



“The accelerated consumption and the under-utilization of textile products have been two of the resulting phenomena of the textile industry’s development.”

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Image Source: Wikimedia Commons. April 16, 2008. Asta Hombre is an Arab designer in Egypt who is looking to find clothes for men who love to wear cloth from the wholesale store of urban retail style. He is searching for perfect urban outfits with trendy T-Shirts on the shelves of abundance in the professional business of an apparel merchant.

Photo Credit: epSos.de .

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Men_Shopping_for_Clothing_Accessories.jpg



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The textile industry – accelerating transformation through future-oriented policy measures

Within the past few decades, the textile industry became one of the world's largest economies. The production volume of textile fibers has tripled since 1975 and is expected to further

double by 2030.¹ Aligned with mass production, this trend has been made possible through a continuous drop in production costs² based on, inter alia, outsourcing activities of production processes to low-income countries. The simultaneous tendency and trend to select lower quality textiles has led to a decrease in prices, making cheap mass-produced garments accessible to a wide audience.³ The accelerated consumption and under-utilization of textile products have been two results of the textile industry's development.

Given the fact that the textile industry is based on a linear system, the sector is designed to require large volumes of raw materials and to discard them after usage.^{4;5} The tremendous environmental pressures related to the industry's activities are thus not surprising and can be directly linked to climate change, loss of biodiversity, water scarcity, and more.^{6;7} Whereas the industry's waste creation figures remain partly unknown, 92 million tonnes of waste is assumed to be generated worldwide every year, while prognoses state an increase of 60% within the period 2015 to 2030. A major share of this waste ends up in landfills or is incinerated while less than 1% is recycled into fibers.⁸

Against this backdrop, the transformation of the current linear textile industry into a circular system serves as a pressing issue in meeting the Agenda 2030 and remaining within planetary boundaries. A circular textile industry foresees to "produce neither waste nor pollution by redesigning fibers to circulate at a high quality within the production and

consumption system for as long as possible and / or feeding them back into the bio- or technosphere to restore natural capital or provide secondary resources at the end of use”.⁹

As the textile value chains are highly complex and globally intertwined, only a systemic circular economy approach scoping all phases of the value chain, such as the design, business, consumption, and end-of-life-phase, can sufficiently transform the industry. The measures for each phase are manifold and can involve a circular design of products (or “design-for-recycling”), alternative and service-oriented business models, repair and resell activities, or innovative recycling solutions. While much progress has been made around the globe in the implementation of circularity measures by both businesses and consumers, the usefulness of classical environmental policy instruments has been exhausted. Future-oriented policy measures that are able to cope with the industry’s complexity and accelerate the transformation efforts proactively are now needed.

This necessity is being increasingly recognized by EU policymakers, as the textile industry is a key sector for applying circular economy measures. Here, waste prevention is plays a key role. This was the clear outcome of the recent progress report on waste prevention that was coordinated by the Wuppertal Institute on behalf of the European Environment Agency.¹⁰

The assessment of the policy background on textile waste prevention has highlighted various European regulations that are at least indirectly linked to textile waste generation, such as the Textile Regulation on textile fiber names and related labeling and marking of the fiber composition of textile products ((EU) No 1007/2011), the Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) Regulation ((EC) No 1907/2006) and the EU Green Public Procurement Criteria for Textile Products and Services. All these regulations focus on reducing the environmental impact per item; they do not focus on a reduction of production or consumption of textiles per se.

At the national level, various measures have been set out by Member States to address textile waste. An assessment of all current national and regional waste prevention programs has identified 40 specific measures (e.g., the reuse of textiles, the ban of destructing returned textile products). However, closing communication gaps between stakeholders, implementing ‘design for prevention’ and increasing transparency through traceability would accelerate textile waste prevention efforts.

Some programs include specific sub-chapters dealing with textile waste generation and linked environmental impacts. Nevertheless, only 6 out of 31 national and regional waste prevention programs include specific indicators on textile waste prevention. The majority of these indicators focus on the reuse of clothing and footwear. When it comes to targets,

it has been shown that none of the currently available waste prevention programs include quantified targets for textile waste prevention. This could be a major drawback in waste prevention efforts, as solid targets are a driver for comprehensive policies.

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