

theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN

NFWI

Resolution Shortlist Briefing Notes

Join the repair revolution



Join the repair revolution

There is a huge excess in clothing production which has devastating consequences for the environment. The WI calls on the UK Government to join the repair revolution and strengthen the law and investment to support a circular economy of clothing and fabrics in the UK, where repair and reuse is achievable, accessible, and affordable to all. We also call on WI members to promote clothing reuse and repair in their communities.

Proposer's position

The proposer would like the WI to lobby the government to promote a circular economy for clothing, including through legislation, to guarantee the right to repair for clothing, investment in repair cafes, promoting repair training, and education for consumers on choosing repairable products. They would also like to see the WI promote reuse and repair skills in local communities.

The scale of the problem

While there is little solid data on the environmental impact of the clothing industry, the fashion industry is considered a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions. Some estimates suggest it is responsible for between 8 – 10% of global carbon emissions, however, there is doubt about the accuracy and source of this claim.

According to Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a circular economy is a “system where materials never become waste and nature is regenerated.” It aims to tackle climate and nature challenges by “decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources” through using maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling, and composting to keep products and materials in circulation.

The circular economy is a gendered issue. According to UK circular economy charity WRAP, women are hugely under-represented in paid roles in the circular economy, with 3 in 4 UK circular economy jobs currently going to men. This situation is unlike the wider UK economy where, since the 1990s, around half of jobs are held by men and half by women. On the contrary, women are hugely over-represented in unpaid roles in the circular economy. Women have typically been assigned to domestic and reproductive roles in the context of family and home life and often partaking in repair and reproductive work such as cleaning, repairing clothes, cooking, and domestic activities which minimise expenditure and make best use of the resources at their disposal.

There are several ways for consumers to recycle clothing, including donations, council collection, dedicated collection points for used clothing, or shop take-back schemes. The Dutch non-profit organisation Repair Café International Foundation supports over 2,500 Repair Cafes across the world. These are free meeting places where people can access tools and materials to make repairs with support from expert volunteers. The UK charity Restart works to enable the repair

of consumer goods, with a particular focus on electronics. This includes supporting local repair events in their communities and developing resources.

The current situation

According to WRAP, in 2021 around 711,000 tonnes of used textile, which is almost half of all used textiles in the UK (49%) were disposed of through general waste, ending up for incineration or in landfills. As part of their Big Stitch campaign, the British Heart Foundation found that around six in ten (57%) people in the UK said that sewing is a skill that is being lost in today's generation, with half of Brits (50%) having to ask their mothers to help fix their clothes.

The charity Ellen MacArthur Foundation is calling for Extended Producer Responsibility to extend to the clothing industry. This would see businesses that place products on the market become responsible for managing their products when these are discarded by consumers, and help promote collection, sorting, reuse, repair, and recycling to shift the economic balance away from the production of new products and materials. This recommendation was also reflected in the WI's 2021 APPG Report on Microplastic Policies for the Government.

In 2018, the government published its Resources and Waste Strategy for England with commitments to work towards a circular economy. In 2019, the government set up the four-year £30 million National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Research (NICER) programme which aimed to move the UK towards a circular economy. In 2021, the government introduced regulations in Extended Producer Responsibility which require manufacturers of larger household electrical items to produce spare parts and enable repairs. They must also make maintenance and repair information available to repair professionals.

In July 2023, the previous government announced new plans setting out its long-term aim to use fewer new resources, drive up the repair and reuse of existing materials and increase recycling, including reducing textiles going to residual waste.

In March 2024, the government announced plans for a new Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Resource Management in the Circular Economy (CESRM), backed by the UN to develop sustainable approaches to the circular economy and resource efficiency to enable carbon reduction and the transition to a greener future. The new Labour government has committed to "reducing waste by moving to a circular economy", through its election manifesto, but the tangible action they intend to take, including whether they intend to continue with CESRM initiative, remains unclear.

Earlier this year the EU adopted a new regulation on eco-design and a directive on Right to Repair, which places obligations on manufacturers to repair goods and encourage consumers to extend a product's lifecycle through repair. While textiles are not currently included it has been identified as a priority for future expansion of the regulations.

Points to consider

- The WI might be well placed to work with businesses and decisionmakers to promote increased focus and urgency on a circular economy of clothes, as well as promoting and supporting repair cafes in local communities.
- A campaign on this topic could be well suited to utilise the WI's heritage and expertise in sharing sewing and repair skills to create change both locally and nationally.
- Work on this issue could tie in well with the End Plastic Soup campaign and previous work such as the Fixing Fast Fashion campaign.
- Many WIs are already promoting repair and reuse of clothing in their communities and repair cafes are found many places in the country. The government is also already committed to a circular economy. Is there enough for a campaign on this topic?

How could the WI work on this issue if it was passed?

A full campaign would be developed by the NFWI if the resolution is passed, taking into account developments since then. To help inform your discussions, here are some ways the WI could consider working on the issue.

At regional and local levels, WIs could share collective skills with one another to help members repair their clothing. WIs could start outreach initiatives that seek to share members' repairing skills with the community, including women and girls. WIs could host clothes swap events to promote a circular economy and reduce the purchasing of new clothing. WIs could campaign to call on local and national governments and businesses to pursue more sustainable practices, including investing in repair cafes and education for increasing repair skills in local communities.

Nationally, the NFWI could lobby the government to promote a circular economy for clothing, including through parliament. The NFWI could do this through partnering with organisations focusing on a circular economy, including the Repair Café Foundation, Restart, WRAP, and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. In collaboration with The Denman Trust, the NFWI could offer upcycling-specific courses and sessions to support members repair their old goods. In collaboration with previous campaigns such as End Plastic Soup and Fixing Fast Fashion, the NFWI could host large-scale in-person events such as a NFWI Repair Day.

Further information

Ellen MacArthur Foundation

[The Ellen MacArthur Foundation/](#)

Repair Cafe Foundation

[The Repair Café Foundation/](#)

The Restart Project

[The Restart Project/](#)

WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme)

[Waste and Resources Action Programme](#)

Video content

Ellen MacArthur Foundation: [Explaining the Circular Economy and How Society Can Re-think Progress | Animated Video Essay](#)