

THE EWIT PROJECT

EUROPE AND AFRICA TOGETHER FOR THE RECOVERY OF SECONDARY RAW MATERIALS AND PRECIOUS METALS

Procurement of raw materials is raising concerns in many countries all over the world, and is particularly topical in the EU. According to the European Environmental Agency (Eea), the EU depends on imports from other continents for over 80% of raw materials used. This rate has urged policy-makers to define new strategies for resources procurement, including recovery of secondary raw materials through an alternative management of products end-of-life. This idea is at the basis of the large-scale reflection on the circular economy, and today it is possible to identify great potentials for innovation and investments in the EU.

Following such reflections, the European Commission has launched several initiatives with the aim to deepen the knowledge of such an important topic – the recovery of secondary raw materials – through waste valorisation, with a particular emphasis on waste electrical and electronic equipment (Weee). As a matter of fact, because of their content of highly-recyclable secondary raw materials and precious metals (such as gold, silver and platinum), Weee are now the focus of EU management strategies that aim to optimize recovery and re-use in production processes.

The project called Ewit (*E-waste Implementation Toolkit*) is integrated in this strategic field. Ewit started in 2014 as a European innovation partnership on raw materials, and in 2015 it became a project for coordination and support, funded by the European Commission within the framework of the Horizon 2020 programme. As a matter of fact, Ewit is an initiative based on cooperation between Europe and Africa, with the aim to develop best practices in Weee management in some African target areas. Africa was chosen as a target area for an initiative related to technological waste because of major changes that have been recorded in this continent in the last few years. Africa, as other developing areas, is indeed experiencing a process of increasing demographic growth and urbanization, set to increase even more in the future. At the same time, the number of consumers of technological devices in Africa is constantly growing, and this fact generates unprecedented volumes of Weee. In addition to locally generated Weee, another phenomenon is being recorded in Africa and in other developing areas of the world, namely e-waste dumping. Every year tons of Weee is shipped illegally from industrialised to developing countries, in order to curb the costs related to proper treatment, with severe effects on the local environment and populations,



which are not in the condition to safely manage the toxic components of Weee.

The management of Weee has thus become an urgent issue in Africa as well; this continent has a growing amount of Weee volumes available, but has not developed a suitable management system, in terms of waste collection policies and infrastructures for waste treatment and recovery.

Ewit therefore grasps this double opportunity: on the one hand by developing policies for Weee management, on the other hand by fostering the recovery of secondary raw materials. The project supports the establishment of a network, with 11 African partners and 13 European partners, collaborating to meet the three project goals:

1) mapping the status in the Weee management system in four target areas of Africa, twinned – within the framework of the project – with four European areas: Choma (Zambia) with Vienna (Austria), Kisii (Kenya) with Porto (Portugal), Johannesburg (South Africa) with Florence (Italy) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) with Antwerp (Belgium).

The twinning scheme has two purposes: sharing of experience and best practices between the twinned towns, and encouraging Europe-Africa bilateral relations in the field of Weee

2) studying guidelines to develop and improve the respective systems in the four African target areas, with particular attention to issues such as waste collection, treatment technologies, as well as aspects related to the law and the funding of the system. The guidelines generated within the project were inspired by the principle of the circular economy (closing the loop). In this respect, the destination and treatment of recovered fractions and the market-related aspects are important causes for reflection, even among EU countries

3) systematization of the project know-how and guidelines in a toolkit available on an online portal, which is dedicated mainly, but not exclusively, to policy-makers working in Africa and in other developing areas of the world, who may be interested in developing policies for the management of Weee at local level.

The Ewit project lasts for two years, but it paves the way for medium to long-term cooperation between the partners, with the double aim to disseminate best practices in Weee management in Africa, for the environmental, economic and social benefits of local populations, and also to recover secondary raw materials and sign trade agreements with the EU, so that the continent becomes less vulnerable in procurement on a global scale.

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