



POLITICAL
INTELLIGENCE

EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles

Overview & Stakeholder Reactions

APRIL 2022



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EU Strategy for Textiles

Overview

EU consumption of textiles has, on average, the **fourth highest impact on the environment and climate change**, is **the third highest area of consumption for water and land use**, and **fifth highest for the use of primary raw materials and greenhouse gas emissions**. Each European throws away 11kg of textiles every year. Around the world, **a truckload of textiles is landfilled or incinerated every single second**. Global textiles production almost doubled between 2000 and 2015, and the consumption of clothing and footwear is expected to further increase by 63% by 2030. However, as their impact on the environment continues to grow, the European Commission argues that urgent action is needed in order to address the production and consumption of textiles, and the European Green Deal itself identified textiles as a resource-intensive sector requiring focused action.

As part of the **Circular Economy package**, the Commission adopted a **comprehensive EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles** on 30 March 2022, which implements commitments made under the **European Green Deal**, the **new Circular Economy Action Plan** and the **Industrial Strategy**. In a **press statement** following the announcement, Commissioner Sinkevicius said: *“we see a growing appetite for change. Consumers want to benefit longer from high-quality textiles [...] And they want the waste problem solved. [...] [They are] tired of being part of the problem. They want to be part of the solution. And that’s what this package is helping them to be.”*

The **Strategy for sustainable and circular textiles** focuses on **sustainability, circularity, industrial competitiveness and innovation**

and aims to **create a greener, more competitive and more modern sector, more resistant to global shocks**. By looking at the entire lifecycle of textile products and proposing actions to change how textiles are produced and consumed, the Strategy aims to present a new harmonized approach and to achieve the following **goals**:

- **New sustainable product framework**, which includes: developing ecodesign measures to ensure that textile products are fit for circularity; ensuring the uptake of secondary raw materials; tackling the presence of hazardous chemicals; empowering business and private consumers to choose sustainable textiles and get easy access to reuse and repair services.
- **Better business and regulatory environment** for sustainable and circular textiles in the EU, in the context of which incentives and support will be provided to: product-as-service models; circular materials and production processes; international cooperation for increased transparency.
- **Guidance for separate textile waste collection**, with the goal to achieve high levels of separate textile waste collection by 2025.
- **Increased recycling and re-use** through innovation and other means, encouraging industrial applications and regulatory measures such as extended producer responsibility.

This Dods EU Political Intelligence report provides an outline of the strategy and some of the initial political and stakeholder reactions to it.

EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles

The **textile sector**, composed essentially of small and medium-size enterprises, **employs over 1.5 million people in over 160 000 companies**, with a turnover of €162 billion in 2019. In order to help the sector to **recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerate the green and digital transformations and enhance competitiveness and resilience**, the Strategy aims to boost the EU market for sustainable and circular textiles, including the market for textile reuse, address fast fashion and drive new business models. In light of the above, the following objectives and actions have to be pursued.

Objectives

- all textile products placed on the EU market will be **durable, repairable, and recyclable**, to a great extent made of recycled fibers, free from hazardous substances, produced in respect of social rights and the environment
- **“fast fashion is out of fashion”** and consumers will benefit longer from high quality affordable textiles
- **profitable re-use and repair services widely available**
- a **competitive, resilient and innovative sector** with producers taking responsibility for their products along the value chain with sufficient capacities for recycling and minimal incineration and landfilling

Actions

The Strategy proposes actions for the **entire lifecycle of textiles products, while supporting the ecosystem in the green and digital transitions**. It addresses the way textiles are designed and consumed, including by looking also at sustainable technological solutions and innovative business models. Some of the measures include:

- New **design requirements for textiles** under the **Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation**, setting mandatory minimums for the inclusion of recycled fibers in textiles, making them longer-lasting, and easier to repair and recycle. The proposal would also ban the destruction of unsold products under certain conditions.
- **Clearer information on textiles** and a **Digital Product Passport** based on mandatory information requirements on circularity and other key environmental aspects.
- Tight controls on **greenwashing**, with stricter rules to protect consumers and direct links to the upcoming Green Claims Initiative.
- Action to address **the unintentional release of microplastics from textiles**. In addition to product design, measures will target manufacturing processes, pre-washing at industrial manufacturing plants, labelling and the promotion of innovative materials.

- **Harmonised EU rules on extended producer responsibility for textiles**, and **economic incentives** to make products more sustainable (“eco- modulation of fees”), as part of the revision of the Waste Framework Directive in 2023.
- Support to **research, innovation and investments** and to the development of the skills needed for the green and digital transitions.
- Addressing the challenges related to **halting the export of textile waste**.
- The co-creation of a **Transition Pathway** to set out concrete steps on how to achieve the 2030 goals set by the Textiles Strategy.

Aspects covered

As regards **fast fashion**, the Strategy **addresses both the demand and the supply side** challenges created by the consumption of low-cost and low-quality apparels. **For producers, mandatory design requirements for textiles** and greater reliance on extended producer responsibility schemes will help extend the lifetime of clothing. **On the consumer side**, the Strategy will encourage a shift towards **quality, durability, longer use, repair and reuse**.

As regards **microplastics**, textiles made of synthetic fibers are one of the main sources of unintentional release of microplastics into the environment. This will be addressed by both the binding design requirements to be introduced under the Ecodesign Regulation for Sustainable Products, and the Commission initiative to address the unintentional release of microplastics in the environment in the second half of 2022.

As regards the **export of textile waste**, the Commission **proposal for new EU rules on waste shipments** will only allow the export of textile waste to non-OECD countries under certain conditions. Attention will also be paid **to increasing transparency and sustainability in global trade** in textile waste and used textiles.

As regards the **social aspects of the textiles industry**, the Strategy will **promote greener and fairer value chains across borders** and focus on the issue of **gender equality**. In parallel, the proposal for a **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive** introduces a corporate sustainability due diligence duty for very large companies to address negative impacts on human rights and the environment, both in their own operations and in their global value chains.

As regards **international cooperation**, around 73% of the textiles consumed in Europe are produced in and imported from third countries; in 2019, the EU was one of the largest global importers of clothing with a combined value of €80 billion. As such, the Commission will engage with international partners to promote cooperation and initiatives that support sustainable textile value chains and sustainable fashion. Also, further progress will be pursued in the context of the **Global Alliance for Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency** and the UN Environment Assembly.

Next steps

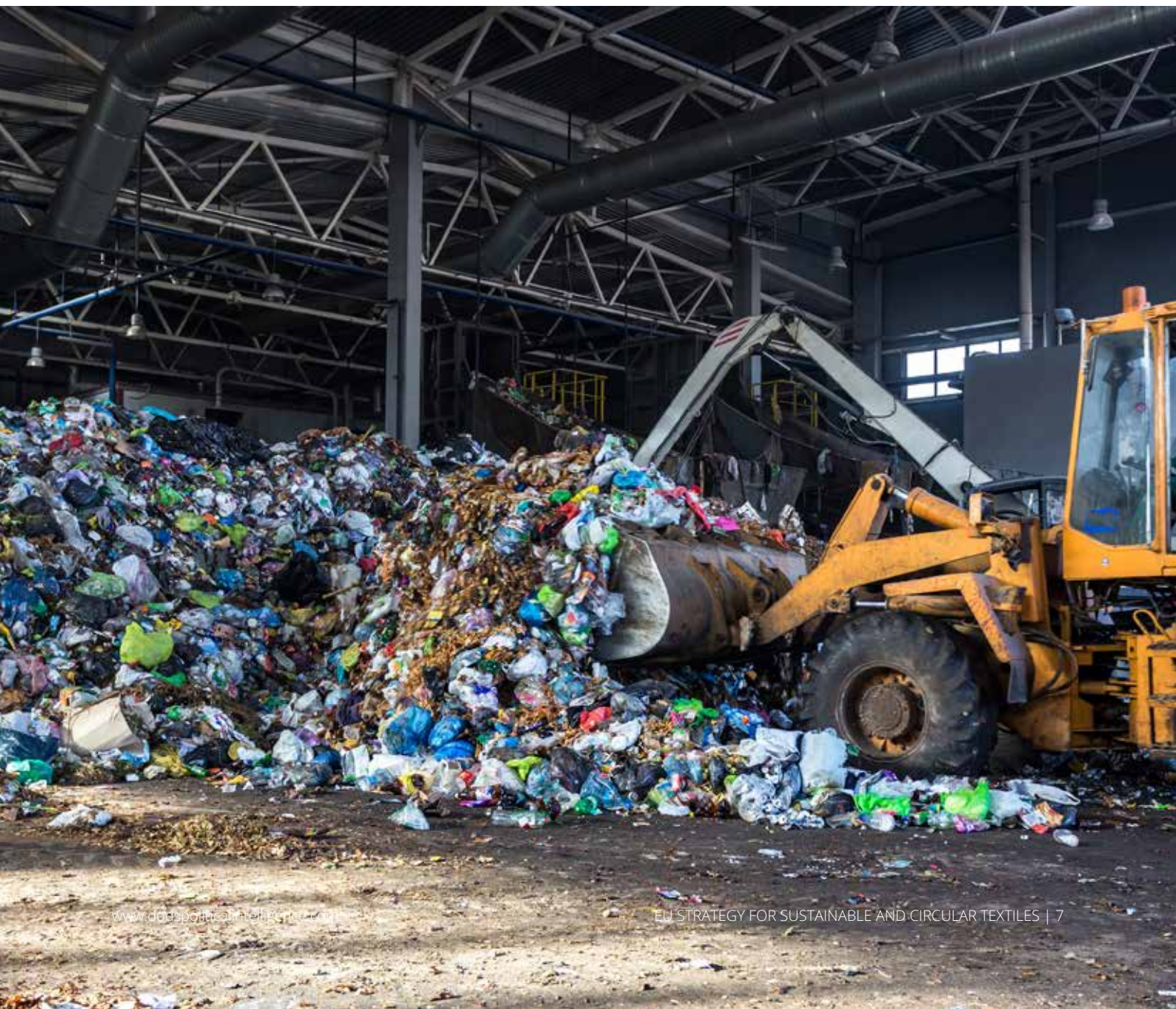
In an **annex** to the Communication, the Commission published the timetable for key actions. Drawing on the experience of the pandemic, targeted efforts are required to help the sector **recover** from the sudden drops in demand, disruptions of value chains and price increases, **be more resilient** to global competition and

future shocks and **speed up the twin transition**. Additionally, the consequences of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine in terms of increased energy and gas prices, and impacts on the export of textiles, represents another reminder of the **vulnerabilities of the textiles ecosystem**.

The Commission proposed the co-creation of a **transition pathway for the textiles ecosystem**. This **inclusive process** will detail key actions to be taken and set targets and commitments. Indicators will be used to **assess and monitor performance over time**, impacts on the competitiveness of European companies and possible innovation needs and investment gaps.

To initiate the co-creation process, the Commission prepared a **staff working document**. More in detail, all interested parties and in particular SMEs, public authorities, social partners and research organisations are invited to express their views on how to realise the transition and boost resilience. Relevant feedback can be provided through an **online survey**, that will run until 15 May 2022, and follow up workshops are planned to take place in June and July 2022.

A concluding workshop is planned to be organised in September 2022 so to finalise the **Textiles Ecosystem Transition pathway**, whose publication is expected by the end of 2022.



Stakeholder Reactions

The EU Textile Strategy was broadly well received by industry and civil society organisations.

According to Green **MEP Anna Cavazzini** the Strategy is a positive step towards developing binding product-specific eco-design requirements for textiles to increase durability, reusability, reparability, fibre-to-fibre recyclability as well as mandatory recycled fibre content. However, she also regretted the lack of “legislative and binding measures to incentivize an absolute reduction in the material use,” for example with “a tax on virgin materials and environmental impact”.

The Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking **CBE JU** expressed support towards the strategy and took the opportunity to showcase the many CBE JU-funded projects have been bringing to the market innovative bio-based textiles that increase the industry’s environmental sustainability.

The European association representing the paper industry, **Cepi**, supported the proposal and noted in a press release that forest fibre could be the future of Europe’s textile industry. Jori Ringman, Director General said: “Europe has the potential to become the global hub for new sustainable textile industry. Sourced, manufactured and recycled in Europe, with European technology, forest-based textiles can carry the potential of rolling out a global renaissance of sustainable fashion. Anything you can do from fossil raw material you can also do from wood in a way that is better for the planet, including sustainable textiles.”

The Environmental Coalition on Standards - **ECOS**, said that the proposal makes important steps towards reforming the sector and was pleased to see the plans for a revision of the Textile Labelling

Regulation, which would include mandatory disclosure of ‘made in’ claims hopefully including clear criteria in the future. They cautioned however that the success of the framework will depend on the ambition of product requirements and on other supporting legally binding measures.

EuroCommerce fully supported the objectives of the strategy and are ready to work with the Commission in achieving these. They emphasised the negative effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the fashion and textile industry in addition to the ongoing increase of energy in Europe. For this reason, they called on the Commission to work closely with the supply chain to ensure the “recovery of the textiles ecosystem in a new, sustainable form.” Moreover, they suggest scaling up innovative technologies and processes, increase public and private investments in recycling technologies and industrial waste sorting as well as ensuring the harmonisation with all related EU policies.

FEAD, the European Federation of Waste Management, supported the Strategy including the introduction of binding product specific eco-design requirements to increase textiles performance as well as mandatory recycled fibre content. They called to ensure significant efforts in research, investments in mandatory recycled content as well as mandatory criteria for green public procurement. They also welcomed the introduction of extended producer responsibility (EPR) requirements with eco-modulation of fees as part of the forthcoming revision of the Waste Framework Directive in 2023. They noted that textile-to-textile recycling is a key strategy for saving resources in this sector which will require developing a market and qualitative initial products are essential to end fast fashion.

The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)** welcomed the “clear plans for binding rules on

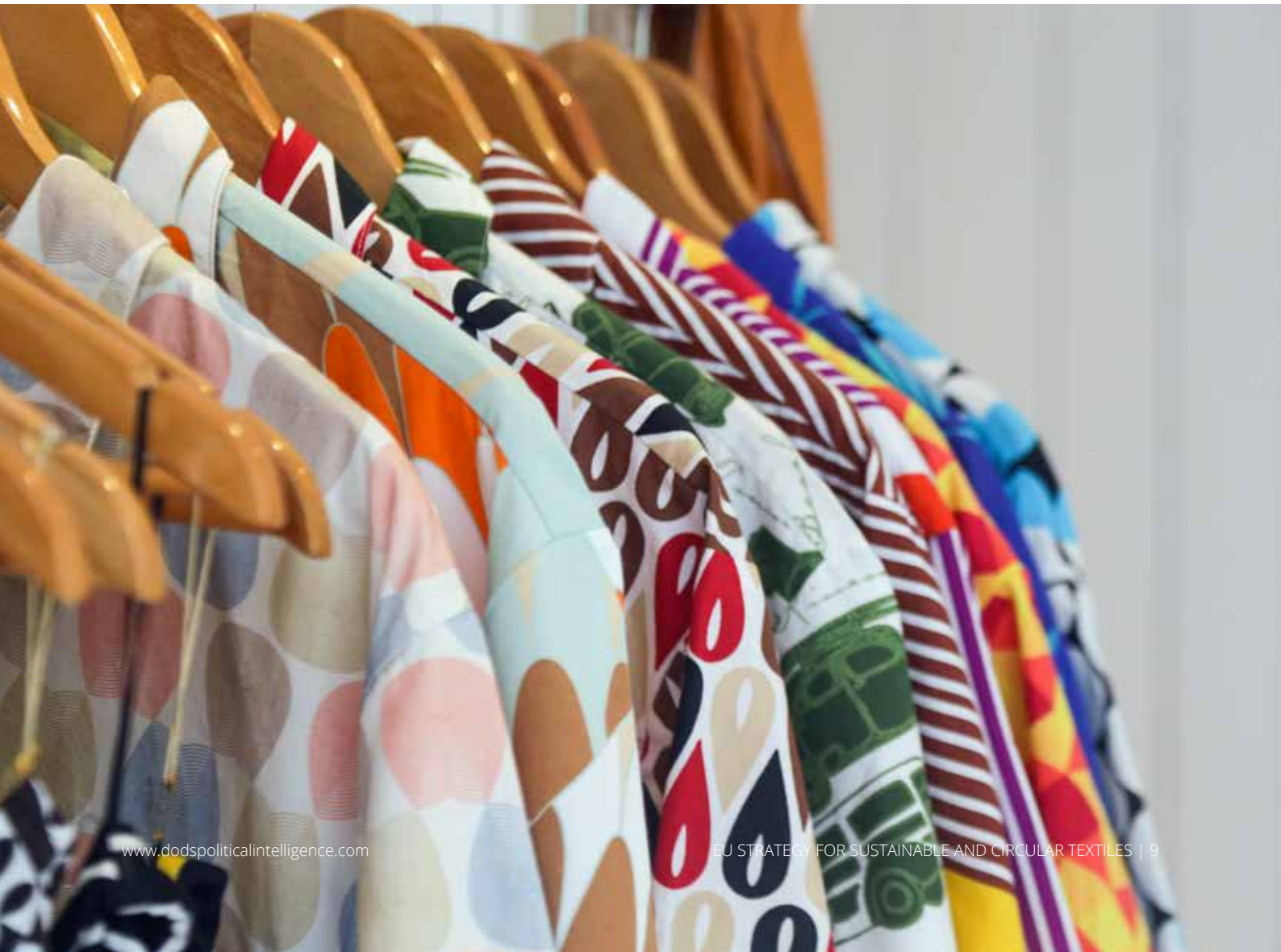
product design, targets for more reused textile products, and for more weight on producers to bear the end-of-life costs of textile waste.” However, the EEB called to ensure that the actions set out in this strategy are translated into real industrial accountability for companies, especially with regards to the destruction of goods and workers rights.

Responding to the strategy, **EURATEX**, the organisation representing the textile industry in Brussels, welcomed the “game-changing provisions on Digital Product Passport, Eco-Design, SMEs and Green Public Procurement” but called for a smart and realistic implementation in order to avoid a “complete collapse of the European textile value chain under the burden of restrictions, requirements, costs and unlevel playing field”. They also note there are many questions that need to be

addressed, particularly concerning the transition pathways.

A coalition of civil society groups have welcomed the ambition but called for a strategy that takes a comprehensive approach by tackling the sector’s environmental and social problems together. Trades union federation **IndustriAll** expressed disappointment concerning the lack of the “social element” in the Strategy and called for a just transition for the textile sector.

Additionally, in reaction to the Strategy, **RREUSE** noted that they are pleased with the proposals but warned that the Commission will have to pay attention not to develop solutions that exclude consumers, re-use social enterprises and independent repairers.



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