

The Impacts of Clothing **Fact Sheets**



Fashioning more
with less

The environmental impact of clothes

- The fashion industry is ranked fourth in terms of its negative environmental impact - just below housing, transport, and food.¹
- Clothes are a major contributor to the problem of plastic in the ocean. It has been estimated that around half a million tonnes of plastic microfibres shed during the washing of synthetic textiles such as polyester, nylon, or acrylic end up in the ocean annually.²
- 35% of primary microplastics entering the ocean are released through the washing of textiles³
- The World Bank estimates that 20% of industrial wastewater pollution worldwide originates from the textile industry. Some of these chemicals are classified as bio-accumulative and persistent, meaning that once in the environment, they will remain there for a long time.⁴
- Textiles production uses around 93 billion cubic metres of water annually and an estimated 1.2 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions from production per year.⁵ This is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined.
- The total footprint of clothing in use in the UK was 26.2 million tonnes CO₂e in 2016 - up from 24 million tonnes in 2012.⁶
- The 6.4 million tonnes of clothing consumed in the EU-28 in 2015 generated 195 million tonnes CO₂e and a total water footprint of around 46,400 million.⁷
- The clothing industry's CO₂ emissions are expected to rise to nearly 2.8 billion tonnes per year by 2030. These are the equivalent of emissions produced by nearly 230 million passenger vehicles driven for a year, assuming average driving patterns.⁸
- It is expected that by 2030 the fashion industry will use 35% more land for cotton and forest for cellulosic fibres.⁹

1. WRAP, Mapping clothing impacts in Europe: the environmental cost (2017), p.18

2. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future (2017) p.39

3. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future (2017) p.66

4. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future (2017), p. 53

5. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future (2017) p.38

6. WRAP, Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion (2017), p.12

7. WRAP, Textiles market situation report WRAP 2016), p.2

8. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2017), p.11

9. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2017), p.14

Consumption of clothes

- In the last 15 years, clothing production has roughly doubled.¹⁰
- During the past 10 years, the number of items of clothing purchased per consumer has more than doubled.¹¹
- It is expected that clothing consumption will increase globally by 63% by 2030, from the current 62 million tonnes to 102 million tonnes by 2030.¹²
- The UK consumes around 1.1 million tonnes of clothing per year.¹³
- Clothing consumption in the UK is rising, with a 200,000 tonne increase in consumption between 2012 to 2016.
- A third of Londoners buy new clothes every six months.¹⁴
- Londoners report owning an average of 76 items of clothing.¹⁵

Clothing utilization

- Worldwide, the average number of times a garment is worn before it ceases to be used has decreased by 36% compared to 15 years ago.¹⁶
- It is estimated that the average garment is worn only ten times before disposal.¹⁷
- It is estimated that more than half of the fast fashion produced is disposed of in under a year.¹⁸
- In the UK, clothing lasts for an average of 3.3 years before it is discarded or passed on.¹⁹
- UK adults only wear 44 percent of the clothing they own.²⁰
- Around 30% of the clothing in the wardrobe of an average UK household has not been worn for at least a year, most commonly because it no longer fits²¹
- A quarter of Londoners' wardrobes are unworn.²²

10. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future (2017), p.18

11. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2017), p.57

12. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2017), p.8

13. WRAP, Textiles market situation report (2016), p.2

14. TRAIID, Recycling Clothes, London (2018), p.13

15. TRAIID, Recycling Clothes, London (2018), p.15

16. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future, (2017), p.19

17. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2018), p.59

18. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future, (2017),

19. WRAP, Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion (2017), p.9

20. WRAP, 'Valuing our clothes: the evidence base' (2012), p.2

21. WRAP, 'Valuing our clothes: the evidence base' (2012), p.2

22. TRAIID, Recycling Clothes, London (2018), p.17

Clothing & waste

- Less than 1% of all materials in clothes are recycled into new garments.²³
 - The estimated cost to the UK economy of landfilling clothing and household textiles each year is approximately GBP 82 million.²⁴
 - Around 350,000 tonnes of clothes, with an estimated value of £140 million, go to landfill every year in the UK.²⁵
 - The UK throws away 4.7kg volume per capita of clothing in household residual waste.²⁶
 - More than a quarter of Londoners think that reducing waste can help to meet UN Sustainable Development Goal Number 12 (SDG12) 57% think that giving longer life to their clothes can help.²⁷
 - 46% of Londoners feel not very informed at all or not very well-informed about both the environmental and social benefits of giving longer life to clothes.²⁸
 - Three in five Londoners give or throw away clothes because they no longer fit.²⁹
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23. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2018), p.59

24. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future, (2017), p.20

25. WRAP, 'Valuing our clothes: the evidence base' (2012), p.2

26. WRAP, Mapping clothing impacts in Europe: the environmental cost (2017)

27. TR Aid, Recycling clothes, London (2018), p.2

28. TR Aid, Recycling clothes, London (2018), p.8

29. TR Aid, Recycling clothes, London (2018), p.20

On second-hand clothes

- Of the countries that have been studied, in the UK the expected active life of clothing is the lowest. Passing on clothes we don't wear is one way of giving longer life to clothes.³⁰
- The UK's charity shops diverted over 330,000 tonnes of textiles from landfill in 2017.³¹
- Two-thirds of UK consumers buy or receive second-hand clothes, and there is a willingness to wear more, especially if a better range were available. This is why it is crucial to circulate our clothes once they are no longer being worn.³²
- Extending the life of clothing has a significant positive impact on the planet. Extending the life of clothes by an extra nine months reduces its carbon, water, and waste footprint by around 20-30% each, and cuts the cost in resources used to supply, launder and dispose of clothing by 20%.³³
- Providing 1 tonne of clothing for direct reuse, such as donating to charities, can result in a net Greenhouse Gas saving of 11 tonnes CO₂-eq.³⁴
- Almost half of people in London never buy new clothes second-hand.³⁵
- Eight in ten Londoners donate their clothes to charity after a clear out.³⁶
- An increase of 10% in second hand sales could save: 3% carbon, 4% water, 1% waste per tonnes of clothing.³⁷
- It is estimated that 650,000 tonnes of clothing were collected for re-use and recycling in 2014.³⁸

30. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2018)

31. <https://www.charityretail.org.uk/london-assembly-environment-committee-adopts-charity-retail-association-recommendation-on-waste-recycling/> accessed July 2018

32. WRAP, 'Valuing our clothes: the evidence base', (2012), p.2

33. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group, Pulse of the fashion industry (2018), p.4

34. WRAP, Textiles market situation report WRAP 2016), p.7

35. TRAIID, Recycling clothes, London (2018), p.14

36. TRAIID, Recycling clothes, London (2018), p.22

37. WRAP, Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion (2017), p.38

38 WRAP, Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion (2017), p.43