

November 2024



# YOUTH MANIFESTO

# SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION FOR TEXTILES

*A Call for Change from the  
'Youth Forum on Sustainable  
Fashion Consumption'*

This manifesto has been facilitated by Maxime van Hoeve, Kiki Boreel, Erikas Marcinkevicius, Alice Fortuna, Alba Mullen, and Bonolo Madib

We support this manifesto



# Who and Why?

**In this Systemic Transformation for Textiles Youth Manifesto, we, six young advocates for systemic change in the textile industry, envision a transition in the way we engage with textiles by 2050, according to our youth-driven demands listed as principles. To unite our voices, the above-listed organisations support this call for action.**

*Disclaimer: This report provides views of the youth authors and does not reflect the views or positions of UNEP and the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU.*

The [UN Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) and the [Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU](#) jointly hosted the event '[Threads of Change: Systematic Transformation of the Textile Sector](#)' in early 2024, which included the *Youth Forum on Sustainable Fashion Consumption*. This Forum was co-organised with us, and attended by 50 youth. It brought together policymakers, industry representatives, civil society, and academia to explore how the textile sector could shift towards systemic change.

The Forum was convened to address the urgently required systems change in the textile sector, thus discussions included policy solutions to shift the narrative, degrowth thinking, and increased adoption of circular business models to contribute to climate, nature, zero pollution, and sustainable resource management goals.

This manifesto is an outcome of this Forum and outlines principles with young people's vision for a different future along the three themes of textile cultures, production, and communication, in line with planetary and human wellbeing.



# 1. The Principles

## 1.1 Textiles & Culture

*Future Textile Cultures will:*

**Principle 1: Future Textile Cultures will shift the perception of ownership from a single product to a plural process of reciprocity and care.**

By rethinking what ownership means to us in relation to our clothing.

**Principle 2: Future Textile Cultures will be based on transparency through ambitious circularity legislation and enhanced education.**

Ambitious and harmonized legislation is critical to understanding its intricacies and revealing harmful practices in the textile industry. Young people are key stakeholders in consultations to develop stronger policies on circularity and textiles. The industry will support the UNEP-facilitated Global Textiles Dialogue to advocate for robust policies that promote circularity and ensure sustainable practices are embedded within legislative frameworks.

**Principle 3: Future Textile Cultures will foster a respectful and appropriate exchange of cultures and knowledge through an intersectional lens.**

Examining the role and influence of interacting elements (e.g., gender and race) that shape the concept of 'fashion' recognises previously overlooked challenges.

**Principle 4: Future Textile Cultures will be grounded in Commons-thinking for collective, long-term needs rather than individualistic, short-term wants.**

Textile cultures can become a space to create for the common good, acting for mutual interest.

**Principle 5: Future Textile Cultures will embrace a holistic perception of all actors involved and affected through enhanced transparency.**

By acknowledging all, from the cotton seeds in the soil to the hands stitching the fabrics to the final destination of the textile.

**Principle 6: Future Textile Cultures will consciously shift narratives and tailor context-specific solutions.**

By considering different types of knowledge in transitioning to alternative models of engaging with fashion.

# 1. The Principles

## 1.2 Textiles & Production

*Future Textile Production will:*

### **Principle 1: Future Textile Production will promote closed-loop circular solutions.**

Circularity not only includes the design to end-of-life phases of a garment but also incorporates the production and processing stages through circular farming and non-toxic processing. Circularity in all phases will promote the production of high-quality products that allow processes in the next stage to adopt circularity-promoting processes as well. Clothes should be compostable and non-toxic so they can be returned to the soil as food, not poison.

### **Principle 2: Future Textile Production will have shorter, circular, and more transparent value chains.**

Transparent, shorter, and circular value chains will internalise the true cost of production, accounting for and halting its impact on climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Brands are transparent about the amount of items they produce.

### **Principle 3: Future Textile Production will respect and promote human rights, animal welfare, and the rights of nature.**

Improving labour practices, prioritising fair wages, protecting animal rights, and creating awareness about resource use to match consumer purchasing decisions with their values in line with planetary and societal boundaries.

### **Principle 4: Future Textile Production will produce garments for an extended life, not an end-of-life.**

Textile garments should be repairable, multifunctional, adaptable, upcycled, nontoxic, and high-quality. There will not be such a thing as waste; resources are valued. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies for textiles are globally accountable and include supporting frontline communities in managing Global North's clothing waste.

### **Principle 5: Future Textile Production will step away from micro-trends.**

Creating a cultural shift towards sustainable production practices places social and ecological well-being at the forefront of the textile sector, over a linear, high volume model that promotes overconsumption.

### **Principle 6: Future Textile Production will co-create differently designed infrastructures that allow for transformative change.**

Design new financial, data, and trade flows as a commonly owned and managed resource; helping to redefine what success looks like.

# 1. The Principles

## 1.3 Textiles & Communication

*Future Textile Communication will:*

### **Principle 1: Future Textile Communication will be honest and direct.**

Brands will embrace honesty, openness, and transparency in all their communications. From storytelling to reality-telling, sustainability claims will be backed by scientific evidence and concrete action. Brands clearly communicate where and by whom clothes are produced. Greenwashing will be eliminated as information will be conveyed in a clear, straightforward manner, ensuring that consumers receive accurate and contextualized insights.

### **Principle 2: Future Textile Communication will no longer accept invasive advertisements.**

By resisting business practices and messaging that encourage overconsumption through emotional extraction and materialistic wanting, as aligned to the UNEP and UN Climate Change Sustainable Fashion Communication Playbook.

### **Principle 3: Future Textile Communication will be fair and socially equitable.**

By actively engaging in a process that critically examines colonial practices and narratives shaping the fashion industry on an institutional level, including resource exploitation, labour, and cultural appropriation. This involves challenging whiteness and shifting power from the dominant Western view to center the voices of marginalised communities, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

### **Principle 4: Future Textile Communication will be accessible.**

Brands will communicate in accessible ways, both in terms of language and data. They should simplify and transpose data to enable consumers to understand the resources used at each stage of the production process. Open source data on best practices and innovation will be available to increase knowledge exchange between brands.

### **Principle 5: Future Textile Communication will encourage consumer advocacy.**

By inviting consumers to question harmful industry practices and motivating advocacy for radical change of the industry through both business and policy.

### **Principle 6: Future Textile Communication will drive behavioural change.**

Being socially aware of the extractivist cultural paradigm shifts perspectives to drive systemic change. Empowering consumers with complete knowledge and redefined value sets, transforms business models towards circular practices and value-driven textile items.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Impacts of the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is one of the leading contributors to climate change, emitting 2-8% of the world's greenhouse gases and being responsible for 9% of the microplastic pollution in the ocean. The quality of the fibres used to create our clothes has declined, as a result of the global fiber production increase to a record of 116 tonnes in 2022. This fiber production is expected to increase even further in the business as usual scenario.

It is estimated that this industry will need to reduce the production of new clothing by 75% by 2030 to align its carbon footprint with planetary boundaries. However, as trend cycles speed up and continue to shape extractivist consumption patterns and business models, young people are questioning the textile sector's ability to achieve this target.

Transformative change in the textile sector is thus critical to address the global environmental crisis. This Systemic Transformation for Textiles Youth Manifesto has identified key principles for transformative change in line with the biodiversity, climate, and society nexus frame.

The principles, shaped by youth, aim to inspire change, build equitable approaches, and enhance interventions to drive systemic change in the textile sector.

This is critical as young people today - whose identities are influenced by a changing economic landscape, climate anxiety and accelerated digitalisation - are value-driven consumers who expect brands to uphold social and environmental justice principles in their production practices.

### 2.2 High-Level UNEP Event

On May 16, 2024, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU jointly hosted 'Threads of Change: Systematic Transformation of the Textile Sector'. Bringing together policymakers, industry representatives, civil society, academia and young people, the event explored how the textile sector could shift towards sustainable practices and circular solutions.

Recognizing the vital role of young people in reshaping textile sector narratives, the event featured the Youth Forum, co-organized with us, to envision a textile sector aligned with planetary and societal boundaries. Following the High-Level panel discussion, the forum provided a space for young people to reimagine the sector.

During the facilitated sessions of Textiles & Culture, Textiles & Production, and Textiles & Consumption, young people came together to conceptualise alternatives for the fashion industry to achieve the Commission's long-term vision of having only sustainable products on the EU market by 2050.

Attendees explored the structures upholding current industry practices to reimagine what the future of textiles could look like, stressing the value of young people in redefining systems and societal values, and ultimately determining the course and speed of change.

### 2.3 About the Manifesto

Systemic transformation towards sustainable textile value chains is becoming increasingly necessary. If European youth were to break the status quo and reshape the textile sector as we know it, what would they recommend as the guiding principles for the future?

In the 1980s, designer Dieter Rams questioned the quality of his work, leading to the creation of ten design principles known as 'The Good Design Manifesto'. Best known for his "less is more" approach, these guiding principles provided practical guidelines and promoted ethical practices, supporting his vision for a different fashion industry. The principles of this Systemic Transformation for Textiles Youth Manifesto similarly aim to lay down a vision for a different approach to the way textiles are being viewed, produced, and consumed.

This manifesto acts as a dot on the horizon, calling for ambitious action for the industry and policymakers to reduce material production and consumption, enhance degrowth thinking, accelerate circularity, and embed human rights due diligence through policies that can help address the sector's most significant challenges.

## 3. Call for Action

To continue driving the vision of systemic transformation in textiles, we invite youth to:

**1. Recognise the necessity of transforming the textile industry to address climate change, biodiversity loss and halt pollution.**

**2. Envision a textile sector that upholds social and environmental justice.**

**3. Advocate for the three transformative principles at the intersection of biodiversity, climate, and society: *Textiles & Culture, Textiles & Production, Textiles & Communication.***

**4. Organise youth-led actions to address systemic change in the textile sector.**

This could include updating and testing this manifesto, collaborating with other youth movements, and hosting conversations with policymakers and the industry to discuss the different roles and responsibilities required for urgent change. We believe that this collective effort is vital to address a just transition.

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