

Fashion Sustainability in Cyprus: The First Steps for a Greener Wardrobe



Figure 1 photo is taken in the Folkmona pop-up event during an upcycling workshop.

When was the last time you bought a new garment? A week ago? Two weeks ago? Just think about it for a second. Our clothes are some of the ways we express ourselves in our daily lives, but apart from that, clothes are trends coming back and going away in the blink of an eye. “Fast Fashion”, as it is called, comprises 10% of total global carbon emissions, the same number as the European Union. It dries up water sources, while 85% of all textiles go to dumps each year, according to an analysis by Business Insider.

Fast fashion garments are not made to last for years; these brands like to advertise them as affordable for everyone, but they are often overpriced for their low quality. Fast fashion brands want you to buy their new styles every other week, and this is one of the reasons they don't invest time in offering high-quality garments or good fitting. However, many consumers love buying from these brands because they are trendy and highly advertised. Apart from that, most of the time in fast fashion brands, you can find more affordable clothes than in higher quality shops. Another reason for their success is the variety in sizes and availability; if you can't find a piece in-store, you can easily find it online and have it effortlessly delivered to you.

In 2024, the European Union established new regulations to change the harmful consequences of fast fashion. Some of these regulations include stopping greenwashing. More specifically, Greenwashing is when fast fashion brands try to claim that their clothes are sustainable and produced in a certain way. The EU is enforcing mandatory sustainability labelling on clothes so consumers will be aware when they are shopping. Among the new measures is the stopping of harmful chemicals used in the clothing-making process. The EU is aiming to announce more of those regulations soon and explain how they will keep fashion waste outside of

Europe. As a member of the European, we should wait to see the implementation of those measures in Cyprus soon, but I would like to discuss the positive changes happening in Cyprus because the citizens care about our environment.

First of all, it's exciting to see small thrifting shops with second-hand or old stock clothes and accessories opening in Cyprus. These shops are small and cater to a specific audience looking for them. Apart from these shops, it's exciting to see second-hand bazaars popping up occasionally, bringing thrifting closer to a larger audience and making it more approachable.

Let's talk about the organizations behind these events. One of these organizations is Fashion Revolution Cyprus, organizing and supporting sustainable events around Cyprus, spreading the knowledge of why clothing waste is harmful to our environment.

Another organisation supporting sustainability is Fashion Heritage Network Cyprus (FHNC), which promotes sustainability while supporting Cypriot heritage and traditional techniques. Its designers draw inspiration from our culture and the sustainable techniques our ancestors used to create their clothes. The members of the network organise or support events and workshops that revive our heritage, like weaving workshops and recycling/repurposing old clothes workshops, encouraging attendees to learn skills.

Moreover, the Cyprus government is taking its own measures to make the fashion industry less polluting by introducing circular solutions for textile value chains based on extended producer responsibility. More specifically, this means manufacturers would be responsible for their products once they reach the end of their usability. This scheme is meant to motivate manufacturers to produce good quality garments. Also, they have established the Cyprus Circular Economy Network, which makes it easier for people to recycle their clothing.

But can everyone be more sustainable?

You may wonder whether sustainability is just buying second-hand clothes and stopping purchasing fast fashion, but we should be realistic about the small changes someone can make to be more sustainable. Thrifting is not for everyone, and many people won't go look for these shops. Sizes and styles are limited in thrift shops, and the low number of these shops doesn't make it realistic for everyone to be shopping there. We have to admit that it takes time and energy to find a good second-hand piece, but there are still multiple ways of making sustainable and better choices that don't include buying second-hand garments. Let's mention some:

Making Better Choices

The EU is implementing measures to let consumers know exactly what they are buying and how the process is used to produce it. Every one of us can look for more environmentally friendly choices.

Moreover, we can avoid buying for fast fashion brands and look for ethical and more sustainable brands that made high quality clothing that can last for years instead of fast fashion brands.

Altering Clothes

If you have garments that you like but you are unable to wear because they don't fit anymore, you can alter these clothes to give them a new life and make them fit the way you want.

Buying less clothes

Many people view every new event they must attend as a new opportunity to buy new clothes. However, actions like this result in many individuals having a lot of clothes they wore once or twice. This is not sustainable, and this is the reason we should think carefully before buying new pieces and how often we will wear these pieces.

Even if you are buying fast fashion pieces, it will be better to buy a product you know you will wear a lot of times than a product you will wear only once.

Donating old clothes

If you have clothes, you don't wear anymore, you can give them to donations to be used for a good cause. If you don't know any organisations accepting second-hand donations, you can use the purple metal bins for textiles. In those bins, you can dispose of clothing, bags, footwear, belts, curtains, and sheets.

Is Cyprus ready for a greener wardrobe?

Overall, the main obstacle to a more environmentally friendly future is the lack of knowledge the citizens have about the hazards and the damage the fashion industry is causing. However, there are plans by the government to increase the number of Green Points by 2025 so more people have access to disposing of unwanted items safely. The government should invest in educating people more about the fashion industry, promoting investment in the textile industry and raising environmental and ethical issues.