CIRCULAR BERLIN POSITION PAPER

Scaling up the Repair and Reuse of Textiles in Urban Areas: Systemic Levers for a Circular Transformation

Contact:
Arianna Nicolette, Co-Managing Director & Education Lead
arianna@circular.berlin
Sarah Keller, Senior Project Manager
sarah.keller@circular.berlin

Circular Berlin

Circular Berlin is a not-for-profit initiative that develops practical and policy-oriented solutions for the circular economy in Berlin.
→ www.circular.berlin

Overview

The negative impacts of the rapidly growing textile industry are increasingly affecting urban areas such as Berlin. The excessive consumption of cheap ultra-fast fashion is leading to rising volumes of textile waste, placing a strain on local waste disposal and collection systems, and making it more difficult to achieve climate and resource conservation targets. Berlin generates over 18 kg of used textiles per person each year. The estimated climate impact of Berlin's used textile waste streams amounts to around 605,000 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent per year, which corresponds to approximately 4% of the city's total CO_2 emissions. At the same time, local repair and reuse networks are under increasing economic pressure. Existing collection, sorting and reuse systems are reaching their limits, whilst large quantities of wearable clothing are being disposed of prematurely.

Reducing textile waste and strengthening reuse and repair schemes are not only relevant in terms of resource policy, but are also crucial for achieving binding climate and circular economy targets at state, federal and EU level. These include, in particular, Berlin's target of climate neutrality by 2045, Germany's National Circular Economy Strategy, and the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. With the introduction of new regulatory instruments such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and the EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), a crucial window of opportunity is now opening to structurally integrate reuse and repair into local climate, waste and economic policy.

The results clearly show:

- clothing that is still wearable is being disposed of prematurely on a large scale,
- existing reuse and collection schemes are insufficient,
- repair businesses are operating under considerable economic pressure,
- at the same time, there is significant public interest in local and accessible reuse schemes.

Circular Berlin therefore recommends three key policy areas:

1. **Establish a reuse infrastructure as part of local authority climate and circular economy policy**
2. **Create fair economic conditions for repair businesses**
3. **Strengthen reuse as a social practice and part of everyday urban culture.**

Reuse and repair are not niche solutions, but key levers for climate protection, resource conservation, local value creation and social participation. For the textile transformation to succeed, we now need a policy framework that systematically strengthens reuse and repair and establishes them as part of resilient urban infrastructure.

Policy Areas and Recommendations

Policy Area 1: Establish reuse infrastructure as part of local climate policy

Since 1 January 2025, all EU Member States have been obliged to collect used textiles separately. At the same time, existing collection, sorting and reuse structures in Berlin are increasingly reaching their limits. Overflowing containers, fly-tipping and large quantities of usable clothing ending up as waste highlight clear shortcomings in the existing infrastructure.

Reuse reduces waste volumes, eases the burden on local waste management systems and avoids CO_2 emissions by preventing new purchases and extending the lifespan of products. At the same time, reuse strategies make a direct contribution to achieving Berlin's climate targets and to implementing national and European circular economy strategies.

For reuse to be established as an effective component of local climate and resource policy, long-term political frameworks, robust data foundations and the structural expansion of local reuse infrastructures are required.

Policy demands:

- **Systematically integrate reuse infrastructure into climate, urban development and circular economy strategies**
- **Establish binding and unbureaucratic data sources on textile flows, reuse and further use**
- **Provide long-term support for municipal reuse hubs, material databases and local collection networks**
- **Allocate funds from Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) specifically to reuse and repair infrastructure**
- **Strengthen reuse businesses through discounted commercial premises, funding programmes and local visibility.**

Policy Area 2: Creating fair framework conditions for repair businesses

Repairing textiles is an effective measure for climate protection, as it extends the lifespan of products, reduces the need for new purchases and prevents textile waste. At the same time, many repair businesses in Berlin are under considerable economic pressure. A low willingness to pay, competition from ultra-fast fashion, and a lack of financial and structural support make it difficult to establish economically viable business models.

Circular Berlin's 'Repair Price Check' project revealed that many repair services in Berlin are barely economically viable. Low visibility, a lack of digitalisation and a shortage of skilled workers further undermine the sector's stability.

At the same time, repair and reuse offer significant potential for climate protection: according to the A-Gain Guide CO_2 calculator, repairing 1 kg of textiles can save around 15 kg of CO_2. If just a quarter of the textiles disposed of annually in Berlin were repaired and reused, over 117,000 tonnes of CO_2 could be avoided each year.

The introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and the EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) are creating new regulatory frameworks designed to strengthen the repair sector structurally. To ensure that this potential can be effectively harnessed, targeted policy measures are needed to stabilise the repair sector economically, raise its profile and make it more professional.

Policy demands:

- **Introduction of a repair bonus for textiles at state level, with long-term funding**
- **Reduction of VAT on textile repairs to strengthen local repair businesses**
- **Expand support programmes for digitalisation, visibility and business support for repair businesses**
- **Strengthen public support for digital platforms and digital repair guides such as the A-Gain Guide**

- Modernise and provide long-term support for training, qualifications and securing a skilled workforce in the textile sector.

Policy Area 3: Strengthening reuse as a social practice and part of everyday urban culture

Although many Berliners are aware of reuse schemes, factors such as cost, the time involved, a lack of visibility of such schemes and limited accessibility prevent wider uptake. Whilst second-hand options are available in many districts, low-threshold reuse and community structures are often lacking in people's everyday lives.

Community-based initiatives such as Repair Cafés, clothes swapping events, open workshops and neighbourhood initiatives create social learning spaces, strengthen practical skills and make climate-friendly behaviour visible and accessible in everyday life. Reuse becomes socially effective, in particular when sustainable consumption practices are experienced collectively, rooted locally and normalised socially.

For reuse to become a long-term part of everyday urban culture, targeted political support is needed for community-based initiatives, including communication strategies and low-threshold access for different sections of the population.

Policy Demands:

- support Repair Cafés, open workshops and local community spaces in the long term and embed them structurally within sustainability strategies
- expand multilingual and neighbourhood-specific information and communication campaigns on reuse initiatives
- strengthen financial incentives such as repair vouchers and reduced VAT on repairs, second-hand goods and upcycling
- support digital platforms and local reuse networks to improve visibility and accessibility
- design reuse schemes to be inclusive – through accessible design, clear language and culturally sensitive communication
- integrate circular economy skills more closely into educational, neighbourhood and local community projects.

Conclusion: Urban centers as drivers of the circular textile economy

Reducing textile waste and strengthening reuse and repair networks are key levers for local climate action, resource conservation and social inclusion. With the EU-wide obligation to collect used textiles separately from 2025, and the Extended Producer Responsibility coming into force from Q2 2028, the pressure to act is growing, as is the potential to strengthen circular solutions at a local level.

To ensure this potential is harnessed effectively, cities such as Berlin must recognize reuse and repair as integral parts of urban infrastructure and local circular economy policy, and support them in the long term. This includes robust data foundations, fair economic conditions for reuse and repair businesses, and the expansion of accessible reuse services in everyday urban life.

In parallel, the textile transformation requires social spaces and community-based initiatives that make repair, reuse and sufficiency-oriented consumption practices visible and adapted to everyday life. Reuse must be structurally embedded as an integral part of resilient urban development, local value creation and sustainable local supply.

Circular Berlin therefore recommends:

- **the systematic expansion of local reuse infrastructure**
- **economic policy measures to strengthen local repair and reuse businesses**
- **the targeted use of EPR funds for reuse and repair**
- **inclusive communication and education strategies**
- **and financial incentives to promote sustainable consumption practices.**

The political and regulatory framework at EU level is in place. What is now needed is concrete implementation at regional and local level. Reuse is not a project for the future - it is a present-day necessity for climate-resilient and circular cities.

The policy recommendations in this position paper are based on findings from three research and practical projects (Solstice, A-Gain Guide, Textiles Journeys) carried out by Circular Berlin between 2024 and 2025. A white paper and a comprehensive technical report are available for download, providing in-depth insights into the data collection, methodology and project results.

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Author **Sarah Keller**

Contributors
**Stefanie Barz,
Alessandra-Isabel Hager,
Arianna Nicoletti,
Sarah Maria Schmidt,
Leo Breitkreuz,
Sofía Johnanheth Nava González,
Nadiia Kuzmenko,
Michael Valenta.**

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Phoebe Blackburn

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