



There are 8 key issues Centre for Sustainable Fashion uses as a starting point for exploring the relationship between fashion and sustainability. These issues relate to both the industrial and personal activities of fashion with consideration to environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts.

1) Climate Change

The current level of CO₂ in the atmosphere already exceeds what is considered safe by scientists and yet the fashion industry's emissions continue to increase. If we fail to respond to this challenge, sea levels will continue to rise, many places will experience droughts, and there will be more frequent extreme weather events, increasing the number of people displaced.

2) Water Stress

1.1 billion people currently lack access to clean water, whilst the fashion industry consumes water in growing fibres, production process and in garment care. It can take 2700 litres of water to make one cotton t-shirt, which alone could provide up to 3 years drinking water for one person.

3) Hazardous Chemicals and Pollution

The fashion industry is one of the largest users of chemicals and in turn is responsible for high levels of water and air pollution, which is hazardous to our ecosystems and human health. Textile processing currently accounts for around 20% of water pollution, whilst through the production of synthetic fibres, nitrous oxide emissions are released into the air, which are 310 times more damaging than carbon dioxide.

4) Land Use and Biodiversity

Measured by the variety of life on earth, biodiversity is the foundation for a healthy planet. Fashion is directly linked to habitat loss and a decline in biodiversity through land use. Areas of forested land have been cleared for cotton cultivation, livestock raising and cellulosic fibres made from wood, whilst livestock mismanagement has also led to degradation of fertile land.

5) Diminishing Resources

The fashion industry relies on many natural and human resources which are finite or diminishing. The making, transporting and use of fashion is almost completely dependent on fossil fuels, whilst hand-based skills and crafts from around the world are rapidly vanishing because of faster and cheaper manufacturing options.

6) Consumption and Waste

Clothing production worldwide has doubled since 2000 and yet the average British or European person keeps their clothing items for about half as long. Globally the vast majority of discarded clothing ends up in landfills or is incinerated, currently only 20% is collected for reuse or recycling.

7) Modern Day Slavery

Modern Slavery still exists today in the forms of forced labour, people trafficking and child exploitation. Victims of Modern Slavery are unable to leave their situation because they are subject to threats, violence, punishment, coercion or deception. With a lack of transparency across the industry, 77% of companies operating in the UK believe Modern Slavery might exist somewhere in their supply chains.

8) Wellbeing

The current level and pace of the fashion industry compromises the wellbeing of workers, communities, wearers, animals and the environment. Over half of workers in fashion are not paid the minimum wage and in most producing countries this is still half of what can be considered a living wage. This is linked to an increasing speed, fueled by marketing messages which pressure women and men to look, feel and shop in a particular way.