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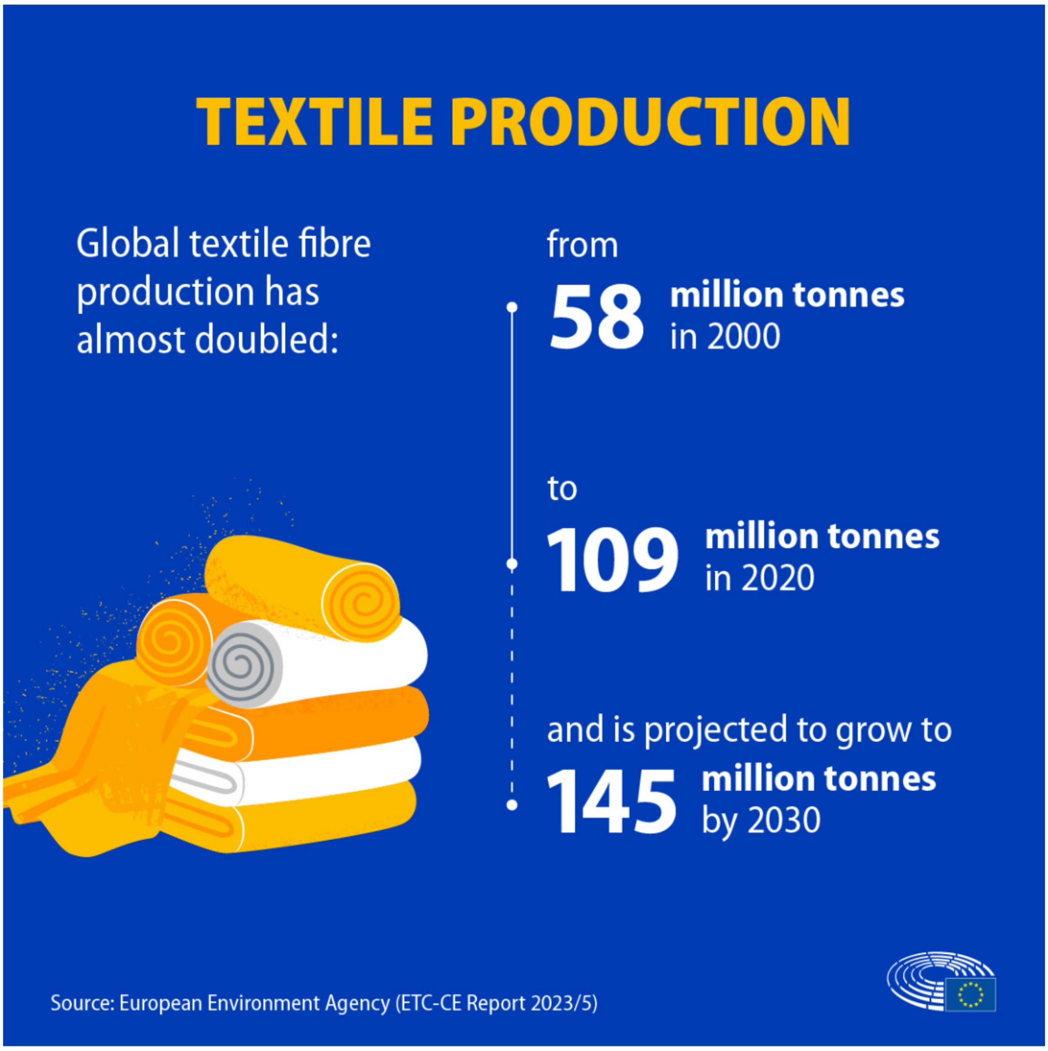
TEXTILE WASTE DIRECTIVE & EPR



Europe's used textile exports: what and where?

Europe faces major challenges in the management of used textiles, which are to be collected separately in the EU by 2025. As reuse and recycling capacities in Europe are limited, a large share of discarded and donated clothing and other textile products are exported.

The amount of used textiles exported from the EU has tripled over the past two decades from slightly over 550,000 tonnes in 2000 to almost 1.7 million tonnes in 2019.

The amount of used textiles exported in 2019 was on average 3.8 kilogrammes per person, or 25% of the approximately 15 kg of textiles consumed each year in the EU.

In 2019, 46% of used textiles exported from the EU ended up in Africa. The textiles primarily go to local reuse as there is a demand for cheap, used clothes from Europe. What is not fit for reuse mostly ends up in open landfills and informal waste streams.

In 2019, 41% of used textiles exported from the EU ended up in Asia. Most of these textiles are directed to dedicated economic zones where they are sorted and processed.

Read more:

https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/newsroom/news/europes-used-textiles-are-an

Waste Framework Directive (WFD)

The Waste Framework Directive sets the basic concepts and definitions related to waste management, including definitions of waste, recycling and recovery. The WFD explains when waste ceases to be waste and becomes a secondary raw material, and how to distinguish between waste and by-products. The Directive also introduces the “polluter pays principle” and the “extended producer responsibility”.

The foundation of EU waste management is the five-step “waste hierarchy”, established in the Waste Framework Directive. It establishes an order of preference for managing and disposing of waste:

Preventing waste is the preferred option, and sending waste to landfill should be the last resort.
source: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02008L0098-20180705

End-of-waste criteria for textiles and plastics

In order for waste to become a secondary raw material, the Waste Framework Directive states that "a treatment for recovery must be carried out, resulting in materials that fulfil the following criteria

- they are used for specific purposes
- there is a market demand for these materials
- comply with technical regulations (product standards and legislation)
- and will not have an overall negative impact on the environment or human health.

However, for some materials, such as glass, steel, textiles and plastics, the European Commission may set additional requirements. Once in place, these end-of-waste criteria will harmonise the rules for the recovery and trade of these secondary raw materials.

In 2023, the Joint Research Centre started to develop new scientific proposals for end-of-waste for **textiles**.For **plastics**, the JRC has already published its conclusions in its report on **EU-wide end-of-waste criteria for plastic waste**[1].

The next step in the process is to incorporate these provisions into a European regulation.

1 https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC139303

New EU Regulations on Separate Textile Collection

Preparing for Change

On January 1, 2025, the European Union enforced new regulations mandating the separate collection of textile waste.

These rules are part of a broader strategy to reduce environmental impact and promote circularity in the textile industry.

Textile professionals must prepare for significant changes, particularly with the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes.

Circularity and Sustainability in Focus

This initiative aligns with the EU's broader Sustainable and Circular Textiles Strategy, emphasizing waste reduction, reuse, and improved recycling technologies. The textile industry currently generates 12.6 million tonnes of waste annually, with less than 1% being recycled into new textiles. The new regulations aim to drive innovation and investment in sustainable textile production and waste management.

In addition, the EU is taking steps to combat fast fashion and overproduction by encouraging eco-friendly business models, such as clothing rental and extended product lifespans through repair and resale initiatives.

Understanding the New Rules

The EU has set forth comprehensive measures requiring producers to take responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their textile products. This includes financial contributions toward the collection, sorting, reuse, and recycling of textile waste.

The EPR schemes apply not only to clothing but also to a wide range of textile-related products, including:

- Footwear and accessories
- Bedding and home textiles
- Curtains, carpets, and mattresses
- Leather and synthetic textile-based goods

Producers, including e-commerce sellers targeting EU markets, will be obligated to cover the costs of textile waste management. Smaller businesses will have an additional 12 months to comply with EPR obligations.

Impact on the Industry

The implementation of EPR schemes will lead to increased producer accountability and potential shifts in pricing structures. Companies will need to:

- Adapt their product design for longevity and recyclability
- Invest in sustainable materials and waste management solutions
- Collaborate with collection and recycling facilities
- Ensure compliance with new regulatory requirements
- Tackling Illegal Textile Waste Exports

The regulations will also tighten controls on textile waste exports, ensuring that only reusable materials are sent abroad. This measure aims to prevent the environmental damage caused by sending non-recyclable waste to countries lacking adequate processing infrastructure.

Looking Ahead

As the textile industry moves towards a greener future, these regulatory changes signal a turning point in sustainable production and waste management. Textile professionals must stay ahead by investing in circular economy practices and aligning their operations with the evolving legislative landscape.

For more details on the new regulations, visit the official EU legislative portals or consult industry organizations specializing in textile sustainability and compliance.

Sources :

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0141

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20250217IPR26975/deal-on-new-eu-rules-to-reduce-textile-and-food-waste

https://www.vleva.eu/nieuws/circulaire-economie/herziening-kaderrichtlijn-afval-standpunt-envi-commissie-gekend

Impact on your organisation

The European Union's Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles aims to transform the textile industry by promoting sustainability and circularity throughout the product lifecycle. A key component of this strategy is the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies, which hold producers accountable for the end-of-life management of their products.

Impact on textile companies in Europe:

Financial Responsibilities: Under EPR schemes, textile producers are mandated to fund the collection, sorting, and recycling of textile waste. This shift transfers the financial burden of waste management from public authorities to producers, incentivizing them to design products that are more durable and easier to recycle.

Operational Adjustments: Companies are required to adapt their operations to comply with new regulations, which may involve investing in sustainable materials, redesigning products for longevity, and establishing take-back systems. For instance, Spain's leading fashion retailers, including Inditex and H&M, are launching a pilot scheme to collect discarded clothes in anticipation of upcoming EU regulations.

Competitiveness and Innovation: While these regulations pose challenges, they also present opportunities for companies to innovate and differentiate themselves in the market. Businesses that proactively adopt sustainable practices may benefit from increased customer loyalty and a competitive edge.

Impact on textile companies outside Europe:

Export Regulations: The EU's strategy includes measures to restrict the export of textile waste, compelling companies outside Europe to develop local solutions for textile waste management. This could lead to increased investments in recycling infrastructure and the adoption of circular business models globally.

Global Supply Chain Pressure: European companies may require their international suppliers to adhere to stricter environmental standards to ensure compliance throughout the supply chain. This could result in additional costs and operational changes for suppliers worldwide.

Emerging EPR Policies Globally: Countries outside Europe are beginning to explore and implement EPR policies for textiles. For example, Australia and Colombia are piloting voluntary EPR schemes, and legislative proposals are under consideration in U.S. states like California and New York.

In summary, the EU's Textile Waste Directive and EPR policies are driving significant changes in the textile industry, both within Europe and internationally. Companies are encouraged to embrace sustainable practices not only to comply with regulations but also to capitalize on new business opportunities in a circular economy.

If you have any question, feel free to contact:

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