Sustainable Apparel and Textiles Conference

From isolated action to scaled solutions: How we can build an industry ecosystem that delivers tangible impact for business, society, and the environment.

April 29th–30th 2026 | Amsterdam

The Sustainable Apparel and Textiles Conference will bring together brand leaders, manufacturers, investors, policymakers, and innovators to explore what genuine systems transformation looks like for the industry.

Held behind closed doors and fully off the record, the forum offers an interactive, solutions-focused programme. Over two days, we'll examine how to shift from isolated action to true ecosystem change; addressing the financial, organisational, and technical barriers that prevent progress on issues such as clean energy, fair purchasing, circularity at scale, worker welfare, and traceability.

This is a practical, action-driven meeting that moves beyond PR and pledges to focus on what works, what doesn't, and how effective strategies can be implemented at scale. With a balance of high-level discussion, technical deep dives, and open debate, the conference will help leaders benchmark progress and accelerate tangible impact across the apparel value chain.

For more information or to get involved, please contact Niamh Campbell at
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Day 0 – Tuesday, 28th April

Afternoon: **Visit to BrightFiber Textiles factory and workshop**

Join us for an exclusive on-site visit to BrightFiber Textiles.

See firsthand how their factory is using locally sourced second hand clothing and recycling them into new textile fibres. We'll look at their efforts in Amsterdam and how the city's textile waste stream could be a blueprint for large-scale recycling.

We'll then break into groups for discussions on the barriers to scaling circularity in the industry. These roundtables protected by Chatham House rules provide an opportunity for a genuine deep dive into the key obstacles and enablers for scaling T2T recycling, as well as questions around local supply chains. This visit kicks off the conference for honest, pragmatic discussions—culminating with preconference drinks at Hotel Casa.

17.30-18.30: **Early-registration networking drinks**

Day 1 – Wednesday, 29th April – Tackling systemic issues

8.00-9.00 **Arrival and light breakfast**

9.00-9.05 **Opening remarks**

9.05-9.20 **Time to align: The necessity of partnerships and pre-competitive dialogue for success**

One of the most classic conference tropes is the call for "more collaboration." And it's true, we do need collaboration. The business reality is stark: our challenges are too complex, our consumer base is too distracted, and our resources too fragile to continue operating in isolation.

But we can no longer simply call for collaboration without follow-through. We need to start practicing genuinely aligned approaches rather than gunning for first mover status. The question is: how? How do we move beyond rhetoric to forge genuine partnerships? How do we create spaces for pre-competitive dialogue where we can scale innovations collectively, establish common standards, and drive efficiencies that deliver real impact?

This keynote sets the tone for two days of pragmatic and honest conversations, reflecting on actionable strategies that turn collaboration from a talking point into tangible results.

9.20-10.00 **Balancing quarterly results and long-term survival: How to make the case for climate action in the board-room**

With average C-suite tenure now just 4.5 years, pressure for quick results often overshadows longer-term risks. Today's environment is volatile: tariffs are disrupting global supply chains, inflation is squeezing margins, and headlines declare the "retreat of ESG" and report that sustainability has dropped down the agenda (2025 State of Fashion Report)

However, the reality is more nuanced. Harvard Business Review found that while some companies are scaling back, most are simply pursuing sustainability more quietly. Climate action remains core to risk management- supply disruptions, resource scarcity, and falling productivity are already here. Strong leaders recognise this investment: the returns may not appear next quarter, but they will determine whether the business endures the next decade.

We'll hear from C-suite leaders on:

- What are the top priorities in 2026, and where does climate fit when budgets are under pressure?
- What risks are we systematically missing in current assessments, and what's the cost of being unprepared?
- The structural and governance changes needed to move from quarterly survival to long-term resilience – KPIs, talent search, board structure
- How can we reframe sustainability as essential business investment for all C-suites

10.00-10.45 **Equitable partnerships: The importance of fair purchasing practises to unlock supplier-brand collaboration**

Sustainability in 2026 is fundamentally supply chain management. For brands with approved science-based targets, 96% of emissions are Scope 3 (Aii), and most social impact opportunities lie within supplier relationships. But whilst brands increasingly pledge long-term partnerships, the Better Buying 2025 Garment Industry Scorecard found that industry-wide progress on purchasing practices had stalled.

The gap between aspiration and practice reflects genuine complexity. Market volatility, shareholder pressure, and competing priorities create real constraints for brands, whilst suppliers face their own pressures around climate adaptation, capital investment, and margins. But 63% of suppliers surveyed by Vogue Business report that brands expect them to advance sustainability whilst continuing to squeeze margins; a financially untenable partnership for all.

Our multi-stakeholder panel will explore:

- What does partnership mean in practice?
- Brand and supplier perspectives on the tensions and trade-offs in sourcing relationships
- How can we shift from brand-led directives to supplier-informed collaboration to share investment and risk?
- What practical tools and technologies should we co-invest in maximise efficiencies for all?

10.45-11.30 Break and speed networking

11.30-12.10 **Electrification: Who's funding the necessary investments to deliver net-zero?**

Despite record numbers of science-based targets and pledges, industry emissions rose 7.5% from 2022 to 2023 alone (Aii). Decarbonisation requires action on multiple fronts, from curbing overproduction to scaling next-generation fibres, but the most immediate and accessible lever is clean energy technologies and clean thermal energy solutions.

Heat needs up to 150°C can be electrified today using existing technology, yet uptake remains limited. The challenge isn't technological readiness; it's finance and transparency. Without collective efforts, suppliers cannot absorb million-dollar costs of transition costs.

Our panel will discuss the practical next steps for apparel's energy transition towards renewables, asking

- Why is the industry dragging its feet when it comes to electrification? Are the obstacles operational or bureaucratic?
- How far can electrification take us on progress towards climate goals?
- What role can brands play in grid advocacy and collective power purchase agreements to unlock renewable infrastructure at scale?
- What are the financial models and board-ready pitches for sharing upfront and operational costs?

12.10-13.00 **Industry transformation: Where are the workers' rights and protections in a 1.5°C+ world?**

The climate crisis is already reshaping garment-producing regions. In Dhaka, one pregnant worker reported that several people faint daily in the hot season (My Body is Burning). In Bangladesh alone, climate impacts have displaced 36% of garment workers, with heat stress driving rising absenteeism and a 6% production drop, hitting women hardest (Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies).

Yet none of the 65 major brands reviewed by Business and Human Rights Resource Centre have explicit ESG targets to protect workers from extreme heat or address the impact of climate change on labour. Most supply chain risk modelling has yet to fully recognise the lived experience of at-risk communities at the base of global supply chains, continuing to treat climate change as an operational issue. But as the ILR's Higher Ground report demonstrated, aligning climate ambition with worker protection is essential for both moral responsibility and resilient, functioning supply chains.

Our panel will discuss how far we've come and what still needs to be done on topics including:

- A just transition – what does this mean in practice?
- How to integrate worker voices, particularly women's, into climate planning
- What is the role of data for real-time assessment of climate risks to at-risk communities?
- Case studies of initiatives that practically alleviate the impact of climate change on workers and their families

13.00-14.00 Lunch

14.00-14.45 Breakout sessions

** Join us in the 'This house believes' for high-energy debates where participants are randomly assigned a side to argue. Limited to 15 participants per room for more intimate, engaging discussion.*

*** Join the learning group for double length sessions exploring financing, organizational, and logistical barriers in the industry. Expert-led discussions with groups of 15 participants working through solutions together. A follow-up call 6 weeks post-event allows participants to share insights after consulting their wider teams.*

1. *Social impact* - **Supply chain due diligence: Identifying and managing forced labour risks beyond tier 1**
2. *Business value* – **Unlocking energy savings: What are the lost-cost, high-return innovation opportunities in tier 2?**
3. *Regulatory preparation* - **Reporting cycles and boundaries: What is the balance between accuracy and scalability?**
4. *This house believes** - **Luxury apparel products are sustainable by nature**
5. *Learning group*** - **From premium to parity: Can next-gen materials ever scale sufficiently to compete with traditional options?**

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14.45-15.30 Breakout sessions

6. *Social impact* - **Water stewardship: How can we identify and address blind spots in the value chain?**
7. *Business value* – **Overcoming the sustainability stigma: Reshaping internal perceptions of sustainability teams and building company-wide sustainability culture**
8. *Regulatory preparation* - **Between greenwashing and greenhushing: What is counts as credible evidence and substantiation for claims?**
9. **This house believes* - **CSRD reporting was/is a waste of everyone's time**
10. ***Learning group continued* - **From premium to parity: Can next-gen materials ever scale sufficiently to compete with traditional options?**

15.30-16.15 Networking break

16.15-16.45 Breakout sessions – Case study round

11. *Social impact case study* – **Grievance mechanisms: How do we engage, respond and remediate with local context and sensitivity**
12. *Business value case study* – **Can recycled polyester become an economically viable alternative?**
13. *Regulatory preparation case study* – **What are DPPs actually valuable for?**
14. **This house believes* - **We need to stop focusing on SBTi targets and focus on action**
15. ***Learning group* - **End-to-end traceability: How do you align internally for effective supply chain management**

16.45-17.30 Breakout sessions

16. *Social impact* - **Living wages: Why worker welfare starts but doesn't end with decent pay**
17. *Business value* – **Shortening supply chains: What are the opportunities of localised production and how do we unlock them?**
18. *Regulatory preparation* - **EPR readiness: How do we prepare for potentially fragmented national schemes?**
19. **This house believes* - **Cotton faces a worse PR crisis than polyester**
20. ***Learning group continued* - **End-to-end traceability: How do you align internally for effective supply chain management**

17.30- Networking drinks

Day 2 – Thursday, 30th April – Circularity in practise

8.00-9.00 **Arrival and light breakfast**

8.00-8.50 ***Coffee catch-up: Brand case studies**

****Join the brand-led coffee case studies for morning sessions exploring a tangible brand strategy: what's been tried, lessons learned so far, and how the initiative might be scaled for greater impact. Limited to 20 participants per session for focused, interactive discussion.*

- **What does meaningful union engagement look like for brands?**
- **How do we embed action on fibre fragmentation within other sustainability priorities?**

9.00-9.50 **The consumption cyclone: Can circularity fix overproduction?**

Despite meaningful progress in alternative business models and recycled materials, total emissions and fibre production continue to rise. According to Textile Exchange, recycled polyester output increased from 8.9 to 9.3 million tonnes in 2024—yet its overall market share fell as virgin polyester grew even faster, undermining decarbonisation efforts. Fashion Revolution underscores the issue: only 9% of major brands disclose their production volumes, yet that small group alone accounts for 4.3 billion items annually.

In this session, our panellists will debate whether circularity will ever fix overproduction. We'll assess:

- Can brands really decouple growth from production while the industry models continues to rely on growth through production? What systemic changes could enable this?
- Do our alternative business models risk in the current policy environment becoming additional consumption cycles that don't displace virgin production?
- What does a truly circular textiles industry look like in practice—and are we actually following the waste hierarchy, or just skipping straight to recycling?
- Given overproduction's carbon impact, should we prioritise proven decarbonisation solutions like clean energy and material upcycling over circularity models that don't reduce total volumes?

Halfway through the session, we'll flip the stage and invite the audience to join the debate.

9.50-10.15 ***Q&A with the European Commission:* Breakdown on the ESPR and the Circular Economy Action Plan**

A fair transition to an effective circular economy requires strong regulation to level the playing field. The Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) will standardise more durable, repairable, and transparent products across Europe, with textiles among the first industries facing compliance by 2027.

But 2025 has brought uncertainty to EU sustainability regulation. In this Q&A with experts, we'll address: What does ESPR mean in practice for large corporations and SMEs? How can businesses evidence compliance? Where are the opportunities, and when should preparation begin? What happens with unsold stock?

This session will equip you with the practical knowledge needed to navigate compliance and seize the opportunities ahead.

10.15-10.45 Networking break

10.45-11.15 **Regenerative cotton as systems change: Impact, opportunity, and operational reality from farm to brand**

Circularity requires more than innovative materials; it depends on collaboration and systems thinking. This session explores how regenerative cotton can move beyond a single input to become a catalyst for transparency, accountability, and circular transformation across the supply chain.

But how do we make the transition to regenerative cotton? The shift required for natural, living systems does not automatically align with commercial, quarterly frameworks or farmer security. Regenerative practices often involve higher short-term cost and complexity, but deliver long-term resilience, risk mitigation, and value creation.

Drawing on case studies from CCI, this session will highlight leadership in regenerative agriculture and verified impact, and explore the next steps for scaling holistic practices across the value chain.

****Join us in 'The other room' for candid conversations about the status quo and what needs to change to drive real progress. With no speakers, every participant is invited to contribute thoughts, experiences, and lessons learned. Pre-registration required, with sessions limited to 15 participants for open, honest dialogue.

11.15-11.55 **Product team perspective: How do we design for durability and recyclability, not retrofit them later?**

The linear 'take-make-waste' model is deeply embedded across the value chain, especially within design teams. Success is still largely measured by low cost per unit and meeting functional or product standards, while the environmental footprint of fibres, production impacts, and end-of-life outcomes have long been treated as external factors — until the arrival of the ESPR.

Products are now required to have reduced impact, improved durability and recyclability, but still satisfy customers at an accessible price point. Our panel will assess how to support design teams to deliver on all fronts:

- Internal governance and upskilling: How do we reset, reframe, and reprioritise our ways of working?'
- Money talks: How will these changes be funded and how can teams demonstrate the ROI?
- Design trade-offs: What happens when efforts to make products more durable undermine their recyclability? What are the other trade-offs and how can these be overcome?

The other room:

How can SMEs drive meaningful change when the system favours giants?

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11.55-12.45 ***Dragons den style presentation* - Can we decouple profit and production through resale?**

The global second-hand market is allegedly booming, growing approximately 3x faster than the overall global apparel market (ThreadUp). Among circular business models, resale stands as the one showing real returns and returning behaviour, particularly among Gen Z consumers (BCG).

Beneath the celebratory headlines, there are some key questions for sustainability teams to consider:

- Are resale models genuinely reducing our environmental footprint, or are they normalising overconsumption? A recent Nature study argues the latter. Affordability, not sustainability, is still the main reason people buy second-hand (BCG). Does resale simply make it easier to buy more?
- Why should CFOs, especially non-luxury ones, pursue resale when traditional linear models still generate higher revenue?

In this dynamic Dragons' Den-session, we'll hear from 3 practical case studies and dive into whether resale can and should scale further.

When is and when isn't AI an appropriate tool for advancing sustainability?

12.45-13.45 **Lunch**

13.45-14:10 **A just transition: How we can centre waste pickers, not just waste, in the circular economy**

Images of textile mountains have become symbols of fashion's waste crisis, highlighting the need for stronger regulation on T2T recycling. But the waste pickers who make re-use possible are almost never seen.

In hubs such as Kantamanto Market and Panipat, people have created livelihoods, income, and agency from discarded textiles. However, the sheer volume of incoming waste now exceeds local capacity to sort and upcycle safely, often exposing workers to hazardous conditions (Guardian). As the industry looks to automate recycling, how do we ensure this transition doesn't further exploit or exclude the informal workers managing waste.

In this session, we'll explore what companies can do to protect worker rights and dignity while building compliant, transparent waste management systems that work with, not against, existing communities.

Measuring biodiversity: What data points should we be tracking?

14.10-14.55 **Breaking the deadlock: What key barriers do we need to overcome to scale T2T recycling?**

In 2017, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation found that less than 1% of material used to produce clothing was recycled into new clothing. Eight years later, despite a wave of start-ups and projections that recycling 30% of textiles could generate over $50 billion in value (BCG), uptake remains stubbornly low. Less than 1% of the global fibre market still comes from pre- and post-consumer recycled textiles (Textile Exchange).

We're stuck in a supply-demand deadlock. Designers aren't incentivised to design for circularity. Collection infrastructure is patchy. Sorters lack the capacity to improve segregation and traceability. Recyclers need long-term commitments and volume guarantees from brands to scale. Brands hesitate to adopt recycled materials at scale due to quality and price concerns — concerns that can't be solved without stronger consumer demand.

So who breaks the cycle? Our expert panel will discuss.

How can the industry address waste colonialism and uplift community-led circular solutions?

14.55-15:30 **Emotional durability: Why consumers neglect their own wardrobe – and how psychology can help**

The transition to a circular fashion economy depends on people valuing what they already own: wearing garments for longer, caring for them properly, and, when the time comes, placing them in the right channels for textile-to-textile recycling rather than sending them to landfill.

However, research such as Zalando's *It Takes Many* report shows that whilst 74% of consumers say they want to wear clothes more sustainably, these values rarely translate into action. The say-do gap is well-documented: people care, but garments still end up neglected at the back of wardrobes or discarded to make space for new purchases.

Waiting for consumers to change on their own is not a viable strategy. The fashion industry must meet people where they are and find ways to build emotional durability into clothing to change this default behaviour.

Our panel will explore:

- What do consumers consider as 'sustainable fashion'? What does the data tell us, and how reliable is it?
- How can brands uncover what truly motivates consumers around garment care and disposal? What - if any - useful generalisations exist, given the emotional complexity of our relationship with clothing?
- What practical interventions have we seen work in bridging the say–do gap and driving repeat purchase behaviour?

15.30- **Closing**

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