

# Fashion Industry, We Must Prepare for New Regulations

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By SJ Guest Editorial

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Recover™ promotes textiles-to-textiles recycling to accelerate the industry's move from linear to circular.  
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While waste from the packaging or electronics sectors has been strictly regulated for years, the fashion and apparel industry's waste problem has never been seriously addressed, until now. New important changes in policy at European and national levels are going to deeply affect the textile sector. But are our products and systems prepared to meet the new requirements?

Europe will become the first continent in the world to introduce regulation to improve circularity of textiles, curb overproduction, empower consumers to make more responsible choices and make fashion brands accountable for their massive waste problem. Last March,

the European Commission published the EU Textiles Strategy, which set out the vision and concrete actions to ensure that by 2030 textile products placed on the EU market are long-lived and recyclable, made as much as possible of recycled fibers, free of hazardous substances and produced in a way that respects social rights and the environment. The specific measures will include ecodesign requirements for textiles, clearer information for the consumer, a Digital Product Passport and a mandatory EU extended producer responsibility scheme (EPR).

The fast-fashion model has continually grown over recent decades and 48 million tons of clothing are disposed of worldwide every year, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation report *Make Fashion Circular (2017)*. These volumes are rising year by year, and are expected to rise even more significantly because of the Waste Framework Directive coming into force, which obliges the EU Member States (MS) to separately collect textile waste as of 2025.

To help manage the intensifying textile waste streams, policy makers have acted to close the material loop and ignite a circular economy transition that will promote maximum reuse and recovery of textile resources and waste prevention.

### **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**

An EPR scheme is a regulatory measure which involves setting fees so companies pay for the costs associated with the end-of-life management of their products, according to the Changing Markets Foundation. The concept of 'Extended Producer Responsibility' (EPR) has been applied in Europe to many product categories, including batteries, consumer goods packaging, whiteware and electronics. By putting in place EPR, costs associated with end-of-life, re-use or recovery of textiles will be (in part) borne by producers, rather than municipalities, and by extension, citizens, as is currently the case.

EPR is an instrument to promote sustainable textiles and textile waste management in accordance with the waste hierarchy. It places more responsibility on producers for the collection, treatment and recycling of textiles. The EPR policy requires producers to responsibly manage all end-of-life products marketed in the country by either operating under an approved recovery plan individually or contributing financially to a Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) accredited by law.

The leading example of EPR in textiles has been running in France since 2008. The PRO operating on behalf of over 5,000 companies is 'Eco TLC', now renamed as Refashion. According to the Refashion 2020 annual report, they have sorted 156,202 tons of textiles, where reuse accounts for 56.5 percent and recycling for 33.3 percent.

The EU Textiles Strategy only harmonizes certain key elements of the EPR at the EU level, which includes guidance on the future eco-modulation fees and on establishing the mandatory targets for reuse and recycling. But then each EU Member State can implement

its own EPR for textiles, as noted in a 2020 position paper by Euratex. Following in France's footsteps, and in anticipation of EU level guidance, several countries have already started to develop their own national schemes, including Sweden, the Netherlands, Greece, UK, Spain, Italy and Ireland, according to PolicyHub.

The potential for EPR to help drive the transition to a zero waste circular textiles industry is not only noticed in Europe. Other regions and countries have also expressed the need for textile EPR through different policy recommendation reports like the ones from Textile Product Stewardship Project in New Zealand or from the [California Product Stewardship Council \(CPSC\)](#) in the U.S.

[Recover™](#) recognizes the many positive aspects of the EU Textiles Strategy, like the stimulation for [circular design for textile products](#) or the future opportunity to use the revenues generated with EPR taxes to address the challenges of [scaling textile-to-textile recycling of post-consumer garments](#). Nevertheless, we have a lot of work to do as an industry to prepare for the implementation of these policies, some requiring development and/or scaling of new technologies, new tools and processes, disruption of existing business models or behavior change at consumer level for example.

To support and help drive the transformation that is needed, Recover™ is part of different initiatives that are trying to bring about change. For example, Recover™ is a Business Council member of [ReHubs](#), a joint initiative unveiled by Euratex to upcycle textile waste and circular materials all over Europe. The aim is to create 5 hubs to process textile waste and become European coordination centers. Furthermore, Recover™ sits on the Steering Committee of [Accelerating Circularity](#), a collaborative project, which has launched efforts to promote textiles-to-textiles recycling and accelerate the industry's move from linear to circular.

*This article was written by Helene Smits, chief sustainability officer, Recover™.*

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