

DISCOVER THE TRUTHS ABOUT THE USED CLOTHING INDUSTRY

THE NEWS:

A variety of associations involved in the used clothing trade around the world have joined forces to dispel myths about the industry. The truth is that the used clothing industry is gaining momentum with tremendous environmental, social, and economic benefits. The industry is working towards a circular economy by offering sustainable solutions for used textiles that will benefit everyone and help to reduce the major environmental impacts caused by the global fashion industry.

THE FACTS:

It is crucial to understand the used clothing supply chain to fully understand what happens to used textiles. There is a common misconception that secondhand clothing exported to developing countries partially ends up being discarded right away. The fact is clothing not sold directly in the market simply gets passed down the supply chain and ends up selling in other smaller markets throughout the region. If you follow simple rationale, it is easy to understand that no profitable business will spend money on packing, shipping, and distributing a product only to have it end up in a landfill. The used clothing industry is growing right now in response to the increasing demand for affordable products and environmentally conscious consumers. In many cases, the used garments are also higher quality and last longer than cheaper new products. This downstream effort is a win-win situation for people looking for a place to re-use their clothing and for consumers searching for good value.

In the United States, Jackie King, Executive Director of Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Assoc. (SMART), explained, "Textile re-use and recycling is the solution, not the problem. Secondhand clothing exported to countries is sorted and graded for customer needs or preferences. Suppliers do not ship waste; it is not cost-effective. Customers demand quality clothing for resale, not waste; the semantics of 'waste' really means what they couldn't sell. The reality is if clothing doesn't sell, it is often shipped to other worldwide markets for resale or recycling – not thrown away."

Similar sentiments are heard from Martin Böschen, President of the Textile Division of the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR). Böschen elaborates, "Due to high transport and import costs, it doesn't make sense for importers to import secondhand textiles which are not suitable for the local market. Discarding or recycling those textiles in the U.S. or Europe would be cheaper than sending them to Africa. Therefore, the hypothesis that a large fraction of the imported textiles goes directly to landfill is highly questionable."

In the European Commission, as part of the waste framework directive, a specific hierarchy is defined. It places 'preparing for re-use' above recycling. In other words, the EU already recognizes the importance of textile re-use from a global perspective. In fact, all EU member states are required to have installed a separate collection for used textile by 2025.



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/topics/waste-and-recycling/waste-framework-directive_en

THE PROOF:

On March 5th, 2021, the Institute of Economic Affairs in Kenya released an extensive study on the used clothing industry and its contributions to the Kenyan economy. Kenya is an excellent example of the impact secondhand clothes can have on the economy. Kenya is one of the largest importers of used clothing in Africa.

Key Research Findings:

- The used clothing textile industry is crucial to Kenya's economy as **two million people are directly employed**. In addition, thousands of other jobs are created and supported in ancillary sectors, like the transportation industry.
- Based on the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) Manpower Survey, mitumba traders fall under the secondhand clothes and footwear industry and make up an estimated **10% of the extended labor force**, or two million people. Therefore, the secondhand clothing industry improves standards of living for two million people and **reduces poverty levels**. The impact is significant since the Wellbeing Report of 2018 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics) states that 36% of the Kenyan population lives below poverty.

Source: <https://ieakenya.or.ke/download/the-state-of-second-hand-clothes-and-footwear-trade-in-kenya/>

The used clothing industry is simply the supplier responding to the demands of Kenyan consumers. Consumers are seeking good value clothing on limited budgets. The report states, "The typical income earner in Kenya spends about 40% of monthly earnings to procure food alone. The rest of the available income is spent on shelter, transportation, education, health, and other needs". Therefore, **91.5% of households in Kenya buy secondhand clothes**.

- It is a significant source of government revenues. Kenya imported 185,000 metric tons of secondhand clothing in 2019 equivalent to an approximate 8,000 containers. As a result: businesses also pay license fees to national and local governments, which translates into millions of dollars to support the economy.
- In Kenya's used clothing sector, many businesses are operated by women, which helps **promote gender equality**.

- The environmental benefits of the used clothing trade are clear: For every 100 used garments purchased, it means 60-85 new garments are displaced. In turn, that means there is a **significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions** and the use of toxins which would have been caused by the production of new textiles.

The extreme benefits of the used clothing industry which are impacting Kenya can have the same effect globally. The Chief Executive Officer at the United Kingdom's Textile Recycling Association, Alan Wheeler, explains it best: "The used clothing industry will continue to underpin the viability of circular business models for decades to come and supplying used clothing to markets & people wherever they are in the world will be fundamental to achieving the maximum environmental benefits as well as social and economic benefits."

MOVING FORWARD:

As a collective group of used clothing and textile associations from various countries, we want to set the record straight and strongly encourage the world to consume used clothing and textiles. The used clothing industry has a far-reaching and positive social, economic, and environmental impact. Even the fashion industry is slowly joining the recycled trend's movement. Other countries should also follow the trends now being set in African countries where 're-use' is more the norm. We should be advancing towards the same dream: for a circular economy which is essential from a global perspective.

We issue one final challenge, please 'share' this factually correct information and let it circulate on the web. We hope it will correct any erroneous information about the worldwide benefits of second-hand clothing, from where it is collected to where it is reused.

Signed,

*The Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART),
The European Recycling Industries' Confederation (EuRIC) – Textiles
Textile Recycling Association (TRA)
Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) – Textile Division*

CONTACTS: (available for interviews)

United States:

Jackie King,
Executive Director
Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Assoc. (SMART)
Tel: 1.443.640.1050 X105 / c. 1.410.920.6681
jking@misp-amc.com

United Kingdom

Alan Wheeler
CEO
Textile Recycling Association
Tel: 0345 459 8276
info@textile-recycling.org.uk

European Union:

Mariska Boer

President of the Textile division at European Recycling Industries' Confederation (EuRIC Textiles)

Tel.: +31 611 60 45 40

mariska@boergroup.eu

International/Worldwide

Martin Bösch

President of the Textile division at Bureau of International Recycling (BIR)

Tel.: +41 76 363 54 44

m.boeschen@texaid.ch

List of clothing and textiles that can be recycled:

https://www.smartasn.org/SMARTASN/assets/File/resources/List_of_recyclable_textiles.pdf