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# **How to start a Re-use Shop? An overview of more than two decades of re-use in Flanders.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The re-use sector in Flanders represents a strong network that has been creating jobs tailored to the needs of vulnerable target groups while, at the same time, realising significant benefits for the environment. It is its structural embedment into the Flemish waste policy that has made this successful combination a reality. Consolidation followed thanks to a number of crucial initiatives: the linking to the employment policy, close collaboration with the municipalities and intermunicipal partnerships, the pursuit of professionalization accompanied by ongoing monitoring and quality control, a carefully conceived communications policy, the support provided by a highly structured umbrella organisation and – last but not least – the daily commitment and personal endeavours of over 5.000 staff. The present brochure contains general and

practical information, facts that are based on 20 years of experience within Flanders. We hope to raise sufficient enthusiasm in the reader to convince him or her to start, or to continue to contribute to, the further expansion of the re-use of products within his or her municipality or region. The brochure is the result of the close collaboration between OVAM<sup>1</sup> and KOMOSIE<sup>2</sup>. OVAM is the central focal point for the Flemish waste- and materials policy and has from the very beginning supported very warmly the re-use activities in Flanders. KOMOSIE npo stands for Federation of Environmental Entrepreneurs in the Social Economy, the umbrella organisation of all accredited re-use centres in Flanders. This non-profit organisation is active in the social profit sector at the crossroads of the environment and social economy.

<sup>1</sup> Public Waste Agency of Flanders (established in 1981), Stationsstraat 110, 2800 Mechelen, Belgium, [www.ovam.be](http://www.ovam.be).

<sup>2</sup> Federation of Environmental Entrepreneurs in the Social Economy, Uitbreidingstraat 470, 2600 Berchem, Belgium, [www.komosie.be](http://www.komosie.be).

## 1. FLANDERS: SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Flanders is the northern federated entity of Belgium. The 3 regions in Belgium operate with a parliament as their legislative body and a government as the executive power and are each individually competent and responsible for their environmental policies. With its 6.410.705 million inhabitants spread over 13.522 km<sup>2</sup>, Flanders is one of the most urbanized regions in Europe. The high density population in Flanders significantly affects its waste management policy in general and the collection systems of the municipal solid waste in particular.



## 2. CREATION OF THE RE-USE SECTOR IN FLANDERS: THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS FACTORS

**At the closing of the eighties, beginning of the nineties of the previous century,** a number of OCMW agencies (Public Social Welfare Centres) and other social and environmental organisations initiated re-use activities. Re-usable goods were sorted out from the bulky household waste citizens set out for collection. Residents could call to their goods picked up or bring it to the re-use centre. The still re-usable goods were then resold cheaply. The inspiration for this initiative originated in the Netherlands, where organisations had for some time already been experimenting with employment projects that combined ecology with job creation.

Some re-use centres pursued a **social objective**. Their prime goals were the creation of employment opportunities for low-skilled and long-term jobless individuals and making inexpensive goods available to people from vulnerable target groups. A limited number of re-use centres operated exclusively out of **environmental considerations**. Their aim was to reduce the massive accumulation of waste through the recovery of re-usable and recyclable fractions and to raise people's awareness of ecological issues, urging them to act with greater concern for the environment and attention to re-use of products.

The combination of environmental care and the employment of vulnerable groups on the labour market became possible through the alignment of the Flemish social economy policy (by making subsidies available towards the recruitment and training of low-skilled workers) and the Flemish environmental policy (through the incorporation of re-use activities and by assigning the unique position of the re-use centres in Flemish waste management policy). This alignment was important for the development and evolution of the re-use centres in Flanders.

### Success factor 1:

Quite rapidly in the development of the Flemish re-use sector the link was established between re-use and social employment.

In **1992**, the 'Volkshogeschool Elcker-ik' organised the first **training** programme for individuals wishing to **start a re-use centre**<sup>3</sup>. Mostly employment agencies followed these initial training courses. They were searching for new projects to help their target public find meaningful employment. Because of the success of these training courses, 'Elcker-ik' arose the idea to participate in supporting the development of the re-use centres in Flanders, by providing information to the authorities and other organisations, through the introduction of training programmes, by structuring the existing re-use activities into a consultative body that would represent the interests of the re-use sector and by achieving further professionalization.

At the start of 1993, there were only 5 re-use centres in operation. These re-use centres were barely known at policy level. In 1995, 18 centres were active and 13 were on the point to start.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the support of the King Baudouin Foundation's Environmental Fund and the then Flemish Minister for the Environment and Housing, N. De Batselier.



The products delivered to the re-use centres are considered as “goods without value” by the parties that discard of them and, consequently, are delivered to the re-use centres for free. Non-re-usable goods are not accepted. The goods collected receive a monetary value following their sorting process and preparing for sale at the re-use centres. It is in this respect that re-use shops are distinguished from other second-hand initiatives. They further differentiate themselves from recycling companies in that they do not operate industrial installations. Their focus is directed towards re-use, although somewhat less than half of the recovered waste is no longer fit for resale in “The Re-use Shop”. Useful applications are being sought for this unsalable fraction of the goods.

The majority of the Re-use Shops chose to operate under the legal form of non-profit organisations.

In 1993, OVAM requested the ‘Volkshogeschool Elcker-ik’ to conduct a study on the feasibility of the re-use centres and their role in preventing and managing waste materials. This study entered a plea for policy support for the re-use centres and their embedding into the Flemish Waste Management Plan. Based on the findings of this study, OVAM decided to introduce the activities of the re-use centres into its own waste policy<sup>4</sup>. The re-use centres and their activities had started to gain a foothold on Flemish soil.

The Solid Waste Management Plan 1991-1995 defined a mandatory door-to-door collection of bulky household waste at least twice a year in charge of the municipality and a sorting out of any recyclable materials<sup>5</sup>. This forced the municipalities and the intermunicipal partnerships to redesign their municipal solid waste policy.

### Success factor 2:

The incorporation of the re-use centres into the Flemish waste management policy also secured their embedment into the local waste policy.

<sup>4</sup> Re-use Centres in Flanders, report drawn up on commission from OVAM, Filip Lenders, ‘Volkshogeschool Elcker-ik’, Antwerp, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Solid Waste Management Plan 1991-1995, p.139.





The re-use centres rapidly profiled themselves as an indispensable link in the household waste collection and received a complementary role in the municipal waste policy. Proper coordination, collaboration, and the demarcation of responsibilities with and vis-à-vis the municipalities and intermunicipal partnerships were necessary to ensure the viability of the re-use centres. The municipality remained responsible for the collection of bulky household waste. The core of the re-use activities contained the collecting, processing and selling of discarded but still usable goods. Non-re-usable, defective and worn-out goods were not accepted.

The initial programme participants that in the meantime had started the first re-use centres continued to meet with one another as the challenges which they encountered were common to all of them. This led to the formation of the Federation of Flemish Re-use Centres (KVK) in 1994.

### Success factor 3:

The Federation of Flemish Re-use Centres (KVK) united nearly all re-use centres and figured as the driving force behind the development of the re-use policy in Flanders.

The main **objectives of this federation** were to provide the re-use centres with guidance in their further professionalization by means of information exchange and assistance and by acting as their representative partner vis-à-vis the competent authorities. OVAM annually subsidised the activities of the KVK with a grant of 25.000 euros, and this for at least 5 years. The Federation of Flemish Re-use Centres have in the course of the years gained valuable experience in matters of expansion

of, and support for, activities that combined the environmental protection with social employment. Following an expansion of the KVK in July 2008, it became known as the Federation of Environmental Entrepreneurs in the Social Economy (KOMOSIE npo). Aside from its re-use activity, KOMOSIE has in the meantime likewise added the areas of energy-saving and food leftovers to its activities.

Continuity and further professionalization figured as the absolute requirements and starting principles for the ongoing growth of the re-use centres in Flanders. The re-use centres needed to continue their expansion both internally and externally.

- **Internal growth** by enhancing the efficiency of the collection, treatment and selling of the goods, with full attention paid to: training, good management, financial support and publicity.
- **External growth** by enlarging the social support and expanding the re-use activity in Flanders. Crucial in this were agreements related to operating area's to avoid unnecessary competition amongst the re-use centres, the dissemination of an uniform concept, the pursuit of collaboration with the municipality via model contracts, obtaining financial support (start-up and investment bonuses), and an uniform registration and reporting method of the results achieved.

### Success factor 4:

The professionalization of the re-use centres was important to consolidate the position achieved within the waste policy.

### 3. INTEGRATION OF THE RE-USE CENTRES INTO THE FLEMISH WASTE- AND MATERIALS MANAGEMENT POLICY

As of **1995**, the Flemish re-use centres were in the possibility to conclude agreements individually with OVAM<sup>5</sup>. As a result, the re-use centres annually received during four successive years a subsidy of 12.447 euros. In order to be eligible for this subsidy, the centres were required to participate in supporting the Flemish prevention and recycling policy and to report annually their activities to OVAM.

As a result, the Federation has since 1995 been surveying all centres in an uniform manner. Initially, this was done via an extensive written questionnaire. In 1998, this survey method became computerised.

The operations of the re-use centres were for the first time included into the **Household Waste Implementation Plan 1997 - 2001**. This plan defined, amongst others, an increase in the number of re-use centres. The collection activities needed to be intensified by their further expansion, through the conclusion of cooperative agreements with the municipalities, and by providing subsidies to start-up re-use centres. OVAM and the Federation of Flemish Re-use Centres would in mutual consultation continue to develop the re-use activities in Flanders. The financial support of 24.790 euros<sup>7</sup> spread over 4 successive years was continued.

Conditions towards the granting of this subsidy included, amongst others:

- the availability of a shop;
- the acceptance by the shop of at least 4 re-usable waste flows;
- the organisation of free collections;
- availability of trained personnel;

- delivering to OVAM of the annual report, all reports and each and every amendment to statutes;
- using the subsidy for investments and deliver the evidence thereof.

The re-use centres became definitively embedded within the Flemish waste policy and started to gain greater momentum.

#### 3 PILLARS OF A RE-USE CENTRE

- **Preventing waste generation by promoting re-use of products. The sold re-usable goods accounted in 2014 for a reduction of 65.000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.**
- **Creating employment for low-skilled and long-term jobless workers. The re-use centres are offering a job, training and future prospects to over 5.000 individuals that, for divers reasons, are offered few or no opportunities in the traditional labour market.**
- **Combating poverty by offering inexpensive quality goods to people living on a limited budget.**

<sup>5</sup> 24 November 1995 accord in principle of the then Flemish Minister of the Environment, Mr. Theo Kelchtermans, with the proposal by OVAM to conclude agreements between OVAM and the Flemish Re-use Centres.

<sup>6</sup> The Flemish Government maintained this one-time start-up subsidy of 24.790 euros per accredited re-use centre until 2004.



OVAM, in mutual consultation with the KVK and the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VMSG), worked out **a guideline for the conclusion of a cooperative agreement between the municipality and the re-use centre.**

Municipalities that concluded this cooperative agreement with an accredited re-use centre received from the **Flemish Government**<sup>8</sup> within the framework of the Environmental Covenant an annual subsidy of 0,13 euro per resident, with a minimum of 1.240 euros and a maximum van 6.197 euros. In exchange, the municipalities informed the population about the re-use activities within their territories and about the possibility to bring re-usable goods to the respective re-use centres. Many municipalities installed a container for re-usable goods at their recycling yard and reimbursed the re-use centres via a fee per tonnage for the collected re-usable goods.

Municipalities of more than 40.000 inhabitants were required to have a re-use centre within their territory. By 2001, every Flemish inhabitant had

to have access to a re-use shop in the vicinity. In the meantime, the operating area serviced by a re-use centre was expanded to include at least 75.000 inhabitants. In effect, a given size was needed within the framework of the ongoing professionalization. The increase in the number of inhabitants per operating area led to a number of mergers amongst re-use centres.

The next Flemish Household Waste Implementation Plan took it one step further. The re-use centres were required to increase their performance to a re-use result of 5 kg per inhabitant per year by the end of 2007, thus to achieve half a volume of re-usable material from the bulky waste<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the re-use centres needed to strive for independence in order to be able to operate autonomously in the future. In this process, proper training of their personnel and further professionalization of management practices were essential requirements.

<sup>8</sup> Option 5 of the Municipal Environmental Covenant 1997- 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Household Waste Implementation Plan 2003 – 2007, Action 26, p. 95.



## REVISIE: THE ROAD TOWARDS QUALITATIVE COLLECTION AND THE REPAIR OF WASTE ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT (WEEE)

The Federation developed in 1999 “Revisie” as quality label for WEEE. The aim was to create a region-wide network with repair workplaces that would be collecting and repairing electrical and electronic equipment for sale in the Re-use shops.

A project assistant at KVK worked out a quality framework containing the necessary procedures, operating instructions, registration tools, and training courses. OVAM subsidised the Revisie project until the end of 2008. That year likewise a registration programme for the various WEEE activities has been introduced.

In 2015, “Revisie” has become a strong embedded quality label within the sector. Some 300 collaborators are employed in 19 repair workplaces and deliver quality equipment and devices to more than 60 Re-use shops.

The re-use centres are collecting WEEE via their own collecting channels (customers that deliver WEEE or have it picked up at home) and via Recupel<sup>10</sup>. To this end, KOMOSIE has concluded an agreement with Recupel. This agreement provides access for those centres that repair WEEE in accordance with the “Revisie” quality system.

This agreement also defines the rules (questions of logistics, facts and figures, qualitative and financial matters) and allows the access to re-usable WEEE via both the intermunicipal partnerships and via Recupel’s distribution channels.

The plan determined that repair activities done by re-use centres ought to be encouraged. To this end, investments were needed in a network of repair workplaces, these being specialised workplaces where the inspection, testing and repair of discarded electrical and electronic equipment and devices are carried out on a larger scale. Moreover, the re-use of these appliances needed to be promoted and supported communicatively on a large scale. It is with that in mind that the repair- and re-use centres developed the “Revisie” quality label.



<sup>10</sup> Recupel: Producer Responsibility Organisation for the implementation of the legal take-back obligation of waste electrical and electronic equipment in Belgium, [www.recupel.be](http://www.recupel.be)

Re-use centres further were expected to try to achieve greater qualitative service and to constantly keep in mind the dual social objective, namely making inexpensive goods available to the poorer segments of the population and promoting employment for vulnerable target groups. With the Department Employment (employment and social economy) the sector cooperated on the alignment of personnel growth.

The implementation plan also defined the financial responsibility of local authorities and provinces with regard to their support for the re-use centres. Re-use centres contributed to local social employment and preventing the incinerating or landfilling of re-usable goods. Municipalities concluded clear agreements with the re-use centres on questions of awareness-raising and financing and ensured their maximum access to re-usable goods<sup>11</sup>.

A new milestone was reached in 2003. The notion of the **Re-use centre** became definitively **embedded legally in the then Waste Decree**. At the same time, the basis was laid towards the elaboration of an **accreditation and subsidy decision** aimed at enabling the further structural growth of the re-use centres<sup>12</sup>.

The next **Implementation Plan for Environmentally Responsible Household Waste Management (2008-2015)** supports anew the operation of the re-use centres<sup>13</sup>. The network of accredited re-use centres is being further expanded, with a main focus on quality control, professionalization, and sustainability. Repair activities continue to be encouraged. Re-use centres, product re-use, and repair work are being integrated into the sustainable materials policy. The target groups (the existing and potential clients) need to be continuously approached via awareness programmes and relevant information.

As a result of the effective work of the KVK, **the re-use centres were via the VLAREA<sup>14</sup> integrated into the legal take-back obligation of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE)**. This discarded electrical and electronic equipment collected by or in charge of the municipality must first be sorted out in re-usable and non-re-usable WEEE. For this process, the municipalities may have appeal to the re-use centres that have been **accredited** by OVAM. The VLAREA has in the course of time changed frequently. The legal take-back obligation of WEEE was expanded. The re-use centres maintained their role and place in the implementation of the legal take-back obligation of WEEE.

The **conditions** for the accreditation and the subsidising of the re-use centres<sup>15</sup> were stipulated in a decision of the Flemish Government.



<sup>11</sup> Implementation Plan for Household Waste 2003 – 2007, Action 36, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> Decree concerning provisions supportive of the 2004 budget, 19 December 2003 (Belg. Off. Jrn. 31 December 2003) Article 14§9 and Article 16§8.

<sup>13</sup> Implementation Plan for Environmentally Responsible Household Waste Management 2008-2015, Action programme “Product re-use via re-use centres and other (social) projects” p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Order of the Flemish Government of 17 December 1997 on the establishment of the Flemish regulations regarding the prevention and management of waste, section 3.5 Brown and White goods Art.3.5.2.

<sup>15</sup> Decision of 20 May 2005.



In 2012, OVAM broadened its scope from a Waste into a Materials Policy. Novel in this is the focus on the closing of the materials loop. Undoubtedly, this framework will present new opportunities for the re-use sector. The sector can play a part in the further disassembly and purposeful sorting of the collected goods, with its focus on the re-use of raw materials within the context of a circular economy.

Up to and including the year 2013, the cooperation between the municipality and the re-use centre had been incorporated into the cooperative agreement between the Flemish Government and the local authorities. Thanks to this cooperation, municipalities received extra resources, as already mentioned. In 2014 this cooperative agreement has been terminated. A recent embedment into VLAREMA offers a new framework for the continuation of this cooperation. The legal basis for this extra VLAREMA<sup>16</sup> provision is article 9, §1, of the recent Materials Decree.



The above illustrates the strong collaboration between OVAM, KVK (currently KOMOSIE) and the municipalities represented by the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities (VVSG). This collaboration forms part of the basis of the professional development of the network of re-use shops in Flanders.

<sup>16</sup> Order of the Flemish Government of 17 February 2012 on the sustainable management of material cycles and waste materials

## 4. PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE RE-USE SECTOR

### 4.1. THE RE-USE SHOP AS A STRONG BRAND

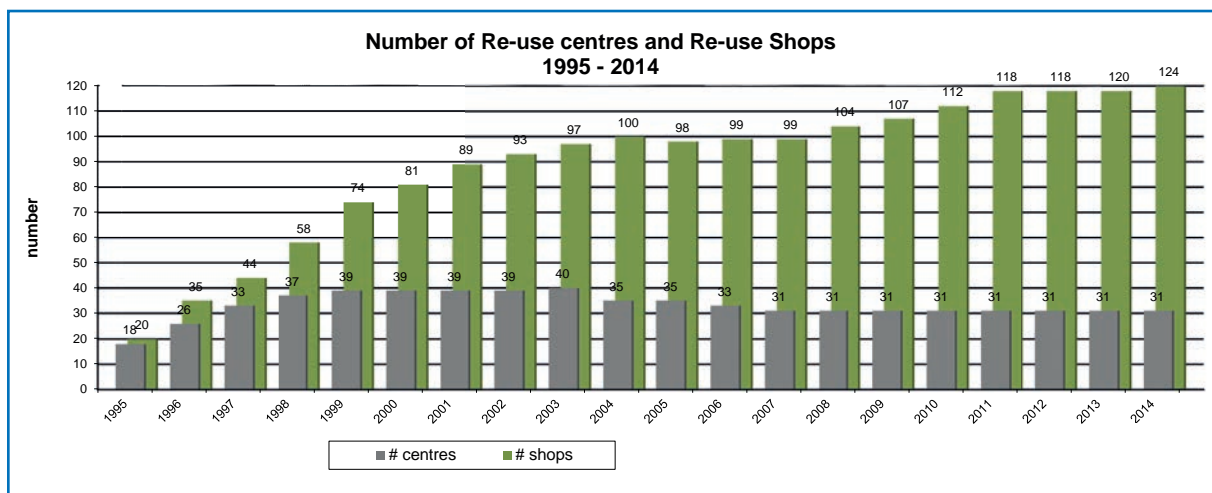
The re-use shops had success, but had to struggle with an image problem. Quite a number of these shops were seen as rather messy and dirty. The quality of goods for sale differed from shop to shop. The Flemish consumer came to look upon these re-use shops as “poor folks outlets”. Amongst the public at large, there was great threshold to step inside them. In other words, a lot of work to do to change that negative image.

In 2002, 66 Re-use Shops then in operation decided to bundle their forces and through a joint strategy and shared values they managed to develop a (quality)brand: “The Re-use Shop/ De Kringwinkel” was born! By means of this common brand name it became possible to work out a Flemish communications campaign and develop a clear recognisable house style.

Further agreements were made about the quality of the service and the offered products.



Begin 2015, there are 125 Re-use Shops<sup>17</sup> in Flanders that communicate in an uniform way, abide by strict (self-imposed) quality management standards, and are basing their decisions on the principles of socially responsible entrepreneurship. The launching of the brand name was a highly needed strategic choice to ensure the sector's growth.



Graph 1: Overview of the number of re-use centres and Re-use Shops (1995 - 2014). The number of shops at the start of the year 2000 fluctuates around 100 but has risen by 2014 to 124 shops. The shops use an uniform house style and joint communications.

<sup>17</sup> 1 centre decided to opt out of this network of re-use shops. It operates 2 shops.



#### 4.1.1 Joining forces for marketing and communication

The common strong brand name enables the Re-use Shops to group means and forces in the areas of communication and marketing. An annual communications campaign is being worked out by and for the sector. Whereas during the start-up years, The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel wished with the slogan **“Originality is not expensive”** to place the main focus on the affordability and the originality of the offered products, the Re-use Shops in 2014 introduced a new baseline with the slogan **“Re-use means Winning”**. The buyer

wins by getting an interesting commodity; the provider of the products wins by giving them new life. The shop worker has managed to get a job that fits him or her. And the environment likewise comes out a winner by increasing re-use of used products. A professional communication agency has been engaged to collaborate on the image campaign for Flanders. This campaign is likewise enhanced through local communications by the Re-use Shops themselves, using the same style. This way, the Re-use Shops are able to use their limited budget to achieve optimum awareness. Customers are being invited at regular intervals to special action days such as the Retro Day and Re-use Shop Day.

#### 4.1.2 Joining forces towards a shop policy

The Re-use Shops collaborate in developing a professionally functioning operation and organisation. They operate within a framework of agreed quality parameters, both for what concerns the management of their organisation and the outfitting of the shops as well as the service towards their customers. In order to be able to determine objectively the way in which a customer experiences and reacts to a shop, they are collaborating with a professional agency. By means of a questionnaire listing 67 criteria worked out by the shops themselves, they are inspected **at least bi-annually by an external auditor and annually conduct a self-evaluation of their operations**. By means of an online reporting system they gain insight into areas that require concrete improvements. In order to assist them, KOMOSIE has developed an inspirational guide of ‘good practices’ and offers ongoing training and support services that concentrate on those common areas open to improvements. In addition, members that fail to achieve satisfactory scores are offered extra assistance and guidance.

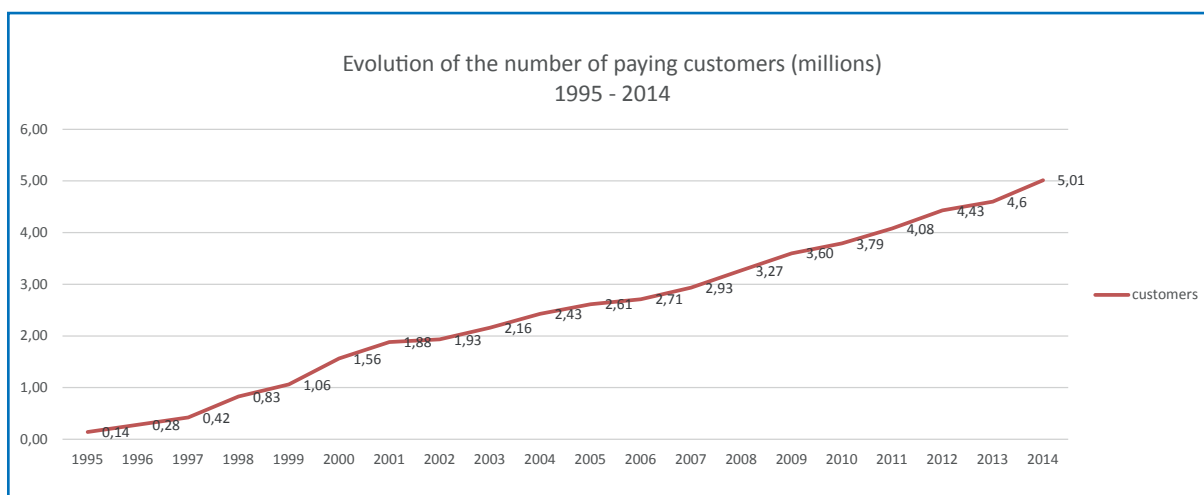




### 4.1.3 The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel: it works!

A quality brand name generates trust and recognition amongst the customers. The most recent survey (2012) conducted among 1.000 Flemish consumers about their perception of The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel shows that 70% of them are familiar with the concept. Out of the 70%, half have already visited a Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel, more than one-third of them have sometimes brought goods to a shop or called a shop for a house collection.

The Re-use Shops have in the meantime been able to address themselves to a broader public. Their customers are no longer limited to people with limited purchasing power. The ever changing range of products, plus also social and ecological considerations, is ensuring a varied customer base.



Graph 2: Number of paying customer in millions (1995-2014).  
The number of paying customers is increasing and totals 5.01 million in 2014. The growing success of the network can be partially attributed to a well thought-out communications policy coupled to the rising popularity of second-hand goods.

## 4.2. K<sup>2</sup>-KWADRAAD – QUALITY FOR RE-USE CENTRES

K<sup>2</sup>-kwadraad started following the introduction of the brand name 'The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel'. A brand name has an inside and an outside. The outside forms the communication towards the consumers whereby the Re-use Shop/ De Kringwinkel promises them to deliver top quality services. It is then up to the Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel to realise their promise on the inside: the internal operational and organisational methods used by the Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel in order to meet the quality standards to which they have committed themselves.

**“It’s not enough to demand good results, the challenge is to create the necessary conditions to achieve the requirements.”**

In order to achieve this internal quality in a sustainable way, it is important that The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel looks further than the quality of the products and services. The totality of the processes, conditions, and organisational systems around these products and services – in other words, the 'organisational quality' – must be kept in proper working order if the organisation is indeed intent upon guaranteeing its label quality not just once but continuously.

The project focussed on the quality of the organisation started in 2002. The project was given the name "K<sup>2</sup>-kwadraad". K<sup>2</sup> stands for Kwaliteit voor Kringloopcentra (=Quality for Re-use Centres), or  $K \times K = K^2$

Organisational quality demands a global approach. In this process, the EFQM model was selected. EFQM stands for European Foundation for Quality Management. It is a model that does not define in minute detail what you should or should not do. It does, however, point out what is important for your organisation and leaves it up to you to choose your own tempo, your approach, and your tools.



#### **THE K<sup>2</sup>-KWADRAAD PROJECT MAY BE DIVIDED INTO 3 PHASES:**

**Phase 1: 2003 → 2005: developing the model and the tools**

**Phase 2: 2005 → 2007: roll-out into de sector**

**Phase 3: 2007 → 2010: internal and external embedment of quality and the model**

**Phase 1 was primarily funded by the Minister for Social Economy.**

**During this phase, the EFQM model was adapted to the re-use sector and practical tools were developed and implemented. In addition, many tools were developed around process management: manuals, templates in Word and Visio, training and workshops, individual coaching on the shop floor ...**

**Phase 2 was partially funded by the Minister for Social Economy and by over 18 re-use centres. With the roll-out, a common 'quality language' was developed amongst the participating centres. This happened in different waves: every year, new centres were able to participate in the project with their own adapted annual programme. Attention remained focused on both the operational and the management levels, with a set of training programmes and workshops.**

**Phase 3 was wholly funded by the participating re-use centres.**

**In order that the quality operation within the re-use sector be not dependent on subsidies, the coordination of quality was, as of 2011, financed by the Federation out of membership fees. At KOMOSIE a member of the staff is working on quality and innovation, assisted by the employees responsible for quality at the re-use centres.**

#### 4.3. TO MEASURE IS TO KNOW: REGISTRATION AND REPORTING

From the very beginning, a great deal of attention was paid to registration and reporting. Initially, this was done via a locally installed software system (Triage). This system was inexpensive to purchase but required a lot of money for its back-up, updates, and licences. Later on it was decided to invest, qua sector, in one single online registration system via a central server (ECLIPS), thus optimization of the centralisation of data. ECLIPS is made up of a number of modules which are used to follow up the logistical functions of

a centre with professional efficiency: dispatching (planning transports), processing and repair of goods, stock management, route planning, maintaining customer data, registration of work hours, cash register, reporting, waste registration ... moreover, ECLIPS keeps track of the incoming and outgoing flow of goods (inflow, re-use, residual waste, recycling). In this way, the re-use centres are informed of what is being collected from every customer, from which municipality, and via which collection channel



OVAM makes a reporting system available. The annual reporting and the use of uniform weight tables have enabled OVAM and the Re-use Shops to group and process the collection data and calculate the re-use percentages in a consistent way. This makes it possible, year after year, to follow up the results and gain insight into the development of the re-use activity in Flanders.

These results form the basis for further support, new initiatives, the expansion of a network of Re-use Shops, its continued integration into the Flemish waste and materials policy, and to work out policy and vision for the future. Via bench learning, the re-use centres likewise are able to exchange their knowledge. Why does a given re-use centre collect more goods while employing fewer personnel? What is the turnover of the textile product group of one re-use shop vis-à-vis another comparable shop?

## A RE-USE CENTRE? A RE-USE SHOP?

The Flemish Government in 2005 established the criteria for the accreditation and subsidising of the re-use centres.

Some examples:

- the operating area needs to contain at least 75.000 inhabitants;
- a shop needs to remain open for at least thirty hours a week;
- the total shop floor of the re-use centre shall measure at least 400 m2 and correspond to an equivalent of at least 1m2 per 200 inhabitants within the assigned operating area;
- a re-use centre shall offer at least the following six product groups: electrical and electronic equipment, clothing, furniture, leisure-time goods, household goods, and diverse items.

KOMOSIE also developed additional quality criteria for the Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel.

Some examples:

- **Accessibility:** route description on website, street visibility of the shop, availability of car and bicycle parking spaces, accessibility of the shop via public transit, wheelchair and pram access.
- **Entry and reception:** friendly reception of customers on their entering the shop and on the phone.
- **Shop comfort:** structured lay-out of the shop featuring spacious aisles, the availability of shopping baskets.
- **House style and recognisability of The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel:** clear and unambiguous communication with the customer.
- **Look and Feel:** shops are brightly lit, properly ventilated and airy, clean and sober in their organisation and outfitting, and featuring correct product displays.
- **Payment and departure:** smooth and friendly payment, availability of bancontact, attention to line-ups at the checkout counter.

## 5. THE RE-USE SECTOR IN THE YEAR 2015

### 5.1.31 RE-USE CENTRES, AND AS MANY OPERATING AREAS

In 2015, the re-use sector consists of 31 individual and autonomous enterprises, each one with its own well-assigned operating/collection area: a conglomeration of cities and municipalities where the re-use centre is allowed to collect and sell goods. These unique operating areas have been established and are defined by a decision of the Flemish Government (2005).

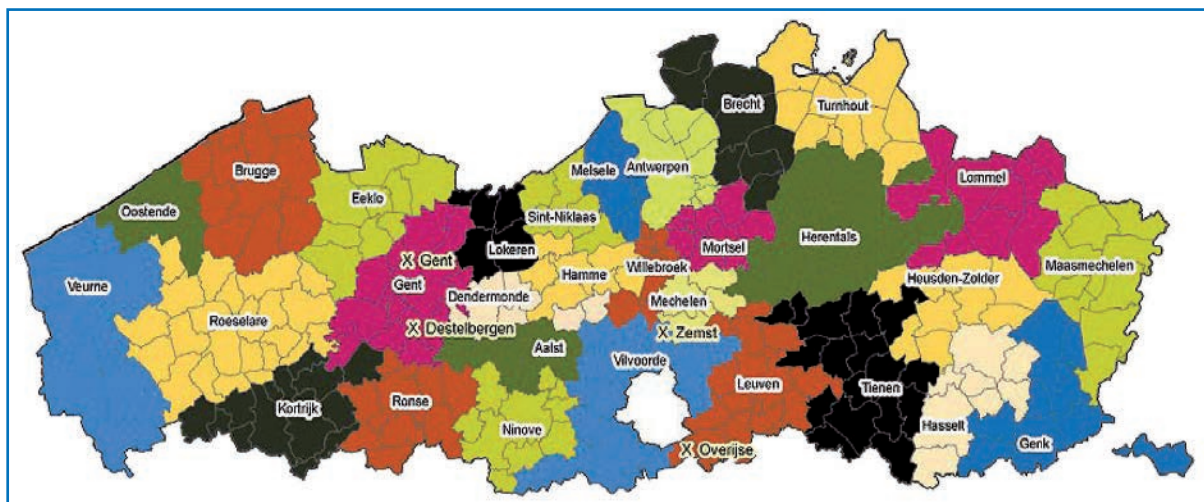


Figure 1: Overview of the operating/collection areas of Re-use Centres in Flanders (2015).

Within most municipalities, only one accredited re-use centre is responsible for the collection of re-usable goods, on behalf of, and in cooperation with, the local authorities. This system ensures less competition amongst the centres themselves and stimulates collaboration through, for instance, an exchange of their practical experiences. A wide diversity exists amongst these different centres, both amongst the centres themselves (activities, number of shops, personnel ...) and their operating area (size, rural versus urban...). The assignment of these area has developed historically out of the successive formations and agreements. Each re-use centre has received an accreditation from OVAM.

OVAM divides the re-use centres in 2 groups, namely centres that operate on a broader scope (22) and the traditional ones (9).

**The whole of Flanders is being served by a territorial network of re-use centres. The success of the re-use activity can be attributed to working with accredited re-use centres within an assigned operating/collection area. This ensures that the competition amongst the centres is being maintained at a stimulating level. A operating/collection area covers on- average- of 200.000 inhabitants.**

### 5.2 TRADITIONAL RE-USE CENTRES AND CENTRES OF BROADER SCOPE

**A traditional re-use centre** concentrates on the systematic collection, sorting and sale of goods with a view to their re-use (= selective collection). These centres have been accredited for product re-use, as stated in VLAREMA; in other words, the basis condition for this process is that the goods be collected (before acceptance) after visual pre-selection for re-use. The sorting, inspection, and the repair work also are part of the basic activity.

**A broader scope centre** likewise carries out overall collection of, for instance, WEEE via door-to-door collection and by using containers, but without visual pre-selection of the goods. OVAM considers this method as a waste activity, which makes these centres subject to the provisions imposed by VLAREMA.

Some re-use centres have developed **extra activities with regard to product re-use**, such as, for instance, a repair workplace for WEEE or a sorting centre for textile products.

**The collection method** is determined in the Implementation Plan for Environmentally Responsible Household Waste Management. It concerns a minimum obligatory service to the citizens. Re-usable goods need to be collected door-to-door for free (because of the 6% VAT ruling) or may be disposed of at the re-use centre. Another possibility is the delivery of re-usable goods to the recycling yard. A good collaboration with the local authorities is crucial for successful collections.

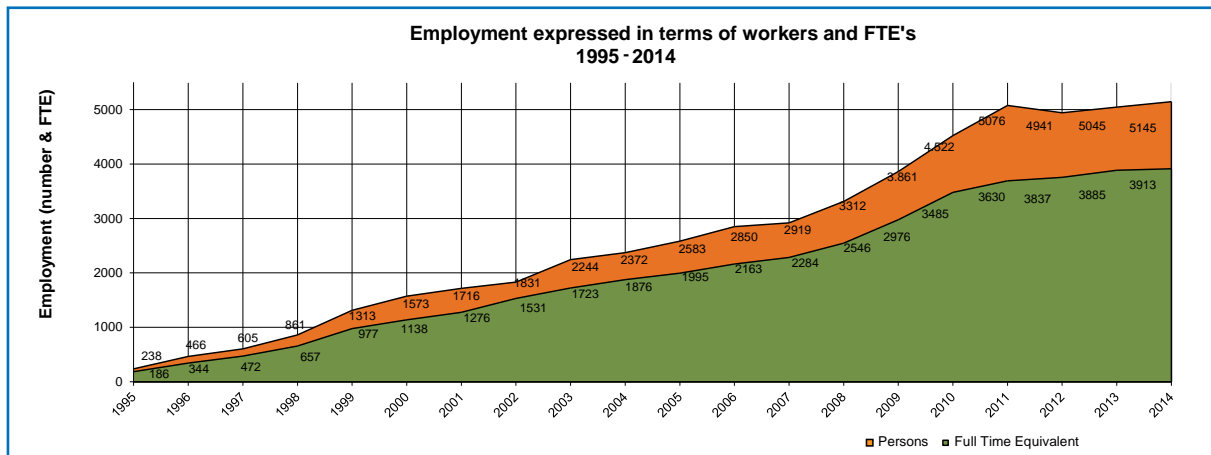
### 5.3. SOCIAL EMPLOYMENT

As already mentioned above, aside from the element of re-use, the creation of social employment is the second fundamental objective pursued by the re-use centres. Re-use centres offer employment especially to individuals that have little or no access to a meaningful job in the regular labour market. The centres offer training and instructional programmes and enhance people's chances of reintegration into the labour market. Management staff within the re-use sector account for some 1/5th of total employment. The required tasks and professional know-how of the staff are in a re-use centre as diverse as within a normal business organisation, ranging from collection with the pickup van or the truck, sorting and storage, repairing, sale inside the shop, to personnel guidance, administration, and day-to-day management.

In 2014, the sector employed 5.145 persons, and this via various statutes such as employment for disadvantaged people in a sheltered work



environment, employment care, work experience and "article 60" in the OCMW legislation. This article allows an OCMW to offer employment to an individual who is entitled to a living wage or financial aid. This measure serves a dual objective. People are given the opportunity to gain practical work experience and practise work attitudes, thus reinforcing their chances for sustainable employment. At the same time, they are building social security rights. The employment of such individuals is defined in time. Depending on their age, they receive an employment contract of 1 to 2 years' duration (the period needed to accumulate social security rights). The OCMW often collaborate with re-use centres in engaging workers under article 60. The OCMW functions legally as the employer, while the re-use centre makes use of the services of the employee. Approximately 1 out of 4 FTEs in the sector are currently working under that statute.



Graph 3: Employment figures in terms of workers and FTEs (1995-2014).

At the start-up of the sector there was a considerable rise in the social employment figures. However, the past few years there is little or no increase: this may be attributed to the limited budget that is being freed up by the subsidising authority for the recruitment of additional personnel. The total personnel complement consists for circa 20% of key supervisory staff. These employees are responsible for the management of the organisation and for providing guidance to the collaborators. Eighty percent of the personnel are workers recruited from vulnerable target groups. They perform tasks such as collecting, sorting, preparing goods for shop display, repairing and selling products.

In addition to job creation for individuals with minimal job opportunities in the regular labour market, the re-use centres also offer other social benefits. A lot of centres today collaborate closely with OCMW agencies and present a product assortment that is attuned to the needs of the most disadvantaged social groups. Their offer may range from financial discounts on purchases in The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel to, for example, a selection of free products to newcomers.



<sup>18</sup> The 6% VAT ruling was granted in 2000 to all re-use centres with an accreditation as socio-economic enterprises and with proviso that the collected goods be acquired free of charge.

<sup>19</sup> VTE = full-time equivalent

## 5.4. SOME SPECIFIC FIGURES

### 5.4.1. A healthy financial policy

Making profit is not a goal in itself for the Re-use Shops. Nonetheless, a healthy financial policy is a necessary condition to enable them to realise their other objectives with respect to the environment and to the creation of sustainable employment opportunities. The pursuit of a stable personnel policy and profitability is a pure necessity for the Re-use Shops. This goal may be achieved through the creation of well-organised and structured Re-use Shops. A number of pioneer re-users in the Netherlands failed because they paid too little attention to this particular aspect. Re-use Shops that have to rely on heavy subsidies or on the goodwill and assistance of volunteers for their daily operations are not to be encouraged<sup>20</sup>. It makes good sense for Re-use Shops to pursue an independent course towards business-economic viability. By being able to trust in their own resources and become self-reliant, they minimize their financial uncertainties.

By offering a wide assortment of goods at a very affordable price, the Re-use Shops have been successful in realising a solid turnover. By judiciously playing these trump cards, they have been able to attract a very broad clientele: people from the lower income groups, environment-conscious buyers, bargain hunters, etc. The quality of, and a warranty policy on, the products on sale have played an essential role. Basic products are sold at low prices: at 10% to 30% of their original market value. High quality products, vintage and antique collectibles are priced somewhat higher. It relates to products that are also in high demand in other second-hand stores and for which there exists a specific market. Prices are set to discourage dealers. Prices differ amongst the various Re-use Shops. Each product is indeed unique and

priced individually by other collaborators. Re-use Shops operate with a high turnover of the delivered and sold products. Given the nature of the goods, maintaining large or strategic stocks offers no financial gains (unless it pertains to seasonal articles for Christmas, Easter, and Saint Nicolas Day). Because of the low prices, the costs for keeping a product in stock for an extended time cannot be justified by its return. The sector to a large degree depends on capital goods. Investments are made in buildings, transportation means, repair workplaces, ...

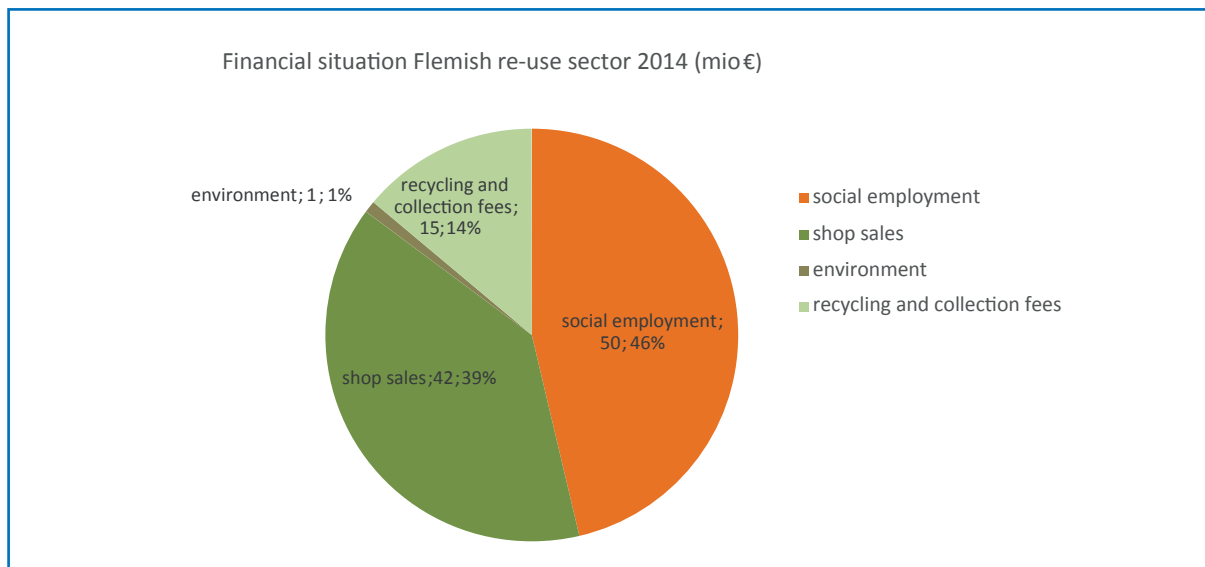


The total turnover is made up from shop-generated sales and subsidies. Shop revenue is generated from the sale of re-usable goods (39%) in The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel. Other revenues are generated from the sale of materials to the recycling sector and tonnage fees for the collections (14%). Subsidies on the average account for 47% of the total turnover. The subsidies given for employment are the most significant (46%). These employment subsidies constitute the engine that drives the growth of the re-use centres, but also the other environmental subsidies (OVAM – 1%) are and remain important to ensure the viability of the centres<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Re-use Centres Environmental friendly Processing of Household Waste, 1993, UIA, Environmental Institute.

<sup>21</sup> The Re-use Centres in Flanders, Follow-up Report 2009, p.39..





Graph 4: Financial situation of the re-use sector.

On an annual basis, the total turnover in 2014 amounted to roughly 110 million euros, 39% of which derives from the sale of second-hand products, 14% from the tonnage fees for collections and the sale of recyclable materials, 1% from OVAM's environmental subsidy, and 46% from employment subsidies.

The subsidy percentages are decreasing year after year; own income from sales, recycling, and services (tonnage fees) accounts for more than half of the turnover figure.

At the sector level, the net result amounts to some 5% of the total turnover. As social economy-oriented, the sector engages itself to reinvest this net result in the creation of employment.

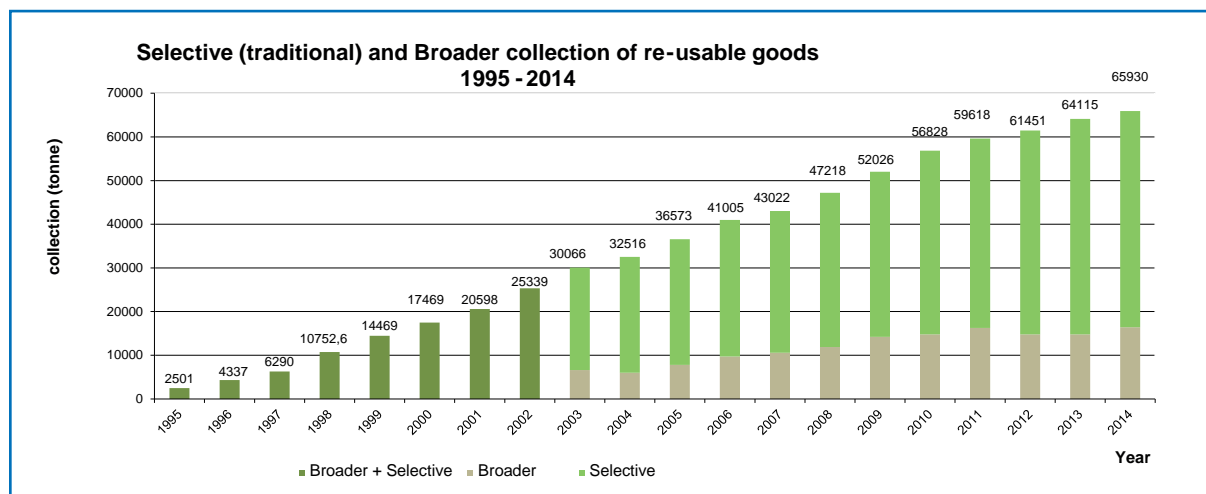


Graph 5: Shop turnover in million euros, excl. VAT (2001-2014).

The total shop turnover amounts to 45 million euros in 2014. This result has been realised through the sale of re-usable products in the Re-use Shops.

## 5.4.2 Collection in kg/inhabitant and per collection method (traditional/broader)

More than 3/4 of the total collection is carried out selectively, whereby only re-usable goods are accepted. Less than 1/4 of the collection is done by the broader scope method, which concentrates especially on textile goods (collection via street containers and kerbside collection) and waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (overall collection at recycling yards and from retailers).



Graph 6: Selective (traditional) and broader collection of re-usable goods (1995-2014). The collection of re-usable goods in 2014 amounts to 65.930 tonnes, 75% of which selectively (only the re-usable products are collected) and 25% by the broader method (without distinction between re-usable and non-re-usable (waste) products). The broader collection primarily collects textile product groups and electrical and electronic equipment.

In 2014, 40% of all of these goods was delivered to the Re-use Shops; 28% were picked up by The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel itself from private residents and businesses; 19.5% were collected from the recycling yards and 12.5% ended up at the Re-use Shops via other channels (textile containers, dealers in electrical products ...).



## 5.4.3 Re-use in kilogram, per product group and per inhabitant

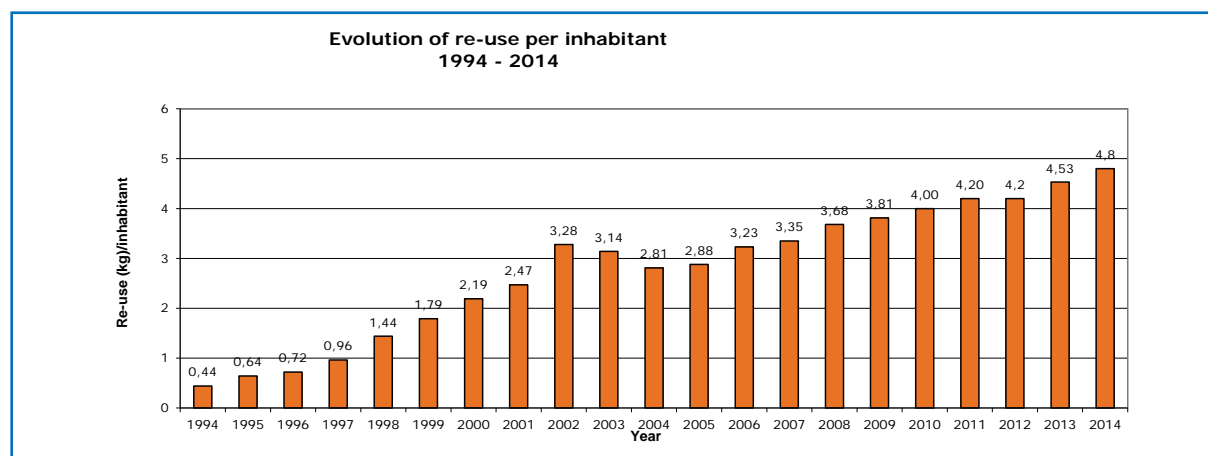
The following table shows the **collections of the various re-usable fractions**. Practically everything that can be found in the average household is being collected for re-use. Furniture, WEEE, and textiles represent – at least in mass/weight – the most important products in 2014. WEEE forms a significant part of the entire collection. A large portion of these goods is being collected overall by 2 re-use centres on behalf of Recupel. Out of this total collection of electrical and electronic equipment, only a small percentage is effectively being repaired. The re-use percentage for WEEE is therefore low.

Of the total quantity of collected products, approximately half are being resold in one of the shops. In addition, the table provides a summary of the **re-use expressed in kilogram and in euros**. Furniture, leisure-time items, and textile goods are the most sold fractions (by weight/mass). Looking at the turnover figures, we note a totally different ranking. Textiles are by far more popular than the other product groups and account for 1/3 of the realised sector sales. The selection for local re-use of textiles hence remains a very important point for attention.

	collection (kg)	%	Re-use (kg)	%	Re-use (€)	%
WEEE large white	4.269.545	6%	621.794	2%	1.335.885	3%
WEEE refrig./freezer	2.888.115	4%	261.807	1%	479.595	1%
WEEE other	8.112.856	12%	1.253.851	4%	2.326.189	5%
WEEE television/screens	3.981.285	6%	183.464	1%	141.211	0%
Books musical multimedia	4.451.866	7%	1.357.580	4%	3.187.110	7%
Do-It-Yourself	1.552.139	2%	1.912.569	6%	499.756	1%
Gas appliances. and other	205.634	0%	140.876	0%	278.960	1%
Household goods	5.060.675	8%	3.700.748	12%	8.051.827	18%
Furniture	19.336.322	29%	12.938.934	42%	9.787.929	22%
Textiles	9.550.358	14%	3.172.558	10%	15.019.564	33%
Transportation	650.700	1%	291.836	1%	924.759	2%
Leisure-time items	5.807.781	9%	5.109.234	17%	3.343.108	7%
<b>TOTALE FRACTION</b>	<b>65.867.276</b>	100%	<b>30.945.253</b>	100%	<b>45.375.893</b>	100%

Table 1: Summary of collection and re-use per fraction in 2014. Furniture items and WEEE are the largest fractions in the collection.

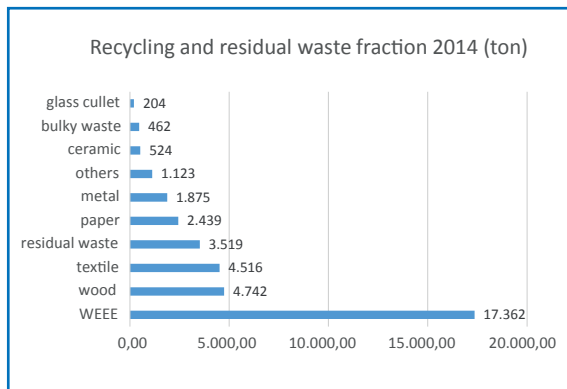
In consultation with OVAM, the sector targeted a goal of 5 kilogram of re-use per inhabitant for 2015, meaning that the average Flemish resident would buy 5 kg of re-usable product per year from a Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel. According to the forecast, the sector result in 2015 will come in at 4,9 kg/resident. The sector, in consultation with OVAM, is considering a new target by 2022. The realisation of this goal has become a societal challenge, whereby both the sector and the local authorities play an important role.



Graph 7: Evolution of re-use per inhabitant (1994-2014). The re-use per inhabitant in 2014 is 4,8 kg/resident and forms an important parameter for the sector. The rise of this parameter follows the trend of the preceding years.

### 5.4.4 Recycling and residual waste

Approximately 55% of the total goods inflow is non-re-usable (= not resalable as second-hand products in the Re-use Shops). This inflow is subsequently processed on a professional way. The following graph offers a summary of the most important removed fractions (2014). Some 5% of the total collected volume is non-re-usable or non-recyclable and is being disposed of as residual waste.



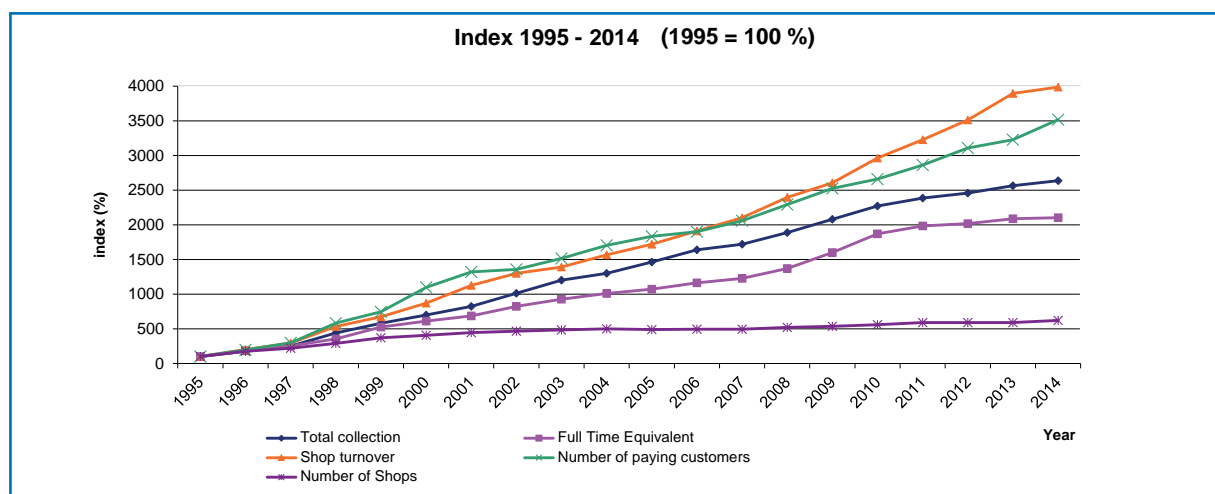
Graph 8: Removal of recyclable fractions and residual waste 2014 (tonne).

The total removal of recyclable fractions amounted to 36.764,82 tonnes. A large portion of that consists of WEEE that is being collected within the framework of the legal take-back obligation. These removed recyclable fractions are subsequently being processed by specialized and authorized recycling facilities.

### 5.4.5 Summary graph

The following graph offers a summary of the most significant results realised through re-use activities in Flanders.

The 1995 value is taken as reference (100%). The graph shows the evolution of the total collection, employment (in FTEs), the number of shops, the shop turnover, and the number of paying customers. For the sake of completeness, we have to mention that, as of 2013, the sector has been operating with a new – OVAM approved – item list based on the new average weights. The year 2013 then needs to be considered as a new benchmark.



Graph 9: Evolution of the total collection, employment (in FTE's), the number of shops, the shop turnover, and the number of paying customers, with 1995 as the reference year.

This graph shows the evolution of the most important sector results, percentage wise. The 1995 reference value is equated with 100%. The graphic shows the steady growth of collections and re-use, but also exposes a historical lag in increase in the employment rate. Because of budgetary savings at the level of the subsidising authorities, the employment growth within the sector has not followed proportional the increase in collections.

## 6. A WORD OF EXPLANATION: GLOSSARY

**Code of Good Practice for the re-use of WEEE** contains an overview of criteria for re-use of used electrical and electronic equipment. Electrical and electronic equipment that does not meet these re-use criteria shall, from an environmental point of view, be rejected. OVAM is of the opinion that such equipment needs to be considered as waste once the owner of such devices no longer wishes to retain them for his own purposes. Used electrical and electronic equipment that does not meet the re-use criteria but may potentially still qualify for re-use can be prepared for such purpose by a repair workplace. This process of preparation for re-use must meet certain conditions. This code of good practice will be integrated in a law.

**The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel:** The Re-use Shop project is the major cooperative partnership within the re-use sector, directed and supported by KOMOSIE vzw. The Re-use Shop functions as quality label and brand name of a group of re-use centres that have adopted an identical house style, an uniform communications mode and strict quality standards. It is, in fact, this project that has given the re-use sector a visible and tangible presence in Flanders.

**ECLIPS:** since 2013, ECLIPS has functioned as the software system for the registration of the goods flow, from collection to sales. It enables the re-use centres to process their registrations more correctly and more efficiently with a new item list (with average weights/mass). The system is built up of different modules to allow the members themselves to select the desired complexity of the system. An extensive reporting module makes it possible to generate information from the system.

**Ecoscore:** is the score assigned to the electrical equipment in The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel. The score compares the annual cost price of the second-hand device to that of a new energy-saving one. Account is taken of the purchase price, the consumption costs (electricity and hydro) and the estimated lifespan. [http://www.dekringwinkel.be/kw/energie-en-hergebruik-de-kringwinkel-engageert-zich/ecoscore-\\_91.aspx](http://www.dekringwinkel.be/kw/energie-en-hergebruik-de-kringwinkel-engageert-zich/ecoscore-_91.aspx)

**Re-use:** any operation by which products or components that are not waste, are used again for the same purpose for which they were originally conceived.

**Repair workplace:** accredited and specialised testing and repair workplace for WEEE and belonging to the "Revisie" network.

**Federation of Environmental Entrepreneurs in the Social Economy (KOMOSIE vzw):** was formed in 1994 under the name Federation of Flemish Re-use Centres (KVK) with the aim to support the re-use centres in Flanders in their interests towards the authorities. For instance, KOMOSIE successfully managed to secure for its members a lowered VAT rate (6 %). In time, its involvement gradually expanded into the areas of providing professional advice about quality care, the organisation and lay-out of the shops, registration and reporting.

**Re-use Centre:** a legal entity accredited by OVAM that operates a collection service, a sorting and sales area and that, within its own assigned operating area, collects, stores, sorts, and repairs potentially re-usable goods in order to re-used.

**Social Employment Place:** a facility offering employment to all persons afflicted with an occupational disability that are willing and ready to work and who are excluded from the regular economic labour loop. A social employment place aims the recruitment of individuals excluded from the labour market with the purpose of an improved integration into the society.

**Recycling yard** is a licensed facility where residents and, in some cases, also business enterprises, are permitted to deposit on certain days and at certain times, under supervision, sorted household waste and possibly also waste materials similar to household waste. A recycling yard enables the sorting of household waste at source with a view to achieving their maximum recycling.

**Revisie:** to guarantee the quality of electrical equipment, The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel uses the "Revisie" quality label. This label assures the customer that an electrical device from The Re-use Shop/De Kringwinkel will work properly and safely. In specialised repair workplaces, every device will be subjected to a thorough technical inspection, professionally repaired (if necessary), tested and fully cleaned. Quality, safety and energy consumption are paramount considerations in this operation.

**Social Economy:** consists of a diversity of enterprises and initiatives that, in their objectives, prioritise the realisation of certain social benefits and in the process respect the following basic principles: priority of work over capital, democratic decision-making, social integration, transparency, quality, and sustainability.

**Sorting Centre for Textiles:** serves for the collection and sorting of textile products collected via, amongst others, street containers and kerbside collection.

**Tonnage Fee:** refers to the fee per tonne that the re-use centre receives from the municipality or the intermunicipal partnerships for the collection of still re-usable goods within its operating area. In this way, it is avoided that still re-usable goods become mixed with the residual/bulky waste. This fee can be calculated on the basis of the volume of collected kilos, the volume of re-used kilos, the number of residents contacted, or a combination of any of these parameters. This tonnage fee does not represent an allowance or a subsidy but is a fee paid for services delivered.

**Preparing for re-use:** checking, cleaning or repairing recovery operations, by which products or components of products that have become waste are prepared so that they can be re-used without any other pre-processing.

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**Photos:** Komosie vzw



