



# How to collect, sort, and reuse textile waste locally?

An overview of policy options for municipalities

December 2023

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# Executive summary

This paper provides an overview of good practices and lessons learned from the separate collection of textile waste across Europe. In view of the EU-wide mandatory separate collection of textile waste as of 2025, municipalities have the chance to align textile collection with the waste hierarchy and support a system of local reuse, particularly for clothing.

This process preempts the EU-wide introduction of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for textiles, which is currently being negotiated at the EU level and is likely to become mandatory in all Member States after 2027. The examples here stem from a review of relevant literature as well as interviews with a range of actors managing the collection, sorting, and reuse of textile waste.

An optimised collection system can support the implementation of local zero waste solutions. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, we have identified the following key success factors:

- *Good governance* is crucial for the success of the collection system. Municipalities have many levers at their disposal, but the implementation also depends on national laws and the wider policy framework, such as social policies that are linked to circular economy objectives. Municipalities should, however, require any collector to generate and report data as well as set performance indicators in line with the waste hierarchy. Finally, the system must anticipate the introduction of EPR and the subsequent cost-coverage by producers.
- *The collection* must take into account local specificities such as urban or rural environments. Branded containers, collection in dry and supervised environments, as well as convenience for citizens can boost collection rates. Communication with citizens is key before introducing the separate collection.
- *Sorting for reuse* should be mandated and requires professionally trained personnel. To boost *local reuse*, actors must promote a culture of local reuse by, for example, providing space for more reuse stores and integrating repair and upcycling activities in the system.

# Recommendations for municipalities

Whilst effective collection and reuse of textiles locally depends on the specific context, best practices are rare since this topic is just emerging for municipalities, and proper data and evidence are lacking, we can still define some key activities that will improve the quality of any policies introduced locally.

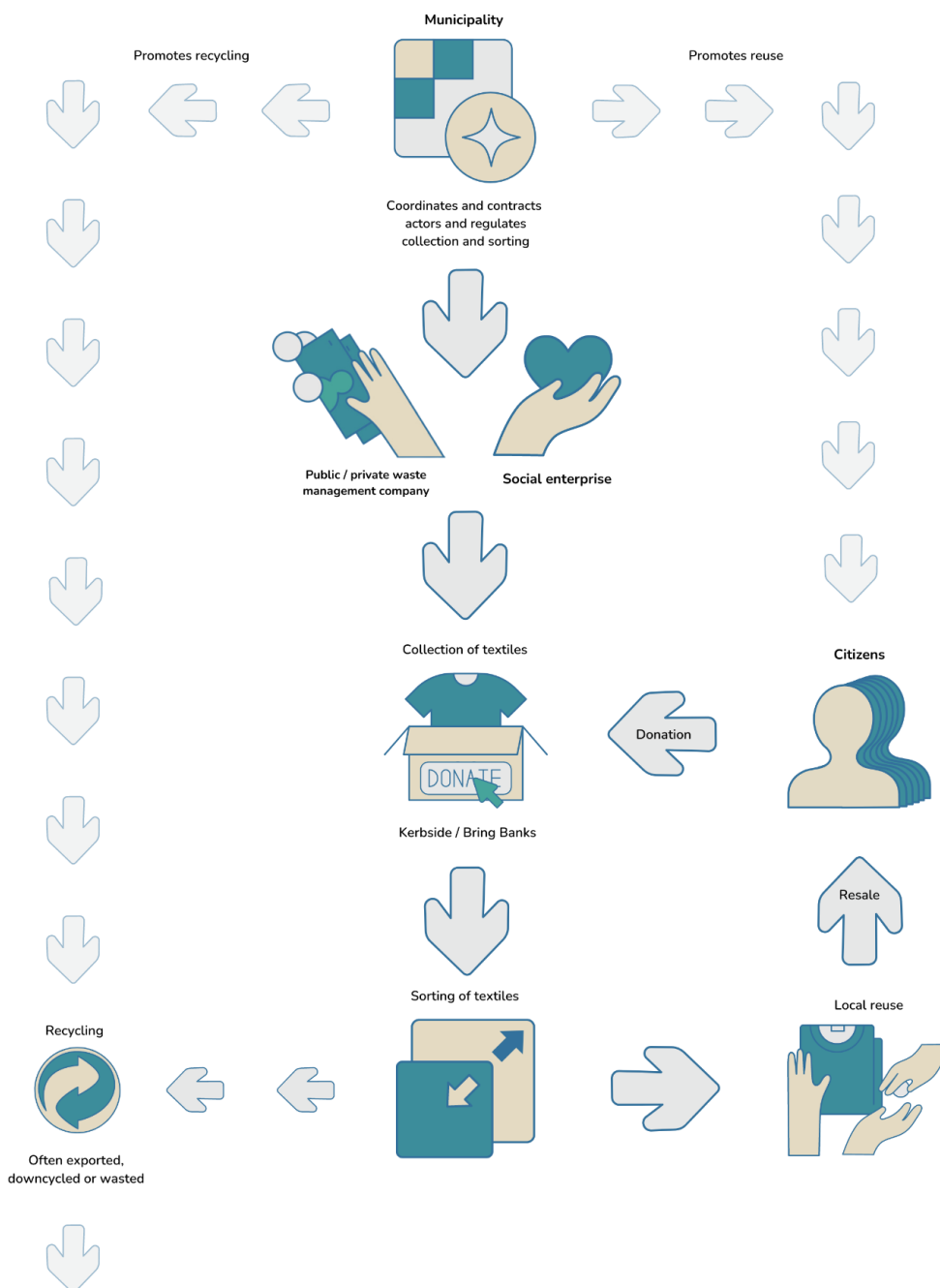
**Therefore, this checklist should act as a guide for municipalities while further generation of local data remains crucial for the implementation.**

- Increase the data captured on local textile waste flows by:
  - Gathering data from textile collectors on the volumes (kg and units) that are collected, sorted, and reused (locally and elsewhere, including exports) on a monthly and/or quarterly basis;
  - Making use of residual waste analysis to identify how much textile waste remains in the non-recyclable (residual) bin and also where within a city the biggest hotspots for textile waste generation are;
- Research and analyse the current collection system to identify who is collecting which waste stream and where. Which contracts exist already? How much is collected per collection point by weight and unit? Engage all relevant actors in this process to ensure they are properly embedded within any new textile waste prevention and collection strategy;
- Use the data collected from undertaking the previous two actions to define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the new system; these can include targets for collection, preparation for reuse, and reuse, as well as objectives to inform citizens about the new system; the indicators should be aligned with the waste hierarchy and local sustainability strategy;
- Anticipate the introduction of a national Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for textiles, to engage with the relevant national and regional authorities about what this may look like and the impact it would have locally. There might be an ongoing consultation or government guidance that could be considered in setting up the local system;
- Clarify relevant definitions under national law such as 'textile waste', 'waste manager', and 'social enterprise' and ensure they are understood by all actors;

- Accredit suitable textile waste collectors, sorters, and reuse operators and draw up contracts that embed this accreditation as a requirement for any public service in these relevant fields;
- Create a communication strategy for promoting the system within the community that aligns with the waste hierarchy, prioritising refuse, then reuse and only then recycling, as well as social goals to improve livelihoods for community members;
- Consider playing a coordinating role in the collection system, liaising between different actors to make the system as transparent and accessible as possible;
- Set criteria for collection, such as supervised 'bring banks' (collection containers) to reduce contamination, and evaluate the use of alternative collection models (e.g. door-to-door collection) to target citizens who are difficult to engage (e.g. in rural areas);
- Mandate sorting for reuse and ensure that non-reusable textiles are recycled. Set targets for local reuse;
- Create a strategy for local reuse to flourish, which includes providing space for reuse centres and sorting, and encouraging the opening of new shops for reuse to ramp up capacity and integrate repair, refurbishment, and upcycling businesses within local strategies;
- Investigate how non-reusable textiles could be recycled and the material reprocessed with local or regional producers by engaging with relevant stakeholders like recyclers and textile producers;
- Check opportunities for partnership with other municipalities or regions to scale up the system;
- Test the options for social economy support and integration of social enterprises in the system; e.g., is there a social inclusion policy that could be linked to circular activities?;
- Provide feedback about the local experiences to the national authorities to facilitate the exchange of best practices and support a harmonised national system.

Figure 1: Example of how a collection and sorting system for textiles can be set up by municipalities

### Example of a textile collection and sorting system setup



**Description:** This infographic gives an overview of the key steps and actors involved in setting up a local structure for the collection, sorting, and reuse of textiles. While municipalities play a central role in setting up the structure when contracting the partners and promoting local reuse, there are also factors that lie outside of their influence, such as what happens to textiles not fit for reuse; these should be recycled, but often end up downcycled, exported, landfilled, or incinerated.