

Statement by the Committee on Environment and Agriculture 2022/23: MJU4 EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles

Summary

In this Statement, the Committee considers the Communication from the Commission on the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, which aims to create a coherent framework and a vision for the transition of the textiles sector.

The strategy contains proposals for a number of measures that can create sustainable and circular textile value chains, new technological solutions and innovative business models for the textiles industry. The Committee proposes that the Riksdag file the statement.

At a general level, the Committee welcomes the Commission's textiles strategy, and considers that it will be an important component in the implementation of the European Green Deal. The Committee also elaborates on its views on some of the subjects dealt with in the Commission's Communication, such as the design and lifespan of textiles, information requirements and digital product passports, and producer responsibility.

The Statement contains one explanatory reservation from the Left Party and the Green Party.

The examined document

Communication from the Commission on an EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles (COM(2022) 141).

The position of the Committee

General comments

As a result of today's unsustainable production and consumption patterns, textiles place a heavy burden on both the environment and the climate. At a general level, the Committee welcomes the Commission's textiles strategy and considers that it will be an important component in the implementation of the European Green Deal. The strategy presents measures that will contribute to the transition to a circular and fossil-free economy, both in the EU and globally. The Committee shares the Commission's view that the EU should become a global trailblazer in sustainable and circular textile value chains, new technological solutions and innovative, circular business models for the textiles industry. In Sweden, active efforts are already in progress both in the public and the private sector in matters relating to sustainable, circular textiles. In view of this, the Committee considers that Sweden has good opportunities to promote and contribute to the various measures announced by the Commission in the textiles strategy.

The Committee also welcomes the fact that the strategy identifies social challenges in work with sustainable value chains for textiles and shares the Commission's assessment of the importance of identifying both social and environmental aspects globally in the manufacturing of textile products. This work can promote the establishment of greener and fairer value chains across borders.

The Committee furthermore wishes to stress the importance of developing and implementing the textiles strategy in line with other relevant EU regulatory frameworks such as the industrial, chemicals and trade strategies. In order to achieve the greatest impact, it is important that the EU's regulatory framework is consistent and coordinated. In addition, the Committee would like, at a general level, to emphasise that the measures that are planned as part of the textiles strategy must have clear support in the EU's basic position regarding free trade and sustainability.

The design and lifespan of textiles

Non-toxic ecocycles are a precondition for a circular economy. According to the Committee, product design is of fundamental importance as choices in the design phase determine the longevity of a product and whether components and materials can be used again with high value and in a safe way. The Committee therefore welcomes the fact that the Commission intends to prioritise regulation of textiles in the proposal for an Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation. The Committee considers that such a regulation must address all the relevant ecodesign requirements and take into account environmental impact throughout the life cycle of the textiles. Extending the life cycle of textiles should, in the opinion of the Committee, take special priority and demands should be made to a greater extent regarding technical life, recycling, reparability, water usage, environmental emissions, information about hazardous substances, etc. In this context, the Committee also welcomes the Commission's announcement of the intention to introduce a ban on the destruction of unsold or returned products, including textiles, and wishes to stress the importance of implementing such a ban.

Information requirements and digital product passports

The Committee is very positive to the Commission's ambition to drive forward work to improve product information to consumers. In the opinion of the Committee, it is important to ensure that information is available about substances in materials and products throughout their life cycle, and the same requirements must be applied to both virgin and recycled materials. The Committee therefore welcomes the Commission's announced proposal on digital product passports. Like the Commission, the Committee considers that a digital product passport can become an important component in work with product information as product passports can contribute to greater transparency in the life of textile products, can ensure traceability and contain information about hazardous chemicals. Together with like-minded member states, Sweden has called for more stringent information requirements in the EU about chemical contents in products for many years, which is why the Commission's announcement of measures in this direction is welcome.

As the textile value chain and market are global, the Committee wishes, in line with what it has already stated at a more general level, to highlight the importance of ensuring that the rules for digital product passports are formulated in a way that is compatible with both the free movement of goods and common principles for international trade. The Committee furthermore considers it important that the rules on digital product passports are designed in such a way that they do not entail an increased administrative burden on companies in the textiles sector. This aspect is especially important for SMEs, which are an increasingly important part of the European textiles sector.

Producer responsibility

The Committee welcomes the extended producer responsibility for textiles announced by the Commission. Extended producer responsibility can contribute to both greater environmental benefits and to safeguarding important activities for the recycling of textiles in the secondhand sector – especially those run by non-governmental organisations. The Committee also wishes to stress the fundamental importance of producer responsibility for textiles being implemented in a coherent and well-coordinated way within the Union. This is necessary in order to ensure the best possible competitive conditions for European companies. According to the Committee, goals for the preparation for recycling and reuse of textile waste should be based on the waste hierarchy, and it is important that the producer responsibility and goals do not obstruct an extended life for textiles and reuse of textiles.

The Committee's overall assessment and proposals

In the light of what it has stated above, the Committee proposes that the Riksdag put the Statement on file.

Reservation

Communication from the Commission on an EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles - explanation (Left Party, Green Party) by Emma Nohrén (Green Party) and Andrea Andersson Tay (Left Party)

Position

We have no objections to the formulation of the Committee's position under the heading Information requirements and digital product passports. As regards the other sections, however, we consider that the position should have the following formulation.

General comments

As a result of today's unsustainable production and consumption patterns, textiles place a heavy burden on the environment and the climate. We therefore welcome the fact that the Commission has presented a textiles strategy and consider that it will be an important component in the implementation of the European Green Deal. The strategy presents measures that will contribute to the transition to a circular and fossil-free economy, both in the EU and globally. We share the Commission's view that the EU should be a global trailblazer when it comes to creating sustainable and circular textile value chains, new technological solutions and innovative circular business models for the textiles industry.

In Sweden, active efforts are already in progress both in the public and the private sector in matters relating to sustainable, circular textiles. In light of this, our assessment is that Sweden has good opportunities to drive and contribute to the various measures announced by the Commission in the textiles strategy.

We also consider that the Commission should ensure that the strategy addresses the social problems that the textile industry causes. Consideration for human rights must become an integral part of circular business models. The EU needs to place more stringent requirements on European clothing companies so that they take responsibility for their impact on the environment and on human rights.

Today, 75 per cent of employees in the global clothing industry are women. We therefore wish to highlight the gender equality perspective and the importance of integrating it into all measures and investments. Change is also a matter of urgency in view of the disproportionately low representation of women in higher positions throughout the chain. It is far from sufficient that the Commission, as regards the social aspects of the production chain, merely refers to the proposal on due diligence for companies, especially given that this proposal is only estimated to comprise 1 per cent of companies. SMEs should also be included in order to achieve the desired results in the textiles sector.

We also wish to stress the importance of developing and implementing the textiles strategy in line with other relevant EU regulatory frameworks such as the industrial, chemicals and trade strategies, the ecodesign regulation and legislation on due diligence. Here, we would like to stress that more concrete requirements should be linked to corporate responsibility for the climate, for example, through binding requirements on companies to develop and implement transition plans in line with the Paris Agreement, with both short-term and long-term emission reduction targets and requirements for companies to manage the climate risks in their value chains.

In order to achieve the greatest impact, it is important that the EU's regulatory framework is consistent, coordinated and clear. If companies fail to observe the ecodesign requirements, they should not have access to the EU market. In addition, we would like, at a general level, to emphasise that the measures that are planned as part of the textiles strategy must have clear support in the EU's basic position regarding free trade and sustainability.

The design and lifespan of textiles

Non-toxic ecocycles are a precondition for a circular economy. In our opinion, product design is of fundamental importance as choices in the design phase determine the longevity of a product and

whether components and materials can be reused with high value and in a safe way. We therefore welcome the fact that the Commission will be prioritising regulation of textiles in the proposed Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation. We consider that such a regulation must address all the relevant ecodesign requirements and take into account environmental impact throughout the life cycle of the textiles.

Extending the life of textiles should, in our opinion, have special priority and demands should be made to a greater extent regarding technical life, recycling, reparability, water usage, emissions to the environment, information about hazardous substances, etc. The Commission has announced that information requirements are to be introduced about destruction of unsold products. In our opinion, this is insufficient and instead, a ban should be introduced on the destruction of unsold or returned products, and we wish to stress the importance of implementing such a ban. Furthermore, concrete and binding targets are needed to reduce our impact on the environment and climate.

Producer responsibility

We welcome a greater producer responsibility for textiles, as announced by the Commission. However, we consider that matters relating to unfair commercial practices, purchase prices or living wages and living incomes – aspects that constitute a major part of the puzzle in making the textiles sector fair and sustainable – are missing in the strategy. Brands use the uneven balance of power between themselves and their suppliers in order to unilaterally impose purchasing methods that are to their advantage, such as setting purchase prices lower than production costs, shortening lead times or making last-minute design changes. These purchasing methods push factories' margins and leave them little or no room to invest in sustainable production or work conditions, such as a safe working environment or living wages.

A clearer producer responsibility of this kind can contribute to both greater environmental benefits and to safeguarding important activities for the recycling of textiles in the secondhand sector – especially those run by non-governmental organisations. We also wish to stress the fundamental importance of producer responsibility for textiles being implemented in a coherent and well-coordinated way within the Union. This is necessary in order to ensure the best possible competitive conditions for European companies.

In our opinion, goals for the preparation for recycling and reuse of textile waste should be based on the waste hierarchy, and it is important that the producer responsibility and goals do not obstruct an extended life for textiles and reuse of textiles.

Concluding comments

With reference to the above, we propose that the Riksdag put the Statement on file.