



BRITISH
FASHION
COUNCIL

Low Carbon Transition Programme - Materials Toolkit



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Credit: Rory James

1. Introduction	3	3. Selecting sustainable fibres and materials	10	5. Material usage and best practice	19
Introduction	4	Natural fibres	11		
About the LCT Programme and this toolkit	4	Manmade cellulosic fibres (MMCF)	12	6. Taking action in your business	21
How to use this toolkit	5	Synthetic fibres	13		
		Blending considerations	14		
2. Understanding circular design	6	Innovative and emerging fibres	17	7. Appendices	24
What is circular design?	8	Industry perspective: innovation in practice	17	Glossary	25
Key principles of circular design	9	4. Sourcing and certification	16		
The resource hierarchy framework	10				
		The Importance of responsible sourcing	17		
		Key certifications and standards	17		
		Asking your suppliers the right questions	17		

Section 1

Introduction



Introduction

The fashion industry is shifting towards lower impact and more circular practices. With growing awareness of clothing production’s environmental and social impacts, brands and designers increasingly seek ways to minimise their footprint and create positive change. One of the most critical areas of focus is the selection of sustainable materials.

Sustainable materials have a lower environmental impact across their lifecycle, from cultivation and extraction through processing, manufacturing, use, and end-of-life. Fashion brands can significantly reduce their carbon emissions, water usage, chemical contamination, and waste generation by choosing fibres and fabrics that are responsibly sourced, efficiently processed, and designed for longevity and recyclability.

Moreover, consumers increasingly demand sustainable options and transparency from the brands they support. A **McKinsey survey** found that 67% of fashion consumers consider using sustainable materials a vital purchasing factor, and 63% consider the use of sustainable materials in the same way. By incorporating sustainable materials into their collections, brands can meet this growing demand, differentiate themselves in a competitive market, and build customer trust.

However, navigating the complex landscape of sustainable materials can be challenging. With numerous certifications, initiatives, and innovations emerging, it can take time for brands to assess the true impact of different options and make informed decisions. This toolkit provides clear, practical guidance on selecting and sourcing sustainable materials, drawing on insights from the Low Carbon Transition (LCT) programme and broader industry expertise.

McKinsey Survey: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/survey-consumer-sentiment-on-sustainability-in-fashion>

About the LCT programme and this toolkit

The LCT programme is an initiative of the British Fashion Council’s (BFC) Institute of Positive Fashion (IPF) that supports fashion brands in measuring their carbon emissions and developing practical strategies to reduce their environmental impact. Through workshops, one-on-one consultations, and resource sharing, the programme helps participants understand their current footprint, set science-based targets, and implement concrete actions to improve their sustainability performance.

One of the key focus areas of the LCT programme is supporting brands in adopting more sustainable materials and circular design practices, following publication of the Circular Fashion Ecosystem report by the BFC’s IPF which outlined three target outcomes for a circular fashion ecosystem in the UK. Participants receive guidance on assessing the impact of different fibres, identifying lower-impact alternatives, and designing products made to last and can be effectively recycled.

This toolkit builds on the insights and learnings from the LCT programme to provide a comprehensive guide to sustainable material selection for the wider fashion industry. It covers key principles of circular design, an overview of different fibre categories and their environmental considerations, guidance on sourcing and certification, and practical strategies for implementing sustainable materials in a fashion business.

Whether you are an LCT participant or a brand looking to start your sustainability journey, this toolkit is designed to be a valuable resource. It presents information in a clear, accessible format, with actionable recommendations and real-world examples to help you make informed decisions and drive positive change in your material sourcing and product development.

Credit: Rory James



How to use this toolkit

It is organised into six main sections, each covering a key aspect of sustainable material selection:

1. Understanding circular design
This section introduces the concept of circular design and its importance in creating sustainable fashion products. It covers key principles such as designing for longevity, recyclability, and minimal waste, and provides examples of circular design in action.

2. Selecting sustainable fibres and materials
This section provides an overview of different fibre categories, including natural fibres, man-made cellulosics, synthetics, and leather alternatives. It discusses the environmental considerations for each category and provides guidance on selecting lower-impact options.

3. Sourcing and certification
This section covers the importance of responsible sourcing and provides an overview of key certifications and standards for selecting materials. It also includes guidance on asking suppliers the right questions to ensure transparency and traceability.

4. Material usage best practices
This section offers practical strategies for designing and producing fashion products with sustainable materials, including tips for reducing waste, extending product life, and considering end-of-life options.

5. Taking action in your business
This section provides guidance on implementing sustainable material practices in a fashion business, including setting goals, engaging suppliers, measuring progress, and communicating efforts to stakeholders.

6. Appendices
The appendices include a glossary of key terms and additional resources for further learning.

To get the most out of this toolkit, you may wish to jump straight to the most relevant sections to your current knowledge and needs. If you are new to sustainable materials, the ‘Understanding circular design’ and ‘Selecting sustainable fibres and materials’ sections will provide a helpful foundation. If you are already familiar with the basics, you may want to jump straight to the ‘Sourcing and certification’ or ‘Material usage best practices’ sections for more specific guidance.

Throughout the toolkit, you’ll find straightforward explanations, practical tips, and valuable resources for further exploration to help you understand and apply the concepts. Whether you read the toolkit cover-to-cover or use it as a reference guide for specific topics, we hope it will be a valuable tool in your journey towards more sustainable and responsible material sourcing.



Section 2

Understanding circular design



Credit: Lily Craigen

What is circular design?

“
80% of a product’s environmental impact is influenced by decisions made at the design stage”
Ellen MacArthur Foundation

Circular design is a holistic approach to creating products that minimises waste and maximises resource efficiency throughout their lifecycle. In contrast to the traditional linear model of “take, make, dispose,” circular design aims to keep products and materials in use for as long as possible, then recover and regenerate them at the end of their service life.

In the context of fashion, circular design involves considering the entire lifecycle of a garment, from sourcing raw materials to the end-of-life options for the finished product. It requires designers to think beyond just a garment’s aesthetic and functional aspects and consider its environmental and social impact at every stage.

By applying circular design principles, fashion brands can create products that are stylish, functional, and more durable, repairable, and recyclable. This helps to reduce the industry’s reliance on virgin resources, minimise waste, and keep materials in circulation for longer.

Key principles of circular design

There are three main principles that underpin circular design in fashion:

Designing for longevity

One of the most effective ways to reduce a garment’s environmental impact is to extend its useful life. Designing for longevity means creating products that are durable, timeless, and easy to care for so they can be worn and loved for many years.

Some strategies for designing for longevity include:

- o Choosing high-quality, durable materials that can withstand wear and tear
- o Constructing garments with reinforced seams, buttons, and zippers to prevent premature failure
- o Creating timeless styles that transcend fleeting trends and remain fashionable over time
- o Providing clear care instructions to help consumers properly maintain their garments
- o Offering repair or alteration services to extend the life of damaged or ill-fitting items

By designing products which are built to last, fashion brands can reduce the need for frequent replacements and minimise the environmental impact of production.

Credit: Lily Craigen



Design for recyclability

Another key principle of circular design is creating products that can be easily recycled at the end of their useful life. This involves selecting materials that can be effectively separated and reprocessed into new products without losing quality or value

Some strategies for designing for recyclability include:

- o Using mono-materials (including 100% cotton or 100% polyester) instead of blends, which are easier to recycle
- o Avoiding materials that are difficult to recycle, such as complex multi-layer fabrics or those with chemical treatments
- o Minimising the use of trims, labels, and fasteners that may need to be removed before recycling
- o Providing clear labelling and instructions for consumers on how to recycle the garment

By designing products with their end-of-life in mind, fashion brands can help close the textile waste loop and keep valuable materials in circulation.

Design for minimal waste

The third principle of circular design is minimising waste throughout the production process and product lifecycle. This involves optimising material use, reducing offcuts and excess inventory, and finding creative ways to repurpose or recycle any unavoidable waste.

Some strategies for designing for minimal waste include:

- o Using zero-waste or low-waste pattern cutting techniques to minimise fabric offcuts

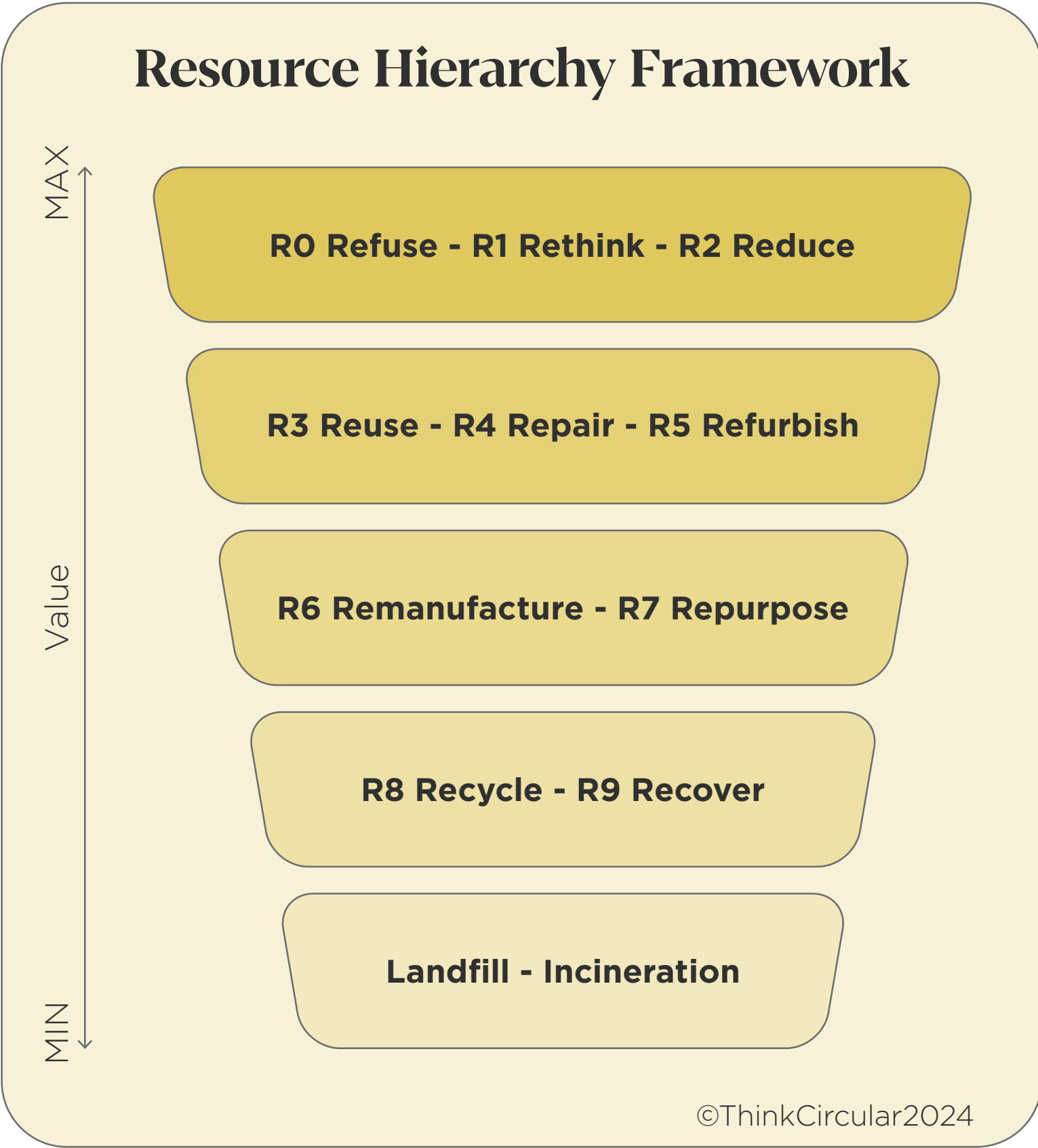
- o Optimising garment sizing and fit to reduce the need for returns and overproduction
- o Exploring ways to use deadstock, surplus, or recycled materials in new designs
- o Partnering with suppliers and manufacturers to implement waste reduction initiatives
- o Offering take-back or recycling programmes for post-consumer garments

By designing with waste reduction in mind, fashion brands can not only minimise their environmental impact but also realise cost savings and improve resource efficiency.



The resource heirarchy framework

The resource hierarchy framework is a highly valuable tool to help brands implement circular design strategies. The framework (below) outlines circular strategies which maximise value and minimise overall impact.



By prioritising strategies at the top of the hierarchy, such as refusing unnecessary production or reducing material use, fashion brands can achieve the greatest environmental benefit. However, all levels of the hierarchy have a role to play in creating a more circular and sustainable fashion industry.

To illustrate how circular design principles can be successfully implemented, here are some examples of innovative approaches being utilised in the industry today

Extended product life through repair and resale

Several outdoor clothing manufacturers have pioneered repair and resale programmes that demonstrate the potential of circular design. These initiatives typically include:

- o In-house repair services to fix damaged items
- o Online platforms connecting buyers and sellers of pre-owned items
- o Educational resources teaching customers how to repair their own garments
- o Take-back programmes that ensure proper recycling of worn-out items

Such programmes have shown that designing for longevity and repairability not only reduces waste but can also create new business opportunities and strengthen customer relationships.

Water conservation in denim production

Innovation in denim manufacturing has led to significant advances in water conservation. Contemporary techniques include:

- o Recycling water throughout the manufacturing process

- o Implementing water-efficient finishing methods
- o Using advanced machinery that requires less water for washing
- o Developing new finishing techniques that achieve traditional looks with minimal water usage

These examples show how circular design principles can be applied across different product categories and market segments, from outdoor apparel to denim to sportswear. By embracing these principles and finding innovative ways to implement them, fashion brands can create products that are better for both people and the planet.

IPF’s Circular Fashion Ecosystem report:
<https://instituteofpositivefashion.com/Circular-Fashion-Ecosystem>

WRAP circular design toolkit for fashion and textiles:
<https://www.wrap.ngo/resources/guide/circular-design-toolkit>

Ellen MacArthur introduction to circular design:
<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/news/an-introduction-to-circular-design>

Circularise - Strategies for a circular economy:
<https://www.circularise.com/blogs/r-strategies-for-a-circular-economy>

IPF’s Low Carbon Transition Programme report:
<https://instituteofpositivefashion.com/Our-work/Low-Carbon-Transition-Programme>

Section 3

Selecting sustainable fibres and materials



Natural fibres

Natural fibres are derived from plants or animals and are often biodegradable and renewable. However, the environmental impact of natural fibres can vary widely depending on how they are grown, processed, and treated. Here are some of the most common natural fibres used in fashion, along with their sustainability considerations:

Cotton

Cotton is one of the fashion industry’s most widely used natural fibres. It is soft, breathable, and versatile, making it suitable for a wide range of products. However, conventional cotton production can have significant environmental impacts, including high water and pesticide use, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss.

Organic cotton is grown without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilisers, using methods that promote soil health and biodiversity. It has a lower environmental impact than conventional cotton but may have lower yields and higher costs.

Recycled cotton is made from pre- or post-consumer cotton waste, such as offcuts from garment manufacturing or used clothing. It reduces the need for virgin cotton production and diverts waste from landfills. However, recycled cotton may have lower quality and strength than virgin cotton, and the recycling process can be energy-intensive.

Cotton

Wool is a protein fibre derived from the fleece of sheep and other animals. It is valued for its warmth, durability, and moisture-wicking properties. However, wool production can have significant environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions from livestock, land degradation from overgrazing, and animal welfare concerns.

Organic wool is produced using methods that prioritise animal welfare and land management, such as avoiding the use of synthetic pesticides and ensuring adequate grazing space. It has a lower environmental impact than conventional wool but may have higher costs and limited availability.

Recycled wool is made from pre- or post-consumer wool waste, such as offcuts from garment manufacturing or used clothing. It reduces the need for virgin wool production and diverts waste from landfills. However, like recycled cotton, it may have lower quality and strength than virgin wool.

Silk

Silk is a protein fibre produced by silkworms and is known for its luxurious feel and drape. However, conventional silk production can have significant environmental and animal welfare impacts, including using harsh chemicals in processing and killing silkworms during cocoon extraction.

Organic silk is produced using methods that avoid the use of synthetic pesticides and prioritise the welfare of silkworms. However, it is not widely available and may cost more than conventional silk.

Alternative silks, such as peace silk or ahimsa silk, are produced using methods that allow the silkworm to emerge from

the cocoon naturally, avoiding the need for killing. However, these methods are labour-intensive and may yield less than conventional silk production.

When selecting natural fibres, it is important to consider the type of fibre and how it is produced and processed. Look for certifications such as the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) for organic fibres and consider recycled options where possible to reduce the demand for virgin resources.



Manmade cellulosic fibres (MMCF)

MMCFs are fibres that are made from regenerated cellulose derived from plant-based sources such as wood pulp or bamboo. They are often used as a substitute for natural fibres like silk or cotton, offering similar drape and softness. However, the production of MMCFs can have significant environmental impacts, including deforestation, chemical use, and water pollution.

Viscose/Rayon

Viscose, also known as rayon, is one of the most widely used MMCFs in the fashion industry. It is made by dissolving wood pulp in a chemical solution, then extruding it through a spinneret to create fibres. Conventional viscose production can have significant environmental impacts, including using toxic chemicals and releasing pollutants into waterways.

However, more sustainable options are emerging, such as Lenzing's EcoVero™ viscose, made from certified renewable wood sources and uses a closed-loop production process to minimise chemical use and water pollution. Look for certifications such as the EU Ecolabel or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to ensure responsible sourcing of wood pulp.

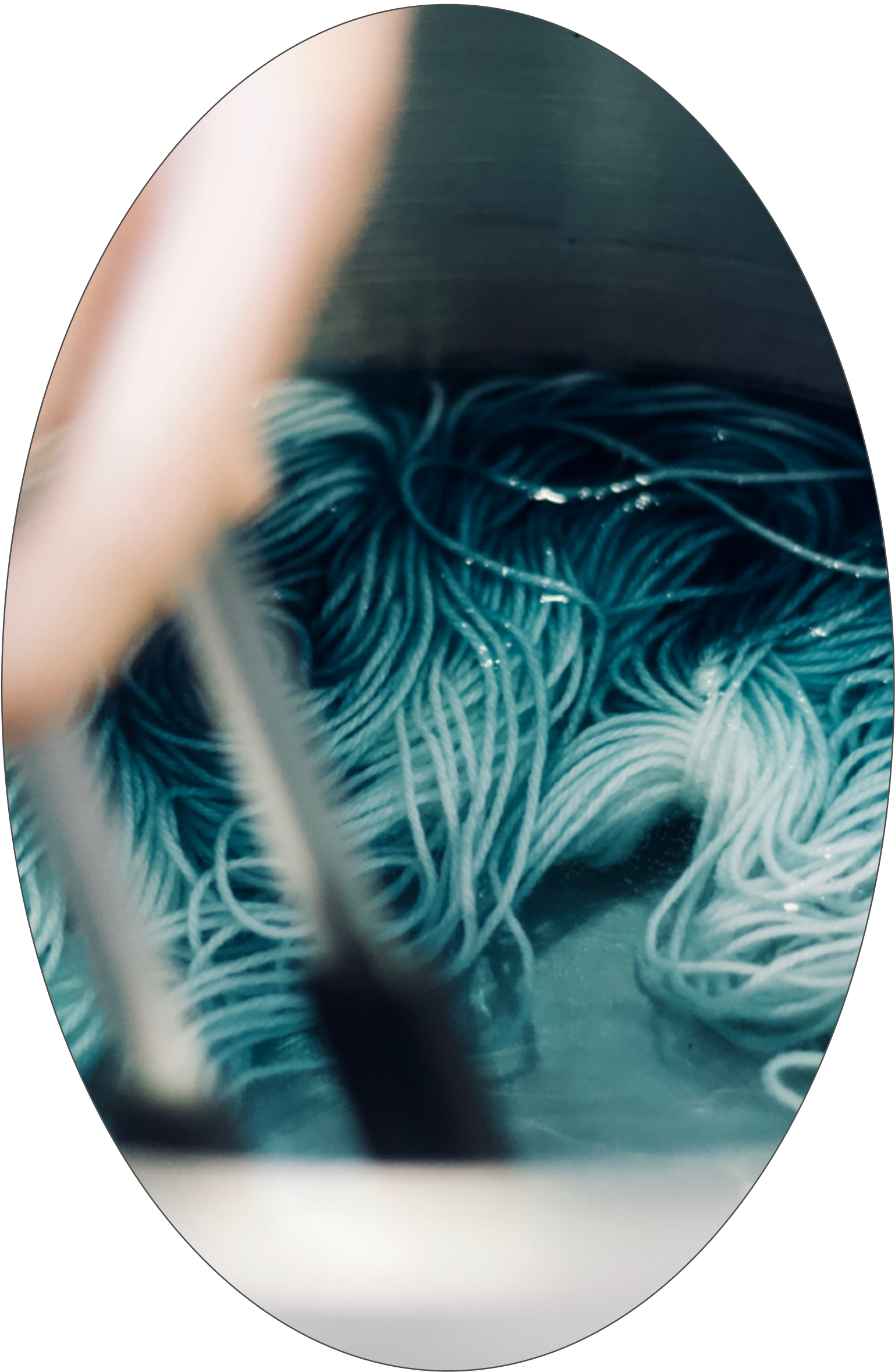
Lyocell

Lyocell is another type of MMCF that is made using a more environmentally friendly production process. It is produced using a closed-loop spinning process that recovers and reuses the solvent, reducing chemical waste and water pollution. Lenzing's Tencel™ lyocell is a well-known example, made from sustainably sourced eucalyptus trees.

Modal

Modal is a type of rayon that is known for its softness and drape. Like viscose, it is made from regenerated cellulose, but it undergoes an additional stretching process that gives it enhanced properties. Lenzing's Modal® is a more sustainable option, made from beech trees that are harvested from certified sustainable forests.

When selecting MMCFs, look for options that prioritise responsible sourcing of raw materials, use closed-loop production processes, and minimise the use of toxic chemicals. Certifications such as the FSC, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), and EU Ecolabel can help to verify the sustainability of MMCF products.



Synthetic fibres

Synthetic fibres are made from petroleum-based chemicals and are valued for their durability, stretch, and moisture-wicking properties. However, the production of synthetic fibres can have significant environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions, non-renewable resource depletion, and microplastic pollution.

Polyester (virgin, recycled)

Polyester is the most widely used synthetic fibre in the fashion industry. It is made from petroleum-derived chemicals and is known for its strength, durability, and resistance to wrinkles and shrinkage. However, virgin polyester production has a high carbon footprint and contributes to the depletion of non-renewable resources.

Recycled polyester, made from post-consumer PET bottles or pre-consumer textile waste, offers a more sustainable alternative. It reduces the need for virgin fossil fuel extraction and diverts waste from landfills. However, the recycling process can be energy-intensive, and there are concerns about the shedding of microplastics during washing and use.

Nylon (virgin, recycled)

Nylon is another common synthetic fibre, known for its strength, elasticity, and lustre. Like polyester, it is made from petroleum-derived chemicals and has a high environmental impact in its virgin form.

Recycled nylon, made from pre- or post-consumer waste, offers a more sustainable alternative. It reduces the demand for virgin nylon production and diverts waste from landfills. However, like recycled polyester, it can be energy-intensive to produce and may shed microplastics during use.

Elastane

Elastane, also known as spandex or Lycra, is a synthetic fibre known for its exceptional elasticity and stretch. It is often used in small amounts in blends with other fibres to provide stretch and recovery. However, elastane is not biodegradable and can be difficult to recycle due to its complex chemical structure.

Some more sustainable alternatives are emerging, such as bio-based elastanes made from renewable resources like corn or castor oil. However, these are not yet widely available and may still have some environmental impacts in production.

When selecting synthetic fibres, prioritise recycled options where possible to reduce the demand for virgin resources. Look for certifications such as the Global Recycled Standard (GRS) or Recycled Claim Standard (RCS) to ensure the use of genuine recycled content.

Leather, leather alternatives and coatings

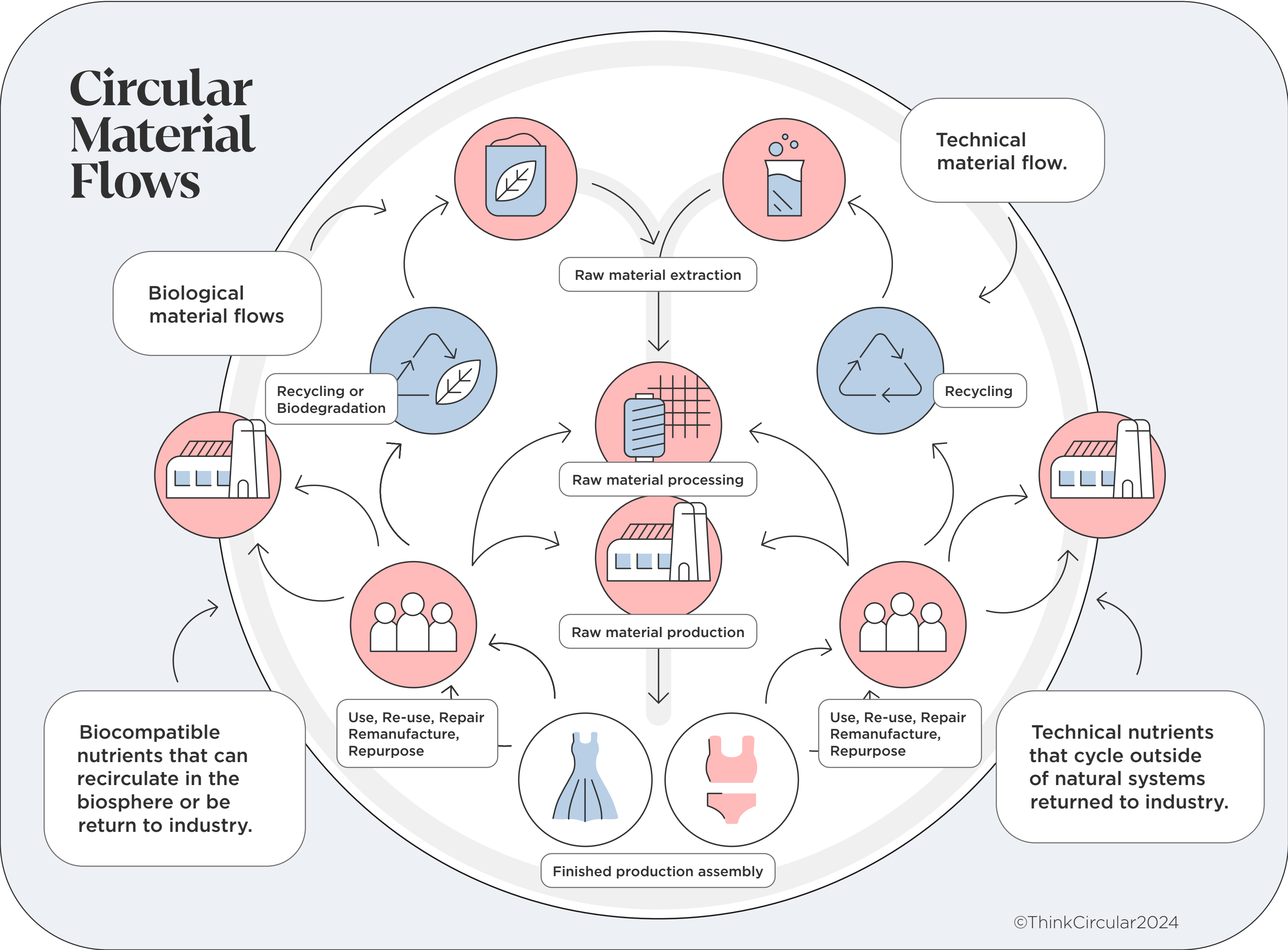
Leather is a durable and versatile material made from animal hides, commonly used in footwear, accessories, and outerwear. However, the production of leather can have significant environmental and animal welfare impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and the use of toxic chemicals in tanning.

More sustainable leather options include:

- o Vegetable-tanned leather, which uses natural tannins instead of chromium and other toxic chemicals
- o Recycled leather, made from pre- or post-consumer leather waste
- o Leather from certified organic or regenerative farming systems, which prioritise animal welfare and land management

Leather alternatives, such as those made from pineapple leaves, cork, or mushrooms, are also emerging as more sustainable options. However, it is important to consider the full lifecycle impacts of these materials, including the use of chemical treatments or coatings.

When selecting leather or leather alternatives, look for certifications such as the Leather Working Group (LWG) or OEKO-TEX® to ensure responsible production practices and chemical management.



Blending considerations

Fibre blending is a common practice in the fashion industry, used to achieve desired properties such as stretch, durability, or drape. However, blending can also complicate the recycling process, as different fibre types may need to be separated before they can be effectively recycled.

Where possible, prioritise mono-material products (made from a single fibre type) to facilitate easier recycling. If blending is necessary, consider blending fibres from the same category (for example, natural with natural, synthetic with synthetic) to minimise complexity in the recycling process.

Innovative and emerging fibres

In addition to the fibres mentioned above, there are many innovative and emerging options that offer exciting potential for sustainable fashion. Some examples include:

- o Regenerated protein fibres, such as those made from waste milk or discarded silkworm cocoons
- o Biosynthetic fibres, made from lab-grown or genetically engineered microorganisms
- o Fibres made from agricultural waste, such as pineapple leaves, banana stems, or sugarcane bagasse
- o Fibres made from recycled materials, such as ocean plastic or post-consumer textile waste

When considering these emerging options, it is important to assess their full lifecycle impacts, scalability, and potential unintended consequences. Look for transparent information from suppliers and third-party certifications to verify sustainability claims.

Industry perspective: innovation in practice

Patrick McDowell, Creative Director of London-based independent sustainable luxury fashion brand, shares their experience with emerging material technologies.

“As a self confessed fabric geek It’s been incredible to see innovations in Fabric over the last five years. Exciting progressions in material science are coming to market and creating viable and exciting ways for us to create more planet friendly clothing.

“We’ve recently worked with bio-based dye companies Huue and Octarine, creating bio-based dyes from bacteria and fermentation achieving great colours. Often great sustainable bases can be dyed with petrochemicals, a sticking point we were keen to overcome and so it’s been wonderful to explore these next generation dyes which I’m sure will quickly become the norm.

“We’ve been exploring leather alternatives too with great success from Forager by Ecovative, a Mycelium based technology company with really competitive pricing. Mycelium has a lot of untapped potential and a viable alternative to leather production is just one way it can be used.

“A more established fibre is Tencel, a next generation viscose. Using less water and energy, created with managed forests and fully traceable Tencel is pioneering the way for the future of fibre manufacturing.”

Patrick McDowell, Creative Director, Patrick McDowell



- Textile Exchange Preferred Materials Matrix:**
<https://textileexchange.org/pfmm/>
- Common Objective - Design Lessons in Disassembly:**
<https://www.commonobjective.co/article/design-lessons-in-disassembly>
- Common Objective - Fibre & Fabrics knowledge hub:**
<https://www.commonobjective.co/hubs/fibres-fabrics>



Sourcing and certification



The importance of responsible sourcing

Responsible sourcing is a critical component of sustainable material selection. It involves considering the type of fibre or material, how and where it is produced, and under what conditions.

Responsible sourcing practices can help to:

- o Minimise environmental impacts, such as deforestation, water pollution, or greenhouse gas emissions
- o Protect the health and safety of workers and communities involved in production
- o Support fair labour practices and living wages
- o Promote animal welfare in the case of animal-derived materials
- o Encourage transparency and traceability throughout the supply chain

When sourcing materials, it is important to ask questions about the origin and production methods, and to look for credible third-party certifications that verify sustainability claims.

Key certifications and standards

Certifications and standards can help ensure the sustainability and ethical production of fashion materials. Here are some of the most common and credible options:



Global Organic Textile Standard
GOTS is the leading certification for organic fibres, covering the entire textile supply chain from farm to finished product. It verifies that fibres are grown without synthetic pesticides, fertilisers, or genetically modified seeds, and that processing meets strict environmental and social criteria.
<https://global-standard.org/>



Organic Content Standard
OCS is another certification for organic fibres, focusing specifically on the presence and amount of organic material in a final product. It provides third-party verification of organic content claims but does not cover processing or end-use criteria.
<https://textileexchange.org/organic-content-standard/>



Recycled Claim Standard
RCS is a standard for verifying recycled content claims in textile products. It ensures that materials are genuinely recycled and traceable through the supply chain, and that production

processes meet environmental and social criteria.
<https://textileexchange.org/recycled-claim-global-recycled-standard/>



OEKO-TEX®
OEKO-TEX® is a suite of certifications that verify the safety and sustainability of textile products and production processes. The STANDARD 100 certification ensures that products are free from harmful substances, while the STeP certification verifies sustainable production facilities and the MADE IN GREEN label identifies products that are both safe and responsibly produced.
<https://www.oeko-tex.com/en/>

Other important certifications and standards to look for include:

- o bluesign® for chemical safety and environmental performance in textile manufacturing
- o Cradle to Cradle Certified™ for circular design and closed-loop production
- o Fairtrade for fair labour practices and living wages in agriculture and textile production
- o Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) for responsible forestry practices in the case of cellulosic fibres
- o Responsible Down Standard (RDS) and Responsible Wool Standard (RWS) for animal welfare in down and wool production

When sourcing materials, look for products that carry one or more of these certifications to ensure they meet high sustainability and ethical production standards.

Asking your suppliers the right questions

In addition to looking for certified materials, it is important to engage with suppliers and ask questions to gather more information about their production practices and sustainability efforts. Some key questions to ask include:

- **What are the specific environmental and social impacts of the material or product, and how are these being measured and managed?**
- **What certifications or third-party verifications does the material or product have, and can documentation be provided to support these claims?**
- **Where are the raw materials sourced from, and how are suppliers vetted for sustainability and ethical practices?**
- **What measures are in place to ensure safe and fair working conditions for workers involved in production?**
- **Are there any initiatives in place to minimise waste, reduce energy and water use, or support circularity?**
- **How transparent is the supply chain, and what traceability measures are in place to track materials from origin to finished product?**

By asking these questions and seeking credible certifications, fashion brands can make more informed decisions about the materials they source and ensure that they support responsible and sustainable production practices.



Section 5

Material usage best practices



Credit: Rory James

Designing for efficiency

One of the key ways to reduce the environmental impact of fashion production is to design for efficiency in material use.

This involves strategies such as:

- o Zero-waste or minimal waste pattern cutting to reduce fabric offcuts and scraps
- o Designing for versatility and adaptability, such as creating multifunctional or modular garments that can be worn in different ways
- o Optimising garment fit and sizing to reduce the need for returns and overproduction
- o Using digital tools such as 3D design and virtual sampling to reduce the need for physical prototypes and samples
- o By designing with efficiency in mind, fashion brands can minimise waste, reduce costs, and improve the overall sustainability of their products.

Reducing consumption and waste

In addition to designing for efficiency, it is important to consider strategies for reducing overall consumption and waste in the fashion industry. This can involve:

- o Encouraging consumers to buy less and choose well, by offering durable, timeless, and versatile products

- o Providing care and repair services to extend the life of garments and reduce the need for replacement
- o Offering rental or subscription models that allow consumers to access fashion without the need for ownership
- o Implementing take-back or recycling initiatives to divert used garments from landfills and support circularity

By promoting a culture of reduced consumption and waste, fashion brands can shift the industry towards a more sustainable and circular model.

Strategies for extending product life

Extending the useful life of fashion products is another key strategy for reducing environmental impact. This can involve:

- o Designing for durability, using high-quality materials and construction techniques that can withstand wear and tear
- o Providing clear care instructions and tips for extending garment life, such as washing less frequently or using gentle cycles
- o Offering repair or alteration services to fix damaged or ill-fitting garments and give them a second life
- o Promoting second-hand or vintage fashion as a sustainable alternative to new purchases

By designing products that are made to last and providing support for their ongoing use and care, fashion brands can help to reduce the environmental impact of clothing over its entire lifecycle.

End-of-life considerations

Finally, it is important to consider what happens to fashion products at the end of their useful life. This involves:

- o Designing for disassembly and recyclability, using materials and construction techniques that allow for easy separation and recycling at end-of-life
- o Providing clear instructions and infrastructure for consumers to recycle or properly dispose of used garments
- o Exploring innovative solutions for textile recycling and upcycling, such as fibre-to-fibre recycling or use of textile waste in other industries
- o Supporting the development of circular business models and infrastructure, such as closed-loop recycling systems or industrial composting facilities

By considering the end-of-life impacts of fashion products and working to support circularity, fashion brands can help to minimise waste and keep valuable resources in use for longer.

Section 6

Taking action in your business



Setting materials sustainability goals

To implement sustainable material practices in a fashion business, it is important to start by setting clear goals and targets. This can involve:

- o Conducting a baseline assessment of current material use and impacts, to identify areas for improvement
- o Setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for sustainable material sourcing and use
- o Aligning goals with industry benchmarks and best practices, such as the Sustainable Development Goals or the Science Based Targets initiative
- o Engaging stakeholders, including suppliers, employees, and customers, in the goal-setting process to ensure buy-in and support

By setting ambitious but achievable goals, fashion brands can create a roadmap for sustainable material practices and drive continuous improvement over time.

Engaging your supply chain

Implementing sustainable material practices requires close collaboration with suppliers and other partners throughout the supply chain. This can involve:

- o Communicating sustainability goals and expectations clearly to suppliers, and providing guidance and support for meeting these requirements
- o Conducting regular audits and assessments to ensure that suppliers are meeting sustainability criteria and identifying areas for improvement
- o Providing training and capacity building for suppliers to help them improve their sustainability performance and adopt best practices
- o Exploring opportunities for vertical integration or direct sourcing to increase transparency and control over material production

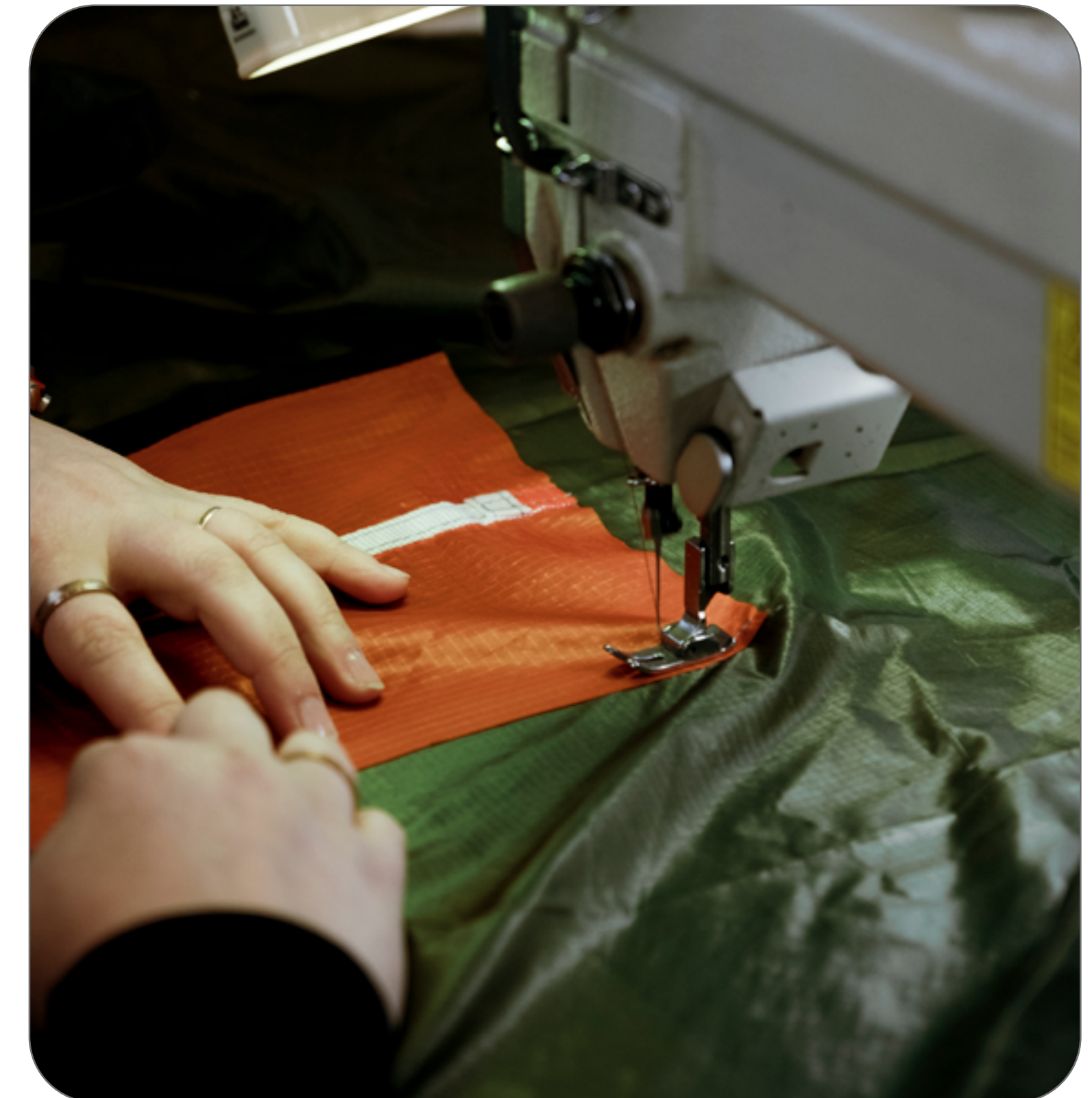
By engaging proactively with suppliers and working together towards shared sustainability goals, fashion brands can drive positive change throughout their supply chain.

Measuring and tracking progress

To ensure that sustainable material practices have the desired impact, measuring and tracking progress over time is important. This can involve:

- o Developing key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics to measure progress towards sustainability goals, such as the percentage of materials sourced from certified suppliers, or the amount of waste reduced through design efficiencies
- o Collecting data from suppliers and other partners to track material flows and impacts throughout the supply chain

- o Conducting regular assessments and audits to verify the accuracy and completeness of sustainability data and identify areas for improvement
- o Reporting on sustainability progress and challenges transparently to stakeholders, including investors, customers, and employees
- o By measuring and tracking progress, fashion brands can demonstrate the impact of their sustainable material practices and identify opportunities for further improvement



Credit: Ben Reilly

Common challenges and solutions

Implementing sustainable material practices can come with a range of challenges, from cost and availability of sustainable options to resistance to change within the organisation. Some common challenges and potential solutions include:

Higher costs of sustainable materials: Look for opportunities to optimise design and production processes, negotiate better terms with suppliers, or explore innovative financing models such as impact investing or green bonds

Limited availability of sustainable options: Work with suppliers to develop new sustainable materials or invest in research and development to bring new options to market

Resistance to change within the organisation: Engage employees and stakeholders in the sustainability journey, provide training and incentives for sustainable practices, and celebrate successes and progress along the way

Difficulty verifying sustainability claims: Work with credible third-party certification bodies and use established standards and frameworks to ensure the credibility and transparency of sustainability claims

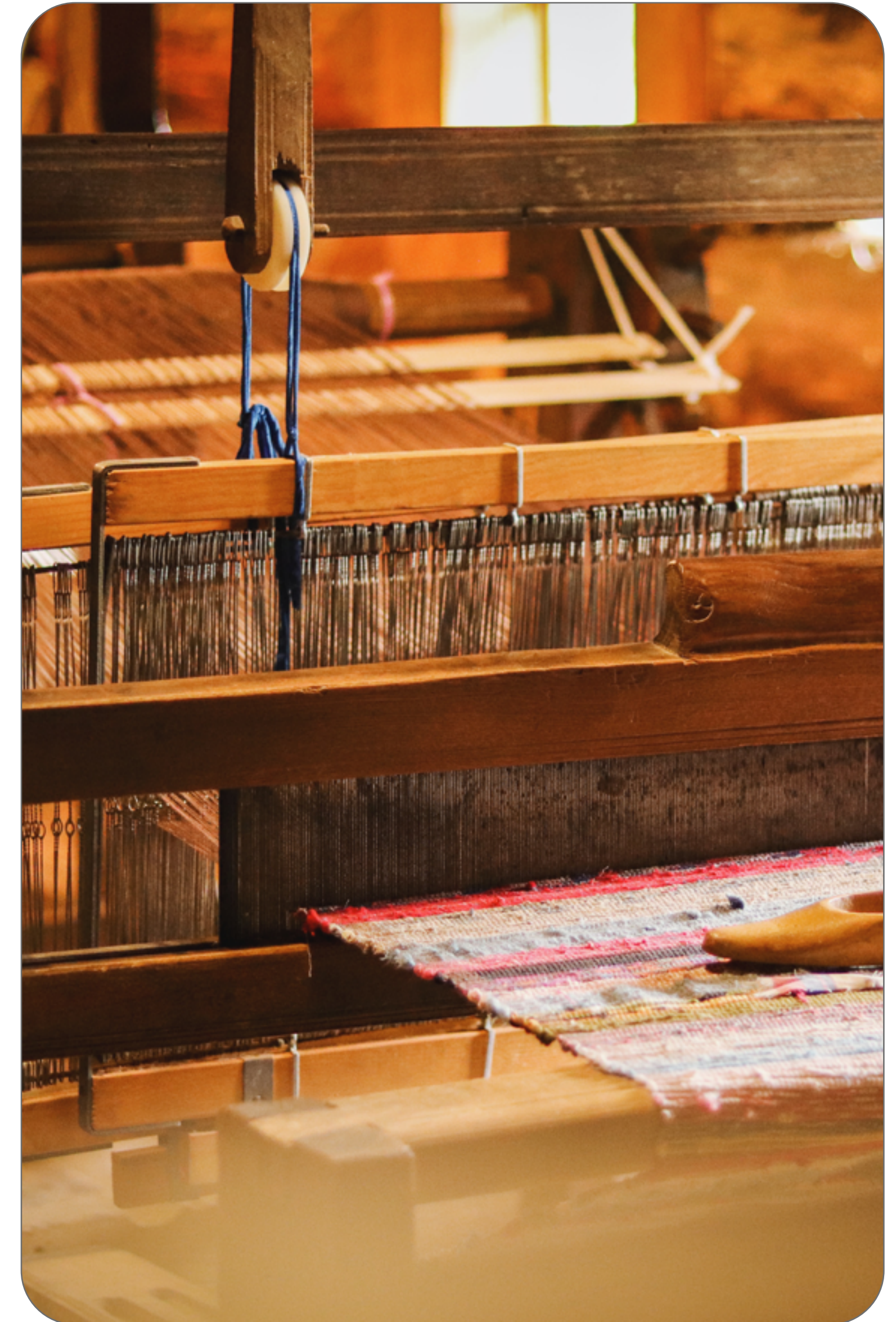
By anticipating and proactively addressing these challenges, fashion brands can overcome barriers to sustainable material practices and drive meaningful change within their organisations.

Communicating your efforts to stakeholders

Finally, it is important to communicate sustainable material practices and progress to stakeholders, including customers, investors, and employees. This can involve:

- o Developing clear and compelling sustainability communications, such as sustainability reports, website content, or product labelling, that highlight the impact and benefits of sustainable material practices
- o Engaging customers in the sustainability journey through education, awareness-raising, and opportunities for participation and feedback
- o Reporting on sustainability progress and challenges transparently and regularly, using established frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative or the UN Global Compact
- o Seeking out opportunities for collaboration and leadership within the industry, such as participating in industry initiatives or sharing best practices with peers

By communicating sustainable material practices effectively and transparently, fashion brands can build trust and credibility with stakeholders and inspire others to drive positive change.



Appendices

About the Institute of Positive Fashion

The BFC’s IPF is a climate think and action tank which convenes the fashion industry to address its environmental and social impact. Founded in 2020 in response to the climate crisis, the IPF engages the industry to accelerate responsible business change with cross-sector programmes and thought leadership through three pillars: Business Change through Circular Economy, Climate & Nature, and Social Change.

Through the BFC Strategy which fuels responsible growth and drives innovation, and by convening an engaged network of Designer Members and Patrons, the IPF gathers evidence to create frameworks and roadmaps for coordinated business action and systems-level change. The IPF shares best practice and its extensive insights to inform policy change at national and international level.

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Glossary

Biodegradable:

Capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms, avoiding pollution.

Circular economy:

A model of production and consumption that involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible.

Closed-loop:

A production process in which post-consumer waste is collected, recycled, and used to make new products.

Cradle to cradle:

A biomimetic approach to designing products and systems that models human industry on nature’s processes, where materials are viewed as nutrients circulating in healthy, safe metabolisms.

Downcycling:

The process of converting waste materials or useless products into new materials or products of lesser quality and reduced functionality.

Extended producer responsibility (EPR):

A strategy designed to promote the integration of environmental costs associated with goods throughout their life cycles into the market price of the products.

Greenwashing:

The process of conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about how a company’s products are environmentally sound.

Life cycle assessment:

A technique to assess environmental impacts associated with all the stages of a product’s life, from raw material extraction through materials processing, manufacture, distribution, use, repair and maintenance, and disposal or recycling.

Additional resources

Circular Fashion Innovation Network

An industry-led programme led by the BFC and UK Fashion and Textile (UKFT) in partnership with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to accelerate the UK towards a Circular Fashion Ecosystem. <https://instituteofpositivefashion.com/The-Circular-Fashion-Innovation-Network>

Ellen MacArthur Foundation

A leading organisation working to accelerate the transition to a circular economy, with a wealth of resources and case studies on circular design and business models. <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/>

Textile Exchange

A global non-profit driving positive impact on climate change across the fashion and textile industry, focusing on accelerating the use of preferred fibres and materials. <https://textileexchange.org/>

Sustainable Apparel Coalition

An industry-wide group of leading apparel, footwear, and textile brands, retailers, suppliers, academics, and NGOs working to reduce the environmental and social impacts of apparel and footwear products around the world. <https://apparelcoalition.org/>

Zero Waste International Alliance

A global network working towards a world without waste through public education and practical application of Zero Waste principles. <http://zwia.org/>

Fashion Revolution

A global movement calling for greater transparency, sustainability, and ethics in the fashion industry, with resources and campaigns to engage consumers and businesses in driving change. <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/>



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