



PS Lifestyle

Policy Brief: Purchases



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pslifestyle.eu

Shifting towards more sustainable, healthier consumption and production of goods and services in Europe

Learnings & policy recommendations from PSLifestyle

PSLifestyle is a pan-European research project funded by the European Union. It has developed a [Lifestyle Test](#) to help individuals adopt positive, sustainable, and healthier lives and to reduce their climate impact. By taking the Test, individuals can see how their daily activities impact their carbon footprint. They also receive personalised tips to help reduce their footprint through lifestyle changes that can be tailored to fit their needs and capabilities. Additionally, the test collects anonymous data on the reasons why people may be unwilling or unable to adopt certain lifestyle choices, providing valuable insights to promote sustainable lifestyles more effectively.

This policy brief draws on over 410,000 responses to the Lifestyle Test. Based on the actions people are willing to take, and on the challenges people face when adopting such actions, it presents a series of policy recommendations on 'Shifting towards more sustainable, healthier consumption and production of goods and services in Europe'. These recommendations aim to address structural barriers to meeting Europe's climate neutral goals and help make sustainable, healthy choices easier and more accessible for everyone.

This brief is one in a series of four, that respectively focus on: transport, food, housing, and purchases. The other three policy briefs can be found [here](#).

What is the situation?

The current prevailing global economic model follows a linear approach, often described as a **“take-make-consume-dispose” model** of consumption and production. Under this approach, raw materials are extracted (take), used to produce goods (make), the goods are purchased and used (consume), and eventually they are discarded as waste after use (dispose).¹

This unsustainable model has **linked economic growth with the depletion of finite natural resources and the damaging of our global ecosystems**, contributing to climate change and resulting in harm to both people and the planet.² Indeed, the consumption of goods and services – such as fashion, electronics, household goods and leisure – is one of the four most critical domains for environmental sustainability, alongside food, housing, and transport.³ How much and in which ways people purchase, use, and dispose of goods is also important. **Consumption patterns and their related carbon footprint are unequally distributed both within and between countries**, with consumption higher amongst the wealthy, and in high-income countries.

This sets consumption aspirations and drives purchasing.⁴ At the same time, **many people cannot afford to meet their basic needs**.

The fashion and other textiles industry represent the **fourth highest greenhouse gas emission pressure category in the EU**. Rapidly changing fashion trends and declining product quality have shortened the lifespan of clothing by 36% in the past two decades, with each item now used an average of just seven or eight times before being discarded or given away.⁵ **Textiles are also one of the biggest sources of PFAS pollution in Europe**, a group of highly persistent chemicals that are widely used in many textile-based products including clothing, carpets and other household goods. PFAS are used for waterproofing, oil, dirt and heat protection, and increased durability, but they have significant environmental and health risks.⁶ With limited reuse or recycling options available, items are often discarded prematurely, fuelling overproduction and overconsumption and accelerating waste.

This issue is not limited to fashion. E-waste – meaning any discarded product with a plug or battery – represents the world’s fastest-growing waste stream. In 2022 alone, **62 million tonnes of e-waste were generated worldwide**. Less than 23% of this waste was properly collected and recycled.⁷ In the EU, approximately 5 million tonnes of e-waste were generated in 2022, equating to about 11.15 kilograms per capita.⁸ This represents roughly 35% of the 14.4 million tonnes of electrical and electronic equipment placed on the EU market that year.⁹ **E-waste is a health and environmental hazard**, containing toxic additives or hazardous substances such as mercury, which can damage the human brain and coordination system.¹⁰

Business as usual cannot continue if we aim to achieve a fair and just transition to climate neutrality.

Meeting the needs of all whilst addressing the environmental impact of goods and services requires a transition towards sustainable consumption and production systems: how can we achieve this?



What needs to change?

Establishing sustainable and positive lifestyles in consumer goods and services requires reevaluating actual needs versus perceived desires, questioning consumerist habits, and shifting away from a throwaway culture, whilst making sure that basic needs can be met for all with dignity and health. This involves **ensuring strong social protection systems as well as encouraging sustainable consumption patterns and circular business models**, and enhancing transparency regarding environmental and social impacts.

Policies should promote sufficiency and circular practices such as sharing, reusing, repairing, and implementing extended producer

responsibility (EPR) standards, supported by innovative business models and financial mechanisms. Beyond these strategies, it is critical to **curb excessive production and consumption by introducing resource use limits** through mechanisms such as carbon and nature quotas at the production level, alongside global targets to reduce lifestyle-related environmental impacts. Complementary policies should also focus on reshaping societal aspirations and values by **shifting the perception of success and well-being from material accumulation toward more sustainable and positive lifestyles**, and helping to reduce inequalities.

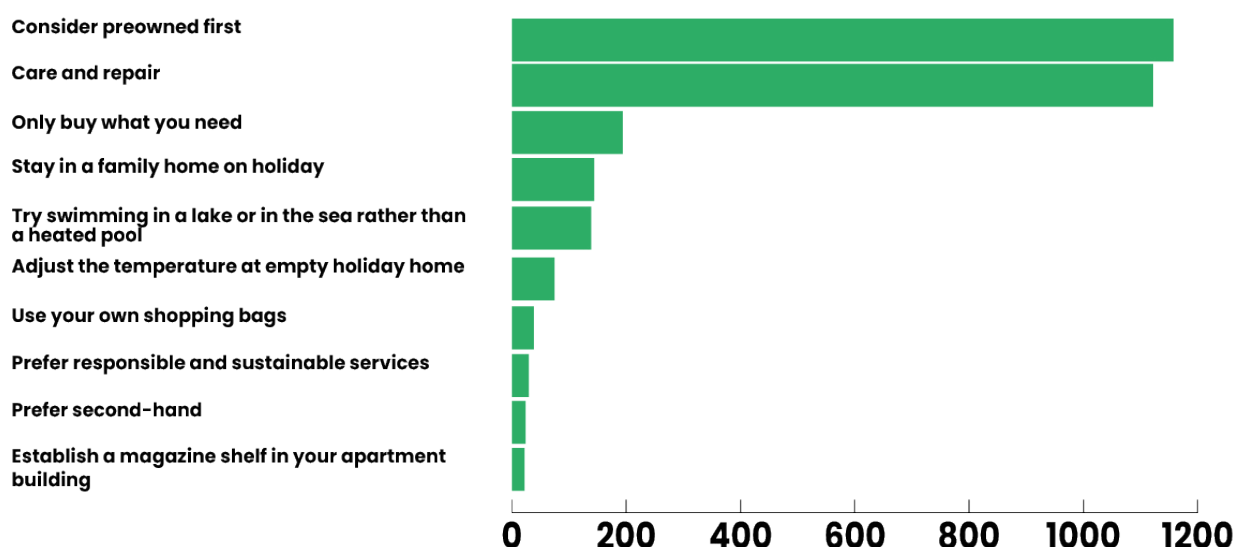
Tackling overproduction and overconsumption, while transitioning to a circular economy, is essential to overcoming these challenges.



The evidence from PSLifestyle: what sustainable actions are people willing and able to take?

The PSLifestyle data presented in the **“Annual CO₂ reductions from Action Plans”** graph highlights two areas with the greatest potential for reducing environmental impacts when it comes to ‘things and purchases’. The first of these is buying preowned items, to extend the lifespan of goods and reduce resource use. The second is practicing care and repair by maintaining and repairing goods to extend their usability and prevent waste.

Annual CO₂ reductions from Action Plans (tonnes of Co₂/year)



Actions we can take

Both of these actions can contribute to substantial cumulative CO₂ reduction, calculated as the impact of the action multiplied by the number of times the action has been chosen by [Lifestyle Test](#) respondents (see box **“What does the Lifestyle Test do?”**). It is important to note that these actions are not necessarily the most impactful in isolation but reflect a balance between potential environmental benefits and individuals’ willingness to adopt them. For instance, only buying what you need has a very high potential to reduce CO₂ emissions, but the cumulative impact is low as not many people are able or willing to adopt this action. The Lifestyle Test data also reveals barriers to adopting these actions.

Barriers to overcome

For considering preowned items, the primary obstacle reported by respondents is that such choices are not compatible with their life situation (43%). Additionally, time and effort constraints (28%) were also cited as barriers, suggesting that preowned goods may not be easily accessible or require more time and effort to find compared to new items. Other barriers include lack of awareness about how to engage with second-hand markets and limited availability in the respondents’ living area.

In the case of care and repair practices, the largest reported barrier is cost (28%), with respondents perceiving repairs just as expensive as replacing items. Respondents also reported a lack of knowledge on how to carry out or access repair services (26%). Lastly, for 22% of respondents, care and repair were deemed unfeasible with their life circumstances.

What does the Lifestyle Test do?

The [Lifestyle Test](#) is a tool designed to inform individuals about the climate impact of their daily activities and inspire them to reflect on their habits, encouraging change through practical actions.

The data presented in this brief, collected between 19 December 2023 – 21 November 2024 in eight European countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Turkey), illustrates the impact of these actions in terms of CO₂ reduction, linked to individuals’ willingness to adopt them. It also highlights the main barriers individuals face in adopting certain actions, with respondents able to select between “too expensive”, “not available where I live”, “not popular where I live”, “not possible in my life situation”, “I don’t know how”, “I don’t have the support I need”, and “it takes too much time and effort”. Their answers highlight the need for structural changes in infrastructures, business models, marketing and advertising messaging, and policies.

By analysing this data, the Lifestyle Test helps to identify actions that decision makers can prioritise to maximise societal acceptance and uptake of more sustainable choices, while pinpointing the key challenges that need to be addressed to further promote these actions across society. Data collection is still ongoing. A new interactive policy and business insight platform providing access to real time data from the Lifestyle Test can be found [here](#).

Policy recommendations: how can policymakers support and enable sustainable change?

The transition to more sustainable consumption and production patterns requires comprehensive solutions that **address systemic barriers, promote innovative business models, and encourage societal shifts in behaviour.** The PSLifestyle data highlights two impactful areas that would enable everyone to contribute to this transition — encouraging the purchase of preowned goods and fostering care and repair practices — while also identifying barriers to these actions. The following recommendations therefore propose actions to address these barriers and achieve environmental sustainability in the goods and services sector.

It is critical to note that these recommendations must go hand in hand with the **implementation of adequate measures to ensure that everyone can afford to meet their needs for essential goods and services.** This is particularly relevant in a context of rising costs of living. Policy guidance and concrete initiatives are provided in the European Pillar of Social Rights,¹¹ which also provides the basis for the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.



I. **Encourage a shift towards circular business models.**

To reduce the environmental impacts of goods, a shift towards circular business models, including circular design, is crucial. This requires technical, social and business model innovation, as well as behavioural change, policy support, and regulations.¹²

Policymakers should incentivise the adoption of circular economy principles by encouraging businesses to offer sustainable alternatives, such as product-as-a-service (PaaS), a model which prioritises access over ownership, promoting leasing, renting, or subscription arrangements.¹³ Financial mechanisms such as VAT exemptions (particularly for start-ups) or reduced

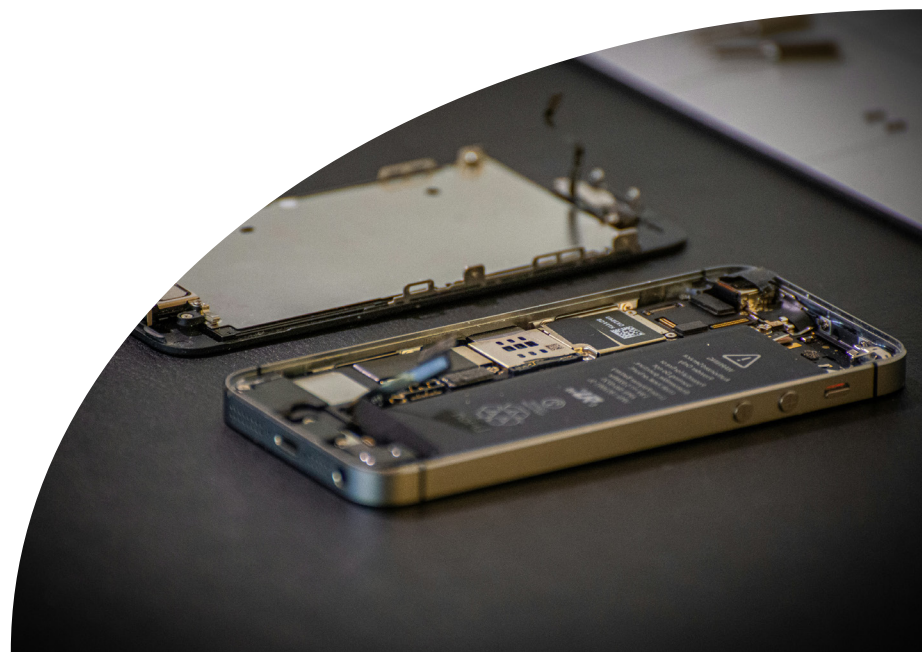
VAT on repair services and preowned goods, as well as subsidies for circular innovations, can make these options more attractive for both businesses and consumers. Establishing clear regulatory frameworks will ensure that circular economy practices are not only incentivised but also integrated into the core of business operations, encouraging a level playing field and driving a race-to-the-top rather than a race-to-the-bottom, for instance in the EU's upcoming Circular Economy Act, planned to be published in 2026 under the umbrella of the Clean Industrial Deal. However, circular practices must not encourage overconsumption but stimulate alternative consumption modes (for example buying second-hand instead of new, not buying second-hand in addition to new) and lead to an overall reduction in environmental impacts.

II. **Harmonise and strengthen extended producer responsibility (EPR).**

This would ensure that producers are held accountable for the environmental impacts of their goods throughout their lifecycle.

Policymakers should mandate and ensure implementation of EPR

schemes following EU and national legislation that include ambitious recycling and collection targets for electronic waste and textiles, with strong monitoring and penalties for non-compliance. Policymakers could also require manufacturers to provide repair manuals, spare parts, and take-back programs to ensure that products are repaired or recycled.





Enable and encourage behavioural shifts towards more sustainable options.

Policymakers should create environments that make sustainable choices the easiest and most attractive option for individuals. This can be achieved through offering more opportunities by expanding access to affordable and sustainable alternatives such as eco-friendly products and services, and motivating individuals through financial incentives, rewards, and positive reinforcement that make sustainable choices more attractive. Policymakers should also develop targeted education and awareness campaigns that

provide the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable decision-making.

One tool for this approach is reshaping "choice architecture", the practice of influencing choice by organising the context in which people make decisions to favour the adoption of sustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns. By systematically reducing the availability of carbon-intensive goods and services and subsidising eco-friendly alternatives, governments can nudge households toward low-carbon lifestyles.¹⁴ Policies can encourage retailers to contribute to behavioural shifts, for instance by reducing their packaging waste as well as by implementing initiatives to encourage consumers to purchase more sustainable, healthy options.



Reduce cost barriers and increase accessibility to preowned and repair practices.

Related to the previous recommendation, policymakers can introduce voucher schemes or repair credits for consumers, and particularly low-income households, to encourage repair practices and offset costs. They can also provide tax incentives or grants for businesses that have repair services or provide second-hand items. This could be coupled with a public awareness campaign to promote the environmental benefits of preowned goods and help reshape societal aspirations away from overconsumption.

Policies could for example help to limit the production and purchasing of fast fashion, at the same time as making sure that everyone can meet their clothing needs through initiatives to re-purpose used clothes, offer discounted pricing, etc.¹⁵

Case studies

Italy – Regenerating household appliances

The 'UTILE' project aims to recover and refurbish washing machines, and deliver them free of charge to families in need. It is a collaboration between DISMECO, a company that specialises in the disposal and treatment of technological waste, and the city of Bologna, as well as other actors. DISMECO and partners have also set up a training centre for young people to learn how to install and maintain reconditioned household appliances, aiming to create new sources of income and employment within a framework of local sustainability. Find out more [here](#).



Slovenia – Library of Things

Knjižnica REČI (Library of Things) is a Slovenian non-profit community-driven initiative that promotes sharing and sustainability by enabling people to borrow everyday items instead of buying them. From tools and kitchen appliances to sports equipment, it encourages resourcefulness, reduces waste, and fosters a culture of collaboration and responsible consumption. Find out more [here](#).

Find out more

Check out the other three policy briefs here: <https://pslifestyle.eu/policy-briefs>

Find out more about the PSLifestyle initiative here: <https://pslifestyle.eu/>

Take the Lifestyle Test here: <https://pslifestyle-app.net/> and help us to share the word!



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