

## New EU Measures on Unsold Textiles: How the STREP Project Supports a More Circular Fashion Industry

### EU specifies rules on unsold textiles

New measures adopted under the EU's Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), will soon require fashion brands to rethink how they handle unsold products. From 19 July 2026 large companies will be broadly prohibited from destroying unsold clothing, accessories and footwear.

Only a few specific situations allow for destruction, for example, when products pose safety or hygiene risks, are irreparably damaged or defective, involve intellectual property issues, or cannot realistically be reused or remanufactured. In these cases, companies must still follow the waste hierarchy, which means giving priority to recycling over other recovery (e.g. energy recovery) or disposal methods. This is exactly where the STREP project contributes, offering high value recycling routes that keep materials in circulation and, where possible, preserve fibres for reuse.

These changes reflect a growing push toward a more sustainable and circular textile system. As companies prepare for the shift away from destruction toward reuse and recycling, the STREP project is helping them adopt new ways of recycling that give textile materials a longer and more valuable life.

### Supporting the transition to circular material flows

Coordinated by Aalborg University (AAU), Denmark, STREP brings together 13 partners from eight countries to advance next generation solutions for processing post consumer textile waste. Although the new ESPR measures specifically target unsold products, they reinforce the broader need for scalable and efficient recycling infrastructure across Europe's textile sector.



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STREP's work focuses on enabling high quality material recovery, improving process efficiency and supporting the shift toward circular production systems.

## STREP's innovations: from smarter sorting to high quality recycling

### 1. Faster, more accurate sorting

STREP is developing sensor-based and AI supported systems that can quickly identify fibre types, detect impurities and automatically remove components such as zippers and buttons. This reduces manual work and ensures waste streams are correctly prepared for recycling.

### 2. Advanced mechanical and chemical recycling

The project is pioneering a suite of recycling technologies, including mechanical disintegration, chemical dissolution, solvolysis, enzymatic processing, pyrolysis and hydrothermal conversion – to recover fibres and transform otherwise unusable textiles into new materials such as secondary fibres, bio oils and biochar.

### 3. Traceability for better waste allocation

New traceability concepts being tested in STREP will help allocate textile waste more accurately to appropriate recycling routes. These tools may also support future sustainability reporting and align with the Digital Product Passport (DPP) framework currently under development within the ESPR.

### 4. Design-for-recycling guidance

To improve recyclability earlier in the value chain, STREP is developing practical guidance that helps manufacturers design and assemble products in ways that support easier disassembly and material recovery at end of life.

## Driving industry readiness for a circular future

Through its pilot activities across Europe, the STREP project demonstrates how innovation in sorting, disassembly and recycling can reduce environmental impacts, strengthen resource independence, and support industry adaptation to new policy expectations.

By enhancing the efficiency and quality of textile recycling, STREP contributes to a more sustainable, competitive and resilient European textile sector.

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