

Environment

Standards of material

RecyCOOL Lessons

Disclaimer

These lessons have been created for and tested with young people in Slovakia, the Czech republic, Germany, Hungary and Croatia. They are open-source and available for adaptation for different groups globally.

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Standards of material

Description

The lesson will introduce you to the topic, make you dive into it, reflect on it and provide information for further reading and understanding.

- First it is asked to research in your own wardrobe for textile certificates and standards and continue this research using the internet.
- Then you will be asked to write down notes.
- Afterwards the lesson provides questions for reflection.

Objective

The objective of this lesson is to have a basic understanding and orientation of textile standards and certifications, with its advantages and limits.

After this lesson you will be able to

- understand the benefits of textile standards, be able to read critically and understand why textile standards and certification can be one great step but is not a solution for every problem in the textile supply chain

Tools and materials

No particular tools needed, but the internet and a laptop are helpful.

TEXTILE CERTIFICATION / SEAL:

A certification is a trademark created by an association or a professional organisation as a means of guaranteeing the origin, specificities, level of quality or conformity of a product to pre-established production standards. It can only be used by producers or brands that comply with the specifications drawn up by the body or agency holding the seal.

TEXTILE LABELS:

Textile labels are small labels usually made of nylon, taffeta or polyester satin, sewn into the interior of a garment so it is not visible when worn. Textile labels are intended to convey important information about the garment to the consumer. This might include size information, branding, wash care instructions, country of origin, fabric content and product details. All types of clothing and shoe manufacturers use textile labels, in products ranging from dresses and t-shirts to socks and gloves.

TEXTILE SUPPLY CHAIN:

What is a clothing supply chain exactly? The fashion supply chain refers to the process of tracing each step of the clothes manufacturing process, from sourcing of the raw materials, to the factories where those materials are made into garments; and the distribution network by which the clothes are delivered to consumers. It's a lengthy process, and it's extremely rare for raw materials to be grown, processed, sewn, and sold all in one location.



Task

Have a look at your wardrobe. Check the labels but also the websites and product pages of your favourite brands – as lots of responsible brands don't put certs on labels due to licensing issues. So their cotton could be organic certified but not the whole product as the processing may not be certified, which means the brand cannot put the logo on their care label.

Make a list and have a look at the certificates websites.

If you cannot find any certified clothes in your wardrobe, you might look more carefully next time at the clothes you're shopping for. Are there any certificates or information about the standard of the clothes? Are there any (online) shops you know of that offer certified products?

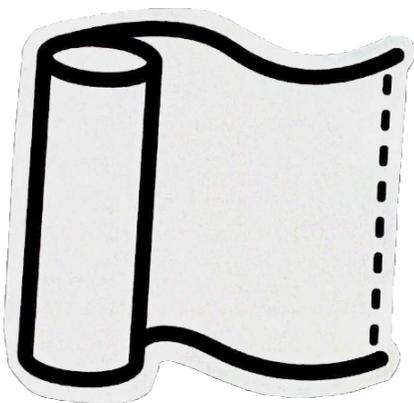
The textile industry has a crucial impact on our environment. The supply chain of clothes is complex and overwhelming. Maybe you have already seen pictures of cotton farms, coloured rivers or exploitive spinning mills.

What is your impression when you see these pictures? How do the environmental impacts affect surrounding areas, habitats, communities? Do you think workers are satisfied with the working conditions?

To begin this lesson, in the earlier steps you were introduced to challenges along the supply chain and standards as a possible solution to those issues.

Every piece of clothing has a beginning (either natural or synthetic fibre source), production tier, consumption phase and an end of its life cycle (or recycle). All tiers have a strong impact, often negative on our environment and the people working along the supply chain. What can we do to reduce this negative impact? This is a very big question, and not easy to answer! There is also not only one answer to this question – but many paths we could take.

Most likely we need to change the system from many angles. Imagine the textile industry as a puzzle. Only when all pieces are put together is it done. Every piece represents a step in the textile industry. Every piece offers options and has an impact on the big picture. This also means that changes to every small piece of the puzzle have an effect on the whole picture. **When we transmit this idea now to the textile industry we come to the conclusion that every step matters and that every step can have an impact for the better.**



Certifications act on every step of the textile supply chain. They try to improve the conditions for the environment and humans, within their range. They might help professionals to better orient themselves within the industry and also comfort consumers who are buying the clothes, at the point of purchase.

The big problem is that some certifications have low standards, are hard to understand or are driven by economic growth rather than by a desire to develop sustainably.

For example, there are certifications that are business led and do not hold **the environment and people as their main target**. Their credibility is weak because they may not be independent from economic profit based decisions. Often they exaggerate their actions – using a lot of nice words and pictures, and summarise or roundup their business decisions in an appealing way for the consumer. These are just a few signs that a business or a brand is using a tactic called **'greenwashing'**.

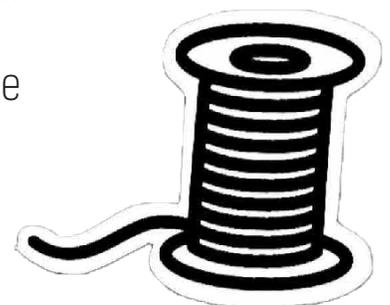


- Fashion Revolution's Fashion Transparency Index 2022 found out that almost half of major brands (45%) publish targets on sustainable materials yet only 37% provide information on what constitutes a sustainable material.

While the greatest environmental impacts of the industry come from energy-intensive raw material production, preparation and processing, there is a lack of data on the actual environmental impacts of each material, which also varies depending on how and where these materials are made. 45% of brands publish a target on sustainable materials, yet only 37% disclose what constitutes a sustainable material. Currently, brands make a wide range of claims on the fibres they use without providing proof on their environmental credentials.

Brands may also claim their fibres are 'sustainable' via on-product labelling despite only focusing on one environmental aspect, meaning the claim made is actually only applicable to one component part of an end product. Recent data from the European Commission shows that many fashion brands and retailers are guilty of greenwashing and exaggerating their sustainability credentials without having supporting evidence.

Legislative proposals to address greenwashing and ensure the reliability of sustainability claims are at various stages of development in the EU as well in the UK, the Netherlands and the United States. Transparency on sustainable materials is particularly important given the lack of standardisation in tools to assess environmental claims and the pervasiveness of false marketing claims on 'sustainable fibres'. We hope these new policy developments, along with the EU Textile Strategy will provide an adequate basis to combat greenwashing and false claims.





These certifications or initiatives are often called **Business compliance initiatives** (BCI). **Multi stakeholder initiatives** (MSI) have a more holistic and credible impact. These initiatives represent a variety of perspectives and needs – often involving more neutral stakeholders. For example; workers, unions, NGO’s, scientists, and politicians all work together on the certification.

Once you have found credible and trustful standards and labels, it is these that will help inform your fairer-fashion shopping decisions! It is a bit of work to read about it...so maybe you know trustful (online) shops that have done this part already and only offer a curated selection of eco and fair clothing? Maybe you can list what these are?

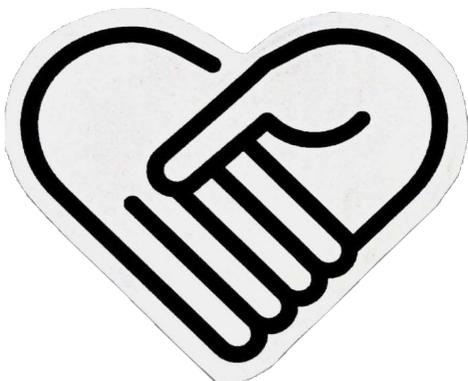
Reflection

The resources on our planet are limited. With our over-consumption of clothes, we exploit our environment and people along the textile supply chain.

Fast fashion has a negative impact on our environment and on humans. What is most important to you – the environment or people? There is no right or wrong!

Write down your answer, and next – write down why?

Based on your decision there are different certifications that are recommendable because they are credible, independent and with a trustful MSI in the background. Thinking about our previous exercise in this lesson – could you identify standards and labels that will help you, when you consider buying a garment next time you are out shopping or shopping online?



For everyone who thinks the environment, needs most support:

[GOTS – Global organic textile standard](#)

“The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) was developed by leading standard setters to define world-wide recognised requirements for organic textiles. From the harvesting of the raw materials, environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing to labelling, textiles certified to GOTS provide a credible assurance to the consumer.”

[German clip](#)

[English clip](#)



For everyone, who thinks workers should be better protected

Fair Wear Foundation

“Being a Fair Wear member means that you take the social side of sustainability seriously. It means that you are working towards the high bar that Fair Wears sets, in line with international standards and conventions to minimise risk for workers. It means that you are serious about protecting the rights of workers and making the factories you source from a safe and empowering place to work” and “Fair Wear member brands monitor conditions in their supply chains, adapt their management practices to support better working conditions, and resolve problems when they are found. Responsibility for worker welfare is shared between brands and factories, so Fair Wear believes they must work together to achieve sustainable improvements.”

“At Fair Wear Foundation, we know there’s a better way to make clothes. We want to see a world where the garment industry supports workers in realising their rights to safe, dignified, properly paid employment. To do this, we focus on garment production, specifically sewing, cutting and trimming processes—the most labour intensive parts of the supply chain. We work with our 140+ member brands, who are committed to finding a fairer way to make clothes, and we engage directly with factories, trade unions, NGOs and governments to find answers to problems others think are unsolvable. Together we’re stitching together new solutions across the supply chain to make fashion fair for everyone.”

Is Fair Wear a certification?

Fair Wear is not a certification. Fair Wear requires its member brands to work with suppliers to fix problems over time. We're tackling complex problems by uncovering new solutions and driving step-by-step improvements that create real change for the people who work in garment factories.

[Fair Wear Formula \(Clip\)](#)



Resources

Website of Fair Wear Foundation. 2023. Available at: <https://www.fairwear.org/>

Website of Global Organic Textile Standard:2023. Available at:
<https://global-standard.org/>



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