

# The problem with fashion in 2021

<https://www.onearmy.earth/news/the-problem-with-fashion-in-2021>

For several years the fashion industry has been under fire for the problems it creates. Workers are exploited, factories are falling apart killing many people due to bad regulations, overproduction to avoid empty inventories, a massive carbon footprint, water pollution and much more. The list goes on.

Many articles have been written, not much has changed. How is this still happening in 2021? Why haven't these issues been fixed after all these years? Well.. as it turns out the fashion industry is very complex. Its supply chain is global and complex making it very hard to trace where things are made. Millions of people livelihood depends on it and a few companies profit heavily. Big investments are made to keep this industry machine going, no matter the consequences. This means that there is little incentive to change the status quo from the top. Searching for solutions there might leave you with a bitter taste.

The problem is not easy, but it does seem fixable. But for that we need to go a bit deeper into the problem, let's dive into it step by step, starting with the production.

## 1. Producing clothes

Production of our clothes happens most of the time in developing countries. Wages are low, material costs less and there are fewer regulations. Lax regulations translate into many cases of water pollution, environmental degradation, exploitation and unhealthy work conditions. Damaging the local environment and the people working in the industry.

The main reason for all of this is simply that it's cheaper. Yep cheap has its consequences but it makes it possible to produce clothes for a fraction of what it would cost in a developed country. It is cheaper to produce clothes on the other side of the world, ship it in a boat and move it in trucks than producing locally in developed countries.

*Did you know?*

*In Bangladesh, the legal minimum wage for workers in the fashion and textile industry is €16 per month, that is around 0,50 cents a day for 14-16 hours a day. Actual living wage in Bangladesh for a single person is €72 per month.*



*Production of clothes and bags in the slums of Mumbai, India*

## 2. Consuming clothes

After clothes are produced and shipped to stores and warehouses in developed countries they need to be sold. Selling clothes = money. So companies want us to buy more clothes. They do this by creating new collections and bombarding us with ads. A new collection makes the previous collection “out of fashion”.

Before collections (haute-couture) were created once a year, then 4 times a year (each season) and nowadays 7 times a year. Some brands even bring out 52 collections a year (weekly!). This is known as fast fashion. They create new trends, make amazing campaigns, hire top actors/influencers/models each time, to make you buy more clothes.



*Fashion shows to set a new trend*

As a result, people don't replace clothes because they are broken, don't function anymore, or because they have gotten much better. They replace them because they look old fashioned.

*Did you know?*

*The average person buys 60% more items of clothing and keeps them for about half as long as 15 years ago.*

*Source Mckinsey & Company*

### 3. Disposing clothes

These new collections mean we replace our clothes regularly for new ones that look more trendy. They go out the door when they still function properly, there is nothing really wrong with them. Nowadays you can find many “Clothing Donation Boxes”. Places where you can dispose of your unwanted clothes in a container for goodwill to get recycled or reused. But is it really? Let's have a look at those two options.

**Reusing:** Reusing clothes is a great option to increase their lifespan. But many second hand stores in the developed world have a surplus of clothes, they get more in than they can sell. Incoming clothes get filtered: good quality is kept, lower qualities are sold back to developing countries, like Ghana and India. Where they are distributed on local markets. Our donating resembles more an act of dumping unwanted materials (like plastic), as a consequence local industries fade away making it difficult to develop an independent local economy. Simply because very few on the other side of the planet make a profit out of this dynamics.

**Recycling:** The harsh reality is that very little of our clothes get recycled, mainly because they are all made from different materials. Polyester, Cotton, Viscose, Wool etc. And everything gets thrown out mixed together. From shirts to underwear and pyjamas. On top of that within one single piece of clothing often different materials are used. For instance, a shirt can be a mix of 80% cotton, 10% Polyester and 10% Viscose. This makes recycling very hard and complicated.

*Did you know?*

*In 2019, over 60% of our garments are made from synthetic materials like polyester, polyamide etc. Also known as plastic.*



*Local market in Accra, Ghana where our second hand clothes are dumped/sold*

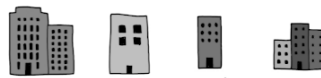
## The root of the problem

The three realities above give an overview of the cycles of our clothes. There are clearly many things to improve, like making the production more sustainable, or making sure we can recycle them better. And these are important topics companies work on (or at least should). Releasing a new collection that is organic, or made fairtrade.

However, fashion brands won't tackle the fundamental root problem. End of the day they want to sell you something. They continue to fuel the engine of "producing more clothes". Clothes that weren't needed in the first place. We don't need more new clothes, at the moment the world has enough clothes, for the coming decade. In shops, warehouses, outlets and our own wardrobes. It's time to keep those valuable clothes longer, reuse them and take proper care of them. But this change isn't going to come from the fashion industry. They are not going to promote this on billboards and advertisements. It has to come from the people. From you and me.

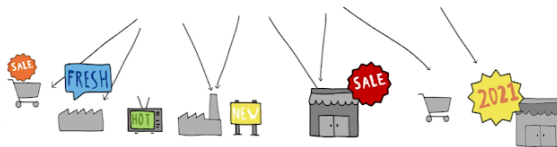
## THE PROBLEM OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY

1.



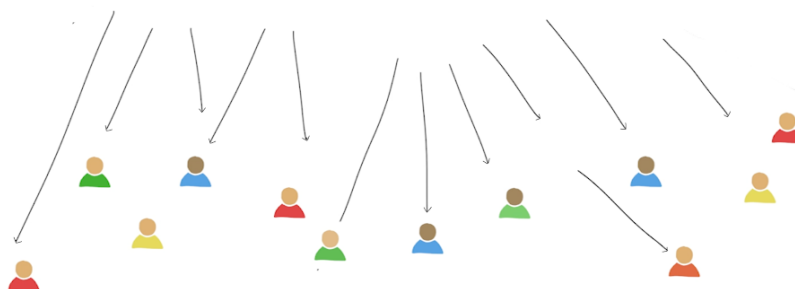
A NEW COLLECTION IS MADE

2.



ITS PROMOTED EVERYWHERE

3.



PEOPLE REPLACE THEIR CLOTHES

 **REPEAT**

FASTER =  
MORE MONEY