

How recyclable

is the textiles industry?

How are unwanted clothing and textiles collected in Switzerland?

Textiles are classified as residential waste. The cantonal authorities are responsible for ensuring it is disposed of correctly. As a rule, they assign the disposal of textiles to the municipal authorities, who in turn entrust the task to collection organisations such as Texaid or Tell-Text.

12% are treated as waste (not only textiles) and are incinerated.

60% are sent abroad where they are sold as second-hand goods.

28% are processed into cleaning rags and insulation materials.

AHA!

It is also often the case that clothing and textiles that are directly returned to clothes shops are passed on to collection organisations for further processing.



AHA!

If the entire quantity of collected clothing and textiles (around 160 tonnes) were to be transported abroad, four 40-tonne heavy goods vehicles would be required every day.

160t

Due to the high costs of collection, organisations sort the goods abroad, where they decide which items are suitable for resale on the second-hand market, and which ones are to be down-cycled or incinerated.

What do the textile collection organisations do with the collected items?

Demand for second-hand goods is not only on the rise in Switzerland.

Manufacturing companies are also discovering this business model. The resale of used clothing is currently the fastest growing textiles market. In 2024, it grew by 15 percent and attained a value of 227 billion US dollars. This figure is expected to increase to 367 billion in 2029.

If discarded clothes and textiles are still in good condition, they can be sold as second-hand goods. This means their useful life can be prolonged. But sooner or later, even these items reach the end of their lifecycle.

Who finances the disposal of clothing and textiles?

60k tonnes

In Switzerland, 60,000 tonnes of used clothing end up in the hands of textile collection organisations each year. It is estimated that a further 40,000 tonnes of textiles are disposed of as waste.

In Switzerland, no advance contribution towards the recycling of clothing and textiles is required, such as that which is collected on electronic goods and PET bottles. The collection organisations recover their costs via sales on the second-hand market.

19 kilograms

Quantity of new items of clothing purchased per person each year in the EU. In Switzerland the equivalent figure is approx. 15 kilograms.

How many clothes and textiles are purchased each year?

What is the proportion of sales of **fast fashion** items versus the overall quantity of purchased clothing?

50%

It is estimated that around 50% of the items of clothing in wardrobes in European households are no longer worn one year later.

How much do people spend each year on clothing and textiles?

CHF 136

Swiss consumers are among the world's biggest spenders when it comes to the purchase of clothing and textiles. In 2022, the average amount spent per person on clothing per month was around **136 Swiss francs** (1.38% of gross income). While the value of purchased clothing and textiles continues to fall, the quantity is increasing sharply. The purchase prices of clothing and textiles are now around four times lower than they were 20 years ago.

What do the terms "fast fashion" and "ultra fast fashion" refer to?

See reverse side for details.



AHA!

First there was fast fashion, and now there is ultra fast fashion. Clothing is being produced even faster and cheaper. And demand for these items is high: in Switzerland alone, major players such as Shein, Temu and Ali Express recorded sales in the clothing and footwear segment amounting to 562 million Swiss francs in 2024.

Various Swiss companies have become members of Fabric Loop,

an alliance that aims to develop a standardised circular system for textiles. Discarded textiles are retained in Switzerland as a raw material and processed into new fibres for new textiles. For further information, please refer to "Pioneering work" or see reverse side.

Various local initiatives have also been launched, such as re-use and repair services, and acceptance of returned textiles for recycling. For further information, please visit our website swisstextiles.ch

Swiss companies are primarily performing pioneering work in the fields of research, development of new fibres, the use of non-hazardous chemicals for fabrics, plastic-free textiles, and development of technologies for recycling. For further information, please see the reverse side or visit our website swisstextiles.ch

What steps are Swiss companies taking to promote a global recyclable textiles industry?

As a textiles company, how can we contribute towards a circular economy?

Which is the most commonly used material for the production of textiles throughout the world?

The majority of textiles are produced using artificial fibres.

The production of these fibres is constantly increasing.

How many clothes and textiles does the global textiles industry produce each year?

150 billion

150 billion items of clothing/textiles are produced throughout the world each year. 25% of these (or more than 35 billion) never make it to a sales point.

124 million tonnes of fibres (both natural and artificial) were produced in 2023 ...

this is expected to rise to **135 million** in 2025 ...

... and to **160 million** in 2030.

Why are so few products made using recycled material?

The EU is currently preparing a comprehensive regulation according to which all textiles brought onto the market **2030** will have to be recyclable by 2030. See the reverse side for further information.

The proportion of high quality material on the market is still very low. Much of the material is composed of mixed fabrics, for which recycling technologies barely exist. The preparation of these materials for recycling (collection, sorting, separation of components, shredding) is labour intensive and expensive.



AHA!

In 2023, 73% of all fibres were produced from artificial sources. Natural fibres such as cotton and wool accounted for 26%, while the proportion of recycled fibres was slightly below 1%.

DISPOSAL

This is what happens to clothing and textiles when they are no longer needed.

CONSUMPTION

People have never before been able to purchase so many items of clothing and textiles for so little money as they can today.

PIONEERING WORK

Swiss companies are carrying out groundbreaking work in support of a recyclable textiles industry.

Textiles boom: global production reaches record level.

PRODUCTION

The choice of material is a decisive factor.

If products are to be transferred for recycling at the end of their useful life, they have to be separated and sorted. In addition, stitches, labels, buttons, etc., have to be removed. This makes the fibre-to-fibre process complex. The fewer different materials a product contains, the easier the recycling process.

There are various ways in which products can be made recyclable.

Here, design is the starting point.



AHA!

There are currently no uniform design requirements for textiles aimed at prolonging their useful life, and making them easier to repair or recycle. It is only if recyclability is taken into account at the design stage that the textiles industry can become circular.

How many textiles and items of clothing are produced and sold?

How many items are discarded and what happens to them?

Is it as easy to recycle textiles as it is to recycle PET bottles?

And who pays for their recycling?

Why is it that not more textiles are produced from recycled material?

We offer some answers.

Making Textiles Recyclable

The consumption of textiles, and especially clothing, has increased by almost 50% in the past few decades. And if consumption increases, so does production. What to do with textiles when they have reached the end of their useful life and how they can be recycled as raw materials is something that is frequently discussed. This may sound simple, but it is in fact a complex matter. This flyer contains important information, facts and findings, and in it we show how, with their innovative solutions, Swiss companies are making a contribution towards a circular textiles industry throughout the world.

We hope you will find our flyer interesting and informative.

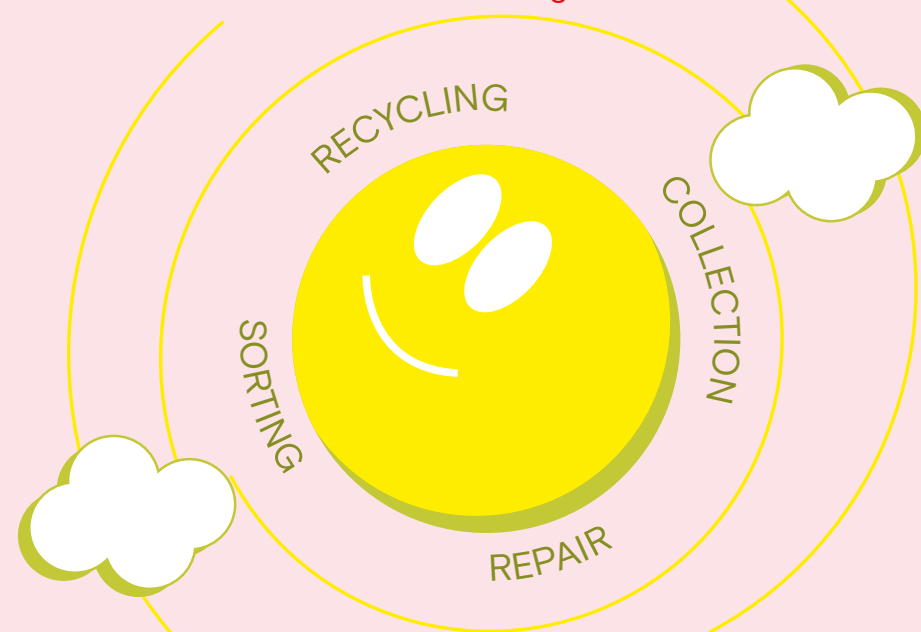
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Here's how the textiles industry can be made recyclable

We're showing the way

Making the textiles industry recyclable is a complex undertaking, especially because textiles often consist of a variety of fibres. Here, for example, a textile may be produced from a mixture of natural fibres such as wool, and artificial fibres such as polyester. The greater the quantity of different fibres in a given product, the more complex the process of separating them in order to produce a new textile. The fact that discarded textiles are an important raw material is meanwhile widely acknowledged. Alongside political initiatives, the industry itself is endeavouring to expedite recyclability in Switzerland and throughout the world.



Industry solution for a standardised system

In November 2024, Fabric Loop was established on the initiative of Swiss Textiles – the industry association for Swiss textiles companies. A variety of Swiss textiles companies have joined this alliance, the aim of which is to develop an industry solution based on the principle of extended producer responsibility. The objective here is to create a standardised circular system so that the processes of collection, sorting, repair and recycling of clothes, home textiles, textile waste, etc, can be organised centrally. In this way, textile resources can also be increasingly retained in Switzerland and cycles can thus be closed. This requires an advance recycling fee so that the necessary infrastructure, technologies and services can be financed. **Further information:** fabric-loop.ch

FABRIC LOOP



This is what's in store for us at the political level

The EU wants to make the textiles industry recyclable.

As part of the EU's textiles strategy, the European Commission is currently taking steps to strengthen the regulation of the market. The aim is for the useful life of textiles to be prolonged, more textiles to be repaired, and the degree of recyclability to be improved. Textiles are to become free from hazardous substances and their production is to take account of social rights and protection of the environment. This means that stronger requirements will apply for manufacturers and distributors, who will also be responsible for accepting returns and disposing of textiles. Some of the new regulations are to enter into effect already in 2030.

Based on the slogan,

“Fast Fashion* is out of Fashion”

the EU is planning to implement comprehensive changes. These include:



Specification of design requirements so that the useful life of textiles can be prolonged, and textiles can be repaired and recycled more easily, plus introduction of requirements relating to the minimum proportion of recyclable material in a given product.



Prevention of the unintended release of micro-plastics from synthetic textiles.



From 2026, prohibition of the destruction of unsold goods.



Addressing the problem of green washing so that consumers can be more comprehensively informed.



Extended producer responsibility: textiles companies throughout the EU will be required to pay contributions towards a circular system.

Further innovative examples at swisstextiles.ch

Here we present a few examples of innovative solutions created by Swiss companies, which are actively shaping a recyclable future of the textiles industry:



The recycling machine developed by **Sântis Textiles** transforms discarded cotton clothing and textiles into new high-quality cotton fibres. These machines are already being used by major international brands, for example for the purpose of producing new jeans from discarded clothing.



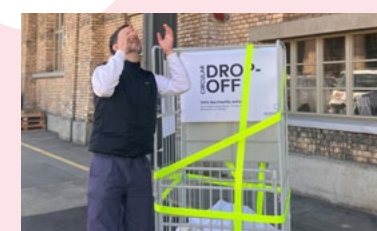
saentis-textiles.com



climatex.com



Circular Drop Off



The sustainable fashion brand, **Neumühle**, collects white textiles made of 100% cotton at the Werkstatt Zurich site. The textiles must be entirely free of artificial fibres such as elastane, and must also be unprinted. Single-source textile waste is easier to recycle. The goal here is to promote awareness of circular design and produce new textiles from discarded items.



Circular down to the last fibre – a new textiles concept

CLIMATEX is developing circular technologies and products that provide textiles with a new lease of life. From patented weaving techniques, to the single-source separation of natural and artificial fibres, through to disintegrating sewing thread which simplifies the recycling of even complex stitched textiles, CLIMATEX is conceiving a new circular future for textiles.

The impending EU regulations are a matter of considerable concern for Swiss textiles companies, all of whom are closely linked with the economy in the EU. There are still many uncertainties relating to the practical implementation of the proposed regulations, as well as various delays.

What's happening in Switzerland?

The federal government has recognised that there is a clear need for action with regard to the circular economy. The 2024 revision of the Federal Environmental Protection Act specified a new basis for enforcing extended producer responsibility in Switzerland. In a report published in mid-April 2025 the Federal Council referred to possible new legal requirements: producers and importers from foreign online platforms could be required to pay an advance recycling fee to an industry association. This would provide the developing industry solution, Fabric Loop, with strong political support. Swiss Textiles regularly informs its members about developments at the political level. Further information: swisstextiles.ch

*What does the term “fast fashion” mean?

There is no precise definition of the terms “fast fashion” and “ultra fast fashion”, but we nonetheless would like to briefly explain them: “Fast fashion” refers to a business model in the clothing industry. Manufacturers produce collections quickly, in line with trends, and market them at low prices. Their profit is based on quantity instead of sales prices. “Ultra fast fashion” is the latest trend: here, items of clothing are produced and brought onto the market even more quickly and cheaply. Trendy collections are designed at even shorter intervals and sold at low prices. In a survey carried out by the Boston Consulting Group, almost half the 18- to 29-year-old respondents stated that they buy ultra fast fashion. And demand for ultra fast fashion is also increasing sharply in Switzerland. Major international players such as Shein, Temu and Ali Express generated sales in Switzerland in the clothing and footwear segments totalling 562 million Swiss francs in 2024. Based on the assumption that a t-shirt costs around five Swiss francs on average, this translates to sales of 112.4 million t-shirts!

An ecological alternative

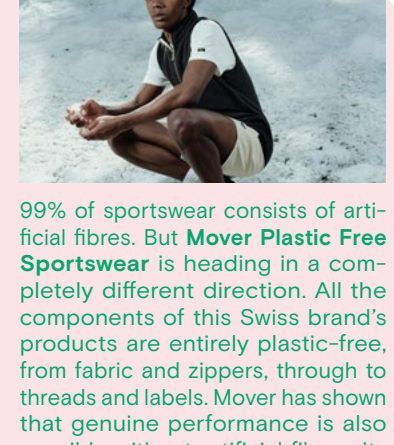
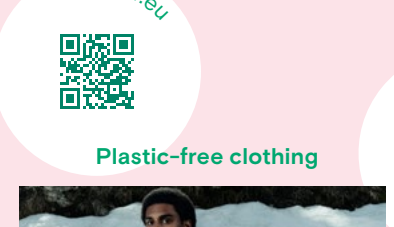


Swiss company **OceanSafe** has developed a synthetic fibre that is more than 93% biodegradable in marine environments within 99 days, and can be easily depolymerised. This fibre offers an ecological alternative to conventional polyester.



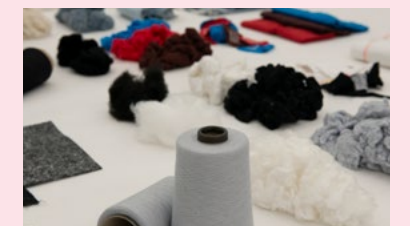
oceansafe.co

Plastic-free clothing



99% of sportswear consists of artificial fibres. But **Mover Plastic Free Sportswear** is heading in a completely different direction. All the components of this Swiss brand's products are entirely plastic-free, from fabric and zippers, through to threads and labels. Mover has shown that genuine performance is also possible without artificial fibres. Its functional outdoor clothing consists entirely of natural materials, is breathable and robust, and assures an uncompromising performance. Mover is the first brand to market a technical range of clothing made entirely of natural fibres.

Textiles research



Under the title, “**CircleUp Textiles**”, the Products and Textiles Research Group of Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Design, Film and Art, is examining options and potential forms of support for the creation of circular added value of textiles. The focus here is on the implementation of circularity at the initial design stage, thus extending the useful life of a given product. In cooperation with industry partners, circular pilot collections in the fields of fashion and home textiles are being brought onto the market.

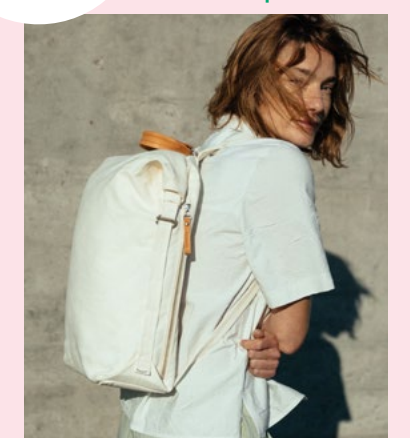


bananatex.info



hsluch

Plants instead of plastic



Bananatex® was developed by the Swiss bag brand **QWSTION**. It is a robust, waterproof and fully biodegradable textile produced from the fibres of regenerative banana plants, and is a genuine alternative to plastic.

Here's
what you
can do!

As a textiles company

become a **member of Swiss Textiles**. We inform and advise our members about forthcoming regulations, encourage exchanges of experience and support research projects. **Become a member of our network – Swiss Textiles: swisstextiles.ch/members**

We are also co-founders of **Fabric Loop**, an industry solution that is currently working on a prepaid recycling fee. **Participate in Fabric Loop: fabric-loop.ch**

Furthermore, Swiss Textiles is the sponsoring organisation of the national sustainable textiles programme, **Sustainable Textiles Switzerland 2030**, which sets sustainability goals for the entire industry. **Sign up to these goals: sts2030.ch**

As a consumer:

“Reflect your style” is an initiative of **Sustainable Textiles Switzerland 2030**. Here you will find suggestions as to how you can make your clothing purchases (more) sustainable: **reflectyourstyle.ch**

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