monopolistic practices in spare parts markets further discourage repair: manufacturers may limit the use of non-original parts through design or software barriers, sell original spare parts at disproportionately high prices, or bundle components together so that a minor repair requires replacing an entire sub-assembly (for example, selling a full appliance door instead of a simple handle). These strategies significantly increase repair costs and push consumers toward premature replacement.

In addition, anti-repair practices increasingly rely on software-based controls such as serialisation and parts-pairing. Serialisation involves assigning unique identifiers to individual components. While not inherently problematic, it becomes a barrier when devices are programmed to restrict or disable functionality if a component with a different serial number is detected, even if the replacement part is original. In such cases, only the manufacturer may be able to remotely re-authorise the component, creating delays and dependence on brand-controlled services. Parts-pairing builds on this logic by deliberately limiting functionality when a component is replaced with a third-party or second-hand original part, such as disabling battery health information after a battery swap. Together, these practices shift control away from users and independent repairers, undermine circular economy objectives, and entrench manufacturer dominance over product lifecycles.

Barriers to consumer engagement

Consumers' engagement in repair is also significantly constrained by structural and economic barriers that vary across product groups. In the textiles sector, technical challenges such as the loss of repair skills, limited access to suitable services, and the difficulty of restoring garments to their original condition reduce the perceived feasibility of repair. These challenges are compounded by cost considerations. While 77% of European citizens express a willingness to repair their goods, this figure drops to 40% when repair implies a price increase.[4] This indicates that high repair costs are a decisive deterrent.

For electrical and electronic equipment (EEE), the price of repair, driven largely by spare part costs, is consistently identified as the primary barrier. A 2019 ADEME study[5] found that 68% of French consumers cite repair cost as the main obstacle. This finding is confirmed by Fnac's Baromètre SAV from 2022, which identifies price as the most decisive factor in repair decisions.[6] More recent ADEME research from 2024 shows that consumers generally consider repair only when its cost does not exceed 20-30% of the product's purchase price, with half of consumers opting for replacement once repair exceeds 25%.[7] Given that repair costs are mainly composed of labour and spare parts, this implies that spare part prices should remain below approximately 15-20% of the product price to keep repair economically acceptable. This threshold was also identified in the Impact Assessment

[4] Eurobarometer survey (2020) (Available here).
[5] ADEME (2019) Les Français et la réparation – perception et pratiques (Available here).
[6] Fnac Darty (2022) Baromètre du SAV (Available here).
[7] ADEME (2025) Étude sur les pièces détachées pour la réparation (Available here).

study for the Directive on Common Rules promoting the Repair of Goods.[8] Data collected by the Open Repair Alliance from community repair events across Europe further corroborate these findings, highlighting high repair and spare part prices, alongside limited availability and information, as key factors discouraging consumers from choosing repair over replacement.[9] More recently, the preparatory study for horizontal ecodesign requirements on repairability also confirmed this barrier.[10]

Policy gaps

Several legislative gaps at the EU level continue to undermine the business case for repair and refurbishment. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes remain largely focused on end-of-life waste management and fail to finance waste prevention activities such as repair, reuse, and refurbishment. In addition, the absence of separate, binding targets for these activities further limits investment and scale-up.

The Right to Repair Directive, as currently in force, is not sufficiently ambitious and covers only a limited range of products. Moreover, its ban on software barriers such as parts-pairing is weakened by a broad loophole. Namely, the Directive allows the practice when it is "justified by legitimate and objective factors, including the protection of intellectual property rights." Furthermore, while the Directive mandates spare parts to be offered at a "reasonable price", it does not define what constitutes a reasonable price in the context of spare parts.[11]

Ecodesign Regulations adopted so far also restrict access to most spare parts and repair information primarily to "professional repairers," often excluding refurbishers from this definition (with the notable exception of smartphones and tablets).[12] On top of this, these regulations do not prevent lengthy and burdensome administrative procedures for independent repairers to obtain spare parts, documentation, or software protocols needed to restore full functionality of serialised components. Often, these procedures can take up to three working days for repairs that would otherwise take about an hour or less.

Finally, the 2022 EU VAT Directive provides only a fragmented and optional set of opportunities for Member States to reduce VAT on repair, spread across poorly coordinated categories with different ceilings and limited product scopes.[13] These measures do not reflect the waste hierarchy and leave significant gaps. In particular, they exclude many independent repair shops, repair cafés, and

[8] European Commission (2023) Impact Assessment Report accompanying the document Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on common rules promoting the repair of goods and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/2394, Directives (EU) 2019/771 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Available here).
[9] Open Repair Alliance (2024) The rise of community repair: the people and the data creating a movement (Available here).
[10] Joint Research Centre (2026) Preparatory study for the setting of horizontal ecodesign requirements on repairability. JRC144290 (Available here).
[11] RREUSE (2024) A Breakthrough in European Right-to-Repair Legislation (Available here).
[12] This is the case for most product-specific ecodesign regulations adopted under Directive 2009/125/EC establishing a framework for ecodesign requirements for energy-related products (Available here).
[13] Council Directive (EU) 2022/542 of 5 April 2022 amending Directives 2006/112/EC and (EU) 2020/285 as regards rates of value added tax (Available here).

commercial repair services operating outside formal waste-management chains. Consequently, this weakens the overall economic incentive to repair.

Existing measures supporting the business case for repair

A number of existing policy instruments at the EU, national, and local levels already demonstrate how repair can be scaled up and made economically viable, even if many remain partial or insufficient.

Right to Repair Directive

At the EU level, the Right to Repair Directive represents an important first step.[14] It extends certain repair-related rights to products covered by existing repairability requirements. However, this currently amounts to only a narrow set of product groups, and an even narrower set of components of those product groups. The Directive introduces an EU-wide repair services database. This has the potential to improve visibility and accessibility of repair services, provided that it is inclusive of all actors, including independent repairers and social enterprises, and that it takes into consideration their digital and administrative capacities. It also requires Member States to establish at least one national measure to incentivise repair, whether financial or non-financial. This obligation is particularly important given the decisive role of affordability. In addition, the Directive prohibits software-based barriers to repair, albeit with a significant loophole. It also strengthens manufacturers' obligations to provide repair services both within and beyond the legal guarantee. To avoid reinforcing manufacturers' dominance over repair markets, these obligations will need to be complemented by ambitious spare parts availability rules and comprehensive bans on anti-repair practices.

Financial incentives

Repair bonus and voucher schemes have been implemented in Austria, France, and several municipalities in Germany and Italy. A study analysing the impact of the repair bonus in Thuringia shows that beyond increasing the number of repair operations, repair vouchers help ensure stability, investment, and professionalisation of small repair businesses.[15] In France, the repair bonus is financed through EPR funds and has contributed to increased repair uptake, although it does not provide direct support to repair businesses themselves. Austria's Repair Bonus scheme has been particularly successful: by April 2023, over 550,000 vouchers had been redeemed – well above the initial target of 400,000 set for 2026 – and the scheme was expanded in September 2024 to include non-electric bicycles alongside household appliances, smartphones, and e-bikes. In 2024, the bonus

[14] Directive (EU) 2024/1799 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on common rules promoting the repair of goods and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/2394 and Directives (EU) 2019/771 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Available here).
[15] Fraunhofer IZM (2024) Erweiterte ökologische Wirkungsabschätzung zum Reparaturbonus Thüringen (Available here).

was covering 50% of repair costs up to €200 and involved more than 3,000 repair operators, including social enterprises.[16]

However, as of January 2026, the situation in Austria has shifted significantly, serving as a warning against regressive national policies. The new "Geräte-Retter-Prämie" has reduced the maximum subsidy from €200 to €130 per repair. Critically, essential circular categories, including smartphones, tablets, bicycles, and e-bikes, are no longer eligible for funding. Additionally, the shift from an upfront voucher to a "pay-first, reimburse-later" model creates a financial barrier for low-income consumers. The Austrian example sheds light on the need for EU-wide minimum requirement for financial incentives to prevent Member States from diluting successful repair/reuse schemes.

Fiscal measures

Several Member States – including Belgium, Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and Finland – have introduced reduced VAT rates for certain repair services. Reduced VAT is already common for bicycle repairs, where repair is well established, but remains limited for other product categories, and should be extended more broadly. Sweden offers a distinct and innovative approach: labour costs for household appliance repairs carried out in consumers' homes are tax-deductible, meaning consumers do not pay these costs upfront, while the scheme is financed through a tax on hazardous chemicals in electronic products.

Transparency instruments

Transparency tools such as reparability scores also contribute to enabling repair, notably in France and Belgium. The French *indice de réparabilité* is particularly impactful as it includes spare-part prices as a criterion, helping consumers factor repair costs into purchasing decisions.

Specific support for social enterprises

Finally, targeted support for small operators and social enterprises demonstrates how tailored measures can strengthen local repair ecosystems and ensure that the social and economic benefits of repair are fully realised. France's *Fonds de réemploi social et solidaire* and reduced VAT rates for work integration social enterprises in Belgium are examples of such dedicated support mechanisms.[17]

[16] RREUSE (2024) Social and circular priorities in the new EU fiscal rules era: Analysis of the 2023 and 2024 Semester cycles (Available here).
[17] Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement (2020) Fonds dédié au financement du réemploi et de la réutilisation (Articles R541-153 à R541-157) (Available here).

Policy opportunities and recommendations to ensure a business case for repair

To unlock the full environmental, social, and economic potential of repair, the EU must move beyond fragmented measures and establish a coherent policy framework that actively supports repair as a core circular economy activity.

Circular Economy Act (CEA)

First, the upcoming CEA should play a central role in correcting current market failures. Measures that ensure financial predictability for repair businesses need to be introduced. Therefore, EPR schemes should be reoriented to finance repair operations, repair incentives, and consumer information campaigns, rather than focusing almost exclusively on end-of-life treatment. Setting targets for reuse and preparing for reuse would also create a framework to support repair activities. All EPR schemes should be organised to generate collection and sorting systems oriented towards reuse and repair. To achieve this, the EPR agreement should include mandatory collection and sorting for preparing for reuse, as well as the handover of collected volumes to reuse-repair operators, in particular social enterprises.

The CEA should also enable zero VAT rates for products repaired by social enterprises, recognising their social added value and contribution to local circular ecosystems. In parallel, strong ecomodulation of EPR fees – based on ecodesign criteria, business practices, and production volumes – should be introduced to reward repairable products and disincentivise designs that undermine durability and reparability.[18]

Green Public Procurement (GPP)

GPP is another powerful but underused lever to scale up repair. Repaired items – alongside reused products – should be explicitly included among eligibility criteria in public tenders whenever possible. Procurement practices should prioritise the Best Price-Quality Ratio, ensuring that environmental, social, and circular economy criteria are properly valued rather than sidelined by lowest-price approaches. GPP criteria should explicitly integrate repair-related requirements, such as product repairability under the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, the purchase of refurbished goods, and the prioritisation of reuse over replacement in line with the CEA. Procurement procedures should also be better aligned with the realities of the repair sector by shifting the focus from uniformity to functionality and by involving circular economy actors – such as repair social enterprises – in pre-procurement market consultations to strengthen locally available supply chains.[19]

[18] RREUSE (2025) Advancing sustainable resource management with the Circular Economy Act (Available here).
[19] RREUSE (2025) Maximising public value through social and circular procurement (Available here).

Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR)

The ESPR must ensure open and competitive repair and refurbishment markets. Robust horizontal and product-specific performance and information requirements should be adopted, particularly for electrical and electronic equipment. The definition of "independent/professional repairer" should include refurbishers and social enterprises. Access to original spare parts, repair information, and diagnostic software must be guaranteed for all preparing-for-reuse actors. The price of spare parts should also be addressed as one of the main barriers to repair for consumers and independent repairers. Crucially, delegated acts under the ESPR should tackle design for disassembly, repairability, and planned obsolescence of products. They should guarantee the unrestricted use of second-hand and third-party spare parts and components. Additionally, clear bans should be introduced on design and software techniques aimed at preventing or limiting repair outside manufacturer-authorised networks. Such measures could draw inspiration from the more advanced regulatory approach in the automotive and batteries sector. This should be complemented by an explicit ban on parts-pairing and binding provisions allowing the use of non-original spare parts, alongside stricter regulation of marketing and advertising practices that fuel overconsumption and obscure repair options, as highlighted in recent ENVI Council discussions. The Digital Product Passport should be designed to interface with the EU repair platform established and implemented under the Right to Repair Directive, improving access to repair information for consumers and professionals alike. It should also include proportionality of reporting and data obligations with simplified procedures for smaller operators, such as social enterprises.

New Legislative Framework (NLF)

Finally, the NLF should be leveraged to recognise and support repairers and refurbishers as key European industrial actors. This requires ensuring fair competition and adequate economic support, notably by avoiding disproportionate legal, administrative, and economic burdens on small operators. Clear and consistent definitions of circular economy actors and activities must be established across EU product and waste legislation through the NLF, explicitly recognising social enterprises, in line with the ESPR. These definitions should then be used to clarify the responsibilities and conformity requirements for new and substantially modified (e.g. remanufactured) products vis-à-vis repaired and refurbished products. It is essential that products that are not substantially modified, like repaired and refurbished goods, are not subject to conformity assessments and procedures applicable to new products. As repair and refurbishment aim at restoring the product's original functionality, often through the replacement of standardised spare parts, introducing safety requirements would not only be redundant but would pose unnecessary burdens on independent repairers and refurbishers, notably social enterprises. The revision of the NLF should avoid these risks and make sure conformity requirements are limited to new and substantially modified products, and that safety remains a responsibility of the product's and spare parts' original manufacturer. The NLF and the future EU Product Act should also reinforce market surveillance through digital compliance information, particularly to close loopholes related to e-commerce and non-compliant products imported directly into the EU, which eventually become waste in Europe. Together, these measures would create the regulatory clarity, market access, competition, and economic conditions needed to secure a durable and scalable business case for repair businesses in the EU.

Resources

On the Austrian repair voucher scheme:

- RREUSE (2024) Social and circular priorities in the new EU fiscal rules era: Analysis of the 2023 and 2024 Semester cycles (Available here).

On what the 2022 VAT Directive specifically allows for repair incentives and under which conditions:

- RREUSE (2022) *Position Paper on the Revised VAT Directive* (Available here).

Comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities to scale up circular business models in textiles, including repair models:

- RREUSE for the CISUTAC project (2024) Unlocking Opportunities for Circular Business Models in Textiles: Phasing out Linearity (Available here).

Comprehensive overview of the (limited) scope and ambition of current repair policy in the EU:

- Right to Repair Europe (2024) Report - Current State of EU Right to Repair (Available here).
- Right to Repair Europe (2024) Policy Brief - Current State of EU Right to Repair (Available here).

On price of spare parts and monopolistic behaviours of OEMs:

- Right to Repair Europe (2023) The Price is (not) Right (Available here).
- Right to Repair Europe (2025) Fixing the unfair reality of spare parts prices (Available here).

On the New Legislative Framework:

- RREUSE (2026) RREUSE's answer to the New Legislative Framework revision consultation (Available here).
- ECOS (2025) A New Legislative Framework fit for circular economy and the digital transition (Available here).

On repair bonuses/vouchers:

- EEB, Right to Repair Europe, Germanwatch, Runder Tisch Reparatur (2024) Reforming Extended Producer Responsibility to Promote Repair (Available here).

On advertising and marketing practices and non-compliance of products:

- BEUC (2025) Influencer Marketing Unboxed: Exposing how the fast fashion and food sectors hook consumers (Available here).

On software barriers and parts-pairing:

- iFixit (2023) How Parts-Pairing Kills Independent Repair (Available here).

- Right to Repair Europe (2025) Feedback on horizontal repairability requirements in ESPR Working Plan (section 5) (Available here).

Data on barriers to repair (price above all):

- Right to Repair Europe (2024) White Paper - Ecodesign Information Requirements on Original Spare Parts Prices (Available here).
- Open Repair Alliance (2024) The rise of community repair: The people and the data creating a movement (Available here).
- European Environmental Agency (2022) An overview of Europe's repair sector (Available here).
- Joint Research Centre (2026) Preparatory study for the setting of horizontal ecodesign requirements on repairability. JRC144290 (Available here).

Attitudes towards devices reparability:

- European Commission (2020) Special Eurobarometer on Attitudes towards the impact of digitalisation on daily lives (Available here).

For more information, please contact:
simone.cimadomo@rreuse.org
marie-jeanne.gaertner@rreuse.org

RREUSE is Europe's largest network of social enterprises active in the circular economy, with a focus on reuse, repair and recycling. Our mission is to empower, represent, and support the social and circular enterprise community. We help drive its development through effecting positive change in European policy, facilitating the exchange of best practices, and fostering meaningful partnerships.

rreuse.org

RREUSE

RREUSE

RREUSE.RREUSE

RREUSE_Brussels

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.