

Forum: Environmental Committee

Issue #EV-01: Addressing the environmental implications of ‘fast fashion’

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Introduction

“Fast fashion” can be defined as the large volumes of clothing produced by the fashion industry based on trends. This production model causes many “trendy” and “affordable” clothing collections to be introduced to the market in short periods of time, and it is proved that these garments are manufactured with low-quality materials, which ensure a low price, and we could even speak of practically disposable clothes.

Fast fashion began around the 1990s and the early 2000s, and since then, it has become utterly popular around the world. The United States, India, China, Vietnam, and Turkey are the countries who incentivize fast fashion the most. We can see this through popular brands such as Zara, H&M, Forever 21, Shein, GAP, and so on.

Countries believe that this type of production can not be stopped due to the fact that it is good for the economy of the producer, whereas if it stops, the countries could end up economically unstable and lead to other national problems. It is estimated that the global fast fashion market last year, 2021, hit a value of 30.58 billion dollars, and it is believed that it will grow even more between 2025 and 2028.

Although the pieces of clothing these clothing stores sell may be fashionable and unique, society is not looking at the terrible consequences fast fashion leaves for our planet. Pollution, low wages, waste and unsafe workplaces are issues that most people are aware of; however, they do not connect it to the fast fashion industry. We all know how they terribly damage the

environment and how, in many cases, it affects workers' mental health, therefore this issue must be tackled.

Definition of Key Terms

Garment

A piece of clothing.

Trend

A fashion or a new tendency in clothing.

Shopping

The activity of looking at clothes to purchase.

Fashion

A style which is popular at a particular time.

Sustainability

The quality of being environmentally friendly, meaning it can be used over a long period of time.

Profit

The money earned in business, as opposed to the money lost during the production.

Issue overview

Addressing the environmental implication of “fast fashion” is the answer to solve the ongoing global environmental crisis. Approaching the issue with all member states could have excellent results for the world’s safety.

Historical Background

Years ago, going shopping for clothes was quite an extraordinary occasion. The only time for dress shopping was when the seasons changed, or you did not fit in your clothes. Around the 2000s, the fashion industry started to develop. Clothes became cheaper, new trends came and went, and as an outcome, going shopping became an approachable and fun activity.

This helped to develop worldwide brands, expand the fashion industry and the evolution of online shopping. What was unbelievable for customers, when this production model arose was the fact that they could copy famous celebrities’ styles, for example, by just going to a store and buying cheap imitation clothes similar to the expensive garments these celebrities wore. As a consequence of fashion models and accessible pieces of clothing, fast fashion became a thing. This type of production still exists today, having negative consequences on the environment, which is why it is a topic to debate.

Although companies are doing a great job in pleasing people’s fashion styles and keeping up with trends in order to make the fashion industry grow, they are not doing a sustainable job in taking care of our planet. The environment has been suffering for years now, and fast fashion is a direct contributor to this suffering. As this research report stated earlier, the clothing items produced are made out of low-quality materials meaning these will not last long. Due to this, masses and masses of waste are made out of single pieces of clothing which have a life cycle of about 1-4 uses after buying. Waste can be found in wastelands as well as in rivers, oceans and even in the streets because people make a bad use of these items of clothes. Us humans need to stop this ongoing issue to protect our environment and get a greener future.

Latest Events

Runaway protest against fast fashion in Argentina

Extinction Rebellion members protested against fast fashion in front of a brand that uses this model of production: Zara. This event took place in Argentina a few months ago in December of 2021. Extinction Rebellion is an international group that follows an environmental movement. In this precise circumstance, they performed a runaway denouncing the consequences of fast fashion through the use of recycled clothing worn by models. The aim was to make people recognize the issue and spread awareness during the Christmas shopping euphoria.

Thrift shopping gaining popularity

Thrift stores are shops that sell second-hand clothing and give a new life to a garment instead of becoming waste. This proves that thrift shops are friendly with the environment, and it is said that many teenagers agree with the fact that waste can be delayed with the implementation of second-hand shops. During these years of pandemic, new trends, which in fact are old fashion trends, appeared, and thrift stores were and are the perfect place to find these pieces of clothing. Therefore not only are these second-hand clothes fashionable and trendy, but they are also better for the environment compared to fast fashion.

H&M's recycling and reusing program

H&M became more aware of the environmental issue and, along with the Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel, it started using a new form of production that will lead towards a "more sustainable fashion future". They take any unwanted clothes from any brand and by filling an H&M bag, the customer gets a gift voucher as a way of expressing gratitude. Although H&M still uses the fast fashion production model, its new goal is to only use recycled and sustainable materials by 2030. The main purpose of this is to tackle the massive amount of waste generated and instead, give these garments the opportunity to be recycled, reused or even rewore. This form of production is

uncommon and it is said that it would take around 50,000 years to handle with just one week's waste production.

Major Parties Involved

People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China is the main source of fast fashion globally. China's production is known for its overproduction and the waste it generates. 85% of its population lives in conditions of poverty and are in dire need of an opportunity to work. These large companies, located in China, hire these people since fast fashion is all about speedy production. We know for a fact that these people, in many cases, do not have legal access protection in workplaces. Therefore, it is common to hear that workers are being exploited and still not earning a fair wage even though they work in unsafe places and in terrible conditions.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's habitants are the biggest consumers in fast fashion, per person, in comparison to the rest of Europe's habitants. In a landfill, around 300,000 tonnes of disposable clothing per year are incinerated or are found submerged in them, most of which were not used at all or were practically new. It is proved that this dependency on cheap, accessible clothing grew during the world pandemic of COVID-19 due to the use of online shopping.

Republic of India

The Republic of India, is the second largest manufacturer and exporter of fast fashion. What is happening in India is very similar to China's situation: worker exploitation, poverty wages and dangerous workplaces.

Republic of Turkey

In the Republic of Turkey, over 650,000 Syrian refugees are fighting for survival by working for international fast fashion companies. Turkey, the third main producer of this production model, is also aiming to produce at a fast phase. To achieve this, these ambitious companies mainly hire women and children, and violate their human rights to reach their objective: the profit.

United States of America

The United States of America is one of the biggest consumers of fast fashion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise of e-commerce, the fast fashion industry accelerated its production even more. The waste generated by the inadequate use of garments is then shipped to places such as Ghana as a donation from the United States of America. However, most of these pieces are very low quality and can not be reused or resold. They once again end up as garbage in landfills.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
December, 1989	Zara's arrival to New York was the origin of the term "fast fashion" since the garments sold were said to be produced and sold in less than fifteen days.
Early 2000s	The globalization of fast fashion occurred when the large brands such as, and not limited to, Forever 21, H&M, UNIQLO and Primark, expanded throughout the world. The consecutive and fast production became more ordinary and people were fascinated. However most of the habitants were not aware of the effects it brought to the environment and much less aware of the difficult situation in which laborers found themselves in.
January, 2020	Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, online shopping arose. The production became even more dangerous not only for the environment but also for the employees who work for these companies. This is where fast fashion became unethical and brought the most affective consequences on our planet. Luckily nowadays the issue of fast fashion is being transmitted in order to find solutions to this issue, nevertheless practice is not yet fully applied.

Past Action

ICC

ICC is committed to ensuring that business consumption and production patterns align with the UN Sustainability and Development Goals. ICC became a signatory of the UN Climate Change Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, which aims to address the climate impact of the fashion sector's global supply chain. It also joined global brands to address the social, environmental, and ethical issues facing the fashion industry's global supply chain, including climate change, energy efficiency, the circular economy, labor conditions, and overconsumption. As the world business organization, ICC will carry on to work alongside stakeholders in the fashion industry and beyond to make sure that environmental obstacles are everyone's business. Last week, ICC Secretary General Denton issued a letter to Environment Ministers of all UN Member States calling for bold, forward-looking recommendations on protecting and preserving our environment.

UN

The UN has launched the Alliance for Sustainable Fashion to address the damages caused by fast fashion, seeking to 'halt the environmentally and socially destructive practices of fashion'.

World Resources

The World Resources Institute suggests that companies need to design, test and invest in business models that reuse clothes and maximize their useful life.

Five other organizations that are against fast fashion and helped solve the issue are: Center for Sustainable Fashion, Greenpeace, Solidaridad, TRAIID and Waste & Resource Action Programme. Each one of them has found different solutions to reduce industrial pollution. For instance, they pressured clothing companies to use safer practices and chemicals. They worked to make the cotton supply chain more sustainable and have funded development projects to improve the textile industry and spread awareness.

Fast fashion does not seem to be slowing down, but is being outpaced by ultra-fast fashion brands promising easy purchasing and near-immediate delivery.

Possible Solutions

Fortunately, there are many solutions to discontinue this issue revolving around punishing the industry and not the people who work for it. Some of these could be applying taxes to the companies and making sure it does not affect the workers or the products themselves, regulating the safety of the quality of products and the workplace to foster protection to the laborer's who are being exploited. Moreover, the implementation of secondhand shopping, giving garments another opportunity, and the control over human rights violations in the working environment and establishing policies that prohibit the contamination and the wasteful use of materials used in the production. Each country will be responsible for the implementation of these norms depending on their situation and stability regarding the topic.

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