



One Person's Trash is Another Person's Treasure Part III: The Right to Repair Movement in the European Union

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In [previous installments](#) of this series, we discussed some common aspects of the right to repair movement in industrialized countries, particularly in Canada and the United States. This article summarizes some of the recent developments in the European Union.

Recent EU Laws Attempt to Give Consumers the Right to Repair:

In March 2021, the first ever right to repair laws came into effect in the EU^[1] As a result of the new laws, manufacturers in Europe will now be legally obligated to ensure that electric and electronic goods, such as televisions and fridges, can be repaired for up to 10 years. One of the main concerns addressed in the EU legislation is “programmed obsolescence” – a practice in which certain technology manufacturers produce devices with shorter life spans that may require expensive repairs or replacement by authorized repair shops. The new regulations demand that manufacturers provide repair parts and manuals to professional repairers within 15 days of request. Depending on the type of product, manufacturers are required to continue supporting third party repairers for 7 to 10 years^[2]. The new laws seem to have been based on EU’s existing eco-design regulations^[3] which were set in place a few years ago to improve the energy efficiency of appliances manufactured in Europe. Although the new laws were welcomed by those concerned with the environmental effects of electronic waste, the issue of scarcity of spare parts remains largely unaddressed. Under the EU rules, manufacturers are obligated to provide repair manuals and parts to “professional repairers”. It seems that it will be up to each EU member to implement its rules while addressing aspects such as defining “professional repairer” and creating national registries. Critics are concerned that the new rules do not go far enough to support and benefit “end users”. So long as end users are not empowered to access spare parts and necessary manuals, certain manufacturers could be non-responsive to end users and continue to stifle access to repair^[4] An additional issue is that the new regulations only cover limited categories of electronic goods such as washing machines, dishwashers, and refrigerators. Critics pose that the regulations must go farther to cover smartphones and laptops which often require repairs during their life spans. These products also make up a large portion of the e-waste that Europe produces every year. The European Commission does have plans to expand the categories of products in the future to include smartphones and laptops, among other things^[5]. France seems to be ahead of the curve already by legally obligating manufacturers of electronic goods to include “repairability scores” on the devices that they produce to better inform their consumers of how easily the devices they purchase can be repaired ^[6].

Although the new regulations in Europe have limitations in terms of scope of coverage, they constitute a good step towards making repairs more accessible, and hopefully allowing faster and cheaper repairs for end users. The larger goal remains to reduce the toll of waste on the environment.

[1] <https://www.euronews.com/2021/03/01/eu-law-requires-companies-to-fix-electronic-goods-for-up-to-10-years>

[2] <https://spectrum.ieee.org/europe-champions-the-right-to-repair/77-percent>

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/qanda_19_5889

[4] <https://repair.eu/news/the-us-moves-fast-on-right-to-repair-and-europe-needs-to-catch-up/>



[5] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_419

[6] <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/right-to-repair-moves-forward-for-your-broken-devices-but-campaigners-want-to-go-much-further/>

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