

Key takeaways from the *One-Earth Fashion* discussion series

Analysis of public and expert inputs received through the webinar series, January to April 2025

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Background

In December 2024, Public Eye published **One-Earth Fashion** report – an analysis of the current pain points of the fashion system and a proposal for transforming the status quo. The proposal centres around 33 targets, which offer a holistic overview of the various transformation pathways that are required to arrive to a more just fashion system within planetary boundaries.

The report came out amidst burgeoning policy efforts to regulate the fashion industry – notably, in Europe, in the United States, and in Australia. National and regional proposals and policy initiatives, including the recently adopted EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, are emerging to reduce the environmental and social impacts of fashion. Considering the global nature of fashion's value chains and its disproportionate impacts on the more vulnerable populations, the need to regulate the system of production, consumption, and disposal of textiles and fashion has been voiced clearly in international meetings.

However, the fashion system is notoriously complex, with issues spanning across social and environmental domains and geographies. With various conflicting interests, uneven power, and lack of research on the topic, it is difficult to even define the scope of the problem, let alone agree on prioritizing certain solutions. One-Earth Fashion is different from other fashion industry reports because it attempted to present a global set of targets that addressed various pain points along the fashion value chain.

From the beginning, the objective of the report was to start a conversation rather than to say the definitive final word on how the transformation could look like. Discussing, scrutinizing, and – if necessary – changing, adding, or removing targets was the intended next step. The goal was to build on feedback, positive and negative, and to move towards a shared sense of what the priority areas and possible solutions may be. Yet, in a crowded space of fashion and textiles advocacy, policy and research, soliciting feedback and keeping the conversation going is not an easy task.

Webinars series and feedback collection process

To achieve its objective of advancing a shared understanding for the transition targets, Public Eye, in partnership with Post Growth Fashion Agency, organized a series of webinars between January and April 2025 open to experts and the general public alike. Each webinar focused on part of the One-Earth Fashion report and brought together experts in respective fields to discuss the key issues and the ways to improve the targets.

The structure of the webinar series

Material Shift (20.01.2025) with experts:

- Dr. Irene Maldini, Senior Researcher at PROLONG project, Design School Kolding in (Denmark)
- Yayra Agbofah, Founder of Revival (Ghana)
- Urska Trunk, Senior Campaign Manager at Changing Markets (Netherlands)

Labour and Knowledge Shift (17.02.2025) with experts:

- Kalpona Akter, Founder and Executive Director of Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity (Bangladesh)
- Saoirse Walsh, Researcher at Circle Economy (Netherlands)

Value Shift (17.03.2025) with experts:

- Marian von Rappard, Co-Founder of Evolution and DAWN Denim (Vietnam, Germany)
- Marie-Jeanne Gaertner, Environmental Policy Lead at RREUSE (Belgium)
- Prof. Simone D'Alessandro, University of Pisa (Italy)

Power Shift (07.04.2025) with experts:

- Lars Fogh Mortensen, Senior Expert at the European Environment Agency (Denmark)
- Ineke Zeldenrust, Co-Founder of Clean Clothes Campaign
- Delphine Williot, Policy and Campaigns manager at Fashion Revolution (Belgium)

Expert selection and webinar structure

For each webinar, it was decided to invite three experts with complementary expertise to comment on different aspects of the topic discussed. Experts were selected through the networks and connections of the organisers. This number of speakers was supposed to provide each of them with time to make longer, more in-depth arguments and engage with others. Each webinar lasted 90 minutes – longer than a typical one-hour event – to ensure ample time for public engagement and questions.

At the beginning, David Hachfeld from Public Eye, one of the co-authors of One Earth Fashion, presented the targets and chapters from the report relevant to the topic of the webinar. Then, an open discussion among the three speakers, facilitated by questions from Dr. Katia Dayan Vladimirova, took place for forty minutes. The remaining forty minutes were dedicated to an open-floor discussion with the public. With the exception of a short presentation from Public Eye, speakers did not have slides, and the conversation relied more on exchanges than on visual prompts.

Feedback collection

The process of feedback collection was announced on the website of Public Eye ahead of the series and then communicated at the beginning of each webinar by the facilitator, Dr. Katia Dayan Vladimirova from Post Growth Fashion Agency. Anyone was given an opportunity to share their insights, comments, or proposals for the targets in a written format through a simple online form or verbally, during the Q&A phase of each webinar. The call for feedback was also shared on social media and through email communications from Public Eye to the registered webinar participants.

Conversation highlights

The webinars generated four rich and engaging conversations that reinforced the premises and assumptions of the One Earth Fashion report and strengthened its position. While each webinar focused on a different theme, arguments presented by speakers transcended these divides and multiple times, the same topics were discussed in several webinars. Below is a selection of several arguments and exchanges that helped advance the One Earth Fashion logic.

Degrowth as a red thread

A paradigm shift away from the growth-oriented capitalist model was central to the One-Earth Fashion report. While degrowth was not in the official titles of the webinars and was only briefly mentioned in the descriptions, the idea of downsizing the fashion system in a just and sustainable manner was the red thread of all found events.

Exchanges addressed the form that degrowth could take when applied to the fashion system – notably, reduction of the volumes of production and of material throughput altogether; its impacts on the price of fashion and consumption patterns; its impacts on workers upstream and on the populations and economies in countries on the receiving end of waste colonialism; changes in material flows, including virgin resources and waste streams; new economic tools and business models to bypass the growth imperative; and policies at various levels to achieve the transition.

There was an implicit contradiction in the discussion on value and degrowth that is worth mentioning. On the one hand, there was a clear agreement on degrowth of the material throughput, especially in the value shift part, and to some extent also in the labor part. On the other hand, there were also arguments to increase the value (at least per item), through higher prices, living wages, use and re-use services etc. At an abstract level, this all would lead to more added value and, as such, to economic growth, at least per item (unclear at the overall level). The discussion did not address this logical contradiction explicitly; however, elaborating on this tension between the material and the value shift may lead to a better understanding of what “degrowth” for the fashion system may entail.

Reduction of production volumes and changes in material flows

The first webinar on material shift addressed heads-on the critical topic of production volumes. Dr. Irene Maldini, who was among the first fashion researchers to openly discuss these questions, argued in favour of gradual reduction of material throughput of the fashion system. While she did not name a specific reduction target, “the less, the better” sums up her approach. In agreement with Irene, Urska Trunk, who works on fossil fuels in fashion materials mix at the Changing Markets Foundation, argued in favour of reducing the volumes of virgin materials derived from fossil fuels. These perspectives are aligned with the target of One Earth Fashion, notably: “The total quantity of virgin material input shrinks by 40% by 2030 (a reduction of 60% in fossil-fuel based materials, and a reduction of 10% in virgin natural resources).”

Despite the general agreement on the objective of reducing production volumes, the “next steps” suggestions varied and remained rather high-level during the webinar. Urska suggested to tax virgin materials derived from fossil fuels, while Irene proposed to focus on better redistribution of existing clothes to reduce the need for new. Katia Dayan Vladimirova, as facilitator, referred to a policy brief on Mainstreaming Sufficiency in the EU Textile Policy, published by ECOS in 2024 – as

a document with more specific policy proposals for reducing production volumes. She also mentioned one measure that did not make it to the final policy brief – import tariffs for clothing as a way to level the playing fields for fashion brands and block opportunities for exploitation in vulnerable countries.

It is worth noting that the conversation on reducing overproduction (as opposed to overconsumption) is a relatively novel policy discourse, and a highly sensitive as it challenges the growth focus of the fashion industry. Even five years ago, this topic has not been discussed in multi-stakeholder gatherings.

Impacts on workers upstream and downstream

During the second webinar on Labour and Knowledge Shift, Saoirse Walsh called attention to impacts of transforming the fashion system on workers in circular economy, including formal and informal labour downstream. Meanwhile, Kalpona Akter offered a perspective of garment workers in Bangladesh when asked about reducing volumes of production. Reducing volumes of orders is often presented by some parties as a threat to garment workers: fewer garments ordered, fewer employees required, leading to job loss, more vulnerability and distress in countries like Bangladesh.

Kalpona, however, made is very clear that, as far as workers in your union are concerned, they would not oppose the fact of reducing the volumes of orders – as long as decent, living wages are implemented and respected in the Bangladeshi garment industry. Today, Kalpona argued, to feed a family of five people on garment sector's salaries, four people have to work long hours, including children. If living wages are implemented, two salaries would be enough to support the same size family, allowing children, for example, pursue educational opportunities.

Reduction of production volumes, aligned with raising wages in production countries, could help create vibrant economies in producing countries, where workers can enhance their knowledge and apply new creative ideas to solving the environmental and social problems in their industry; where monotonous labour is the thing of the past and a more open exchange of ideas and knowledge is encouraged. Sounds utopian? Within the existing fashion system eventually. But transformation requires a fundamental questioning of practices and norms – and to imagine a fashion system where labour and knowledge is mainly guided by purpose rather than by profit maximation.

Impacts on price and fashion consumption patterns

Clothes, shoes, and accessories devaluated over the course of twenty years, with price no longer representative of value or costs. Ultra fast fashion model remain profitable, therefore, only due to high volumes of new garments. Reducing production volumes in alignment with environmental and social objectives would inevitably lead to increased prices of new garments.

This point was discussed in webinars three on Value Shift and four on Power Shift, as a challenging but necessary step in the right direction. In a sense, increasing prices of fashion would be a return to the way prices were before the fast fashion model was allowed to benefit from unchecked and exponential externalization of social and environmental costs.

Regulations linked to price were discussed by two participants. Ineke Zeldenrust argued that there is a strong need for a ban on below-cost pricing as a form of dumping by fast fashion brands. David

Hachfeld suggested exploring minimum price agreements for specific garments to address unsustainable competition in production countries.

Rising prices would further affect consumption patterns. With the rise of prices of new, second hand could become an affordable alternative, according to Marie-Jeanne Gaertner. Reuse contributes to circular economy; however, infrastructure and opportunities for reuse could and should be improved. Prof. Simone D'Alessandro argued in favour of raising prices, at the condition that social inequalities in consumption patterns are adequately assessed and addressed. Katia Dayan Vladimirova brought up the concept of *Right To Adequate Clothing*, which addresses clothing poverty and accessibility for the bottom income quintiles.

New economic tools and business models to bypass the growth imperative

A vibrant discussion around new economic models and existing initiatives took place during webinar three on Value Shift. The role of businesses in driving the transition can be positive but it is important to consider which kinds of businesses could bring change forward.

Marion von Rappard, who founded a denim factory in Vietnam that adheres to strict social standards and pays a living wage to its garment workers, discussed the difficulties from the point of view of suppliers. The way relationships between fashion brands in the Global North and their suppliers in the Global South are structured leaves small and medium factories at a serious disadvantage due to back paid orders (which also leaves room for order cancellations). Today, brands that engage into unfair supply chain practices are not only not punished, they cut their costs and win the market as opposed to brands that respect social and environmental standards. The field is uneven.

While discussing the re-use scene, Jeanne-Marie shared that the majority of European re-use efforts are driven by social enterprises, SMEs, and associations. Similarly, Yayra Agbofah underlined that on the receiving end of unwanted textiles from the Global North there are mostly individual entrepreneurs, resellers, SMEs involved in local second hand trade in Ghana. It appears from the different conversations that the benefits of the current uneven global trade and exchanges disproportionately accrue to large corporations (fashion brands), while the “clean-up” falls on the shoulders of SMEs and social initiatives.

As alternative post-growth businesses models, cooperatives and community-led local initiatives were discussed. Delphine Williot mentioned cotton growing cooperatives in Brazil but underlined that these examples are rare and have much less power than brands or large industrial for-profit counterparts. Involving more stakeholders into profit sharing was discussed. Ineke stressed the importance of differentiating between rights holders (workers, communities) and other stakeholders.

Policies at various levels to achieve the transition

Finally, all webinars had discussions pertaining to regulations and policies required for the transition. At the international level, the need for a binding agreement to regulate the fashion system was voiced by Lars Mortensen. Akin to the Global Plastics Treaty, such an agreement could lead to the consolidation of efforts and to cooperation among countries to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry and to better distribute the benefits the system generates.

Taxes and tariffs came up multiple times, from taxing fossil-fuel-based materials to import tariffs and minimum price agreements, it appears that economic “sticks” to reduce and transform the material throughput of the fashion system are available to national governments and regional organizations (like the EU) alike. In terms of economic “carrots”, a discussion of possibilities available to local governments centered on supporting local communities and creating local fashion ecosystems, especially in wealthy cities which are the hubs for overconsumption. By investing in local communities of interest – around textiles, craft, upcycling, reuse – could help increase the resilience of cities in the face of climate change and beyond.

Engagement and feedback analysis – lessons learned

The webinars attracted over 220 people and helped gather feedback during and outside the events, from expert speakers and the public. Five pieces of written feedback were submitted through the online form, with half a dozen inputs received directly by the authors of One Earth Fashion.

Written feedback received did not reveal substantial criticism or proposals for improving the targets and did not start an in-depth discussion over any specific area. It was supportive and in agreement with the main lines of the One Earth Fashion. Experts in the field seem to agree with the targets and the overall course set by the report. While a positive outcome on the surface, this engagement pattern may also signal that the conversation happens in a like-minded community, not reaching stakeholders who may have more critical take on the proposal or its elements.

An important element of the process was to solicit feedback on the report and targets from the invited experts during the webinars – without compromising the width and depth of the discussion on the webinar topic. However, it was proven difficult to focus on targets and the specifics during the webinars due to the selected format. A webinar open to the public should remain engaging and not too technical or narrow-focused. A targeted, by-invitation consultation format may be better suited for a detailed expert discussion.