



Open letter

Unique opportunities to unlock the potential of social economy in making the green transition a just one.

11th March 2024

Dear European Union policy makers,

As you revise the European Union's circular economy policies and legislation, you have a unique opportunity to advance sustainable resource management, nature conservation and climate neutrality as well as the fight against poverty, inequality and social exclusion. This opportunity to simultaneously advance environmental and social objectives currently lies in protecting and enhancing social economy enterprises' vital role in addressing the problem of textile waste.

Alongside [EU institutions](#), the [OECD](#) and other [international institutions](#) we recognise social economy enterprises as important social economy actors and circular economy pioneers. They are the only actor in the textile value chain that prioritises local reuse, and they showcase a unique business model that promotes community wellbeing, active citizenship and a sufficiency approach at the same time.

By prolonging textiles' life cycle these social economy actors reduce both the overall quantity of textile waste and the cumulative environmental impact of producing new garments. They do so while setting examples for a just transition by providing inclusive local jobs and developing crucial green skills.

In the area of textiles alone, social enterprises in Europe [create 20-35 jobs per 1,000 tonnes](#) collected for reuse. Through these jobs, they ensure labour market integration of people with disabilities, members of the Roma community, refugees, people experiencing homelessness and others at risk of poverty, social exclusion or long-term unemployment. They also offer affordable second-hand clothing and repair services in their communities, thereby mitigating the impact of the cost-of-living crises and addressing material poverty.

Therefore, the European Union should use the ongoing revision of the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) and the upcoming Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Schemes for textiles to preserve and enhance the social economy's vital role in driving forward a more inclusive and sustainable textile value chain and society at large.

The European Commission's proposal for the WFD revision included several positive provisions regarding the involvement of social enterprises in the re-use and preparing for re-use of textiles. These were taken on board, with improvements, by the European Parliament's ENVI committee. Yet, a lot is still at stake as the legislative process moves toward the EP plenary vote, the Council's general approach and the trilogues.

Certain commercial operators and their associations have pushed back against specific provisions on social economy actors. They disregard the distinct nature and ethos of the social economy and the higher upfront cost compared to commercial actors.

To actually “level the playing field” and give social economy a chance to live up to its potential in making the green transition a just one in the area of textiles, we jointly call upon EU policymakers to:

- **Uphold all positive provisions** on the social enterprises’ role in the collection and management of used and waste textiles that the European Commission included in its proposal for a WFD revision;
- **Grant decision-making power** for social enterprises, alongside municipalities, in the Extended Producer Responsibility schemes’ governance;
- **Require that Extended Producer Responsibility fees cover all costs** associated with re-use and preparing for re-use activities carried out by social enterprises, including the management of residual waste;
- **Ensure that social enterprises maintain ownership** over the used and waste textiles they collect.

Strengthening the role of social economy in textile reuse and waste management is an environmental imperative as well as a catalyst for inclusive economic and social development. We count upon you and everyone else in positions of power across the EU to make this a reality through the ongoing legislative processes and beyond.

Sincerely,

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