



Apple has expanded its repair services to Europe. How are other companies and countries tackling e-waste?

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Keeping a phone for just one year longer could reduce the number of handsets in landfills by 25%.

Image: REUTERS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh

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- The world is predicted to produce 75 million tonnes of e-waste by 2030, unless attitudes towards old and damaged products change.
- Apple is among the companies moving to help customers repair their own products.
- US President Joe Biden has formally backed consumers' rights to repair damaged electronic equipment.
- It's often considered cheaper to replace a product rather than repair it.
- As awareness increases, free repair cafes and government incentives are popping up across the globe.

"When I have any problem with my phone, I call my daughter."

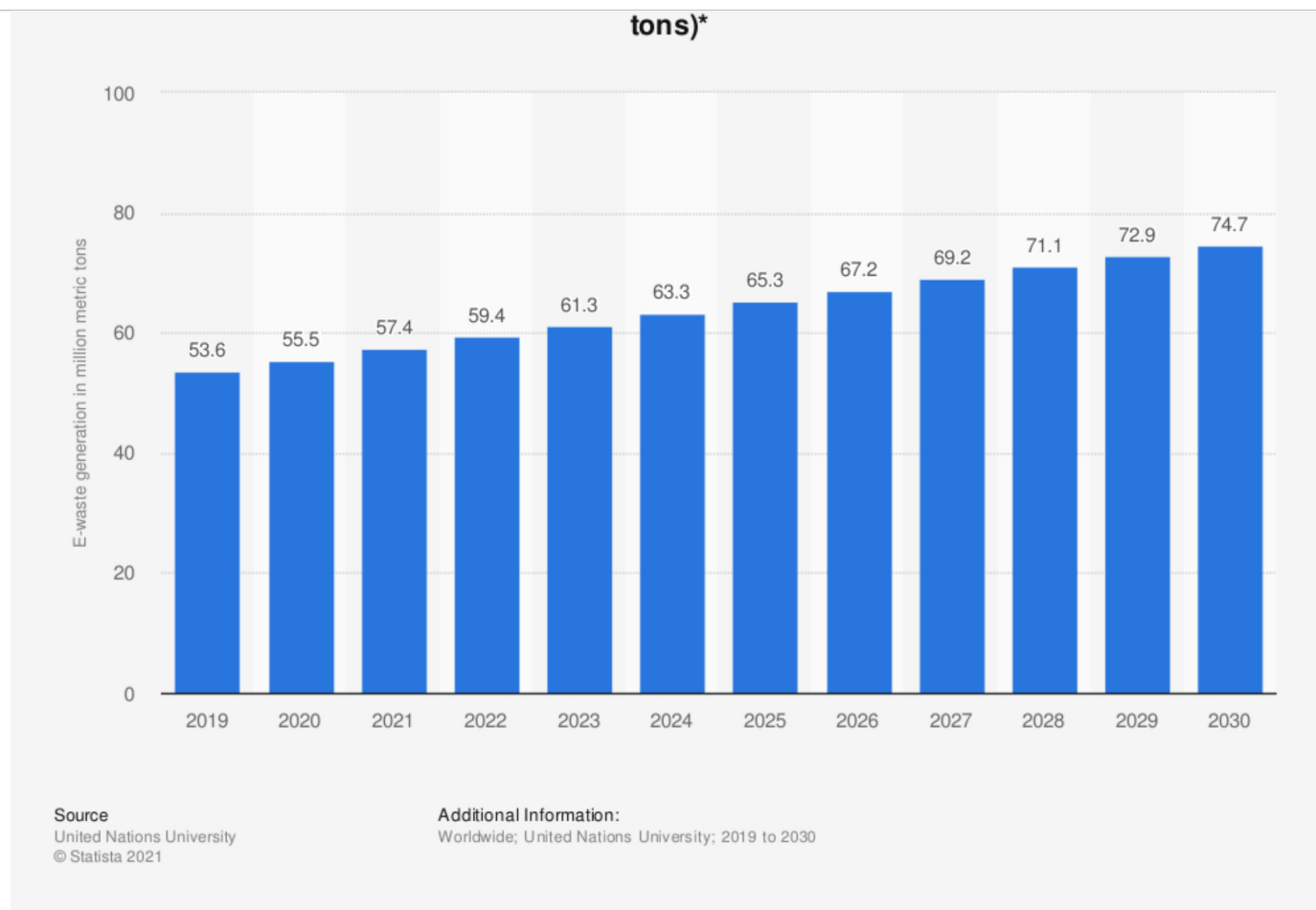
So joked US President Joe Biden during a [cabinet meeting at the White House](#) in January 2022.

But he was making a serious point about the so-called 'right to repair', which was part of an executive order he issued in July 2021 to [promote competition in the US economy](#) – and ultimately reduce prices for consumers.

"It's going to make it easier for millions of Americans to repair their electronics instead of paying an arm and a leg to repair or just throwing the device out," he said.

Apple is among the companies that have since begun rolling out repair services. The tech firm started offering self-service repairs for Macs and iPhones [in the US from November 2021](#), and then in parts of Europe from December 2022.

The service allows people to [buy replacement parts and repair kits to resolve common problems such as cracked screens](#). Customers can also hire the repair kits for \$67 per week, instead of having to buy them outright



The volume of e-waste generated worldwide is forecast to keep growing. Image: Statista

The company has nearly doubled the number of service locations with access to genuine Apple parts and tools over the past three years. And other technology companies are beginning to work repairability into their design process as consumers look for products that will last longer. Microsoft has released a video showing how straightforward it is to open up and swap components out of its Surface Laptop SE – a low-cost device aimed at children and educational institutions, where repairability is key.

Helping consumers cut down on e-waste

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according to the [United Nations Global E-waste Monitor report](#).

That's concerning, not least because many of the products we've discarded could be reused, reducing the need to produce more, but also because e-waste tends to contain [harmful chemicals](#) that can leach into the environment.

Cutting back on what we get rid of is beneficial for the environment. Using smartphones for seven years instead of two-and-a-half [saves around 100kg of greenhouse gases](#).

[Changing the way we consume is at the heart of the solution](#), according to the World Economic Forum. A circular vision for the e-waste sector will promote the elimination of waste and could yield up to [\\$4.5 trillion in economic benefits](#) by 2030.

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Biden's July 2021 executive order recognized that smartphone and other tech companies were imposing "restrictions on self and third-party repairs, making repairs [more costly and time-consuming](#), such as by [restricting](#) the distribution of parts, diagnostics and repair tools."

The order urged the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to "issue rules against anticompetitive restrictions on using independent repair shops or doing DIY repairs of your own devices and equipment".

In an update in January, Biden said: "If you own a product, from a smartphone to a tractor, you don't have the freedom to choose how or where to repair that item you purchased.

"If it's broke, you had to go to the dealer and you had to pay the dealer's cost – the



"Denying the right to repair raises prices for consumers, means independent repair shops can't compete for your business."

Since the order, the FTC unanimously announced that it would ramp up enforcement against illegal repair restrictions, he added, while major companies voluntarily agreed to change their restrictions on repairs.

Laws and built-in design

Several countries besides the US are working to introduce laws that encourage consumers to repair and reuse.

The European Union introduced several initiatives, including the Waste of Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive, Energy-related Products (ErP) Directive and the Ecodesign Directive to lower resource consumption and environmental impact.

France passed the Anti-Waste for a Circular Economy Act (AGEC) in 2020. Since January 2021, some French businesses have had to display a repairability score that gives a grade out of 10 – with 10 deemed the most repairable. The law applies to smartphones, laptops, televisions, washing machines and lawnmowers.

The [Repairability Index](#) displays a score with different colour variations to make it easier for consumers to note if a product has a good score (green) or a bad score (red).

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The [UK's 'Right to Repair' law](#) was introduced in July 2021 – aimed at extending the life of electronics and appliances by up to 10 years. It legally requires manufacturers to make spare parts available to citizens and third-party repair companies. But it only covers dishwashers, washing machines, washer-dryers, refrigeration appliances, televisions and electronic displays.

The [Big Repair Project](#) – a partnership between Brunel University London, Warwick University and University College London – aims to investigate how well the Right to Repair law achieves its aims.

Repair cafes and houses



bonus to reimburse consumers for part of their costs.

Up to €100 (\$105) per person is available under the bonus scheme if you have a defective electrical device repaired instead of opting for disposal. Thuringia introduced the programme in June and [had run out of funds](#) by October due to its popularity.

“Those who take good care of their [defective devices will be rewarded](#),” said Thuringia's Environment Minister Anja Siegesmund.

Repair cafes are cropping up worldwide, designed to encourage consumers to bring in their products. Run by volunteers, [the cafes](#) offer help with repairs and the maintenance of broken or faulty items.

With thousands of cafes worldwide, they are particularly popular in Belgium which has almost 2,000. The cafes can also assist with modifications such as improving the fit and appearance of clothing.

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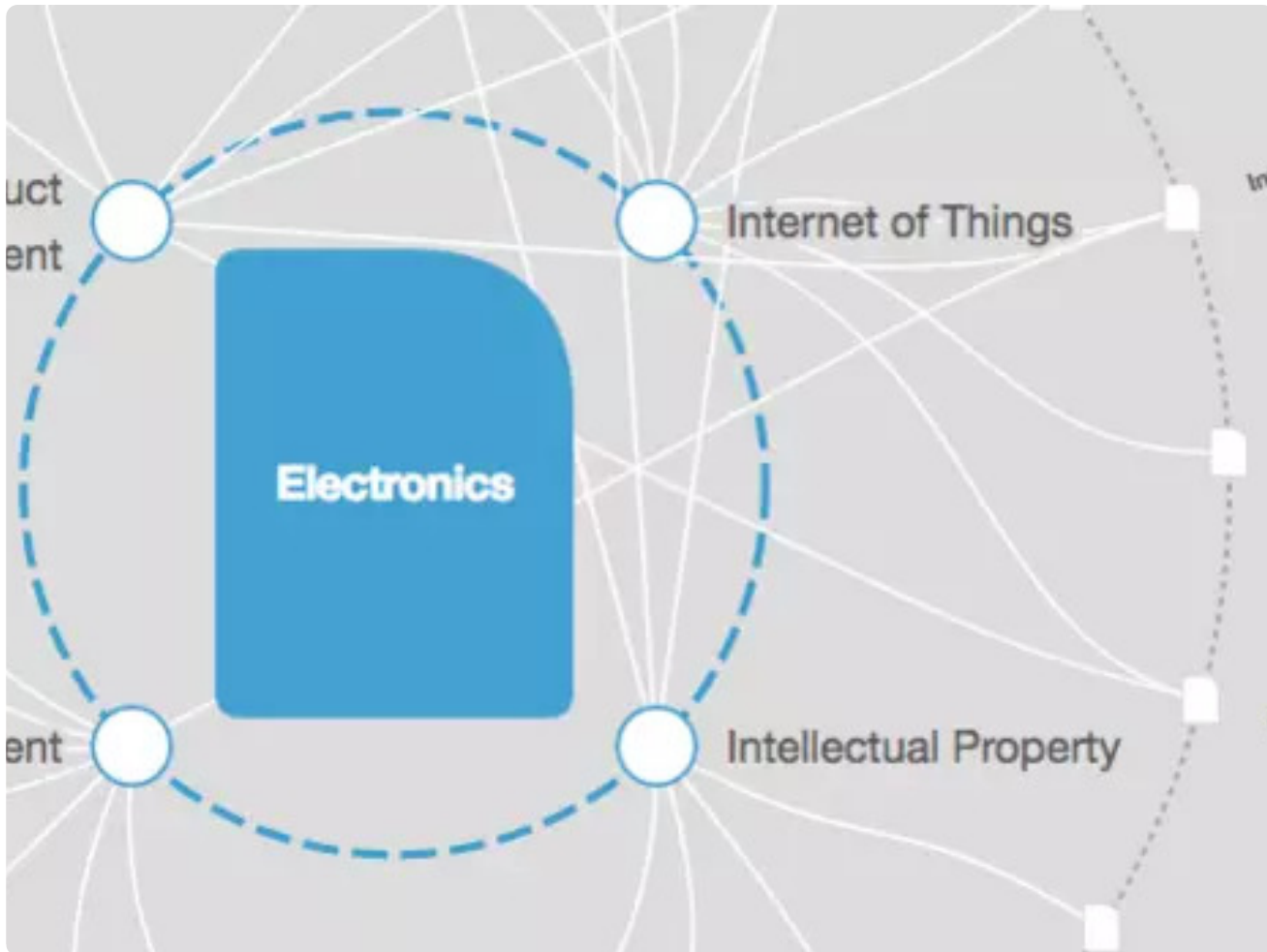
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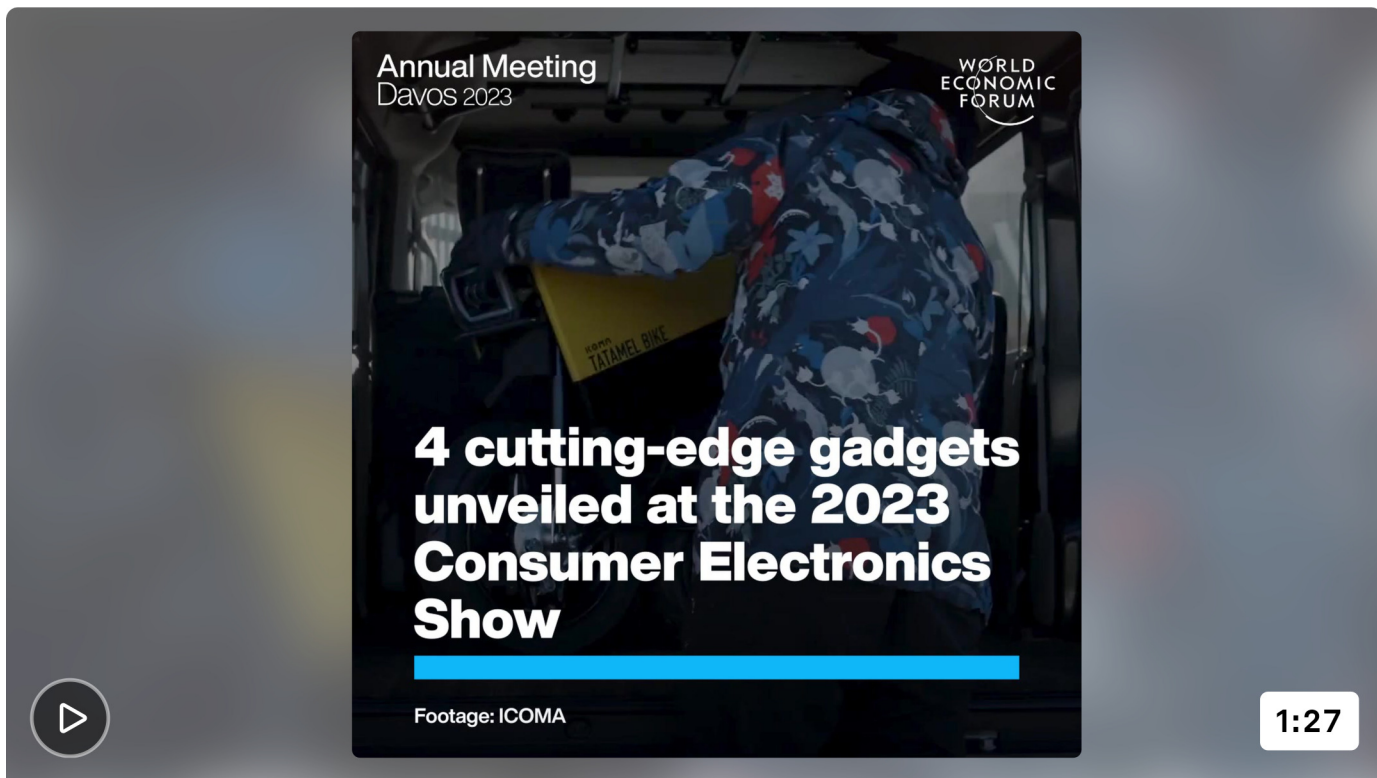
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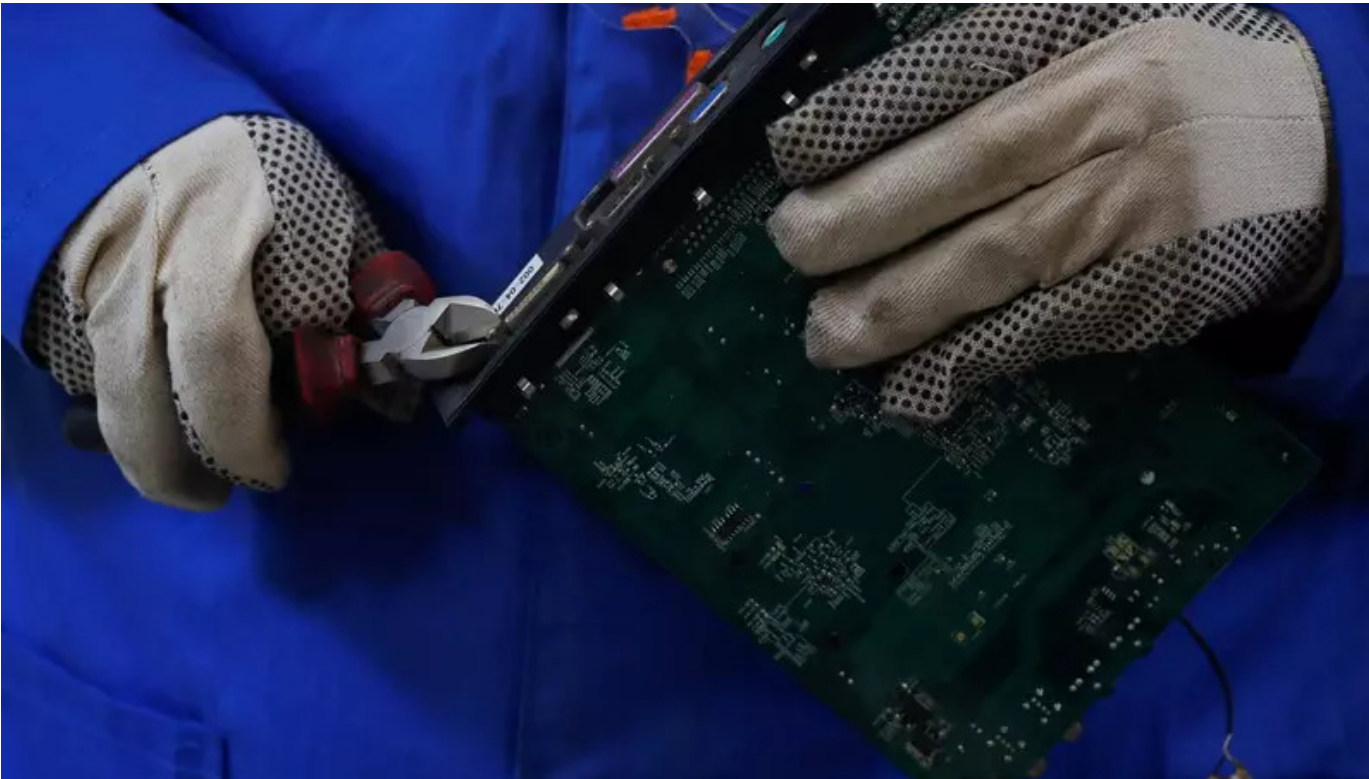
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