

London's fashion footprint

London's response to the report

Introduction to the research

The fashion industry is the UK's largest creative industry¹, but it comes with a huge environmental price. Fashion accounts for around 10% of global emissions — more than aviation and shipping combined². The industry consumes 98 million tonnes of non-renewable resources every year³, and the European Environment Agency reports that it is the fourth highest industry in terms of usage of raw materials⁴. Without significant intervention, these impacts are expected to compound as a result of increasing levels of consumption, putting the industry on track to use over a quarter of the world's carbon budget by 2050⁵.

Thanks to funding through the UKRI Circular Economy Hub (CE-Hub) Flexible Fund, ReLondon worked with University College London, with support from Circle Economy, to trace the flows of clothing across London's fashion supply chain and assess the impact that Londoners' fashion habits have on damaging carbon emissions.

Two levers were identified that have the ability to support the transition towards a circular and low carbon fashion supply chain. These are:

1. shift to lower emission fibres
2. extend the life of existing clothing

What the report shows is that if the sector were to meet the ambitious scenarios against each of the two levers (which are based on what might be achieved in line with wider industry commitments) there is the **potential to reduce the carbon emissions associated with London's fashion supply chain by 34%**.

¹ British Council (2016). The power of fashion. Sourced from: [British Council's website](#).

² Note that this aligns with the rate used by the European Parliament and World Bank. Sourced from: the [European Parliament's website](#) and the [World Bank's website](#).

³ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017). A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning fashion's future. Sourced from: [Ellen MacArthur Foundation's website](#).

⁴ European Environment Agency (2019). Textiles in Europe's circular economy. Sourced from: [EEA's website](#).

⁵ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017). A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning fashion's future. Sourced from: [Ellen MacArthur Foundation's website](#).

Overall, this research has made it very clear that actions to reduce Londoners' demand for new clothing and keep clothes in circulation for longer, to promote circular business models and shift towards lower emission fibres, and to improve reuse and recycling infrastructure are all needed to lower emissions, not only within the city but across the entire fashion supply chain. However, without greater transparency, data and alignment across the whole industry, it will be extremely difficult to transition to a low carbon circular economy for clothes, both in London and globally.

The report can be downloaded [here](#), and a summary of the key findings are outlined below.

What does the evidence tell us?

- In 2019, London acquired 154,600 tonnes of 'new' clothing and got rid of 142,700 tonnes. This equates to a **huge 48 items of new clothing on average being acquired per person per year**. An overwhelming 92% of clothing was made elsewhere and imported into the city.
- Londoners' consumption of clothing resulted in the production of 2,009,300 tonnes CO₂eq, around **0.23 tonnes CO₂eq per person**.
- An overwhelming **87% of the total consumption-based emissions** produced by London's fashion supply chain are linked to imports. This is in significant contrast to the 12% of emissions that are associated with clothing that is manufactured within London. The remaining 1% comes from emissions linked to post-consumer waste management.
- The most **common fibre types** in the clothing consumed by Londoners are synthetic fibres (54%) and cotton fibres (43%).
- Of the 142,700 tonnes of clothing discarded by Londoners in 2019 (**around 44 items of clothing per person**), over 40% ended up in the waste bin where 90% is lost to energy from waste/incineration and 10% goes to landfill.
- The **remaining 60% is collected by charities, local authorities and textile merchants** who play a crucial role in diverting clothing from end-of-use waste treatment. In spite of at least 10% being reused within London, around two-thirds are exported overseas either due to a lack of quality, lack of domestic demand, or excess volume. The rest is discarded or downcycled due to damage and contamination.

- **Fast fashion poses a significant challenge for charities** as it has resulted in an increase in the volume of clothing donated, but a decrease in its quality and condition. According to the charities involved in this research, fast fashion donations have very little resale value.
- If actions are taken to reduce Londoners' demand for new clothing, promote circular business models and shift towards lower emission fibres, our **ambitious scenarios have the potential to reduce the carbon emissions associated with London's fashion supply chain by 34%**. The main bulk of these emissions savings come from reducing the amount of new clothes being bought through extending the life of existing clothing.

A commitment to explore measures to reduce fashion-related consumption-based emissions

The Mayor of London recognises the circular economy as a central component of meeting the ambitions set out in the [London Environment Strategy](#) and identified textiles as one of its priority focus areas due to its high carbon footprint and material contribution to London's municipal waste stream.

London Councils' One World Living programme, led by the London Borough of Harrow, was set up to reduce Londoners' consumption-based emissions, including textiles, by two-thirds by 2030 and develop and implement action plans. This is one of seven major programmes for cross-borough working on climate change developed as a joint initiative from the London Environment Directors' Network and London's Transport and Environment Committee.

ReLondon and London boroughs will work together to update the One World Living textiles action plan and deliver the actions in a collaborative way. The programme's textiles workstream is led by West London Waste Authority and the London Boroughs of Richmond and Wandsworth. It focuses on helping London residents make informed decisions about their textiles consumption and making sure no textiles end up in the bin. Given '[London's fashion footprint](#)' outlines the need for collaboration and alignment across all actors within London's fashion supply chain, this action plan will include the following actions to convene the industry:

- I. The One World Living programme, ReLondon and the GLA will **convene a series of workshops**, bringing together **actors across the fashion supply chain** to explore how to promote circular business models such as resale, rental and repair by London businesses and discuss barriers to their uptake.

2. The One World Living programme, ReLondon and the GLA will **support ReLondon's existing Love Not Landfill and Repair Week campaigns**. They will engage partners who can help expand campaign activities **which target fast fashion and reduce volumes of new consumption** amongst London residents; and will collaborate to find funding to both deliver and evaluate these activities.
3. The One World Living programme, ReLondon and the GLA will **convene a workshop of boroughs** to explore how local government can lead by example, both by **using their purchasing power** to measure and reduce the consumption-based emissions of clothing procured by councils and their partners and by exploring other levers to promote circular practices, such as repair and resale initiatives and better communication for citizens around disposal.

Appendix

Detailed below are just some examples of the work ReLondon and others are doing already across the city to support London's transition to a low carbon circular economy for fashion.

Activities and achievements to date

- To support London's transition to become a low carbon city, the **Mayor of London** set waste and resource targets in the [London Environment Strategy](#) in 2018. These include an aim to send no biodegradable or recyclable waste to landfill by 2026 and to increase the municipal waste recycling rate to 65% by 2030. The London Environment Strategy looks to ensure that materials stay in use for as long as possible, that they are prevented from becoming waste, and that recycling is maximised. This is done, in part, by targeting materials for reuse and recycling that have a high environmental impact and economic value as highlighted in London's [Circular Economy Route Map](#), leading to the identification of the textiles sector as a priority area.

- **London Councils' Transport and Environment Committee and London Environment Directors' Network** established the [One World Living programme in 2019](#), led by the London Borough of Harrow. It includes a workstream on textiles with the goal to significantly reduce consumption-based emissions for textiles across London by two-thirds by 2030. Through this programme, West London Waste Authority and the London Boroughs of Richmond and Wandsworth are developing and implementing a London borough-led textiles action plan which advocates for a more sustainable textile system. It aims to do this by promoting a range of circular actions from repair and resale, to incorporating circular procurement statements within local government policies. To date, the programme has worked with the textile charity, TR Aid, to offer a free textile collection service across London boroughs in which residents can book a collection from their household at a date and time that is convenient. On publication of this commitment, One World Living has facilitated a TR Aid home collection rollout across four London boroughs to encourage greater donation of unwanted clothing, saving 143 tonnes of CO₂e and diverting 15,893kg of textiles and shoes from waste collectively. More boroughs are expected to participate as this programme progresses.
- **The Deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative Industries** launched a new campus in 2022 for fashion, innovation and sustainability, in the Fish Island Village development in Hackney Wick in East London, to support small sustainable fashion businesses. This campus forms the centre of London's Fashion District and is supported by the Mayor of London, the London College of Fashion, the London Legacy Development Corporation, and the British Fashion Council. The campus includes studios, manufacturing, coworking and event spaces for emerging fashion businesses, in recognition of the array of local talent already within London's fashion industry and with the aim of building a new generation of fashion designers within London.
- **ReLondon's [business transformation programme](#)** is supporting the development of an eco-system of innovative circular fashion businesses using a variety of circular business models, from sharing, reuse and rental to upcycling and repair of existing garments. Thanks to funding from various streams including the Mayor of London's Green New Deal Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, ReLondon has supported 66 fashion businesses since 2017 with 1,283 hours of support and £135,000 in grants. This has helped create/safeguard 58 jobs, including in companies such as Thrift+, Save Your Wardrobe, Bundlee and Phoebe English.

- [Love Not Landfill](#) is a non-profit campaign, run by **ReLondon**, to encourage fast fashion fans to buy second-hand, swap, recycle and give to charity. Running since 2018, the campaign encourages 16-24-year-old Londoners never to throw an unwanted item of clothing in the bin and seeks to educate and empower young people to become activists and influencers amongst their peers and make sustainable changes to their own clothing habits. The campaign has three strands of activity: organising pop-up shop and swap events; managing a fleet of textile banks; and running a digital campaign.
- **ReLondon** hosts an annual [Repair Week](#) that aims to give Londoners practical skills and encourage greater use of existing repair services. First taking place in 2020, Repair Week brings together a wide range of businesses, boroughs, not-for-profits and individuals across London to run hands-on repair sessions, host online tutorials and facilitate discussions with those at the forefront of the repair movement. ReLondon's latest Repair Week was held from 20-26 March 2023 with over 100 events taking place across the capital. 66 of these either entirely focused on the repair of textiles or had a textiles element to them, from garment upcycling and repair classes to survival sewing skills presentations and button workshops, all in an effort to teach Londoners skills which can help to extend the lifetime of their clothing.
- Created by **ReLondon**, [Mindful shopper](#) is a guide to products and services which help consumers reduce waste as part of a more sustainable lifestyle. Its goal is to help everyone discover easy ways to tackle the sheer volume of waste in our lives by making it easier and more desirable to make sustainable choices, sharing waste-busting products and services and explaining how they contribute to a sustainable lifestyle. On this platform, there are a number of textiles businesses advertised from Petit Pli, Riz Boardshorts and thelittleloop to StyleSwap and Nuw.
- **ReLondon** and **QSA Partners** worked with a number of fashion retailers in 2018 to develop and pilot a range of new circular economy business models such as clothes hire, product resale, repair and rental services. The retailers – including Ted Baker, Farfetch and FW – explored more sustainable ways of operating through the [Circular Fashion Fast Forward](#) two-year project funded by Laudes Foundation. Following this project, a guide was produced to share the lessons learnt through the retailers' journeys.