

EU wants to force fashion firms to make clothes more durable and recyclable

The European Commission is calling for an end to fast fashion by 2030, as it announced a vast expansion of eco-design rules that could in future apply to any product, starting with textiles.

The EU executive also wants large companies to disclose how much unsold stock they send to landfill, as part of a wide-ranging plan to crack down on throwaway culture.

- 5 EU eco-design rules, which set energy efficiency standards for a host of consumer goods, such as toasters and washing machines, will also in future cover durability and recyclability. Manufacturers, for example, may have to use a certain amount of recycled content in their goods, or curb the use of materials that make them hard to recycle.
- 10 “The products we use every day need to last,” Frans Timmermans, the European Commission vice-president in charge of the EU green deal, told reporters. “If products break we should be able to fix them. A smartphone should not lose its functionality,” he said, gesturing to his own device and voicing frustration that it was not possible to change the battery without going to specialists. “The clothes we wear should last longer than three washes and should also be recyclable,” he added.
- 15 The EU environment commissioner, Virginijus Sinkevičius, said the commission wanted fast fashion “to get out of fashion”, saying: “By 2030 textiles placed on the EU market should be long-lived and recyclable, made to a large extent of recycled fibres.”
- 20 He voiced optimism that consumers – sold the idea of constantly updating their look – would embrace the agenda: “They [clothes] will not need to be thrown away and replaced as often as now and that way consumers will actually gain a nice alternative, an attractive alternative to fast fashion.” (...)
- The average European throws away 11kg of clothes, shoes and other fabric goods every year. Textiles are the fourth-largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, after food, housing and transport, as well as consuming vast amounts of water and raw materials.
- 25 If the proposals come into force, they could have a big impact around the world, as nearly three-quarters of clothing and household textiles consumed in the EU are imported from elsewhere. (...)
- 30 Companies will also be obliged to tell consumers about features that shorten a product’s lifespan, for instance, software that stops or downgrades the functionality of smartphones and laptops over time.