



BUY. USE. THROW AWAY. REPEAT?

How Consumer Policy Can Enable a Circular Economy

Executive Summary and Policy Recommendations

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Executive Summary

A more circular economy is not only important for the environment. It can also strengthen consumer rights and improve societal resilience. In this report, we show how consumer policy can make circular choices easier, safer and more attractive for consumers.

The circular economy is a consumer policy issue for several reasons. First, many consumers want to consume more sustainably. Second, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution affect consumers directly through higher prices, reduced access to goods and greater uncertainty in global supply chains. Third, a more circular economy strengthens society's resilience. The longer products and materials can be used, repaired and reused; the less vulnerable society becomes when access to new goods is disrupted.

Norway has one of the highest levels of material consumption per capita in the world. Only a small proportion of resources are kept in circulation through repair, reuse and recycling. Around two-thirds of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with Norwegian consumption occur outside Norway. The goods and services consumed in Norway therefore have a significant climate and environmental impact in other countries as well.

The main challenge is not consumers

The report's main finding is that the challenge is not primarily a lack of willingness among consumers. Rather, today's markets often make it easier and cheaper to buy new products than to repair, share or buy second-hand.

One of the biggest challenges is that many products are replaced long before they are worn out. Some have short lifespans or are difficult to repair. Others are replaced because marketing, digital solutions and a constant stream of new models create a perceived need to buy something new. The result is increased resource use and large amounts of waste, even when products are still functioning.

A circular economy is about making better use of the resources we have already extracted from nature, rather than continuing with today's linear model of buying, using and discarding. Products should last longer and be repaired, upgraded, shared and reused. Extending the lifetime of products delivers greater climate and environmental benefits than recycling alone.



The transition to a more circular economy depends on solutions that work in consumers' everyday lives. For the transition to succeed, change must take place at the systemic level: products, services and markets must be designed so that circular choices become the easiest, safest and most attractive options.

The path to a circular economy

Consumption is largely driven by habits and quick decisions. Circular choices therefore need to be the easiest choices.

So far, the debate on the circular economy has largely focused on production, businesses, waste and recycling. Much less attention has been paid to what happens before we buy and between purchase and disposal: Why do we buy things we may not need? How are products used, maintained, repaired, shared and reused in everyday life? This is where consumers play a crucial role – and where the transition to a more circular economy will succeed or fail.

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that measures be based on the Avoid–Shift–Improve (ASI) framework used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). First, unnecessary consumption should be avoided. Second, consumption should shift towards products and services with a lower climate and environmental impact. Finally, products and production should be improved. This approach delivers the greatest overall climate and environmental benefits.

Policy Recommendations

The report identifies several key conditions for a more circular economy:

1. **Designing products to last longer** – products that can be repaired, upgraded and used for many years (*Chapters 3 and 7*)
2. **Expanding reuse and second-hand markets** – for both consumers and businesses (*Chapter 5*)
3. **Making sharing easier** – including car-sharing, tool libraries and other schemes that enable people to share resources (*Chapter 4*)
4. **Regulation and economic incentives** – rewarding durable products and solutions that keep resources in circulation for longer (*Chapters 7, 8 and 9*)
5. **Making circular choices easier** – by reducing commercial pressure and providing relevant, reliable consumer information (*Chapters 6, 8 and 9*)



The Norwegian Consumer Council's policy recommendations for making circular choices easier, safer and more attractive for consumers:

Chapter 3: Recommendations for repair

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that:

- VAT on repairs should be abolished or significantly reduced.
- A national repair scheme should be established, funded through a combination of industry contributions and public funding, with a low cost to consumers.
- Larger retailers should be required to provide access to repair services and spare parts.
- Consumers should have the right to choose their repair provider for all products.
- Clear repairability requirements should be introduced for products, in line with the EU Ecodesign Regulation and the EU Right to Repair Directive. These should include access to spare parts and repair guides and should gradually be extended to cover more product groups.
- A stronger obligation to repair rather than replace products should be accompanied by stronger consumer protection throughout the repair process, including requirements for prompt repairs and the right to a replacement product while the original product is being repaired.
- Consumer protection and the competitiveness of repair services should be strengthened through solutions that provide guarantees for repairs.
- Intellectual property legislation should be reviewed with a view to removing restrictions that make repairs more difficult for consumers.
- Businesses should be allowed to provide a used or refurbished product as a replacement, provided it is free from defects and is of at least the same quality and condition as the original product. When a used product is provided as a replacement for a defective product, the remaining legal guarantee should be extended by at least one year.
- Norway should invest in increasing recruitment to vocational education and training to ensure access to skilled workers who can provide high-quality repair services.



Chapter 4: Recommendations for more borrowing, renting and sharing

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that:

- In order for consumers to choose to borrow or rent products more often, these options must be financially attractive, accessible and safe.
- Consumer legislation should be introduced for the rental of goods, providing the same level of consumer protection as when purchasing goods, including rights to a price reduction, termination of the contract or compensation in the event of delays or defects.
- Local and national authorities should initiate, facilitate and support resource-sharing solutions through funding, appropriate regulatory frameworks or the allocation of necessary space.
- As products shared by many people are subject to greater wear and tear, stronger durability requirements under ecodesign legislation are important to make borrowing and renting more attractive and safer.

Chapter 5: Recommendations for strengthening the second-hand market

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that:

- Consumer rights and knowledge about safe second-hand purchases should be strengthened.
- VAT on second-hand sales should be abolished or significantly reduced.
- Regulations governing the sale of second-hand goods should be simplified to make it easier for businesses to operate in the second-hand market.
- More transparent second-hand markets should be promoted, including better information about product condition, history and repairability.
- Clear information requirements and consumer rights should apply to the sale of refurbished products.
- Efficient and environmentally friendly transport and logistics systems should be developed as an integral part of the circular economy.



Chapter 6: Recommendations for better consumer information

- The Environmental Information Act should be strengthened to provide consumers with standardised and easily accessible information on product lifetime, durability, repairability, spare parts and repair costs.
- Consumers should be able to request environmental information without risking legal action if the Environmental Information Appeals Board rules in their favour.
- Mandatory labelling schemes should be introduced to make key circular characteristics, such as product lifetime and repairability, clearly visible.
- Rules against greenwashing should be strengthened, with clear requirements for substantiating environmental claims.
- Enforcement of the Transparency Act, the Marketing Control Act and rules against greenwashing should be made more effective by removing the current negotiation-based enforcement model.
- Consumers should receive accurate and relevant sustainability information at the point of purchase, both in shops and on products or packaging.
- Digital product passports can make it easier to access accurate and relevant information, but are not sufficient as a consumer tool on their own.
- The large number of different environmental labels should be streamlined, and awareness of the requirements behind such labels should be improved.
- Information measures alone are not enough. Regulation is needed to ensure that products and markets become more circular.

Chapter 7: Recommendations for more durable products

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that:

- The legal guarantee period for making a claim under the Consumer Purchases Act should be extended from two to three years for all products, and from five to six years for products intended to last substantially longer than three years. For products intended to last substantially longer than six years, the period for making a claim should be linked to the product's expected lifetime under normal use.
- Consumer rights should be enforced more strictly, with sanctions for businesses that breach consumer rights, including the right to complain about defective goods.



- It should be easier for consumers to contact sellers with complaints. The Consumer Rights Directive should be followed up to ensure that consumers have access to clear and understandable information, including sellers' email addresses and telephone numbers.
- The consumer complaints process should be made simpler and faster. The most important step is to improve frontline customer service so that fewer cases need to be referred to consumer complaints boards. Complaint fees should be abolished.
- Consumers should have stronger rights to software updates so that products can be used for longer. This should cover operating systems as well as apps and services that many people rely on in their everyday lives.
- Norway should swiftly implement the ecodesign framework and push for stronger requirements on product lifetime, repairability and resource efficiency.
- Consumer interests should be given significant weight in standardisation processes, helping to ensure that consumers can easily find long-lasting products that are compatible with other products and free from harmful chemicals.
- More electronic products should be covered by deposit-return schemes that provide consumers with a financial incentive to return products for reuse or recycling.
- A deposit-return scheme should be introduced for household batteries, and a similar scheme for electric vehicle batteries should be considered.

Chapter 8: Recommendations for stronger regulation of marketing

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that:

- The overall volume and pressure of marketing should be regulated, including the use of purchase triggers such as time pressure and buy-now-pay-later solutions. Norway should propose relevant measures under the EU Digital Fairness Act and explore the scope for national measures.
- The threshold for what constitutes aggressive marketing should be lowered, and the blacklist of unfair commercial practices should be expanded.
- Marketing on social media and by influencers should be limited to a maximum of 20 per cent of content, in line with current rules for linear broadcasting.



- Measures should be introduced to limit strategies designed to encourage additional purchases, without weakening fundamental consumer rights. For example, it should be prohibited to discard or destroy fully usable returned goods, following the model introduced in France in 2022.
- The Norwegian Consumer Authority should be given additional resources and clearer and stronger legal powers to enforce existing and new marketing rules.

Chapter 9: Recommendations for a more circular business sector

The Norwegian Consumer Council recommends that:

- Any new or increased environmental taxes should follow the polluter-pays principle. The revenue should benefit consumers through measures that make circular choices easier and more financially attractive.
- More extended producer responsibility schemes should be introduced, reflecting the full costs of waste and making circular choices more attractive to consumers. Fees should reward products with long lifetimes, good repairability and high quality.
- Easily accessible, nationwide systems for returns, collection and reuse should be ensured.
- The possibility of using the duty of care under the Product Control Act to impose stronger repairability requirements should be examined.
- International e-commerce platforms should be subject to the same taxes, fees and extended producer responsibility obligations as Norwegian businesses, ensuring a level playing field.
- Norway should introduce legislation that makes it possible to hold international e-commerce platforms more accountable when they sell products that do not comply with Norwegian and European rules.

