

THE FUTURE WE WANT

YOUTH MANIFESTO



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1

Who we are

2

Introduction

3

What is the
problem

4

What we
demand

5

What young
people say



WHO WE ARE

We are a group of 50 young people from nine European countries united to advance the Sustainable Development Goals across Europe. But, in this manifesto, we represent more than just ourselves: we are standing for the thousands of young people who have put their names to support our campaign throughout Europe. Overall, our mission is to engage young people and mobilise policymakers on environmental issues and sustainability through advocacy, online and street campaigns.

We are focusing our campaign on Fast Fashion due to its major role in the climate crisis and its profound impact on society and the environment. Fast Fashion has a detrimental impact on young people's lives. The constant pressure to keep up with rapidly changing trends can contribute to mental health issues, while the use of low-quality and potentially harmful materials poses risks to health and safety. Most importantly, the environmental costs of fast fashion are significant, from resource extraction and production to transportation and waste disposal.



We are taking a stand on these issues through a campaign where we visited 17 European cities over several weeks, with stops in Romania, Serbia, Italy, Slovenia, Germany, France and Belgium, before concluding at the European Institutions in Brussels. During this journey, we have raised awareness, rallied support, and gathered the youth's perspectives to craft a Manifesto that reflects the future that young people want for Europe.



OUR MISSION WAS TO OFFER:

Access to education and information

In each of the 17 cities we visited, we organised a street campaign to raise awareness of the impacts of Fast Fashion. It is all too easy to buy Fast Fashion products while we are blind to the reality of how they are produced and what will happen to them when we are done with them. By raising awareness about the environmental and social impacts of Fast Fashion, we can enable people to make more informed and responsible decisions about what they choose to wear.

Collaborative work processes

Throughout the project, we (50 young people from different countries and cultural backgrounds) involved stakeholders at all levels: local, national and European representatives (city mayors, city councillors, representatives of ministries), civil society organisations, media, local businesses (especially upcycling and second hand businesses) and consumers. True change only happens when every stakeholder understands the importance and takes action - we are stronger together. We believe in cooperation and a holistic approach to problem solving, so this is the method we employed to drive change.

Inclusive & innovative learning spaces

Everyone in the world is impacted by the issue of Fast Fashion: even if someone never bought a Fast Fashion product in their life, they will still be affected by the environmental fallout from the Fast Fashion industry. Therefore, it was vitally important to us to create a campaign accessible to everyone. The social media campaign is without geographical limits, the street activities are multilingual, requiring varied levels of interaction, to be able to engage every person regardless of their age, ability, gender, nationality or prior knowledge of environmental issues.



INTRODUCTION

The challenges to sustainable development that come with the complexity of a globalised world are increasing worldwide. Climate change represents a global threat that is already having devastating and irreparable consequences on the economic, social and environmental systems. Whilst global efforts are being made through instruments such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals or the European Green Deal, Europe's production and consumption systems are hindering its ability to meet sustainability goals - the EU's material footprint currently stands at an alarming 14.8 tonnes per capita annually, more than double the threshold deemed sustainable and just. Whilst the world's poorest and most vulnerable, particularly women and children, bear the brunt of our culture of overproduction and overconsumption, the consequences are far-reaching and impact us all.

In the context of the climate crisis, the fashion industry plays a significant yet often overlooked role, responsible for around 10% of global carbon emissions - more than international flights and maritime shipping combined. Its reliance on energy-intensive production processes leads to substantial greenhouse gas emissions, while the widespread use of synthetic fibres, like polyester, exacerbates environmental harm, as these materials release microplastics into oceans and take centuries to decompose. The industry's overconsumption of water - accounting for 20% of global waste water further strains natural resources.

Only 1% of this material ends up being recycled into new clothing. Europe has reached a critical level of overconsumption and pollution. Most of the clothes are being exported outside of the EU and 87% of them are mostly incinerated or landfilled.

Research shows that ads and marketing campaigns target and influence customers' behaviour. The only response to fast fashion and consumerism driving climate change in the European Union has been from the French National Assembly, which has adopted in 2024 legislation banning advertising for fast fashion brands and taxing low-cost, mass produced clothes.



In the global effort to achieve the UN SDGs and honour the commitments of the Paris Agreement, it is crucial to limit fast fashion practices. The European Union is currently finalising the adoption of an ambitious Green Deal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040. To support this goal, addressing fast fashion issues and promoting more sustainable fashion practices should be a priority. By enforcing stricter environmental and social standards, the EU can lead the way towards a more sustainable, just and responsible fashion industry, and such towards a more sustainable future.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM

THE PROBLEM OF OVERPRODUCTION & OVERCONSUMPTION

The change in fashion rhythm with the rise of fast fashion

Fast fashion has significantly accelerated collection renewals, leading to environmental harm and poor working conditions all over the world. In 2015, 63% of European fashion brands operated on a biannual collection cycle but by 2020, only 49% maintained this rhythm, with 70% of brands shifting to at least four deliveries per year. This approach, once typical of fast fashion giants like Zara and H&M, has now spread across the industry, influencing even mid-range brands to adopt faster delivery rhythms. In the last years, e-retailers like Shein have only made the problem worse.

Fast fashion and its excessive impact on the planet

Fast fashion continues to accelerate at an alarming rate. For 40% of mass-market brands, collections are renewed more than ten times per year - a pace once reserved for industry leaders but now common among many low-cost retailers. Ultra-fast fashion brands like Shein, Asos, and Fashion Nova have pushed this dynamic to extremes.

Shein alone adds an average of 7,200 new items to its site daily, sometimes reaching as many as 10,800, resulting in over 470,000 models available in real-time with an average lifespan of just 65 days. This relentless overproduction has an already catastrophic environmental impact, which could only get worse if this trajectory continues: if current purchasing trends persist, the fashion industry's share of global greenhouse gas emissions could rise to 26% by 2050. To stop this destructive momentum, it is urgent to regulate the production system - not just by improving product durability, but by addressing the root cause: overproduction.



THE PROBLEM WITH ADVERTISING

Fast fashion advertising drives consumption by creating a sense of urgency and desire for the latest trends. Marketing campaigns use emotional triggers to make consumers feel they need to constantly follow fashion trends to be socially accepted, a phenomenon called emotional obsolescence.

Research shows that the frequent introduction of new styles drives consumer behaviour, with ads emphasising affordability and trendiness to justify frequent, short-term purchases. Fast fashion ads target younger demographics, who are more susceptible to peer pressure and social media. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Youtube amplify the pressure to keep up with ever-changing trends, including through targeted advertising and influencers, resulting in excessive buying and waste. This cycle of overproduction and overconsumption is worsened by the influence of social media and fast fashion advertising.

THE PROBLEM WITH GREENWASHING

Fast fashion brands' greenwashing initiatives mislead consumers about their environmental practices, creating the illusion of sustainability without real action. In 2021, major contributors like Zara and H&M, were accused of falsely promoting eco-credentials, claiming their products are made from recycled materials, yet failing to provide transparent data or meaningful changes in their practices. This deceptive marketing convinces customers they are making eco-conscious choices, though most clothing donated for recycling ends up in landfills (65%) or second-hand markets, with only 1% actually being repurposed globally. Research also shows that brands like H&M and Zara are associated with terms like "trendy," "recycling," and "eco-friendly fabric," shaping consumer perceptions without scrutiny of actual practices. This greenwashing not only misleads consumers but also perpetuates a cycle of overconsumption and environmental damage, as people unknowingly contribute to climate change under the guise of supporting "sustainable" fashion.

WHAT WE DEMAND

Responsible & ethical advertising

BUT

BUT

WHY?

Studies show that fast fashion brands fuel excessive purchasing, leading to 92 million tons of textile waste annually. Advertising plays a key role in this cycle, promoting a culture of overconsumption and disposability. By banning fast fashion advertising, the EU can curb demand for unsustainable fashion practices, helping to reduce overproduction, waste, and the industry's contribution to climate change.





Integrate a ban on fast fashion advertising into the European Green Deal to discourage unsustainable consumer behaviour. This ban should compel fast fashion brands to redesign their business models if they wish to promote their products within the European Union. It must encompass both physical and online advertisements as well as the influencers promotion on social media.


In 2024, France introduced groundbreaking legislation that bans advertisements promoting fast fashion.



This law aims to curb the environmental damage caused by overconsumption. This legislation builds on France's existing environmental advertising regulations and seeks to reduce textile waste and carbon emissions by limiting the marketing of disposable clothing. By discouraging frequent purchases through advertising restrictions, the law encourages more sustainable consumer behaviour and sets a strong example for other countries to follow in aligning fashion practices with environmental goals.

 A 2021 investigation by the European Commission found that 42% of companies' green claims were exaggerated, false, or misleading. Independent validation of green claims will ensure transparency, reduce false eco-credentials, and hold companies accountable, aligning with the EU's goal of achieving a truly sustainable economy.

 Policy demand/proposal: Combat greenwashing advertisement by endorsing the directive on green claims, mandating that all environmental claims are scientifically validated by independent third parties.

 A good practice example of combating greenwashing can be seen in Norway's Consumer Authority, which took action against misleading environmental claims in 2019 and challenged H&M for marketing its "Conscious" collection as sustainable without sufficient evidence to support the claims.

Norway requires that environmental marketing be backed by clear, verified data. This approach aligns with the European directive on green claims, which mandates that all environmental claims be scientifically validated by independent third parties.

The regulation of production

BUT

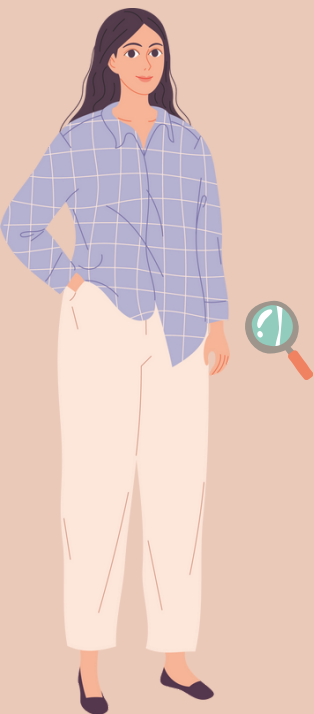
BUT

WHY?

Regulating fast fashion by limiting brands to four collections per year with a maximum of three drops is critical to mitigating its environmental and social impacts. The fashion industry produces more than 100 billion garments annually. This overproduction drives massive waste, contributing to the 1.2 billion tons of CO₂ the industry generates yearly. Setting strict limits on production will encourage more sustainable practices and reduce the overconsumption and waste inherent in fast fashion.

Define fast fashion brands by regulating clothing production, setting a cap of four collections per year with a maximum of three drops allowed per brand.

This cap identifies fast fashion brands and controls excessive production. Brands surpassing these limits will be categorised as fast fashion and banned from advertising.



This measure is designed to prevent brands from expanding their collections solely to follow trends and embrace the emerging fast fashion model. By slowing the pace of production and consumption, it aims to combat trend-driven consumerism and promote a more sustainable fashion industry.



A good practice example can be found in Denmark's Ganni, a brand that has taken steps toward more sustainable production by reducing the number of collections it releases each year. While Ganni does not yet fully meet the proposed limit of four collections annually, the company has actively scaled back its production and made transparency a core part of its business model. By slowing down its production cycles and prioritising quality over quantity, Ganni demonstrates that it is possible to operate a profitable business while reducing environmental impact. Integrating similar caps on collections across the industry would further incentivize sustainable production and help shift the fashion sector away from overproduction and waste.


BUT

BUT


WHY?

Penalising fast fashion companies that exceed production limits is essential for curbing overproduction and its harmful consequences. The average person today buys 60% more clothing than 15 years ago, but each item is kept for only half as long, driving increased waste and environmental damage. The rapid production cycles also contribute to poor labour conditions, with factories under pressure to meet relentless demand, often at the expense of worker safety and wages.

Imposing penalties for exceeding production limits would push companies to slow down, reduce waste, and adopt more sustainable practices, helping to address both environmental and social challenges.

 Require member states to impose penalties on fast fashion companies that exceed these limits to reduce overproduction

This advocates for an annual cap on market launches, combined with a progressive reduction target, in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. A return to four annual collections to slow down production and consumption in the fashion industry should be an objective promoted by the European Union. Additionally, a bonus/malus system, similar to the French model, should be established. Overproduction, which often leads to environmental degradation and human rights abuses, should be penalised, with the fines redistributed to support sustainable brands economically.

 Just as banning cigarette advertisements has proven effective in reducing smoking rates, imposing penalties on fast fashion companies that exceed production limits could significantly curb overproduction. Both practices demonstrate the effectiveness of government intervention in addressing public health and environmental concerns. By introducing financial penalties, fast fashion companies would face a strong disincentive to produce excessive quantities of clothing, leading to a more sustainable and environmentally responsible industry.

DEAR EUROPEAN UNION,

I met these humans, these people,
Standing in public spaces,
Smiling, open, hopeful,
I've stood in the same way,
Vulnerable, open, on a street corner
Pleading with the world
With passers-by
To stop, just for a moment
Would you stop just for a moment?
To talk, to think,
To question, to care
For just a moment
They, we, propose change,
Asking for us
To slow down
To use less, make less
Abuse less.
We can do such things,
Make such changes.

We can stop buying
Stop spending
But the passers-by, us,
We need some allies
We need support
From the structures
From the collaborations
And partnerships
The EU stands for
Like with our clothes,
Our communities,
Countries, environments,
And homes,
They just need some care and
repair
Before being passed down
From one generation
To the next, our future.



Madison Lindsman, Belgrade, 2024

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

“I would like to see a change in the fashion industry that prioritises sustainability and ethical practices over the disposable culture perpetuated by fast fashion.”

“There is slavery behind consumerism and European values should be against slavery in all parts of the world.”

“Fast fashion is dangerous to our climate.”

“Please listen to the voices of the young people.”

“Please limit the advertising of fast fashion.”



“We need to live in a world where child labour is unacceptable, as well as a world where fields are not filled with plastic clothes and no polluted water caused by fast fashion!”

“Please think about the people working in such vile conditions in those fast fashion owned factories. Please ban fast fashion.”

REFERENCES

European Environment Agency.

White Paper for an EU within Planetary Boundaries: Sustainable Resource Management in the EU, Climate Action Network Europe

10 Statistics about Fast Fashion, Earth.org

Slow down, our planet can't keep up, European Research Executive Agency.

Quand la mode surchauffe, Les Amis de la Terre France

Mode éthique ou fast-fashion?, Greenpeace France

Misleading Consumers with Green Advertising? An Affect-Reason-Involvement Account of Greenwashing Effects in Environmental Advertising, Desirée Schmuck, Jörg Matthes & Brigitte Naderer

AUTHORS

Andreea Oglagea

Monica Tudorache

Victoria Carasava

Antonia Pislariu

Elena Stevkovska

Mihajlo Kovač

Ivana Katančević

Una Kubat

Nevena Gajić

Maša Čežek

Sarah Michelle Engels

Siobhan Kraus

Mathilda Petersik

Anna Altenschmidt

Saqib Abdullah Azhar

Auri Leino

Saara Pirhonen

Saga Kampman

Airiina Åström

Meeri (Miko) Brummer

António Emanuel Ramos Abreu

Nádia Catarina Silva Nunes

Yusleivy Sairy Rodrigues Vivas

Zofia Lisowska

Ana Rita Meireles Araújo

Amel Sana Abbassi

Alice Sansone

Lune Culmann

Nazarena Plumb

Luca Antoine

Thibaut Terré

Simona Papa

Leina Brachot

Ornella Logbo

Juliette Rasir

Pauline Cubélier

Klara Jamnik

Klara Francesca Junkar

Mustafa Kamil

Atusa Karbaschi

Elena Sofia Mondello

Giulia Zaffino

Clara Zaffino



Co-funded by
the European Union

THE FUTURE
WE WANT

