



What happens to your old laptops, tablets and smartphones?

Collection and reuse of laptops, mobile phones and tablets (LMT) in Belgium 

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Study commissioned by Recupel



 RDC
environment

About RDC Environment & Recupel



30 economists & engineers

Brussels HQ + Rouen · six working languages · est. 1992

Sustainability assessments · Circular economy · Policy

1 000+ LCA studies · EPR support · Economic analysis

Clients: EU institutions, PROs, industry, governments, federations, multinationals

45 % France · 25 % Belgium · 30 % other EU countries

Independent – no conflicts of interest



Belgium's WEEE producer responsibility organisation since 2001

Manages collection across Belgium

Recycling parks, drop-off boxes, retailer take-back

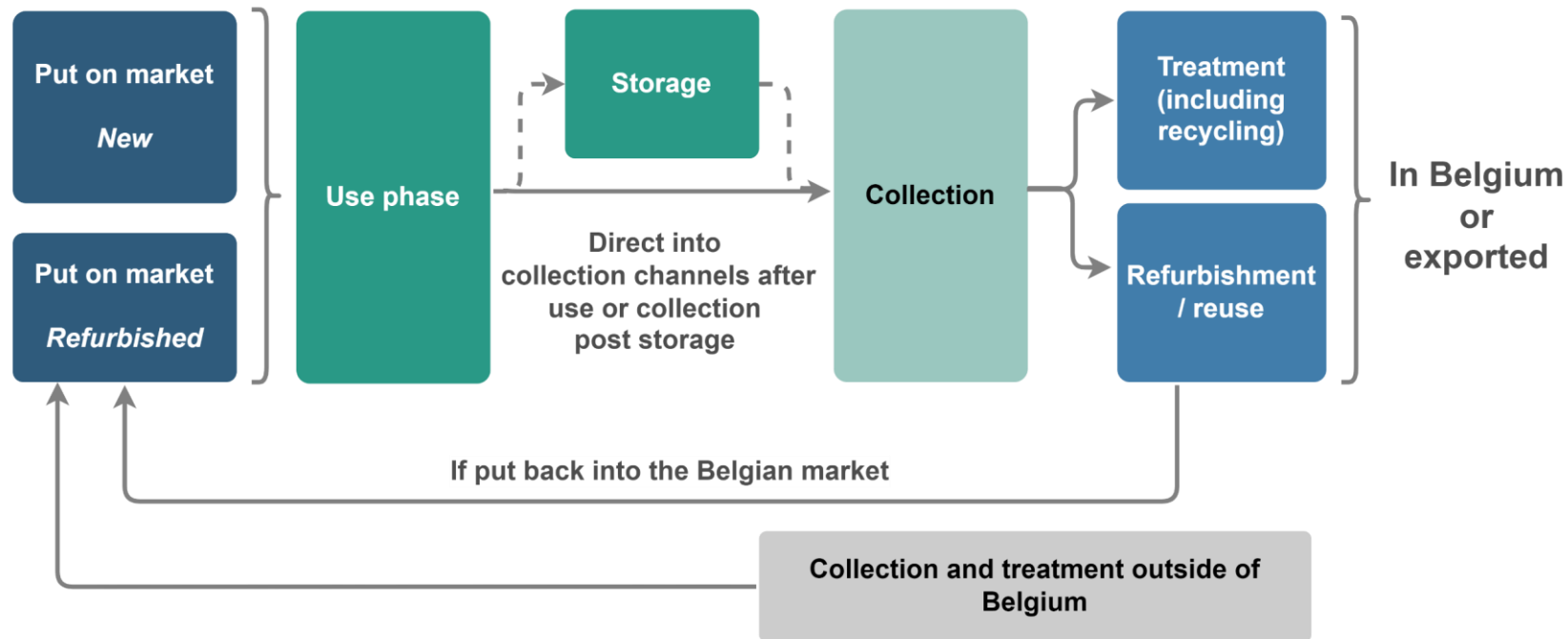
Funded by producer eco-contributions

Mandatory EPR

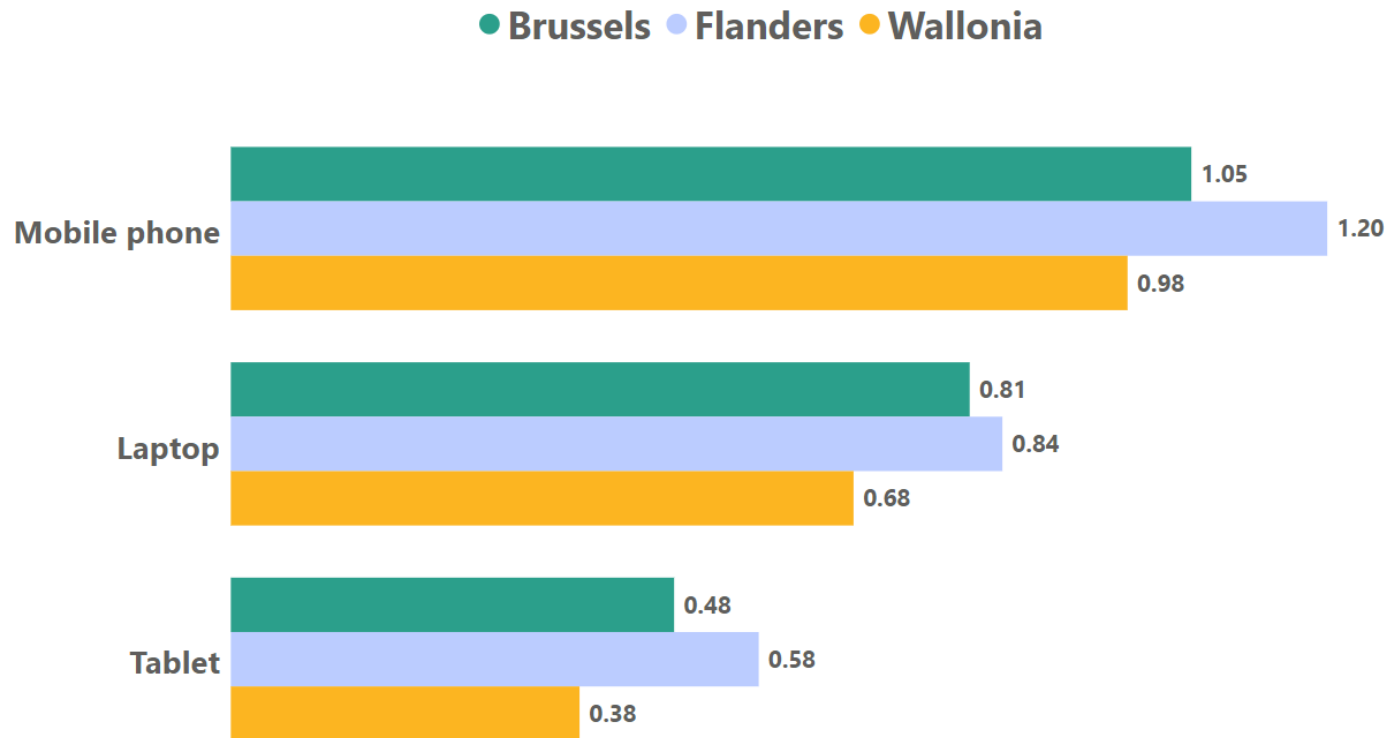
Commissions independent research

Including this study – to close collection gaps

Device life cycle in Belgium



Device ownership in Belgium



Source: Recupel Ownership study 2024

The scale of the problem



60%

of household devices
sit in storage after use



~5 yrs

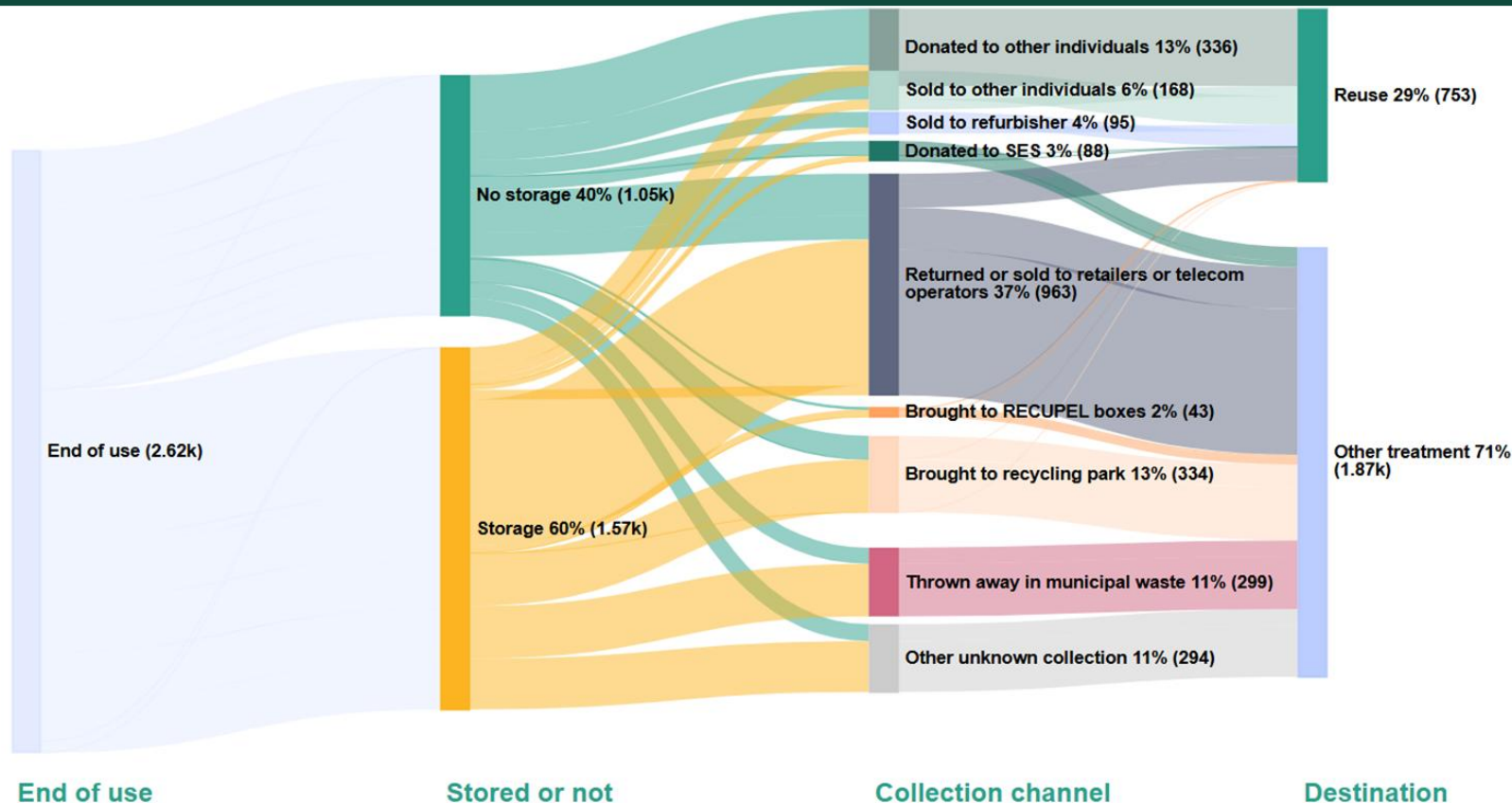
average time a mobile phone
gathers dust in a drawer



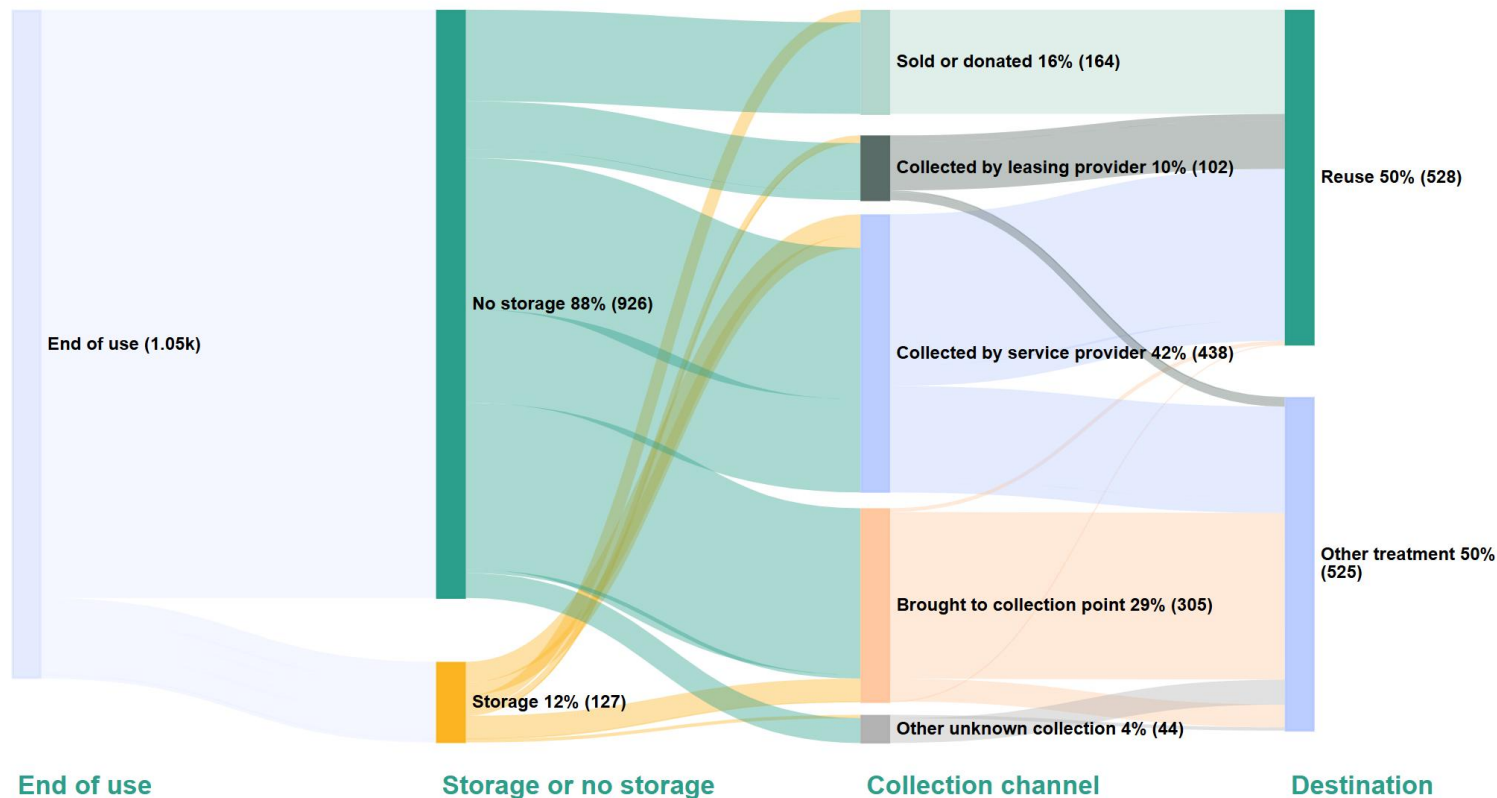
71%

of household LMT ends up
in 'other treatment' (not reuse)

Where do household devices go?



Where do businesses' devices go?



Businesses: a different story

Households

- 60% of devices stored after use
- Only **29%** reuse rate
- Many channels – low traceability

Businesses

- 88% of devices exit storage quickly
- **50%** reuse rate
- IT service providers collect 42%

Three barriers to collection (and reuse)

The drawer problem

01

Households hold onto unused devices for ~5 years on average. Most have negligible residual value by the time they surface – the window for reuse has closed.

Traceability breaks down

02

Collection involves retailers, telecom operators, leasing firms, refurbishers and informal collectors, in and out of Belgium

Refurbishment economics

03

Domestic refurbishment is squeezed by a competitive international market. Closed-loop reuse remains marginal.

Recommendations



Separate LMT reporting

Require producers to report laptops, mobiles and tablets to Recupel – not bundled into broad WEEE categories.



Tighter controls on collection actors

More stringent obligations on who can collect, transport and process used LMT. Informal flows – including private collectors shipping devices out of Europe – currently operate with minimal oversight.



Financial incentives at point of return

Encourage retailers and telecom operators to offer trade-in value when consumers buy a new device. This is the moment when the old device is most likely to be in good enough condition to reuse.



Accredited refurbisher partnerships

Recupel should build formal partnerships with certified refurbishers – ensuring quality standards, data-wiping protocols, and traceability. Also: consider VAT reductions for refurbished devices sold with origin guarantees.

Full report: RDC Environment for Recupel (2025)

recupel.be

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