A DECISION COMPANION

The useful life left in a phone

Repair, secure reuse or responsible recycling: choose the next job before choosing the next device.



Conceptual illustration. See source and provenance notes.

01 Safety comes before longevity.

02 Calculate useful months, not repair price alone.

03 Follow the device beyond the collection box.

Companion to the complete WTM article. A practical synthesis, not personalised financial, legal, medical or safety advice.

Four questions before the upgrade

A route through the decision, not permission to handle a damaged battery or bypass security limits.

01

Safe?

No swelling, damage or unusual heat

→

02

Supported?

Security updates fit the intended use

→

03

Needed?

A real task or recipient exists

→

04

Repair value?

Cost, condition and useful life align

STOP

If safety is uncertain

Stop using or charging it and seek manufacturer or qualified guidance. Do not puncture, dismantle or post a damaged battery casually.

USE

If secure use is possible

Keep, repair or transfer it for a specific purpose. A device that sits unused in another drawer has not gained much value.

RECOVER

If reuse is unsuitable

Use a responsible specialist collection route. Ask what happens after collection, including handling of batteries and data.

EPA battery guidance and electronics collection advice. Security support is model-specific; verify it with the manufacturer.

A repair price needs a time horizon

Illustrative comparison. A cheap repair is not good value if the phone will soon be unsuitable or unsafe.



Conceptual illustration. See source and provenance notes.

HYPOTHETICAL REPAIR

£90 ÷ 18 months = £5 per month

This is the repair cost spread over extra useful months, not a guarantee of savings or an environmental impact calculation.

BEFORE AGREEING

Confirm the fault, the repair warranty, security support and whether the repaired device meets the intended need.

For covered models placed on the EU market from 20 June 2025, rules include durability and repair requirements. Scope exclusions apply.

Transfer a working tool, not a problem

Secure preparation and a recipient's actual needs matter as much as the device changing hands.



Conceptual illustration. See source and provenance notes.

01

Agree the use

Check network, language, accessibility and charger needs.

02

Protect the data

Back up and verify important data before erasing.

03

Follow the device instructions

Use manufacturer guidance for sign-out, locks and reset.

04

Confirm the outcome

Check that the next person can actually use the phone.

Factory reset erases device data. Follow the correct manufacturer sequence, and remove SIM or storage cards as applicable.

Collection is a beginning, not proof of recovery

A recycling claim needs a downstream process. Safe workers, accountable handling and real reuse are part of the result.

GLOBAL E-WASTE, 2022

62 million tonnes

Generated across all covered electrical and electronic equipment, not phones alone.

22.3%

Documented as formally collected and recycled. The remainder is not a single known disposal route.



Conceptual illustration. See source and provenance notes.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Keeping equipment useful can preserve value. When it is finished, responsible treatment protects people as well as materials.

ITU / UNITAR Global E-waste Monitor 2024 reports 2022 data. These are historical global totals, not a 2026 smartphone recycling rate.

What the evidence can carry

Linked primary sources, reporting periods and boundaries. Figures are dated evidence, not live operational advice.

01 US EPA: frequent questions about lithium-ion batteries

02 ITU / UNITAR: Global E-waste Monitor 2024 (2022 data)

03 European Commission: smartphones and tablets requirements

04 Google Android Help: factory reset guidance

05 US EPA: electronics donation and recycling

06 WHO: e-waste, children and health

EDITORIAL BOUNDARIES

No model or recycler has been tested or endorsed. Manufacturer instructions and local collection rules must be checked.

EU requirements apply to covered models by market-placement date, with exclusions. They do not guarantee the condition of an old phone.

The repair example is hypothetical. No measured carbon saving is claimed.

Never put lithium-ion batteries or devices in ordinary household waste or recycling.

SOURCE REVIEW + VISUAL PROVENANCE

Sources reviewed 11 November 2026. AI-assisted research, drafting and visual production. Illustrations depict fictional people and scenes, not documented individuals, properties or events. No original interviews or field reporting are claimed.

Editorial review edition. Publication approval remains outstanding. Source and visual checks do not replace local professional advice.