

ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

Topic A: How can countries ensure the successful implementation of SDGs by 2030, especially in the face of economic challenges?

Topic B: Should international laws be implemented to regulate the environmental damage caused by the global fashion industry?



Introduction to Committee

Composition and Functioning

The Environmental Council (EC) is a specialized decision-making body within the United Nations system that brings together representatives from all member states to address issues at the intersection of environment, development, and sustainability. It functions similarly to other intergovernmental councils, where each member has one vote, and resolutions are adopted either by consensus or majority depending on the issue at hand.

The EC works through both formal sessions and working groups. Formal sessions focus on drafting and adopting resolutions, while working groups address technical matters such as climate adaptation strategies, financing mechanisms, and scientific cooperation. Non-governmental organizations, scientific experts, and international institutions are often invited to participate as observers, contributing valuable insights but without voting rights. This composition ensures a balance between inclusivity, representation, and efficiency.

Scope of Responsibilities

The Council's responsibilities extend across three primary areas:

Policy Guidance — advising the UN General Assembly and other organs on matters relating to the environment and sustainable development.

Coordination — ensuring coherence among UN agencies, financial institutions, and international treaties that affect the SDGs.

Monitoring and Accountability — assessing member states' progress on commitments such as the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, and the SDG targets.

By coordinating across multiple fields — from energy and agriculture to education and health — the EC plays a central role in ensuring that the SDGs are not treated as isolated objectives but as interconnected priorities that require holistic solutions.

Key Roles in Environmental Governance

The Environmental Council acts as a bridge between environmental policy and global governance. It ensures that sustainability considerations are integrated into discussions of trade, finance, and security. For example, in cases where economic challenges hinder environmental commitments, the EC advocates for solutions such as debt-for-nature swaps, green bonds, and technology transfers.

Additionally, the Council monitors compliance with international agreements and provides recommendations for strengthening resilience in the face of crises. Its role in environmental governance is therefore both preventive and corrective: it seeks to anticipate risks that might derail sustainable development while also helping countries recover when crises strike.

Introduction to Chairs

Honourable delegates,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the Environmental Council for this year's conference. As the international community stands only five years away from the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the urgency of our discussions has never been greater. While significant progress has been made in areas such as access to clean water, renewable energy adoption, and reducing child mortality, global setbacks caused by economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate disasters, and international conflicts threaten to undermine decades of work.

The issue before this council — ensuring the successful implementation of the SDGs by 2030 in the face of economic challenges — reflects the intersection of environmental, social, and financial policy. It compels us to ask: how can governments safeguard long-term sustainability when short-term crises dominate policymaking? How can countries balance debt obligations, inflation, and economic recovery with commitments to climate action, poverty eradication, and gender equality?

This council must serve as a platform for constructive dialogue. The goal is not only to understand the challenges but also to chart a path forward through innovative financing mechanisms, stronger multilateral cooperation, and meaningful partnerships with civil society and the private sector. We encourage you to approach the debate with creativity, pragmatism, and a willingness to compromise, as these are the qualities that define real diplomacy.

We look forward to fruitful discussions, and we are confident that your contributions will bring us closer to achieving the shared vision of a sustainable and equitable world by 2030.

Sincerely,
Rodrigo

Introduction to Chairs

Esteemed Delegates,

Welcome to the KCSOTOMUN of 2026! My name is Teresa Hernández and I will be one of your chairs of the Environmental Committee (EC) for this third edition of our MUN. It is my pleasure to serve you all; whether it is your first conference or if you have experience, I hope we can all form excellent debates and learn from each other throughout your experience.

From my personal experience with these conferences, I learnt how much you can grow from all the different aspects of your participation and how much this unique experience will stick with you for the future. It is my hope that I will be able to make your time here exceptional through broadening your understanding of world situations and perspectives in a situation which will help you take a step towards success.

All we ask is that you try your absolute best to explore your potential to the fullest and, as always, enjoy every moment in this committee!

Sincerely,
Teresa Hernández

Topic A : Key Definitions

- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** – A universal set of 17 goals adopted in 2015 by all UN member states to achieve peace, prosperity, and sustainability by 2030.
- **Debt-for-Nature Swap** – A financial arrangement where a portion of a developing country's foreign debt is forgiven in exchange for local investments in environmental conservation or sustainability.
- **Green Bonds** – Fixed-income financial instruments designed to raise funds for climate and environmental projects. They are key tools for financing renewable energy, infrastructure, and adaptation measures.
- **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** – Financial aid provided by developed countries to developing nations, aimed at promoting sustainable economic growth and welfare.
- **Climate Finance** – Funding, both public and private, local and international, aimed at supporting climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in line with the Paris Agreement.
- **Global North–South Divide** – The disparity in wealth, development, and resources between industrialized nations (the North) and developing nations (the South), which strongly influences SDG progress.
- **Resilience Building** – Efforts to strengthen the ability of communities and systems to withstand economic shocks, environmental disasters, and social instability without compromising development goals.
- **Just Transition** – Policies and programs ensuring that the shift toward greener economies does not disproportionately harm workers and vulnerable communities, but instead promotes inclusivity.
- **Multilateralism** – A system of global governance where multiple states cooperate through institutions such as the UN to address shared challenges, essential for SDG progress.

Topic A : Context and Current Issues

Context of the Challenge

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, the world has faced repeated crises that have slowed progress. As of 2025, only 15% of SDG targets are on track, while nearly 40% are showing stagnation or regression. Many experts now warn that the world is not projected to achieve the full agenda before the 2050s.

The primary challenges include the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, global inflation, climate-related disasters, and growing inequality between countries. Developing nations in particular have struggled to balance urgent budgetary demands with long-term SDG investments. Without dramatic changes in financing and cooperation, the 2030 deadline will likely be missed.

Post-COVID Recovery

The pandemic represented the most significant shock to the SDG agenda since its creation. According to the World Bank, over 100 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2020–2021, erasing almost a decade of progress. School closures affected 1.6 billion students worldwide, damaging progress on education and human capital development.

Recovery has been uneven: advanced economies could mobilize large fiscal packages, while low-income states relied heavily on loans, deepening debt burdens. This divergence widened the North-South divide, leaving poorer nations behind on key goals such as healthcare, job creation, and climate resilience.

Inflation and Rising Costs

Global inflation peaked at 8.7% in 2022, the highest rate in decades, driven by energy shocks and supply chain disruptions. In poorer countries, households spend up to 60% of income on food and fuel, making them highly vulnerable to price spikes. Sub-Saharan Africa has recorded food inflation above 20% in some states.

High interest rates have also made it more expensive for governments to borrow, reducing their ability to invest in infrastructure or renewable energy. The cost-of-living crisis has sparked unrest in several countries, from Sri Lanka to Argentina, creating political instability that further delays SDG implementation.

Debt Crisis in Developing Countries

Many low- and middle-income countries face unsustainable debt levels. According to the IMF, over 50 states are in or at high risk of debt distress. Some governments spend more on debt servicing than on healthcare or education, undermining SDG 3 (Health) and SDG 4 (Education).

This crisis has made innovative financing mechanisms essential. Proposals such as debt-for-nature swaps or restructuring packages tied to SDG progress have emerged as potential solutions, but implementation remains limited. Without debt relief, many countries will lack the fiscal space to fund their sustainability agendas.

Topic A : Context and Current Issues

Energy Dependence and Transition Costs

Energy systems are at the core of the sustainability agenda. While renewable energy capacity is growing, many countries still depend heavily on fossil fuels for economic stability. Transitioning requires massive upfront investments — the IEA estimates \$4 trillion annually will be needed in clean energy by 2030 to meet climate targets.

Yet developing countries often lack the financing to undertake such transformations. The conflict in Ukraine worsened global energy insecurity, pushing states to prioritize short-term supply over long-term sustainability. This has led to record fossil fuel subsidies in 2022, directly undermining SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Global Inequality and Financing Gaps

The UN estimates the global SDG financing gap at \$4 trillion annually, a figure widened by inflation and global instability. Wealthier nations still fall short of the 0.7% of GNI target for Official Development Assistance (ODA), while private investment flows disproportionately go to middle-income rather than least developed countries.

This inequality risks entrenching a two-tier system where advanced economies continue progress, while poorer regions stall or regress. The widening gap between North and South is now one of the largest threats to global cooperation on the SDGs.

Role of Private Sector and Investment Flows

The private sector plays a vital role in financing the SDGs. According to the IFC, up to one-third of SDG financing needs could be met through private investment, especially in infrastructure, renewable energy, and healthcare.

However, investors are reluctant to put money into high-risk environments. Many developing countries lack strong institutions or transparent regulatory frameworks, deterring capital inflows. Unlocking private investment will require risk-sharing mechanisms such as blended finance, guarantees, and public-private partnerships.

Climate Change and Natural Disasters

Climate-related disasters are increasing in frequency and severity, costing billions annually and undermining multiple SDGs. For example, the 2022 floods in Pakistan caused damages exceeding \$30 billion, wiping out decades of development in affected areas.

These events force governments to redirect scarce resources toward recovery rather than sustainable development. The growing link between climate vulnerability and economic fragility underscores the importance of climate finance, adaptation strategies, and disaster preparedness.

Topic A : Context and Current Issues

Food Security and Agriculture Sustainability

Rising food prices, extreme weather, and supply chain disruptions have left millions at risk of hunger. The FAO estimates that over 735 million people faced chronic hunger in 2022, a reversal from earlier progress toward SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).

Sustainable agriculture requires investments in resilient farming, water management, and technology. Yet many farmers in developing nations lack access to credit, seeds, or infrastructure. Without addressing food security, the broader SDG framework risks collapse.

Health Systems and SDG Setbacks

Health systems remain strained following the pandemic. Many low-income countries diverted resources from routine healthcare toward emergency responses, leading to setbacks in maternal health, vaccinations, and disease prevention.

The WHO warns that the world is off-track for achieving universal health coverage by 2030. In addition, climate change is increasing health risks, with rising cases of heat-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, and malnutrition. Ensuring resilient healthcare is thus essential to overall SDG progress.

Education and Human Capital Losses

Education has been one of the greatest casualties of recent crises. According to the World Bank, COVID-19 caused learning losses equivalent to 0.6 years of schooling, while 1.6 billion students were affected by school closures. Girls in particular faced heightened risks of dropping out, child marriage, or being forced into informal labor, worsening gender inequality.

Shrinking education budgets have limited progress on teacher training, digital infrastructure, and inclusive schooling. This undercuts SDG 4 (Quality Education) and weakens countries' long-term economic prospects. Unless financing and innovation increase, global human capital will continue to erode.

Urbanization and Infrastructure Strains

Nearly 70% of the global population will live in cities by 2050, posing major challenges for sustainable urban planning. Rapid, unplanned growth has led to rising slum populations, inadequate transport systems, and pollution. Megacities in Africa and Asia are especially at risk of overburdened infrastructure.

With governments facing economic pressures, sustainable investments in public transport, renewable grids, and waste management are often delayed. This not only undermines SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities) but also exacerbates inequality, as urban poor are hit hardest by overcrowding and poor services.

Topic A : Context and Current Issues

Migration and Displacement

Climate disasters and economic challenges are intensifying migration. In 2022, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reported 32 million people displaced by disasters, alongside conflict-related displacement. Host communities often struggle to provide services, creating social and political tensions. For displaced populations, access to education, health care, and employment is often severely disrupted. This undermines SDGs on poverty, hunger, and equality. Addressing migration requires regional and international cooperation to ensure fair burden-sharing and sustainable solutions.

Technological Innovation and Digital Divide

Technology offers potential breakthroughs in renewable energy, agriculture, and healthcare, but 2.7 billion people still lack internet access. This digital divide leaves many developing countries unable to fully participate in the global digital economy.

Closing the gap requires investment in infrastructure, digital literacy, and affordability. If unaddressed, technological innovation risks deepening inequalities and slowing SDG progress, particularly in education, decent work, and access to information.

Governance, Corruption, and Transparency

Strong governance is critical for SDG progress, but corruption remains widespread. According to Transparency International, most countries have made little progress in fighting corruption over the past decade. Funds intended for climate finance or social development are often mismanaged. Economic crises worsen the problem, as governments under strain may reduce transparency or cut oversight mechanisms. Weak governance not only delays SDG progress but also erodes public trust in institutions.

International Aid and Development Cooperation

Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains vital for many low-income countries, but commitments continue to fall short of the 0.7% of GNI target. At the same time, humanitarian crises and climate disasters have increased competition for limited funds.

For many countries in Africa, South Asia, and small island states, ODA is the primary means of financing SDG-related projects. Without renewed donor commitments and more effective allocation, progress risks stalling further.

Trade Disruptions and Supply Chain Challenges

The pandemic, war in Ukraine, and geopolitical tensions have all disrupted global trade. Shipping costs soared, supply chains broke down, and export restrictions on food and fuel worsened inflation in import-dependent countries.

For developing states, these disruptions have undermined food security and economic stability. Long-term solutions must involve diversifying supply chains and investing in regional production to build resilience.

Topic A : Context and Current Issues

Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Justice

Young people represent the future of SDG progress, but they are disproportionately affected by unemployment and instability. As of 2023, youth made up 40% of the world's unemployed, with long-term risks for poverty and inequality.

At the same time, youth movements have been central in climate advocacy and social justice campaigns. Ensuring meaningful participation of youth in decision-making processes is essential for achieving long-term sustainability and fairness across generations.

Regional Case Studies

SDG progress varies greatly by region. Sub-Saharan Africa faces the steepest financing gaps, with more than 60% of states off track to meet poverty and hunger goals. South Asia has advanced in renewable energy but struggles with inequality and population pressures. Latin America is hampered by political instability and dependence on extractive industries, while Europe is relatively advanced but faces energy insecurity.

These differences highlight the need for tailored regional strategies rather than uniform solutions. Strengthened cooperation at both global and regional levels will be crucial for advancing the SDG agenda.

Topic A : Timeline of Key Events

1. United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)

Adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015, this agenda introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. It provided the comprehensive framework for global action on poverty, environment, and peace. All subsequent SDG policies are anchored in this agreement.

2. Paris Agreement (2015)

Adopted in December 2015 under the UNFCCC, this treaty committed states to limit global warming to below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. It emphasized climate action financing, technology transfer, and nationally determined contributions (NDCs), directly impacting SDG 13 (Climate Action).

3. Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (2015)

Signed in July 2015, this agreement set the foundation for financing the SDGs, focusing on mobilizing domestic resources, private investment, trade, and international aid. It emphasized reducing the financing gap, estimated in the trillions annually.

4. Glasgow Climate Pact (2021)

Adopted at COP26 in November 2021, this pact called for a phasedown of unabated coal power and fossil fuel subsidies. It reaffirmed the \$100 billion annual climate finance goal and urged increased support for adaptation. It underlined the economic challenges of balancing sustainability with growth.

5. Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries (2022–2031)

Adopted in March 2022, it outlined a 10-year plan for the 46 Least Developed Countries, focusing on structural transformation, investment in science and technology, and resilience against climate shocks. It reinforced commitments to SDGs in fragile economies.

6. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (1992)

Signed at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992, this was the foundation for all subsequent climate agreements. Its principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” remains central to debates about equity in SDG financing and environmental responsibility.

7. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030)

Adopted in March 2015 in Sendai, Japan, this framework addressed disaster risk reduction, resilience, and preparedness. Given the economic costs of disasters, it directly contributes to SDGs on sustainable cities, climate action, and reducing inequalities.

8. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022)

Adopted in December 2022 at COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, this framework committed countries to protect 30% of land and oceans by 2030. It underlines the link between biodiversity, climate resilience, and economic development, tying directly into SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Topic A : Key Points to Debate

- How can debt restructuring and relief be tied directly to SDG progress?
- Should developed countries be legally bound to meet their 0.7% GNI ODA commitment?
- To what extent should private investment be incentivized for SDG financing?
- Can carbon pricing or global taxation schemes realistically fund SDG gaps?
- Should the IMF and World Bank reform their lending frameworks to prioritize sustainability?
- What role should emerging economies (e.g., BRICS) play in financing global SDGs?
- How can climate finance be better directed toward adaptation in vulnerable states?
- How can small island states secure reliable, long-term financing for resilience?
- What accountability mechanisms can ensure transparent SDG implementation?
- Should debt-for-nature swaps become a standard mechanism for developing states?
- What innovative financing mechanisms (green bonds, blended finance) can close the \$4 trillion SDG gap?

Topic A : Main Parties

United States

The U.S. is one of the largest providers of development aid, supporting programs in global health, food security, and education. Its technological innovations and private sector leadership heavily shape renewable energy markets and green finance. However, domestic debates often lead to inconsistent international commitments, such as fluctuating climate policies. As a G7 economy, U.S. priorities strongly influence global SDG financing and partnerships.

China

China is a pivotal actor as the largest global emitter and the largest builder of renewable capacity. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, it funds infrastructure across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, significantly impacting SDG outcomes. Domestically, it has reduced poverty on a massive scale, advancing SDG 1, yet its overseas investments often spark concerns about debt and environmental damage. China's policies will play a decisive role in whether the SDGs succeed.

Russia

Russia's influence lies in its role as a major energy supplier and its geopolitical actions. The war in Ukraine disrupted food, fuel, and fertilizer supplies, driving up global inflation and undermining SDGs on hunger and energy. Sanctions have isolated Russia economically, limiting its constructive role in financing development. However, its control over fossil fuel exports means it remains central to debates on energy security and the transition to renewables.

India

India, with its population of over 1.4 billion, is essential to SDG implementation. It has expanded renewable energy capacity rapidly, especially solar, and implemented large-scale health and social welfare programs. Yet persistent poverty, water scarcity, and air pollution remain serious obstacles. As a leading voice for the Global South, India advocates for more equitable climate finance and technology transfers. Its policies will significantly shape global progress.

Topic A : Main Parties

Brazil

Brazil is a major actor because of the Amazon rainforest, crucial for biodiversity and climate stability. Deforestation directly affects SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). As Latin America's largest economy, Brazil influences regional development strategies. It faces challenges of inequality and reliance on extractive industries but is also a key player in renewable energy. Within BRICS, Brazil pushes for stronger South-South cooperation on sustainable development.

Germany

Germany is Europe's largest economy and a leader in sustainability. Its Energiewende program has made it a global example in renewable energy transitions. It is also one of the top providers of Official Development Assistance, supporting SDG initiatives in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. As a central EU member, Germany influences regional climate diplomacy, financing rules, and green technology policies. Its leadership is vital for international cooperation on the SDGs.

Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and most populous country, making it central to the continent's SDG agenda. It faces challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment, and underdeveloped infrastructure. However, its potential in renewable energy, agriculture, and technology is immense. Nigeria's policies affect not just its 220 million citizens but also the development trajectory of West Africa as a whole. It also serves as a strong voice in the African Union.

Indonesia

Indonesia is Southeast Asia's largest economy and an emerging regional leader. Its natural resources create both opportunities and challenges: economic growth often comes at the cost of deforestation and high carbon emissions. Indonesia has committed to ambitious renewable energy goals but faces significant financing barriers. As a G20 and ASEAN member, it serves as a bridge between developed and developing economies, shaping discussions on global trade, climate, and sustainability.

Introduction to Topic B

Should international laws be implemented to regulate the environmental damage caused by the global fashion industry?

The Environmental Committee focuses on engaging with the community and solving environmental issues globally. The main focus are topics such as climate change, sustainable development, deforestation and similar topics which are related to the global environment.

The topic at hand focuses on the fashion industry, which can contribute 8%-10% of the total global carbon emissions, as well as the necessity for vast amounts of water and harsh chemical dyes to be able to make their products. There is also a large demand for the goods produced from this industry, as there are billions of people globally who need new clothes - reasons that could range from growing up as kids to fashion choice and trends. Mass producers are a big part of the fashion industry, brands such as Zara or Shein, which produce massive amounts of unsustainable clothing, which are a big cause of the waste crisis, through which 85% of textiles end up in landfills annually, posing a big threat to the environment.

There is a big problem with the cycle of overproduction that the fashion industry causes, as it is not just the chemicals and energy that is used to create the products that is harmful, but also the constant change of fashion trends and 'need' to change clothes and get rid of old ones constantly, through the seasons, to follow brand releases and such. This is due to the global culture of having a linear economy, instead of a circular one, where products would be recycled and the waste levels would drastically decrease, as well as the carbon emissions due to leaning towards sustainable manufacturing and usage of these items.

Topic B : Key Definitions

Fast Fashion - Inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends

Sustainable Fashion - A term describing efforts within the fashion industry to reduce its environmental impacts, protect workers producing garments and uphold animal welfare. Sustainability in fashion encompasses a wide range of factors, including cutting CO2 emissions, addressing overproduction, reducing pollution and waste, supporting biodiversity and ensuring that garment workers are paid a fair wage and have safe working conditions

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) - An environmental policy approach that holds producers responsible for their products throughout their entire lifecycle, from design to end-of-life management, and shifts the burden of waste management and recycling away from consumers and local governments

Circular Economy - An economic system based on the reuse and regeneration of materials or products, especially as a means of continuing production in a sustainable or environmentally friendly way

Linear economy - An economic system in which materials involved in production, and the products themselves, are ultimately disposed of as waste without being reused or regenerated

Carbon Footprint - A measure of the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organization, or community.

Microfibers / Microplastics - Microplastics are plastic pieces less than 5 mm in size, with microfibers being the most common type, originating primarily from the washing and wear of synthetic textiles like polyester and acrylic clothing

Polluter Pays Principle - The polluter pays principle states that the entity responsible for causing pollution should bear the costs of preventing, controlling, and cleaning it up to prevent environmental damage and protect public health

Topic B : Key Definitions

Basel Convention (1989) - An international treaty that was designed to reduce the movements of hazardous waste between nations, and specifically to restrict the transfer of hazardous waste from developed to less developed countries.

UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion - A United Nations partnership platform that brings together UN agencies and allied organizations to reduce the fashion industry's negative social, economic, and environmental impacts, while promoting sustainable production, circularity, and responsible consumption throughout the fashion value chain.

Greenwashing - When a company, organization, or institution misleads people into believing its products, services, or practices are more environmentally friendly than they actually are.

Supply Chain Transparency - The practice of making information about the entire supply chain — from raw material sourcing to production, distribution, and delivery — visible, accessible, and traceable to stakeholders (such as consumers, regulators, investors, and civil society).

Environmental Justice - The principle that all people, regardless of race, gender, income, or geography, have the right to equal protection from environmental harms and equal access to environmental benefits.

Eco-Design Directive (EU) - Sets mandatory requirements for the environmentally conscious design of energy-related products, aiming to improve their environmental performance throughout their entire life cycle; from production and use to disposal.

Textile Waste - Discarded clothing, fabrics, and other textile materials that are no longer wanted or usable, arising from any stage of the textile life cycle; production, distribution, consumption, or post-consumer disposal.

Topic B : Context and Current Issues

According to an analysis by Business Insider, fashion production comprises 10% of total global carbon emissions, as much as the emissions generated by the European Union. The industry dries up water sources and pollutes rivers and streams, while 85% of all textiles go to dumps each year. Even washing clothes releases 500,000 tons of microfibres into the ocean each year, the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles.

The Quantis International 2018 report found that the three main drivers of the industry's global pollution impacts are dyeing and finishing (36%), yarn preparation (28%) and fibre production (15%). The report also established that fibre production has the largest impact on freshwater withdrawal (water diverted or withdrawn from a surface water or groundwater source) and ecosystem quality due to cotton cultivation, while the dyeing and finishing, yarn preparation and fibre production stages have the highest impacts on resource depletion, due to the energy-intensive processes based on fossil fuel energy.

According to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, emissions from textile manufacturing alone are projected to skyrocket by 60% by 2030.

The time it takes for a product to go through the supply chain, from design to purchase, is called lead time. In 2012, Zara was able to design, produce and deliver a new garment in two weeks; Forever 21 in six weeks and H&M in eight weeks. Newer industry player Shein, a major Chinese fast fashion company, has garments ready to be sold in just 10 days.

This results in the fashion industry producing obscene amounts of waste.

Overconsumption of natural resources

It takes a lot of water to produce textile, plus land to grow cotton and other fibres. To make a single cotton t-shirt, 2,700 litres of fresh water are required according to estimates, enough to meet one person's drinking needs for 2.5 years.

The textile sector was the third largest source of water degradation and land use in 2020. In that year, it took on average nine cubic metres of water, 400 square metres of land and 391 kilogrammes (kg) of raw materials to provide clothes and shoes for each EU citizen.

Topic B : Context and Current Issues

Water pollution

Textile production is estimated to be responsible for about 20% of global clean water pollution from dyeing and finishing products.

A single laundry load of polyester clothes can discharge 700,000 microplastic fibres that can end up in the food chain.

The majority of microplastics from textiles are released during the first few washes. Fast fashion is based on mass production, low prices and high sales volumes that promotes many first washes.

Washing synthetic products leads to the accumulation of more than half a million tonnes of microplastics on the bottom of the oceans every year. In addition to this global problem, the pollution generated by garment production has a devastating impact on the health of local people, animals and ecosystems where the factories are located.

Greenhouse gas emissions

According to the European Environment Agency, textile purchases in the EU in 2020 generated about 270 kg of CO₂ emissions per person. That means textile products consumed in the EU generated greenhouse gas emissions of 121 million tonnes.

Textile waste in landfills and low recycling rates

The way people get rid of unwanted clothes has also changed, with items being thrown away rather than donated. Less than half of used clothes are collected for reuse or recycling, and only 1% of used clothes are recycled into new clothes, since technologies that would enable clothes to be recycled into virgin fibres are only now starting to emerge.

Factories dubbed sweatshops are best understood from a historical perspective. Whether speaking of England in 1830 or Vietnam today, garment manufacturing has typically been characterized by long hours and intensive manual labor. Sweatshops are problematic for Westerners because, in addition to concerns about unpleasant conditions, the wages are low. And sometimes cheaply constructed factories lead to injury or even death. In 2013, the Rana Plaza garment factory collapsed in Bangladesh, killing over 1,100 people; Fashionopolis contains interviews with survivors who saw coworkers die. In response to this tragedy, new safety guidelines were instituted, and fortunately, there have been no mass-casualty events since then. The tradeoff is that the stricter standards resulted in fewer jobs in garment factories in Bangladesh.

Topic B : Context and Current Issues

In 1998, the year that American students founded United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in Bangladesh was estimated to be under \$500. Most of the population lives in poverty, experiencing health crises and premature deaths that go with material lack. Yet recently the nation has undergone what some might call a development miracle, with per capita GDP rising to \$2,500. This rapid economic growth in Bangladesh is closely linked to garment exports, a main source of income for the country. To protect this source of revenue, the government has created rules that support garment manufacturers. From the perspective of people inside the country, this is a link to the world economy that employs millions of people. Humans have been voting with their feet for hundreds of years, indicating a preference for factories over subsistence farming and rural life. Economic development requires moving up the chain in productivity.

One reason multinational firms initially set up manufacturing in China was that labor was cheap. It is not through legislation (which is avoided by subcontracting with illegal shops) that sweatshops are receding in China. Working conditions in Chinese factories are improving because of economic growth, and Chinese wages are rising quickly. Many of the jobs that were once in China have moved to Vietnam; today, the Wall Street Journal reports, those factories can't find enough workers because young people would prefer to work in service industries.

This is a separate topic from sweatshops, but it is important to acknowledge that there is still slavery in the world. Walk Free estimates that there are tens of millions of enslaved people in the Asian and Pacific regions today. Although I would not advocate sanctioning manufacturers over low wages, I and other free traders support private boycotts and laws, such as Section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930, targeting goods made from forced labor. For example, the US government is scrutinizing the Chinese fashion firm Shein over the issue of forced labor. To trade in the global economy, companies should have to follow such laws. But forced labor is different from the issue of poverty and low wages.

Indeed, activists for raising wages must be passionate advocates of sustaining and accelerating economic growth. That is the only way to generate enough income for tens of millions of garment workers in Asia and elsewhere. Elizabeth Cline defines a living wage as one that affords "food, water, housing and energy, clothing, health care, transportation, education and child care, as well as modest funds for savings and discretionary spending." This is not a mandate to return to nature or retreat from globalization. Because trade increases wealth, in fact, this is a mandate for more globalization in the years ahead.

Topic B : Timeline of Key Events

- **Global Pact for the Environment**
 - **Date: May 2018**
- **UNEA Resolution on Plastic Pollution**
 - **Date: March 2022**
- **UNEA-6 Declaration on Fast Fashion**
 - **Date: March 2024**
- **Right to a Healthy Environment**
 - **Date: July 2022**
- **UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action**
 - **Date: Dec 2018 / Nov 2021**
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Directive**
 - **Date: September 2025**
- **UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion**
 - **Date: March 2019**
- **UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action**
 - **Date: November 2021**
- **UNECE and ECLAC Measures on Second-Hand Clothing**
 - **Date: July 2024**
- **France's Fast Fashion Legislation**
 - **Date: March 2024**

Topic B : Key Points to Debate

A pathway to cleaner fashion is technology, and we are already seeing innovations along several dimensions:

- **Materials.** Like lab-grown meat, lab-grown fibers are in the early stages but could generate cloth in ways less polluting than cotton farming or leather tanning. With continued advances in chemistry and biology, we might move away from harvesting raw materials on farms and shipping them for large-volume production runs in low-income countries.
- **Production.** The introduction of sewing-capable robots could disrupt the current model that created millions of manufacturing jobs in Asia. The International Labour Organization reports, “Prominent occupations in certain countries face extreme risks of automation. For example, in Cambodia, where garment production dominates the manufacturing sector, close to half a million sewing machine operators face a high automation risk.” The future might look like print-on-demand clothes made by highly paid technicians.
- **Recycling.** All garments eventually become unwanted, but clothes do not have to become garbage. Clothes are already recycled for use as industrial rags or insulation; a goal among fast fashion activists is to see more clothes recycled into raw fibers that could make new clothes. If it works, we could achieve what is known as “circularity.”
- **Matching.** Fabric is not scarce in America today, but attention is. AI can fill the attention gap and become a personal assistant for obtaining clothes, with the option of finding sustainable products. At the same time, technology could help or replace workers at organizations like Goodwill who are tasked with separating donated goods into piles for resale or recycling—a costly and time-intensive process. Smart robots powered by AI could scan donated clothes and direct them to a new buyer or an appropriate recycling plant. The gains from cheap decisionmaking would be high and the potential for harm through AI errors is limited. If AI-powered sorting is the future, then it could become efficient enough for people to sell their unwanted clothes to sorters, which would increase circularity compared to the donation model.

Topic B : Main Parties

USA

The USA has a big focus on producing sustainably domestically, yet it has little to no regulations regarding global regulations. There are areas which have more activity for make the country more sustainable such as New York and California, where there are heavy regulations on transparency, recycling and emissions. In general, the USA takes action internally, through state-level regulatory experimentation and industry led sustainability approaches.

China

China has not openly presented any type of acknowledgement towards international laws, similarly to the USA, it also focuses on internal domestic development of the circular economy and green development. They have implemented strong regulations internally for Five-Year Plans, cleaner-production rules and EPR-type targets for textiles. China is the largest producer and exporter of clothing, yet they are also investigating and investing in eco-friendly technology to decrease their waste levels and become more sustainable.

India

India has not expressed any support for international treaties specifically for fashion sustainability, but there is internal focus on domestic sustainability and incentives for these companies to follow these rules. India is one of the biggest producers in the fashion industry due to its large textile base and cotton farming quantities.

Brazil

Brazil is currently not actively promoting sustainable production of textiles and such internationally, and recent political difficulties and changes have led to environmental protections and laws to weaken significantly compared to other countries. There has been debates internally recently regarding supply chain impacts and deforestation. Brazil is also a main supplier of leather, which plays a big part in the fashion industry but also is directly linked to deforestation.

Germany

Germany is a country that pushes for sustainable development in every sector of the economy, including textile production, consumption and recycling. They are constantly pushing for strict regulations to be implemented, backing up EU-wide measures, such as the Circular Economy Action Plan and the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. As well as favoring obligatory laws instead of voluntary commitments.

Topic B : Main Parties

France

France is also very aggressive when taking measures for sustainability regarding the fashion industry. In 2020, it became the first country to ban the destruction of unsold clothes, targeting luxury and fast fashion waste, as well as implementing eco-labelling for textiles to be aware of sustainability. France also aims for international laws to be implemented as well for striving towards a circular economy by 2030.

Sweden

Sweden is a strong advocate for international regulation to be implemented, as it is a global leader in sustainability and environmental issues. It is in favour of many actions and regulations being taken such as the EU's sustainable textiles strategy and often pushes for ambitious goals beyond EU minimums. They want to reduce fast fashion's overproduction problem, and similarly to other EU countries, promote consumer awareness and eco-labelling as well as striving for a circular economy.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the world's 2nd largest garment exporter, so their stance is both cautious yet poses economic concerns due to the employment of over 4 million people in this sector of the economy. While conscious of the environmental impact, Bangladesh's goals are mainly protecting jobs, exports and their economy. They prefer incentives over strict rules and seek technological aid from foreign countries to develop greener ways to remain stable in this sector.

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