

Webinar highlights: “Textile circularity and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)”

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On 5th of September a Nordic-Baltic webinar took place which is part of a project [“Paving the way for strategic cooperation on textile circularity in the Nordic Baltic region”](#) financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Latvia (NCM). This initiative builds on [an earlier project](#) from 2018–2020, also supported by the NCM, that highlighted the interconnected textile ecosystem and the growing textile circularity challenges in the Baltic-Nordic region, emphasizing the need to avoid siloed conversations and more collaboration.

The 2.5-hour webinar featured experts and stakeholders from the Nordic-Baltic region and the Netherlands, discussing the current state, challenges, and opportunities in textile circularity, with a strong focus on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies and its practical implementation. The webinar aimed to consolidate existing knowledge, raise critical questions, and facilitate cross-border knowledge exchange.

In total 190 participants were registered, with 130 participants attending the event.

The webinar was organised in 3 sessions. The first part framed the agenda, where [Maija Kāle, Advisor for sustainability and digitalisation](#) at the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Office in Latvia, said the opening words followed by project affiliated experts [Kerli Kant Hvass](#) and [Dace Akule](#) introducing the Nordic-Baltic project and the region’s textile circularity context.

[A helicopter view of the Nordic-Baltic textile circularity](#) context was provided based on the preliminary results of a survey in spring 2025 involving targeted experts from all 7 countries analysed in the project (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) and limited desk research, with time to add more details to be discussed at a regional conference in Riga in the first half of 2026. Highlights are summarised below:

- **Post-consumer textile flows from the Nordics to the Baltics** began in the early 1990s as humanitarian aid and charity. Over time, this developed into a trade where textiles collected in the Nordics are to a great extent exported to the Baltics for manual sorting, for local reuse or further export. These volumes have increased notably in recent years, especially with the EU’s separate textile collection requirement. For example, Sweden’s exports to Lithuania rose from 9,150 tonnes in 2020 to 11,164 tonnes in 2024. Exports to Estonia grew from 88 tonnes in 2020 to 450 tonnes in 2024, while Sweden’s exports of second-hand textiles to Latvia also showed an upward trend, increasing from 539 tonnes in 2020 to 683 tonnes in 2024.
- Finland, Latvia and Denmark were early birds in implementing the **mandatory separate collection** of post-consumer textiles in 2023. Currently, in all seven countries, municipalities are the primary actors responsible for textile waste collection, often working in partnership with private waste management companies, charities, and social enterprises.

- **Collection-related challenges** are broadly shared across the region: limited infrastructure in rural areas, low quality or contamination of collected textiles, unclear material flows, insufficient end-market demand for non-reusable textiles.
- **Technology aided sorting** of used textiles for recycling is more developed in the Nordic countries, while **manual sorting** for reuse dominates in the Baltic states.
- **Preparing for reuse/ repair** is limited to some charities and pilot initiatives across the region, where charities, social enterprise and small businesses are main knowledge and operational stakeholders, helping extend textile lifespans, despite gaps in legislation and market mechanisms.
- **Reuse and second-hand** textile consumption is more widespread in the Baltic countries, compared to the Nordic countries. There is a dependence on export markets for reuse.
- **Textile recycling** in the Baltic states is mostly mechanical, experimental and small-scale. **Chemical recycling** is gradually emerging in a few Nordic countries. Despite promising initiatives, significant challenges remain: limited feedstock quality, insufficient volumes of locally collected textiles, lack of large-scale infrastructure, and weak market demand for recycled fibres.
- **Latvia** is the only country in the region that has an EPR policy for textiles in place since July 2024.
- **The region faces challenges like those seen elsewhere in the EU.** The January 2025 requirement for separate collection of post-consumer textiles has increased volumes but lowered quality, while uncertainty around EPR has weakened investment incentives in collection, sorting, reuse, and recycling. Key obstacles include insufficient rural collection infrastructure, inconsistent sorting standards, fragmented reporting, and poor transparency on textile flows – particularly regarding exports.
- **Opportunities for increased textile circularity in the Nordic-Baltic region** stem from a strong and emerging ecosystem of projects, research institutions and cooperation networks linking diverse stakeholders across the region, with some cross-border cooperation already taking place. Several initiatives in textile recycling (mainly in the Nordic countries) demonstrate the region's potential to contribute to the EU's textile recycling industry, while also making use of the textile manufacturing capacity that remains more prominent in Baltic countries.

I panel discussion: Textile circularity in the Nordic-Baltic region

The second session focused on the practical aspects of textile circularity in the Nordic-Baltic region and took the form of a panel discussion, with **Pirjo Heikkilä** from VTT (Finland), **Kaj Pihl** from Humana People to People (Denmark), **Rudrajeet Pal** from University of Borås (Sweden), **Viktorija Nausede** from Looptex (Lithuania) and **Kerli Kant Hvass** from Aalborg University/Revaluate (Denmark and Estonia) as panellists and **Dace Akule** from Green Liberty (Latvia) as moderator.

The discussion highlighted the complexities of textile collection systems, the importance of consumer behaviour, the role of social enterprises, and the need for harmonised legislation. The discussions also touched upon the emerging EU policy framework, its implications for textile waste management, and the necessity for regional cooperation in policy harmonization, innovation, and knowledge exchange. The panellists shared country-specific insights and regional considerations, revealing how policy delays and fragmented governance slow down investments and system effectiveness.

Key insights

- **Regional collaboration is key:** The interconnected textile value chains across Nordic and Baltic countries necessitate joint strategies rather than isolated national efforts, highlighting the ecosystem approach to optimize resources and avoid redundant investments. This collaboration can serve as a model for other sectors as well.
- **Outdated system design misaligned with sustainability:** Textile waste management still follows traditional waste-handling logic (like plastics or packaging), overlooking changing consumer expectations and the potential for value recovery. Yet textiles differ fundamentally from standard waste streams, requiring approaches that go beyond conventional waste management models.
- **Poorly defined national frameworks create confusion and enable system abuse.** In countries like Lithuania, all collectors – from waste companies to charities – must obtain permits or agreements with waste management companies to hand over textiles for proper treatment, as textiles left in boxes are legally “waste” (as also stipulated in the EU Waste Framework Directive’s revision). Collectors are required to gather all items, including wet or contaminated textiles which can damage materials. At the same time, some bypass the permit system by claiming “on-site sorting”, creating unfair competition.
- **Rushed and rigid regulations block new models and innovation:** A concern was raised that in Lithuania, impact startups, social enterprises, and reuse actors face long permit delays and complex bureaucracy, while local authorities often resist granting access, treating innovative systems as competitors to municipal textile collection services.
- **Consumer confusion impacts collection quality:** Mixed textile waste streams and unclear collection guidelines lead to contamination and loss of reusable textiles. Consumers often dispose of wearable items incorrectly due to unclear communication, which undermines circularity efforts and reduces the quality of collected materials. Designing user-friendly and behaviourally informed systems is critical, while systems designed purely from a waste management perspective risk undermining the reuse potential.
- **The system is failing to cope with growing financial pressure:** Declining quality of collected textiles, rising labour costs and an oversaturated second-hand market make it impossible to cover operational expenses. Meanwhile, municipalities expect lower

collection costs despite increasing expenses, creating an unsustainable economic model.

- **Social enterprises are vital actors:** Charities and social businesses lead reuse and repair efforts, extending garment lifespans despite limited legislative support and market failures. Their role is essential in achieving circularity goals, yet they face regulatory challenges such as waste permits that can impede their operations. Strengthening their capacity and integrating them into EPR systems can amplify impact.
- **The complexity of textile waste management** stems not only from the physical materials but also from the multi-layered governance involving municipalities, private companies, social enterprises, and producers. Harmonizing responsibilities and incentives across these actors is vital to avoid system fragmentation.
- **Used clothing trade with Africa and Asia.** Textile circularity in the Nordic-Baltic region cannot be viewed in isolation. Much of the used textiles end up in Africa and Asia, where the trade creates important social and economic value but, with rising volumes of fast and ultra-fast fashion, and limited waste infrastructure, also serious environmental challenges. These impacts must inform Nordic-Baltic and European solutions, including EPR design – an issue that deserves deeper analysis beyond what was discussed in the webinar.

This comprehensive discussion from multiple country perspectives and sectors provides a rich understanding of the textile circularity landscape in the Nordic-Baltic region and sets a foundation for continued collaboration and policy development.

II panel discussion: Towards effective Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in the Nordic-Baltic region

The final session addressed the development and implementation of EPR for textiles. While some countries in the region – such as Latvia – have already introduced EPR schemes, others are awaiting forthcoming EU legislation. The panel brought together diverse national perspectives, with contributions from [Piret Otsason](#) (Estonian Ministry of Climate), [Mairita Lūse](#) (Riga City Council, Latvia), [Aiste Rakauskiene](#) (Ministry of Environment of Lithuania), [Janine Röling](#) (Collectief Circulair, the Netherlands), [Jens Maage](#) (Sirk Norge, Norway), [Traci Kinden](#) (TexRoad, the Netherlands) and was moderated by **Kerli Kant Hvass** (Aalborg University/Revaluate).

The discussion explored how upcoming amendments to the EU Waste Framework Directive will shape textile EPR and broader circularity policies in the region. Speakers highlighted the need for coherent implementation that balances environmental objectives with practical system design. A Nordic-Baltic ministry-level working group on EPR, led by the Estonian Ministry of Climate, meets regularly to strengthen cooperation, improve communication, and build capacity among national authorities.

The group works towards harmonisation, information exchange, sharing best practices, and providing mutual assistance to ensure effective enforcement of EPR. Its focus includes

supporting Nordic and Baltic authorities in educating online sellers about their obligations and addressing challenges posed by distance sellers such as Shein and Temu.

Key insights

- **EU Waste Framework Directive shapes future policies:** The upcoming amended directive mandates extended producer responsibility for textiles with phased implementation and introduces financial contributions for collection, reuse, and eco-design. However, the directive lacks concrete targets for waste prevention and reuse, which will be reviewed by 2029. The directive also emphasizes the inclusion of social economy entities, representing a progressive step for the region.
- **Inclusive governance and transparency in EPR:** Experiences from the Netherlands reveal that EPR schemes governed inclusively – with stakeholders from across the value chain including social enterprises – can avoid monopolistic pitfalls and foster transparency. Transparent decision-making and open data sharing build trust and enable collaborative innovation. This inclusive governance is crucial for effective circular textile systems.
- Insights from the Wasted Textiles project in Norway highlighted how a **Targeted Producer Responsibility (TPR)** approach can tackle fast fashion. By implementing a diversified, eco-modulated fee based on product longevity, fibre content, recyclability, and waste data, this approach aligns financial responsibility with environmental impact and helps curb overproduction. However, the complexity of governance and fee structures remains a significant challenge.
- **The inclusion of second-hand textiles in EPR schemes** is debated; while some argue that such inclusion supports circularity, others see the mixing of low-quality fast fashion with genuine second-hand goods as problematic. Differentiated policies may be needed to protect the social and environmental benefits of reuse without compromising regulatory clarity.
- **The financial sustainability of EPR schemes** depends on realistic fee structures that reflect the true costs of collection, sorting, reuse, and recycling. Current fees in some countries appear insufficient to fully support circularity objectives, signalling a need for ongoing evaluation and adjustment.
- **Digitalization and data integration**, especially through tools like digital product passports, promise a transformative impact on circular textile management by improving traceability, supporting eco-modulation of fees, and enabling smarter resource use across the supply chain.
- **Data as a foundation for circular textile systems:** Robust, interoperable data collection is fundamental for tracking textile flows, assessing environmental impacts, and designing fair EPR fees. Digital product passports and standardised reporting can bridge gaps between producers, collectors, recyclers, and policymakers, enabling better decision-making and system optimization across borders.

The panel discussion concluded with reflections on the future direction of EPR schemes, stressing inclusive governance, fair fee structures, and the critical role of data in making informed decisions.

In the concluding part of the event, [Betina Simonsen](#), CEO of the **Danish Lifestyle and Design Cluster** introduced the **Nordic Textile Transition Group**, which seeks to foster cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange. The initiative is now expanding into the **Nordic-Baltic Textile Transition Group (NBTT)** to further support regional textile sector development and Nordic-Baltic cooperation, with its official launch planned for November 2025 in Nuuk, Greenland, during the Nordic Circular Summit.

The webinar highlighted the necessity of regional platforms and knowledge-sharing initiatives like the **Nordic-Baltic Textile Transition Group** and **Nordic Circular Hotspots** and **Baltic Circular Hotspots** to coordinate actions, share best practices, and foster innovation. Such networks are critical to scaling practical solutions and aligning policy frameworks.

Finally, Dace Akule closed the webinar by introducing next steps of the Nordic-Baltic textile project and the upcoming regional conference on textiles and circularity in Riga, in the first part of 2026.