

# Strengthening Circular Economy Collaboration in Leuven

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## Executive snapshot



Leuven is accelerating its transition to a circular economy by creating a long-term collaboration model that connects public authorities, businesses and civil society. Through support delivered under the City Expert Support Facility (CESF), Leuven 2030 and the City of Leuven worked with Happonomy to identify and address five barriers to scaling circular economy initiatives, including policy alignment, financial models and governance.

The initiative focused on five lighthouse cases covering plastics, textiles, construction materials, electro repair and medical waste. By combining strategic policy development, stakeholder workshops and tailored business support, Leuven laid the foundations for a citywide “circular superstructure” that can coordinate investment, shared assets and collective action. This work strengthens Leuven’s contribution to the EU Cities Mission by embedding circular economy principles into the city’s pathway to climate neutrality.





# Knowledge Report

## THE IMPACT

Leuven now has the strategic and operational foundations to scale circular economy action across the city and region. The work translated a broad ambition for stronger ecosystem collaboration into concrete policy proposals, investment-ready business models and clearer governance arrangements.

Progress was particularly visible in the most mature lighthouse cases. Plastics reached the stage of structural collaboration, textiles entered implementation, and both construction materials and electro repair gained stronger financial and organisational footing. Together, these advances demonstrate how coordinated support can accelerate multiple initiatives at once.

## THE APPROACH

The assignment began with interviews across Leuven's circular economy ecosystem to understand what was preventing initiatives from scaling. This diagnostic phase identified five barriers that became the focus of the support trajectory.

The response combined three complementary elements:

- Developing a policy framework and budget proposal to strengthen political alignment
- Convening stakeholders to identify shared challenges and solutions
- Providing targeted financial and strategic support to individual lighthouse cases

Delivered between July 2024 and February 2025, the process brought together the City of Leuven, Leuven 2030, sector experts and circular economy organisations in a structured co-creation effort.



## OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

- **Plastics:** Ready to establish a joint venture or other long-term collaboration model.
- **Textiles:** Entered a new phase of operational expansion.
- **Construction materials:** Equipped with a product-driven strategy and supporting financial model.
- **Electro repair:** Achieved a clearer business concept and basis for decision-making.
- **Medical waste:** Continued progressing through research and development.
- **City policy:** Circular economy priorities and a supporting budget were prepared for the next municipal term.

### **What worked:**

The most effective element was linking strategic policy work with hands-on support for concrete business cases. This ensured that ecosystem-wide ambitions were grounded in initiatives capable of delivering visible results.

### **Transferable insight:**

Cities can accelerate circular economy transitions by pairing a clear political mandate with focused assistance to a small number of high-potential projects. These projects can act as practical building blocks for broader systemic change.

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE CITY

The next priority is to formalise the circular superstructure and secure the governance and resources needed to sustain it. Leuven can build on the momentum of the strongest lighthouse cases while introducing shared services, communications and investment mechanisms that support collaboration across the wider ecosystem.

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