

The International Day of Zero Waste

Key messages

30 March 2025

The third annual **International Day of Zero Waste** will be observed on 30 March 2025. A zero-waste vision promotes sustainable production and consumption patterns and encourages a shift towards the use of lifecycle approaches. This ensures that no materials or resources go to waste, enabling society to recognize waste as a resource.

This year, for the first time, the day will be observed under the theme **"Towards zero waste in fashion and textiles"**. The fashion and textiles sector embody the zero-waste agenda – from the importance of bolstering waste management globally to the need for reducing waste generation, and promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Prevention, reduction, reuse, repurposing and recycling are critical to **#BeatWastePollution**. National and local governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, women, youth and other stakeholders from around the world all have an important role to play in achieving zero waste.

Promoting zero-waste initiatives can also help advance the goals and targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including **Sustainable Development Goal 11** on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and **Sustainable Development Goal 12** on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.

A global waste crisis is impacting the climate, ecosystems and human health

- Our planet is drowning in waste, fueled by unsustainable production and consumption.
- Globally, humanity generates between **2.1 billion** and **2.3 billion** tonnes of municipal solid waste each year. If current trends continue, we will generate 3.8 billion tonnes annually by 2050.
- The equivalent of a city the size of Paris is built **every week** to meet the demands of rapid urbanization, which is **one of the five** main drivers of environmental change. Most construction and demolition debris is sent to landfills, polluting air, soil and water.
- Waste management is the **third-largest emitter** of methane, contributing significantly to short-term global warming.

- **Poorly managed waste** – including electronic waste, textiles and end-of-life vehicles – can leach chemical pollutants into the soil, decreasing plant growth and productivity and contaminating water sources. It can also accumulate in the food chain and alter reproductive functions in wildlife and humans.

The fashion and textile sector's linear business model is fueling overproduction and overconsumption, contributing to the global waste pollution crisis

- Driven by one of the most powerful marketing engines on Earth, the business model for the fashion and textile industry is anchored in an aspirational narrative of newness, immediacy and disposability, resulting in mass overconsumption and waste.
- Textile production and consumption volumes are **rapidly rising and increasing** the impact of the sector, outpacing the progress made towards the sustainability of its products and practices.
- Each year, **92 million tonnes** of textile waste are generated worldwide — the equivalent of a **garbage truck full** of clothing being incinerated or dumped in landfills every second.
- **Eleven per cent** of plastic waste comes from clothing and textiles, making it third in line after packaging (40 per cent) and consumer goods (12 per cent).
- Only **8 per cent** of textiles fibres in 2023 were made from recycled sources, with less than 1 per cent of the total fibre market coming from textile-to-textile recycling. A lack of fibre recycling practices is estimated to equate to an annual material value loss of more than **US$100 billion.**

Humanity's current patterns of unsustainable textile production and consumption are contributing to the triple planetary crisis: the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature, land and biodiversity loss, and the crisis of pollution and waste

- The textile sector is not on target to reach any of its sustainability goals in relation to the triple planetary crisis. It is, for instance, expected to miss the 2030 emissions reduction targets outlined by the Paris Agreement by **50 per cent**.
- Every year the textile sector produces **2–8 per cent** of global greenhouse gas emissions. It uses **215 trillion litres** of water, the equivalent of **86 million** Olympic-sized swimming pools. And it contributes **9 per cent** of the microplastic pollution that flows into the ocean.
- Fashion is contributing significantly towards biodiversity loss by putting pressure on fragile ecosystems. By 2030, it is projected the fashion industry will use **35 per cent** more land for fibre production, the equivalent of 115 million hectares.
- Cotton cultivation uses **3 per cent** of the world's arable land, yet accounts for 5 per cent of all pesticides measured by total pesticides sales and **10 per cent** of insecticides.

- More than **15,000 chemicals** can be used during the textile manufacturing process, including detergents, flame retardants, stain repellents, softeners and carriers. Many of **these chemicals** are designed to remain with the article while others may be a carry-over from manufacturing. Some of these chemicals have persistent properties and accumulate in the environment for **decades**, causing impacts to the environment, and to human and animal health, even in remote places or far from where they were produced or used.
- **All fibres**, both synthetic and natural, have an impact throughout their life cycle. All textiles are subject to fiber fragmentation, contributing to environmental pollution by shedding **microfibres** during production, laundering, consumer wear, recycling and end of life.
- Made of fossil fuels such as crude oil and natural gas, synthetics are contributing directly and significantly to the triple planetary crisis. Synthetic fibers – including polyester, nylon, elastane and others – dominate the market, comprising approximately **67 per cent** of total production volumes in 2023. **Synthetics, and polyester** particularly, are widely considered responsible for the rise of throwaway clothing and the fast fashion business models that sit at the heart of this growth.

Current textile and waste management practices are disproportionately affecting the urban poor, rural communities and women

- As global trade of new textiles has increased, so has the volume of used textiles for the secondary market. But the quality of those items has decreased with the rise of cheap materials and processes designed for obsolescence, contributing to the waste crisis.
- Used textiles are often traded internationally to locations in the **Global South** that can lack the infrastructure to adequately enable their reuse, leading to them being discarded as waste, incinerated in low-income areas or added to informal landfills. Extending the use of textiles is already important in creating livelihoods in developing countries. For example, in Kenya, the used clothing trade employs **2 million people**, nearly 10 per cent of the country's labour force.

Upstream solutions and a zero-waste approach are critical to reducing pollution while producing economic value

- Bolstering waste management globally and embracing a life cycle approach would lead to an annual net gain of **US$108.5 billion** by 2050.
- New circular textile business models could generate **US$700 billion** in economic value by 2030. Reducing volumes of production and consumption in key markets, eliminating hazardous chemicals and microfibre shedding, and diverting existing textiles from landfills through reuse and recycling, is vital to the zero-waste agenda.
- Designing products to be reusable and durable not only decreases production intensity but – coupled with creating an enabling environment – can also encourage consumers to alter consumption patterns. Considering circularity during the design stage will lower resource use and waste generation.

- Doubling the number of times a garment is worn would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by **44 per cent.**
- Multiple policies and legislation, for example those that promote extended producer responsibility (EPR), can help reduce adverse environmental impacts.
- **EPR** is a market-based policy instrument (that can be either mandatory or voluntary) that can be used to promote environmental improvements throughout the life cycle of a product, including at the post-consumer stage. EPR schemes, if designed properly, can incentivize eco-design by lowering the tariffs paid for more environmentally responsible products. France, Hungary, Latvia and the Netherlands have already adopted an EPR policy covering textiles.

Governments, industry and consumers have an important role to play in achieving zero textile waste

Governments can:

- incentivize industry and citizens to shift towards circular business models, prioritizing reuse and reducing the volume of new textiles produced;
- regulate the use of harmful chemicals and materials in the textiles sector, and champion good practices that move towards circularity and green and sustainable chemistry;
- support research and development, and improve textile waste management systems to ensure adequate infrastructure is available to process textile waste;
- support access to information to inspire consumer's decisions; and
- join the UNEP-facilitated **Global Policy Dialogue on Textiles**, which governments called for at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

Cities can:

- lead by driving circularity and lifecycle approaches, fostering innovation in the textile sector, integrating solutions like clothes banks to promote reuse, ensure safe disposal practices and championing systemic change;
- protect vulnerable communities from exposure to pollution by enforcing urban environmental standards and improving waste management infrastructure, while integrating and supporting informal waste workers in the development of inclusive policies and city-led innovative solutions;
- drive policy solutions and local initiatives that promote sustainable consumption patterns, public engagement, and circular business services, such as repair and rental; and
- **join** UN-Habitat's Waste Wise Cities and African Clean Cities programmes, which assist cities in shifting towards circular economies.

Industry can:

- become more sustainable and circular;
- scale up revenue from circular business models and reduce production volumes in key markets to avoid overconsumption;
- design for durability, longevity, and recyclability, while also addressing fibre fragmentation throughout the life cycle of products;
- join extended producer responsibility schemes to ensure the durability and reusability of garments, promote material recovery and address the environmental impact of items; and
- redesign textile products and systems to eliminate hazardous chemicals, minimize pollution, and prioritize sustainable, recyclable and regenerative materials.

Consumers can:

- reduce overconsumption by purchasing only the items you need and prioritizing quality clothes that will last.
- stay away from fast fashion that mass produces at the cost of the environment and social inequality.
- embrace mindful practices, like repairing items, creating a core basic or 'capsule' wardrobe, redesigning old pieces, buying vintage and swapping clothing, to drive the shift toward a circular fashion and textile sector.

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