

# LET'S FIX FASHION

## GREEN-SCHOOLS LET'S FIX FASHION!

We all love to buy clothes, to feel good in a new pair of jeans that fit you just right or to have the latest pair of trainers.

Who doesn't love to watch a shopping haul on YouTube!

But listen, we need to get serious about the fast fashion industry and its impact on people and the planet. We need to raise our voices on this important issue! We need to act with our wallets! Join us this school year to learn more about what you can do to take action. Here are some facts and figures about the fashion industry to get you started.

## FACTS FROM IRELAND

- In Ireland, the current collection pathways for used clothes (textiles) include donations in-store to charity shops donations to clothing banks, door to door bag drops, collections in communities / schools and collections through commercial retailer take back schemes.
- Approximately 71,700 tonnes textiles are discarded every year via recycling and residual waste bins at household level<sup>1</sup>.
- Of the textiles collected by charity shops, about half is sold locally through charity shops for reuse. The remainder (unusable / unsaleable stock) is sent as rag to commercial textile recyclers, mainly in Northern Ireland, which are then mainly exported. The textiles collected by commercial recyclers are primarily exported. There is a limited amount of upcycling taking place through numerous small-scale projects.
- We discard around 110,000 tonnes of textiles as waste every year and nearly all are processed via waste-to-energy plants or landfill. Of these textiles around 64,000 tonnes are discarded as household waste via kerbside collection and the majority are clothing (42,000 tonnes). This shows that the household bin is the single largest source of textiles waste.
- Around 57,000 tonnes of textiles every year are collected separately through commercial textile banks and collections (24%) and direct donations to charity shops (10%). Of these collected textiles around 44,500 tonnes are sold for reuse - 6% are sold for reuse within Ireland and 21% are exported overseas. Vintage and online reselling of clothes is around 1,500 tonnes each year. In terms of recycling, around 15,000 tonnes of collected textiles each year go for recycling as rags, fibre, etc.

Textiles | Environmental Protection Agency (epa.ie)

## What is 'Fast Fashion'?

'Fast fashion' is the term used to describe the mass production of cheap, poor-quality clothing. These cheaply made, trendy pieces have resulted in overwhelming amounts of consumption, and waste. All the elements of fast fashion—trend replication, rapid production, low quality, competitive pricing—add up to having a detrimental impact on the planet and the people involved in garment production.



## THE PROBLEMS WITH

# FAST FASHION



## ARE TWOFOLD: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL

### ENVIRONMENTAL



**Waste:** The fashion industry creates over 92 million tonnes of waste globally, much of which ends up in landfill or is burnt.



**Water:** The fashion industry is the 2nd largest consumer of water and is responsible for 20% of global clean water pollution. The water footprint network calculates that approx. 2500 litres of water are required to produce just one cotton shirt. A pair of jeans require 7,000-10,000 litres.

**Case-Study:** The Aral Sea in Central Asia has shrunk to just 10 per cent of its former volume, largely due to irrigation for cotton farming.



**Energy:** Fibre production, spinning, weaving, dyeing and finishing fabrics, as well as clothing manufacture, and transport, all consume high levels of energy. It is estimated the fashion industry produces up to 10% of global CO2 emissions. By 2030, on current trends, emissions from production are set to rise 60 per cent, reaching an estimated 2.8 billion tonnes of CO2.



**Pollution:** Toxic chemicals from pesticides and insecticides used in cotton production during the growing process, as well as the 8,000-plus different chemicals used to dye, manufacture, and finish the garments, all release huge amounts of discharge into fresh and oceanic waterways. Synthetics like polyester now account for 70% of all materials. It is derived from fossil fuels, contributes to global warming, and can shed microfibres that add to the increasing levels of plastic in our oceans when it's put through the wash. 1,900 fibres can be released from a typical garment.



**Biodiversity:** The most damaging stage of the creation of a garment is at the raw material extraction stage. More than 150 million trees are chopped down each year to make certain fabrics like viscos, 30% of which come from endangered forests. Animals are also impacted by fast fashion, by the toxic dyes that are released in waterways and the microfibres that are often ingested by ocean life. When animal products such as leather and fur are used, animal welfare is put at risk.

### SOCIAL



**Poor working conditions:** The Global Slavery Index estimates that 45.8 million people are living in modern slavery or forced labour. Many of those people are working in the supply chains of many well-known fast fashion online and high-street retailers

**Case study:** These poor working conditions may be a lot closer to home than you think. Leicester, in the UK, is home to a hub of approximately 1,500 factories supplying the well known online fast fashion retailers. Investigations showed many of these factories had locked fire doors, filthy toilets, no clean drinking water and deplorable conditions, all while paying their workers as little as £3-£4 an hour.



**Living wage:** Most of the world's garments are made in Asia and most of the workers who make the clothes are not paid enough to live. Majority of the workers are women. More than 80% of the workforce in Cambodia garment industry are women aged 18-35.



**Health and Safety:** There are many potential hazards when working in the garment industry, e.g., carrying heavy cotton loads, inhalation of dust or fibers, exposure to harmful chemicals, excessive noise and heat. Many factory buildings fail to adhere to safety regulations. In April 2013 1,134 Bangladeshi garment workers were killed in a factory fire.



**Harassment and Abuse:** This often goes unreported or is not addressed because workers, especially women, feel unable to speak up for fear of further harassment. In Bangladesh, 68 per cent of women garment workers in one survey reported verbal harassment.

EPA, Household Waste Characterisation Campaign - Final report,  
Community Resources Network Ireland- Circular Textiles Project 2018.  
<https://fashionchecker.org/>  
[www.commonobjective.co](http://www.commonobjective.co)



# Lets Fix Fashion and the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals, set by the United Nations in 2015, are a road map intended to guide action that balances human needs with environmental health. The goals are a global agenda, a to-do list, that will end poverty, inequality, and achieve environmental sustainability by 2030. The fashion industry can achieve sustainability through the integration of the goals across its supply chain to not only protect the environment but also the people working throughout. The industry can be directly related to the following goals:



## Production, Supply chains and Consumerism

Since 2000 clothing consumption has doubled. Globally, fashion is responsible for 92 million tonnes of waste being dumped in landfill every year, the equivalent of 1 rubbish truck of textile waste landfilled or burned every second. Less than 1% of the material used to produce clothing is recycled into new clothing, with many textiles exported to the "rag" trade infiltrating both local communities and landfills.



Polyester is one of our most worn fabrics. Synthetics now account for 70% of all materials. It is derived from fossil fuels, contributes to global warming, and can shed microfibres that add to the increasing levels of plastic in our oceans when it's put through the wash. But even "natural fabrics" can be a problem at the scale fast fashion demands. Conventional cotton requires enormous quantities of water and pesticides in developing countries. This results in risks of drought and creates huge amounts of stress on water basins and competition for resources between companies and local communities. For example it takes 2,500 litres water to make a t-shirt. In addition synthetics can sit in landfill for up to the 200 years releasing methane and other harmful greenhouse gases contributing to global warming. manufacturing of conventional cotton uses high levels of pesticides and hazardous chemicals which can leach into our waterways and soil devastating eco systems and citizens living in the area.



## Climate Change

Textile production contributes more to climate change than international aviation and shipping combined, consumes lake-sized volumes of fresh water and creates chemical and plastic pollution. The fashion industry, in its current linear form, is unsustainable and is now confirmed as one of the world's biggest contributors to climate change. Globally the industry is reported to account for 10% of the world's annual carbon emissions. In 2015, greenhouse gas emissions from textile production totalled 1.2 billion tonnes of CO2 which was more than that of all international flights and maritime shipping combined. In addition, with consumer demand for new clothing growing exponentially (fast fashion), experts predict that the fashion industry could account for a quarter of global emissions by 2040.



### Pollution

The constant supply and demand puts huge stress on our environment such as for land clearing, impacting biodiversity, and soil quality. The processing of leather also impacts the environment with 300kgs of chemicals being added for every 900kg of animal hides tanned. The speed at which our clothes are produced also means that more and more clothes are disposed of by consumers, creating textile mountains in countries we export our disgarads to. Take a look at the short documentary 'Textile mountain' if you have not yet done so.



Textile pollution thrives across the supply chain from textile dyeing, toxic chemicals leaching into soil, adding pesticides, contaminating surface and groundwater. 500,000 tonnes of microfibres (50 billion plastic bottles) are released into the oceans yearly. An average wash of synthetics can release 700,000 microfibres into our water systems. Take a look at the River Blue for the extensive damage. Animals are also impacted by fast fashion, by the toxic dyes that are released in waterways and the microfibres that are often ingested by ocean life. When animal products such as leather and fur are used, animal welfare is put at risk.



### Human and Social Impact

By the mid-2000s, the fast fashion model dominated the fashion industry. It is characterised by super-fast, offshore production in countries that offer the lowest wages, the least regulation, and the fewest protections for workers and the environment. Labour, gender and poverty inequalities estimated to employ more than 60 million people worldwide and directly linked with labour issues vastly driven by the cost of labour, with many brands seeking out the cheapest route. An estimated 21 million people are entrapped in modern-day slavery where millions of people are forced to work with little or no pay under the threat of violence and horrific working conditions. 80% of the workforce throughout the supply chain are women, often subjected to violence and sexual harassment. Further down the supply chain, there are the farmers who may work with toxic chemicals that can have devastating impacts on their physical and mental health.

