

The Consumer Voice in Europe

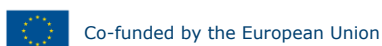
## FASHION MAKEOVER: MAKING SUSTAINABLE TEXTILES THE CONSUMER NORM

BEUC position paper



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## Why it matters to consumers

Through the arrival of new clothing collections to the shops every second week, fast fashion has doubled the textile production volumes in only 15 years. With Europeans consuming annually 26 kg of textiles per person, the production of textiles is one of the activities with the highest impacts on our planet. Meanwhile, consumers are becoming more aware about textiles' impacts and try to adapt their behaviours. However, we need systemic changes and ambitious legislation to make sustainable fashion and textiles a real choice for consumers.

## Summary

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Within the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan, the EU has committed to address the environmental and social impacts caused by the production, trade and consumption of textiles. On 30 March 2022, the Commission presented the EU Strategy for Circular and Sustainable Textiles<sup>1</sup> setting the goal to make sustainable textiles the norm by 2030 and drive fast fashion out of fashion.

The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) strongly supports key policy measures announced in the strategy to achieve the transition towards textiles sustainability and make sustainable consumption in this area a reality for consumers. In this paper, we highlight the strategy's most relevant proposals from a consumer perspective and advocate for further measures to tackle the roots of textiles overconsumption:

- **Sustainable and safe by design textiles:** Sustainable textiles should be the easy and attractive choice for consumers.
  - The development of **Ecodesign for textiles** should ensure that they are of higher quality, used longer, repairable and recyclable.
  - In combination with REACH, Ecodesign should support **phasing out hazardous substances from textiles by 2030**.
  - The Ecodesign requirements could be a rapid game-changer if they applied horizontally to a broad scope of clothes, home textiles and footwear. This would avoid slow progress if Ecodesign was developed for different types of garments.
  - The Digital Product Passport can enable, in combination with the due diligence legislation, higher **transparency and respect of social rights** in the supply chain.
  - Price signals should make the **sustainable choice the most convenient and affordable** for consumers.
- **No to greenwashing, yes to reliable information:** Europeans should rely on trustworthy information about how sustainable textiles are:
  - **Misleading claims should be banned**, as they are unfair for consumers and hamper the shift towards sustainable consumption of textiles.
  - Voluntary claims and labels should build on **robust and comprehensive assessment methods** and independent evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> [EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles](#) (COM/2022/141 final)

- **Mandatory information** (e.g. durability, maintenance, standardize size, etc.) could enable more sustainable consumption behaviours.
- **Tackling overproduction and supporting sustainable consumption behaviours:**
  - Consumers should be better protected against **digital surveillance advertising** and marketing techniques pushing consumers into impulsive buying behaviours.
  - The **destruction of unsold textiles** should be banned, as there is enough evidence of its widespread use by fast fashion companies. On the other hand, policies should nudge consumers into solutions that favour **reduced consumption and circularity** approaches such as repair and second hand.
  - Beyond financial incentives, **binding targets** for textiles waste prevention can support a more sustainable textiles ecosystem.
- **Tackling the challenges of globalisation and e-commerce:** Ensuring **market** surveillance and enforcement of all the pieces of legislation supporting textiles sustainability is key but also a major challenge, notably as most textiles are produced outside the EU and e-commerce is increasingly used.
  - The EU and Member States need to reinforce the resources of market surveillance authorities' and optimise their cooperation in the field of textiles.
  - Online marketplaces should be made liable in case they sale textiles non-compliant with legislation.
  - The reform of EU customs policy should prevent illegal textiles from accessing the EU market in the first place.
  - Finally, the EU should introduce sustainability safeguards in **trade agreements**.

## Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Making sustainable textiles the easy choice for consumers .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Setting minimum sustainability requirements through Ecodesign .....	5
2.2. Ensuring toxic-free garments and home textiles.....	8
2.3. Manufacturing textiles respecting the environment and human rights .....	9
2.4. Making sustainable textiles accessible to all.....	10
<b>3. Providing reliable information on textiles' sustainability .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. Tackling overconsumption .....</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1. Protecting consumers from 'dark patterns' .....	13
4.2. Unsold is gold: banning the destruction of unwanted textiles .....	14
4.3. Promoting environmentally sound circular consumption paths.....	14
4.4. Enforcing the use of legal and extended guarantees in textiles .....	15
4.5. Setting targets to prevent textile waste .....	16
<b>5. Ensuring textile rules are respected and tackling the challenges of globalisation and e-commerce .....</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1. Online marketplaces.....	17
5.2. Trade policy .....	18

## 1. Introduction

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### The big issue

With fashion industry accounting for 10% of greenhouse gas emissions, textiles are top in the list of sectors responsible for climate change just after food, housing and transport according to the European Environment Agency (EEA).<sup>2</sup> Producing clothes requires large amounts of energy, land, water and chemicals. Yet most of the environmental impacts of textiles consumed in the EU occur in other parts of the world where manufacturing takes place, often in poor working conditions.

Starting with the use of fertilizers and pesticides for the cultivation of cotton, the extraction of fossil fuels and chemical feedstock to produce synthetic fibres, the textiles sector heavily relies on the use of toxic chemicals. Estimations show that up to 20% of global water pollution is caused by textiles dyeing and finishing processes.

The pressure on the environment by the sector has increased exponentially in the last decades. This is the direct result of corporate strategies aiming at overconsumption, known as 'fast fashion'. For instance, brands have moved from seasonal collections to marketing 16 to 24 collections a year, causing a rapid turnover of clothing lines. As a result, textiles production volumes have doubled between 2000 and 2015 and the increase will continue<sup>3</sup> and even accelerating with the recent rise of 'ultra-fast fashion' e-commerce brands which are marketing thousands of new styles every day.<sup>4</sup>

Clothes prices have significantly dropped in the past two decades. In parallel, the amount of clothes purchases per household grew by 40% between 1996 and 2012<sup>5</sup>. Consumers buy more clothes than they need and use them for shorter times<sup>6</sup>, making up for untenable amounts of textile waste.

While Europeans discard 11 kg of textiles on average per year, only 1% of textiles are recycled at global level. The EEA<sup>7</sup> found that exports from the EU to Africa and Asia have tripled in the last 20 years, with a significant share ending up in open landfills where they cause environmental and health problems.

### Why shifting to textile sustainability matters to consumers?

Market pressure from fast fashion exposes consumers to unsustainable volumes of garments. Clothes and textiles can be of low quality, contain hazardous chemicals, be made with poor environmental and social standards and be cheaper than repairing or buying second hand.

In parallel, the proliferation of greenwashing in the textiles sector provides consumers with a misleading and incomplete picture about the real sustainability of textiles. Greenwashing

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<sup>2</sup> EEA (2022) [Textiles and the environment: the role of design in Europe's circular economy](#)

<sup>3</sup> According to the EEA, the increase of production volumes could be higher than 60% by 2030.

<sup>4</sup> [What is Ultra Fast Fashion? Investigating Why It's Ultra Bad](#); OCU (2023) [Shein, la moda ultrarrápida](#).

<sup>5</sup> EEA (2019), [Textiles and the environment in a circular economy](#).

<sup>6</sup> In the past 20 years the use time decreased by almost 40%, with studies in different European countries showing that up to one third of clothes are kept non used in wardrobes across Europe. E.g. [Maldini I. et al \(2017\)](#); [WRAP \(2022\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> EEA (2023) [EU export of used textiles in Europe's circular economy](#)

undermines consumer trust and creates confusion with respect to most sustainable options, including buying fewer clothes.<sup>8</sup>



**9 out of 10 Europeans think that clothing should last longer and that brands should be obliged to ensure good working conditions.**

As concerns about the environment and the future of our planet grow, consumers are progressively becoming conscious about the impacts of clothes and textiles: 9 out of 10 Europeans think that clothing should last longer and that brands should be obliged to ensure good working conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Research from consumer organisations from the BEUC network, including OCU in Spain, VZBV in Germany and Arbeiterkammer in Austria, confirms that consumers are increasingly aware of the problem and trying

to adapt their behaviours.<sup>10</sup> Many of them would like longer lasting clothes and would prefer avoiding buying new ones to contribute to climate protection. However, despite high level of awareness about fast fashion and overproduction, consumers own too many clothes which they use rarely. A significant share of consumers relies on fast fashion brands and online platforms to buy clothes.

More efforts to increase consumer awareness are necessary and emerging public attention creates opportunities for a cultural shift. However, **boosting consumer awareness to achieve behavioural changes is far from sufficient. To address the challenge, we need systemic changes tackling the root causes of the problem and changing market dynamics.**

Against this background, BEUC welcomes the EU Strategy for Circular and Sustainable Textiles and fully supports its goal to ensure that by 2030 sustainable textiles will be the norm. The Strategy rightly recognises that fast fashion is the major driver of textiles' harmful impacts.

In this paper, BEUC provides the perspective of consumer organisations on how to make this ambition a reality, listing key measures needed to make sustainable textiles a real choice for consumers and effectively support their active involvement in the sustainability shift.

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<sup>8</sup> According to [Eurobarometer survey \(2020\)](#) 4 out of 5 (81%) EU citizens said that, while many clothing products claim to be environmentally friendly, they do not trust these claims; and 87% thought there should be stricter rules when assessing the environmental impact and related claims.

<sup>9</sup> [Eurobarometer 2020](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Behavioural research](#) by OCU (2019) showed that in Spain a majority of conscious consumers avoided unnecessary purchases and more than one third fast fashion brands. In 2022, a [VZBV](#) found that 75% of Germans are willing to wear clothes longer to protect the climate and 55% would pay more if being certain about increased durability. More recently, [Arbeiterkammer and Greenpeace found](#) that forth fifths of Austrians are concerned about the impacts of fast fashion and overproduction of clothes on the environment, but still buy more clothes than necessary.

## 2. Making sustainable textiles the easy choice for consumers

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### 2.1. Setting minimum sustainability requirements through Ecodesign

One of the key actions announced in the EU Textiles Strategy is the development of **Ecodesign performance requirements for textiles**. This will be a crucial step for making sustainable textiles the easy choice for consumers.

As recommended by the EEA,<sup>11</sup> mandatory requirements should encompass as a priority design for durability, reuse and reparability of textiles. The EEA also highlights design for recycling as a complementary requirement to support closing the loop, as well as substitution of hazardous chemicals, avoiding microplastics shredding and ensuring safe recycled content. Moreover, Ecodesign should support the consideration of social aspects in synergy with due diligence legislation.

The Commission should **take inspiration from the EU Ecolabel** and equivalent labels and set a **wide scope of Ecodesign requirements for textiles**. Building on the EU Ecolabel, Ecodesign could introduce requirements applying to different types of fibres and fabrics such as polyester or cotton, thus increasing their quality and minimising their impact on the environment.

In addition, to implement Ecodesign swiftly, the EU should set horizontal requirements for finished clothes or home textiles. If product-specific requirements for different types of textile products are relevant but further research is needed, they could be developed at a second stage.

This approach would be more efficient in handling the variety of different textile categories and avoiding slow progress which would be inevitable if Ecodesign was to apply progressively to subgroups of apparel (e.g jeans, T-shirts and so on). Ecodesign should also address footwear to make it longer lasting and repairable.<sup>12</sup>

To speed up the adoption of Ecodesign requirements, on top of the criteria set by the EU Ecolabel and equivalent labels, existing standards for textiles should be considered as a basis to improve durability and circularity.<sup>13</sup> For instance, textile companies use EN and ISO standards to address different quality parameters or standards such as OEKO-text 100 to restrict hazardous chemicals.

Thanks to the Ecodesign Sustainable Product Regulation, in combination with the EU Textiles Labelling Regulation, **consumers' garments and home textiles should be:**

- **Used and reused for longer**

Available studies estimate that prolonging the use of clothes by nine months can reduce their water and carbon-footprint by 20-30%. As one third of clothes are discarded because

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<sup>11</sup> EEA (2022) [Textiles and the environment: the role of design in Europe's circular economy](#)

<sup>12</sup> A [survey](#) by VZBV (2022) found that consumers want shoes that last longer and are sustainable. More than 9 in 10 consumers consider durability as an important aspect when purchasing shoes. However, while a large majority consider repair of shoes as desirable, price of repair and access to repair services were seen as important barriers.

<sup>13</sup> The study by "Ecodesign criteria for Consumer Textiles, OVAM (2021)" provides a comprehensive summary of standards used by the textile sector. See also ECOS Technical paper "[Deep dive: Standards to measure textile durability \(2022\)](#)", [Blue Angel Basic Award Criteria for Textiles \(2023\)](#) and [Nordic Swan Ecolabel for textiles, hides/skins and leather \(2022\)](#).

they are worn out, extending the lifetime of textiles and garments can have the greatest short-term benefits for the environment.<sup>14</sup>

**Increasing textile quality is the most relevant aspect to keep textiles longer in use.** Available quality standards for different product categories (i.e., clothing, protective clothing, bath, bed and kitchen textiles, curtains, upholstery fabrics, mattress ticking and floor coverings) provide a good basis for the development of performance requirements. For instance, Ecodesign measures could focus on avoiding dimensional changes during washing and drying of textiles, colour loss through washing, perspiration, light or rubbing, fabric pilling and abrasion or tearing.

At the same time, **the definition of durability should also integrate the so-called emotional durability** or ability of textile products to stay relevant and desirable for consumers.<sup>15</sup> As such, the definition must consider the factors driving the replacement of textiles which have not reached the end of their physical lifespan.<sup>16</sup> Developing measures to address this dimension is complex but different approaches could be investigated to incentivise that the right quantities of clothes are produced.

For instance, the speed of renovation of collections can reduce the emotional durability, while timeless designs can increase it. Information requirements on the expected durability of garments, date of production and number of garments produced within the same batch could help to create more visibility on production volumes and disposal speed. Also, the Nordic Swan Ecolabel explicitly prohibits the destruction of unsold textiles by companies awarded with this label as a measure to reduce overproduction.

In addition, considering the introduction of harmonised information on sizes can be relevant to reduce the number of returned clothes. It is a common practice for some consumers purchasing online who may order different sizes of the same garment to make sure one will fit them.<sup>17</sup>

#### - **Repaired and better cared for**

Enhancing quality will increase the likelihood that consumers repair their garments. In complement, design requirements and information for repair can make it easier and cheaper. Although there is no available standard assessing or defining the reparability of textiles yet, the EU criteria for green public procurement could be used as basis.

**Design requirements should facilitate disassembly** (e.g. removable buttons and zips) while ensuring durability. In complement, companies should offer repair services, tutorials, and use standard components for those parts that are prone to breaks or make special spare parts (e.g. buttons, thread and zips) available on demand.

In addition to repair, **systematically making care instructions available** using harmonised symbols and rules across the EU will increase the lifetime and reduce environmental impacts in the use phase. Currently, there is no EU legislation requiring mandatory information on harmonised care instructions for longer duration of textile

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<sup>14</sup> In [a survey](#) on products durability in 2014, Arbeiterkammer found that consumers in Austria wished for a longer lifespan and use time for clothes than what was achieved. Similarly, the study "[Ecodesign criteria for consumer textiles](#)" OVAM (2021) shows that 61% of consumers would wear their clothes longer if they were in better shape.

<sup>15</sup> [WRAP, Clothing Durability Report, 2015.](#)

<sup>16</sup> <https://clothingresearch.oslomet.no/2022/10/19/review-of-clothing-disposal-reasons/>

<sup>17</sup> See for instance, 18% of Austrian order different sizes of the same garment when purchasing online according to the survey [\(Sustainable\) fashion consumption in Austria: a high level of awareness, but potential to do more, AK Wien \(2023\). Further research shows that 32% of parcels related to fashion are returned in the EU, while in Germany this is as high as 64%. Another study by UBA highlights high return quotes of textiles and shoes and](#)



articles. This means manufacturers provide this information on a voluntary basis, depriving some consumers from valuable care instructions.

#### - *Recycled at end-of-life*

With separate disposal of textiles becoming mandatory in the EU by January 2025,<sup>18</sup> it is getting urgent to ensure that textiles can be reused and ultimately recycled at the end of their life.

Ecodesign can contribute to closing the loop by **incentivising design for effective recycling**, through easier disassembly or avoiding fibres or blends of fibres which cannot be recycled.

**Recycled content** can incentivise the use of secondary materials. However, in case of trade-offs between quality and durability or if there is potential presence of hazardous substances, these two factors should prevail over a minimum content of recycled fibres.

The EU Textiles Strategy rightly considers that **close-loop recycling of fibre to fibre** should be favoured against the recycling of sorted PET bottles into textiles. In a circular model, PET from bottles should be kept in closed-loop recycling of food contact materials instead of downcycling them into textiles. In other words, it is more efficient to recycle bottles into bottles numerous times instead of converting them into textiles, limiting further recycling potential.

From a consumer perspective, it is crucial **that recycled textiles are bound to the same safety standards** as new textiles. Restricting hazardous substances in textiles will therefore play an important role in ensuring their recyclability. Moreover, **the future Digital Product Passport (DPP) for textiles should support traceability** and provision of information on material composition and any presence of hazardous chemicals.

#### - *With limited microplastics shredding*

Synthetic textiles are responsible for one third of the total microplastics found in oceans, with most microplastics released during the first few washes. Fast fashion garments that wear out quickly and are used only a few times are highly responsible for this pollution.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to environmental pollution, these tiny toxic plastics enter our food chain raising human health concerns. BEUC therefore welcomes that the Textile Strategy prioritises this problem. The upcoming **initiative to reduce the release of microplastics into the environment** should address measures preventing microplastic shredding from textiles.

The Commission should explore setting **Ecodesign requirements and maximum thresholds for microplastics release**. As synthetic fabrics release the highest amount of microplastics during the first washes, the Commission should consider industrial pre-washing and wastewater filtering.<sup>20</sup>

On top of Ecodesign measures for textiles, the Strategy considers the possibility of **installing filters in washing machines** to cut microplastic release from laundering. This option should be carefully assessed to ensure that it is convenient for consumers (i.e. filters should be easy and cheap to change) and does not lead to equal release of microfibrils, for

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<sup>18</sup> According to obligations set by the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC

<sup>19</sup> EEA (2022) [Microplastics from textiles: towards a circular economy for textiles in Europe](#)

<sup>20</sup> OECD (2020) [Workshop on Microplastics from Synthetic Textiles: Knowledge, Mitigation, and Policy](#).



instance through rinsing-off filters in sinks. Appropriate collection and recycling schemes for filters should be in place.

## 2.2. Ensuring toxic-free garments and home textiles

The textile sector uses chemicals in high volumes. The Swedish Chemical Agency indicates that around 3,500 chemicals are used in textile manufacturing,<sup>21</sup> while other studies refer to the higher amount of 8,000 chemicals.<sup>22</sup> Some hazardous chemicals can remain in the final textile as residues or impurities from production processes but can also be intentionally added to achieve specific functions (e.g. colour, easy care, etc.).

Four in five consumers are concerned about the presence of hazardous chemicals in everyday products.<sup>23</sup> Clothes and textiles are products with which consumers come in very close and prolonged contact over their life, making the exposure high. Yet, hazardous chemicals are found in consumers' clothes, as shown through the numerous entries in the EU Safety Gate tests and tests by BEUC members. To name a few, in 2021 Sveriges Konsumenter found in jackets fluorinated substances (PFAS) known as "forever chemicals" that accumulate in the environment and human body. Forbrugerrådet Tænk also found these harmful chemicals in children snowsuits, in addition to Bisphenol A (BPA) - a known endocrine disruptor.<sup>24</sup> Hazardous chemicals in home textiles also cause risks to consumers through direct contact or indoor air pollution.

Through its REACH Regulation, the EU can address some of the problematic aspects of hazardous chemicals in textiles. Notably, REACH restricts a limited list of carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic (CMR) chemicals in textiles.<sup>25</sup> However, this restriction is not dynamic, meaning that those classified as hazards after the restriction was adopted in 2018 are not automatically banned. This is the case with Bisphenol A which is still allowed in clothes. Additional work under REACH is ongoing to restrict further chemicals of concern, such as PFAS or skin sensitizers.

Rules preventing the presence of toxic substances in textiles are not systematic and apply only to few substances, often with many exemptions. This situation stands in stark contrast to other EU product laws such as for cosmetics or toys which include strict safeguards against hazardous chemicals. For example, whereas EU rules strictly limit the use of Bisphenol A in toys, no comparable safeguards exist for textiles. In other words, the clothes of our children's dolls are better protected against exposure to harmful BPA than the clothes they wear themselves.



**The clothes of our children's dolls are better protected against exposure to harmful BPA than the clothes they wear themselves.**

The Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability commits the EU to substitute and minimise the presence of substances of concern in consumer products, such as textiles. To achieve this goal and ensure that textiles will be free from toxic chemicals, we need stronger legal tools.

<sup>21</sup> Swedish Chemicals Agency - KEMI (2020) [Rapport 3/15: Kemikalier i textilier – Risker för människors hälsa och miljön](#)

<sup>22</sup> Refashion for Good (2018) [Safer Chemistry Innovation in the Textiles and Apparel Industry](#).

<sup>23</sup> [Eurobarometer, 2020](#)

<sup>24</sup> Other examples of tests carried out by BEUC members can be found in ANEC and BEUC paper "[Protecting consumers from hazardous chemicals in textiles](#)" BEUC-X-2016-020

<sup>25</sup> 33 CMRs substances classified as Category 1A and Category 1B are currently restricted. Unlike the EU Ecolabel for textiles, the restriction also does not apply to category 2 CMR substances.

As such, the **revision of REACH** announced in the Chemicals Sustainability Strategy should not be delayed any further. It should set **2030 as a binding target** for the phase out of hazardous substances from textiles.

In combination with chemical legislation, **Ecodesign should support the restriction of hazardous chemicals** and incentivise design solutions and manufacturing processes reducing the use of substances of concern. Ecodesign should further limit the use of harmful chemicals such as pesticides in the cultivation of cotton and other raw materials, as the EU Ecolabel does.<sup>26</sup>

Phasing out substances of concern in textiles is crucial to transition to a circular economy and to avoid presence of legacy chemicals. Moreover, consumers should be informed in case textiles contain hazardous substances.<sup>27</sup>

The development of the **DPP for textiles** through Ecodesign, in synergy with the EU Textiles Labelling Regulation, should enable **full traceability of chemicals** used in manufacturing processes and present in textiles.

### 2.3. Manufacturing textiles respecting the environment and human rights

Approximately 80% of textile products sold in Europe are manufactured outside the EU, in countries with limited environmental and social legislations, leading to price dumping, overproduction and unsustainable textile waste volumes.

Despite voluntary initiatives in the sector, the improvement of social conditions and environmental impacts in production countries is insufficient. The EU should tackle textiles as a high-risk sector and set ambitious measures improving environmental protection and respect of social rights throughout the supply chain. Companies should be obliged to properly assess, cease, and mitigate the risks for human rights and the environment throughout the entire supply chain, with a strong focus on preventive measures.

Like the Batteries Regulation, **Ecodesign for textiles should also introduce requirements supporting due diligence in complement to the Sustainable Corporate Due Diligence Directive**. Notably, the DPP could be used to register compliance with environmental, social and labour standards in manufacturing locations throughout the supply chain. It could disclose the location of factories and audit reports including information on working conditions. This would support public scrutiny and companies' accountability.

Last but not least, we welcome the Strategy's proposal to develop legislation **prohibiting products manufactured with forced labour from entering the EU market**<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> The EU Ecolabel prohibits the use of hazardous pesticides to grow the cotton used to manufacture textiles awarded with the label, by rewarding organic cotton and requiring tests of absence of harmful pesticides when cotton is not certified as organic.

<sup>27</sup> Consumers want to know whether hazardous chemicals are present in the products they use. For instance, this is highlighted by [a survey](#) from Sveriges Konsumenter showing that 86% of Swedes would like to access information about the content of harmful chemicals in clothing at the time of purchase.

<sup>28</sup> Proposal for a Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market, [COM\(2022\) 453 final](#).

## 2.4. Making sustainable textiles accessible to all

The shift towards more sustainable textiles will impact the price of clothes, potentially making them more expensive. The different policies should address this aspect - particularly in times of the cost-of-living crisis - with an inclusiveness strategy. There should be a fair distribution of costs between consumers and companies, while ensuring that workers' rights are respected including through fair remuneration.

With the deployment of fast fashion, clothes have become increasingly cheaper over the last two decades and prices poorly reflect the environmental and social costs associated with unsustainable textiles. However, consumers have not necessarily benefited from cheaper prices when considering the growing amounts of clothes purchased by households over the same period. Both the decrease in quality and increase in quantity of clothes consumers own but rarely wear are also hidden costs of fast fashion.

The assessment of policy measures to improve textiles sustainability should integrate overall cost impacts for consumers, notably for the less affluent people, and show how longer lasting and toxic-free clothes can benefit them. Sustainable design and manufacturing should be supported through financial measures rewarding the most sustainable textiles. Positive price signals should also reward the most sustainable consumption options (e.g. repair or second hand) and make them more widely available and affordable.

### BEUC recommendations

BEUC welcomes the goal to make sustainable textiles the norm by 2030 and support ambitious legislation to achieve this:

- Ecodesign requirements should apply to textiles as a priority sector, including clothing, home textiles and footwear.
- Requirements could apply horizontally to different types of materials and finished articles to enable fast progress.
- Performance requirements should improve the quality and lifetime of textiles, enhance reparability, design for recycling, consider minimum recycled content (with same safety levels as those of new products) and reduce the release of microplastics.
- Ecodesign, in combination with the EU Textiles Labelling Regulation, should ensure adequate provision of information on maintenance, repair and material composition.
- Hazardous substances should be phased out of textiles by 2030. REACH should be urgently revised to speed up restriction processes. Ecodesign should support the restriction of hazardous chemicals incentivising safety and sustainability design.
- The DPP for textiles should enable full traceability of chemicals used to manufacture textiles and inform consumers about the presence of any substances of concern in articles. It can also support compliance with environmental and social standards by including information relevant for due diligence.
- Textiles manufactured with forced labour without respecting minimum living wages should not be allowed in the EU market.

### 3. Providing reliable information on textiles' sustainability

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Misleading sustainability claims in shops or online are commonplace.<sup>29</sup> National consumer protection authorities are increasingly investigating green claims in textiles and the Dutch and Norwegian authorities have ruled out against misleading practices in the sector.<sup>30</sup>

Too often green claims and labels are not backed with robust independent evidence and imply that the entire product is sustainable, while the real improvement is small and may relate only to one aspect.<sup>31</sup> For instance, clothes are marketed as sustainable just because they are made of recycled fibres, while disregarding greater impacts due to poor manufacturing processes and working conditions.

**Claims offering a false image of products' sustainability are unfair for consumers and cause bad decisions**, including paying premium for clothes that are not truly sustainable and reinforcing overconsumption behaviours. This is the reason why ambitious regulatory measures are necessary to clean up the market from misleading claims and to offer consumers reliable information on textiles' sustainability.

The EU can achieve this goal through ambitious legislations under revision or development:

- the Directive on empowering consumers for the green transition (ECGT),
- the Green Claims Directive,
- the EU Ecolabel for textiles,
- the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation,
- the Digital Product Passport (DPP) and
- the EU Textiles Labelling Regulation.

The Directives on ECGT and Green Claims are promising pieces of legislation **to set robust requirements for voluntary sustainability claims, labels and digital information tools**<sup>32</sup> and to oblige companies to **publish independent evidence** backing their claims. An ex-ante verification approach along with regular checks will enable a more efficient enforcement by market surveillance authorities.

The **underlying methods for claims and labels should be holistic** and cover all relevant environmental and social impacts of textiles. The Product Environmental Footprint method can help identify hotspots and processes to be improved. However, it needs to be further improved with up-to-date data and complemented with other tools to integrate key aspects insufficiently addressed by life cycle analysis methods such as biodiversity, use of hazardous chemicals or release of microplastics. As far as possible, when assessing textile sustainability, decision makers should consider requirements addressing fast fashion and the factors behind the replacement of textiles that are still functional - such as the frequency of brand collections' renewals.

**The EU Ecolabel for textiles should be revised** in synergy with the development of Ecodesign for textiles so that it can differentiate best-in-class textiles beyond mandatory requirements. The Commission and Member States should reinforce the use of the EU

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<sup>29</sup> The [Commission and the Consumer Protection Cooperation](#) found that 42% of green claims online (including textiles) were potentially misleading and more than half were not supported with easily accessible and available evidence.

<sup>30</sup> In 2021 [the Dutch Consumer Authority](#) (ACM) ruled out that the use by Decathlon and H&M of general claims "Ecodesign" and "Conscious" were misleading. In June 2022, the [Norwegian Consumer Authority](#) asked clothing companies to withdraw labels based on the Higg Index.

<sup>31</sup> [Forbrugerrådet Tænk](#) has brought to the attention of the Danish Ombudsman misleading sustainability filters used by online platforms. [Forbrugerrådet](#) made a similar complain to the Norwegian their authority.

<sup>32</sup> For BEUCs recommendations in this area see our position paper entitled "Proposal on empowering consumes for the green transition", [BEUC-X-2022-105](#)

Ecolabel and equivalent labels by increasing consumer awareness and market recognition, including through financial incentives and green public procurement.

Finally, consumers would benefit from **mandatory information supporting more sustainable consumption of textiles**. Notably, such information could refer to the origin of clothes and textiles,<sup>33</sup> their composition, how long they are expected to last (e.g. number of washing cycles), whether and how textiles can be repaired, care instructions, standardised sizes or whether the articles are covered by a commercial guarantee beyond the legal guarantee.

Decision-makers should introduce mandatory information requirements via Ecodesign for textiles and the EU Textile Labelling Regulation. However, information should complement, and not replace mandatory performance design requirements.

### BEUC recommendations

The EU should put an end to greenwashing and ensure that consumers can rely on trustworthy information on textiles' sustainability:

- Through the directives on Empowering the consumer for the green transition and Green Claims, the EU should ensure that only reliable sustainability claims, labels and digital information tools are displayed on textiles.
- The EU should set common requirements for the substantiation of green claims and labels within a transparent and inclusive process
- Companies should publish the evidence backing a claim to allow effective market surveillance by authorities.
- The Product Environmental Footprint method provides consumers with an incomplete picture of textiles' sustainability and should be improved and complemented with other tools.
- The EU Ecolabel should be revised in synergy with Ecodesign to reward best-in-class textiles. The Commission and Member States should incentivise its use by companies and make ecolabelled textiles widely available for consumers.
- Consumers would benefit from mandatory information on sustainability such as on origin, durability, maintenance and material contents.

## 4. Tackling overconsumption

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Improving the quality and durability of textiles will contribute to slow down production volumes and reduce the negative impacts of textiles. However, addressing marketing practices preventing sustainable consumption is fundamental. The EU Textiles Strategy focusses mainly on measures to support circular business models but tackling marketing practices leading to the overproduction and overconsumption of textiles is equally important.

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<sup>33</sup> The EU rules of origin of an imported product are currently determined by its last place of substantial transformation. For textiles, this could mean that two pieces of fabric imported from Bangladesh but assembled in the EU could qualify as originating in the EU. As this can mislead consumers, it will be necessary to improve the traceability of textiles to inform accurately consumers.

#### 4.1. Protecting consumers from 'dark patterns'

Consumers increasingly face marketing techniques to steer their choices. This has become particularly relevant in the case of digital companies using choice architecture interfaces (i.e., options presented to consumers) to skew consumers towards choices that serve their own commercial interest. Businesses also resort to surveillance advertising, using algorithms to target consumers based on data about their interests, weaknesses and life circumstances.

The use of shady practices to distort consumers' economic behaviour is nothing new, but it takes on a new dimension with the massive collection of behavioural data and the use of technology to steer behaviour. This phenomenon is known as "deceptive design" or "dark patterns" and relies on design tricks that influence or impair the autonomy, decision making or choice of customers, nudging or persuading them into decisions that they would otherwise not have made.

A survey by Swiss consumer organisation Fédération Romande des Consommateurs reveals the exposure of consumers to "dark patterns" when shopping for clothes online.<sup>34</sup> All the websites analysed employ various interface tricks pushing impulsive buying behaviours, overconsumption, and getting consumers to disclose their personal data to allow for surveillance advertising. For instance:

- (1) Encouraging the acceptance of unnecessary cookies or the disclosure of more personal data than necessary (e.g. by requiring registration of an account, pushing the use of apps, proposing bonus systems when evaluating articles or sharing personal data).
- (2) Creating a false feeling of urgency or scarcity and a 'fear of missing out' leading to impulsive purchases (e.g., the use of a "high demand" message, stocks counting, offers with a countdown timer, short-term promo codes...).
- (3) Using intrusive pop-ups with special offers or suggesting buying more items to receive discounts or free delivery.
- (4) Making certain choice options more prominent or easier to select.
- (5) Automatically adding products or supplementary services into the purchasing basket.

EU consumer law already has partial capacity to address these situations, but it is currently insufficiently enforced. **In addition to better enforcement, EU law must be updated to tackle these unfair practices** and ensure consumers are not harmed by misleading user interfaces and data personalisation techniques. Notably, the use of dark patterns should be prohibited within the Unfair Commercial Practice Directive,<sup>35</sup> currently under revision.

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<sup>34</sup> Fédération Romande des Consommateurs (2022) "[Dark patterns: when web interfaces manipulate us](#)."

<sup>35</sup> See more detailed recommendations in BEUC paper "Dark patterns" and the EU Consumer Law Acquis – Recommendations for better enforcement and reform [BEUC-X-2022-013](#)

## 4.2. Unsold is gold: banning the destruction of unwanted textiles



In 2020, Forbrugerradet Tænk reported an annual destruction of 677 tons of new clothes (i.e. the equivalent of 3 million T-shirts) in Denmark.

In 2020, BEUC member Forbrugerradet Tænk<sup>36</sup> reported an annual destruction of 677 tons of new clothes (i.e. the equivalent of 3 million T-shirts) in Denmark. More recently Forbrukerrådet and the NGO Future in Our hands have estimated the annual surplus of clothing in Norway to 825 tonnes.<sup>37</sup>

Concrete measures to effectively reduce production volumes and the number of collections per year are necessary. In this

regard, we welcome the provision made in the Ecodesign Sustainable Products Regulation to increase transparency on volumes of unsold or returned goods.

Policy makers should however go a step further and introduce an **immediate general ban on the destruction of unsold goods** (including returned and repairable ones) in the ESPR, especially for the textile sector where this practice is well documented.

When setting the ban of unsold goods, the EU should avoid repeating shortcomings of existing legislation in some Member States. Notably, in the French law prohibiting the destruction of unsold goods, the recycling of clothes in perfect condition is not considered as problematic, which is a significant loophole. Moreover, companies face the same fine worth €15,000 regardless of the amount of destroyed goods. This is a weak deterrent for most – if not all – textile retailers.

## 4.3. Promoting environmentally sound circular consumption paths

According to the Ellen MacArthur foundation,<sup>38</sup> the growth of resale, rental, repair and remaking could contribute up to one third of the GHG reduction efforts necessary for a 1.5-degree pathway of the textile sector. This would require that 1 in 5 garments will be traded through circular business models by 2030.

However, second-hand shops and repair services are less easily available and attractive for consumers as they compete with the cheap prices of fast fashion garments. This is illustrated by investigations from consumer organisations in the BEUC network such as Tudatos Vásárlók Egyesülete<sup>39</sup> in Hungary and CECU<sup>40</sup> in Spain.

To increase circularity in the consumption of textiles, not only products and materials but also businesses and trade logistics need to be rethought to increase reuse. However, it is crucial to mainstream circular business models that are based on environmentally sound logistics to prevent any rebound effects. While new circular business models can bring added value in some cases, there is increasing evidence of models where negative impacts arise.

<sup>36</sup> Forbrugerrådet Tænk (2020) [Stop wasting clothes](#).

<sup>37</sup> Samfunnsøkonomisk analyse AS (December, 2022) [Excess clothing from clothing industry in Norway](#)

<sup>38</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021) [Circular business models: redefining growth for a thriving fashion industry](#).

<sup>39</sup> TVE (2021) [There is no hiking and hiking equipment that cannot be repaired](#)

<sup>40</sup> CECU (2022) [Study of the conduct of Spanish society regarding the reparability of products](#)



For instance, in 2021 researchers looked at different options to own and dispose a pair of jeans.<sup>41</sup> The most climate-friendly option would be buying less, followed by reuse, while renting appeared as the worst option, notably due to transportation logistics. However, if clothes were of higher quality and the logistics could rely on low-carbon transportation, the benefits of renting could be as high as the reuse scenario.

When renting clothing, consumers have higher quality expectations than for the clothes they own. This can lead to a higher replacement rate and disposal of garments which are still in acceptable conditions for longer use.<sup>42</sup> When looking at reselling online platforms, research shows that the sales of second-hand clothes can be driven by the desire to purchase new items.<sup>43</sup> Engagement strategies from these platforms – such as discount vouchers for next purchases – can steer consumer behaviours towards increased consumption, thus failing to reduce resource use.

The Commission and Member States should support **circular business models which** contribute to longer lifespan, reuse and are based on environmentally sound logistics. Notably, the **repair and second-hand sector** are traditional business models in line with these objectives.

**Financial incentives** for second-hand sales and repair services, such as VAT reduction or exemptions can support their market penetration and encourage more circular consumption. The EU should also support second-hand and repair options when developing rules on **Extended Producer Responsibility** for textiles. A system of eco-modulation of fees could incentivise not only the most sustainable textiles but also circular and environmentally sound business models.

In addition, policymakers should fund consumer organisations and other civil society groups to raise consumer awareness and promote circular consumption alternatives through educational campaigns.

#### 4.4. Enforcing the use of legal and extended guarantees in textiles

Whenever consumers buy a product in the EU, they are protected for minimum two years against goods that are defective or do not look or work as they should. This is called the legal guarantee. There is less awareness among consumers on the use of legal guarantees for clothes and textiles compared to other products such as electronics. In 2019, the Norwegian consumer organisation Forbrukerrådet reported that despite the high volumes of garments sold in Norway, very few consumers complain about faulty clothes<sup>44</sup> and encouraged consumers to make use of the legal guarantee.

The Commission and Member States can support longer lifespan of clothes through measures reinforcing the use of legal guarantees of non-conformity in cases of defects of garments and textiles. Guarantees can be a strong tool to ensure textile products are of good quality. If more people exercise their rights and complain about clothes that are of too poor quality, it will become less profitable for companies to sell low quality clothes. High quality clothing that can be used longer will be a win-win for the environment and consumers' wallets because they wear them longer.

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<sup>41</sup> Levanen J et al (2021) [Innovative recycling or extended use? Comparing the global warming potential of different ownership and end-of-life scenarios for textiles](#)

<sup>42</sup> Clube, R. and Tennant, M. (2020). Exploring garment rental as a sustainable business model in the fashion industry: Does contamination impact the consumption experience? *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 19(4), 359-370.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sites/default/files/from-crm/Circular-and-Fair-report.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> [Complain about your clothes! – The Consumer Council \(forbrukerradet.no\)](#)

Increased awareness can be achieved through the introduction of an **EU-wide mandatory label of “guaranteed lifespan”** on all products including textiles, which should inform consumers about the minimum period of the legal guarantee. It would be possible for manufacturers to expand it on a voluntary basis with a longer lifespan declaration, which could be suitable for instance in the case of technical garments. Moreover, setting minimum Ecodesign quality performance criteria, information on the expected durability of a garment and clear maintenance instructions could help to enforce the use of the guarantee.

#### 4.5. Setting targets to prevent textile waste

Increasing the lifespan and reuse of clothes will help make textile consumption more sustainable, but further measures are needed to reduce textile waste volumes. The EU Textiles Strategy rightly aims to drive fast fashion out of fashion, but it does not go far enough when proposing concrete measures to address overproduction.

The revision of the **Waste Framework Directive** should introduce ambitious, quantifiable and timebound **targets to reduce textile waste** and **increase textile reuse**. Unfortunately, the Commission proposal<sup>45</sup> has failed to integrate separated targets for textiles waste prevention, collection, reuse and recycling, despite a clear call from the European Parliament<sup>46</sup>.

Moreover, further to the European Parliament resolution on the Circular Economy Action Plan,<sup>47</sup> the Commission should explore **setting headline targets for reducing resource use** and aligning fashion consumption with the Paris Agreement.

Finally, the Commission and Member States should work on **preventive measures** to ensure that when separate collection becomes mandatory in 2025 the high volumes of recovered textiles will be reused and not **increase textile waste exports to third countries**.

For instance, it is very important to ensure that there will be adequate collection infrastructures with enough clothing containers, allowing for the separate sorting and storage of functional clothes which can be reused. The infrastructure is not yet sufficiently developed as shown for instance by OCU in Spain.<sup>48</sup> It is also necessary to involve social economy organisations in the design and implementation of collection systems to support the reuse of clothes locally while having a positive social impact. In this context, it is necessary to rethink solutions that perpetuate the purchase of new clothes in return of old ones and instead favour the repair and reuse options.

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<sup>45</sup> Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2002/98/EC on waste, [COM \(2023\) 420 final](#)

<sup>46</sup> See recital 61 of Report by the European Parliament on an EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles ([2022/2171\(INI\)](#)).

<sup>47</sup> [PR INI \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>48</sup> OCU (2023), [Contenedores de ropa, ¿a dónde va mi ropa usada?](#)

## BEUC recommendations

- The EU legislation and policy measures should address marketing strategies causing overconsumption of textiles. The Unfair Commercial Practice Directive should explicitly ban the use of “dark patterns” pushing consumers towards impulsive buying behaviours.
- Through the ESPR, policymakers should introduce an immediate ban on the destruction of unsold goods, including textiles.
- The EU and Member States should support environmentally sound and consumer friendly circular business models.
- Financial incentives should make the repair and second-hand options more widely accessible and attractive for consumers.
- Authorities should promote the use of legal guarantees of non-conformity in case of defects of garments and textiles.
- Through the Waste Framework Directive, the EU should set targets to reduce textile waste and increase reuse.
- The EU should explore setting headline targets for reducing resource use and aligning the fashion sector with the Paris Agreement.
- The EU should take responsibility for the management of textile waste generated in Europe and prevent exports to third countries.

## 5. Ensuring textile rules are respected and tackling the challenges of globalisation and e-commerce

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The value chain of clothing and textiles is highly complex, with most products on the internal EU market manufactured outside the EU, often in countries with lower labour and environmental standards. More than half of the clothes in the Single Market are imported mainly from China, Bangladesh and Turkey.<sup>49</sup> This raises challenges in terms of market surveillance and trade policies. The EU needs to connect the dots between internal and external policies.

### 5.1. Online marketplaces

The broad range of legislations presented above and pushing the textile sector towards sustainability also brings enforcement challenges, especially in a context of global supply chains and raising international e-commerce sales. Online marketplaces are a source of non-compliant products, in particular from third countries.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, every year the EU Safety Gate reports a high number of illegal unsafe clothing articles (i.e., presence of banned hazardous chemicals,<sup>51</sup> features causing suffocation risks...).

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<sup>49</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20200424-1>

<sup>50</sup> Testing from consumer organisations in 2020 concluded that [two-thirds of 250 products bought from online marketplaces failed safety tests](#).

<sup>51</sup> Greenpeace (2022) [Taking the Shine off Shein; a business model based on hazardous chemicals and environmental destruction](#).

Textiles should be one of the EU priority areas for cross-sectoral coordination of market surveillance authorities. We welcome that the Textiles Strategy proposes to enhance the capacity and **cooperation among market surveillance authorities through the EU Product Compliance Network**. BEUC recommends establishing a specialised laboratory for testing chemicals in textiles as part of the EU Reference Laboratories to support and facilitate Europe-wide joint enforcement actions on textiles.

Within the **Ecodesign for Sustainable Product Regulation (ESPR)**, currently under negotiation, policymakers **should introduce mandatory testing** of a percentage of products to check compliance with new requirements and a coordinated system to flag non-compliant products (similar to the EU Safety Gate). The proposal should specify dissuasive sanctions to ensure businesses comply with sustainability rules.

Moreover, EU policymakers need to **close legal loopholes to tackle the sales of non-compliant and dangerous products sold online**. Authorities should make use of the new provisions of the recently revised General Product Safety Regulation and the Digital Safety Act to ensure that online marketplaces stop offering non-compliant products to consumers. However, contrary to brick-and-mortar shops, online marketplaces are still not liable and do not have the importer-like status in case no one else in the supply chain takes appropriate responsibility for dangerous products sold online. Within the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, EU policy makers should strengthen the liability rules of online marketplaces if they sell products breaching Ecodesign requirements.

## 5.2. Trade policy

Once the products have accessed the EU market it is very challenging for market surveillance authorities to ensure product compliance. Therefore, **the EU should achieve an ambitious reform of the EU customs policy** to prevent illegal products from accessing the EU market in the first place.<sup>52</sup> It should ensure adequate cooperation between market surveillance and customs authorities (e.g. preventing the automatic release of unsafe products identified by customs authorities if they do not receive a response by market surveillance authorities) and provide adequate IT tools and resources for the authorities to fulfil their mission.



**The EU should achieve an ambitious reform of the EU customs policy to prevent illegal products from accessing the EU market in the first place.**

Finally, there needs to be a **better balance between trade and sustainability policies**. Measures designed to improve the sustainability of textiles could be perceived today by third countries as 'barriers to trade'. They could launch a dispute settlement and ask the EU to amend or repeal a measure. Indeed, the EU has obligations under the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements and its free trade agreements. These agreements foresee that the EU should not adopt rules that could create 'unnecessary barriers to trade'. In theory, the EU has the right to diverge from its obligations in order to preserve the environment. But in practice, when countries are challenged in a dispute by a trade partner, it is very complicated to justify this right.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See BEUC's recommendations to reform EU customs policy in our position paper "Catching dangerous and non-compliant products at the border – BEUC's recommendations to reform EU customs policy" [BEUC-X-2022-093](#)

<sup>53</sup> A [report](#) by Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch shows that out of 48 trade disputes in the WTO, only 2 cases successfully invoked the possibility to diverge from trade obligations.

The EU must better protect its right to regulate. To achieve this, the EU should seize the opportunity of the reform of the WTO to call for a review of the general exceptions of the WTO agreements and apply the same logic in its own trade agreements.<sup>54</sup> It should also consider the use of mirror measures in legislation to ensure safety and absence of hazardous substances in our clothes. This would follow the positive example of the EU legislation on veterinary medicinal products, which requires third country producers exporting animal products to the EU to follow some of the EU's rules and restrictions governing the prudent use of antimicrobials.

### BEUC recommendations

The EU needs to address the challenges of globalisation and e-commerce through ambitious policies and legislation on market surveillance, customs and trade:

- The EU Product Compliance Network should prioritise cooperation among market surveillance authorities in the field of textiles, including the setup of a specialised laboratory for testing chemicals in textiles.
- Policymakers should further improve the provisions for enforcement and market surveillance in the ESPR, e.g. mandatory testing of a percentage of products to check compliance.
- Policymakers should make online marketplaces liable in case of sales of products non-compliant with Ecodesign and safety legislation.
- An ambitious reform of the EU customs policy should prevent illegal products from accessing the EU market.
- The EU should protect its right to legislate to make sustainable products the norm in trade agreements.

ENDS



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