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PRESS RELEASE

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Textile Recycling Association welcomes Nordic textile export study but urges caution over policy recommendations

New research finds no direct evidence of dumping or uncontrolled burning at African and Asian destinations and recognises the benefits of international textile reuse and recycling.

The Textile Recycling Association (TRA) has welcomed a new study examining international trade in used textiles from Nordic countries, while raising concerns about aspects of its methodology and recommendations that could restrict legitimate reuse and recycling markets.

Understanding Used and Waste Textiles Exports from the Nordics, produced by Eunomia and Mepex, combines international trade data, stakeholder research and a six-month tracking exercise involving 200 garments.

Significantly, the researchers found **no direct evidence of dumping, uncontrolled burning or environmental leakage at African or Asian endpoints**. They also recognise that international markets extend garment lifetimes, provide affordable clothing, support livelihoods and supply recycling feedstock.

Alan Wheeler, Chief Executive of the TRA, said:

"This is a welcome and considerably more measured contribution to the debate about international textile exports.

For too long, claims about used clothing being dumped in developing countries have been repeated as established facts, sometimes based on little more than assumptions about where tracking devices stopped transmitting.

Encouragingly, these researchers recognise that a tracker's last recorded location does not necessarily establish what happened to the garment itself."

Important methodological questions remain

While welcoming the research, the TRA identifies three areas where the methodology could have been strengthened.

Firstly, the six-month tracking period does not fully reflect seasonal clothing markets. Garments may be stored for months before being sold, and a 12-month study would have provided a fuller picture.

Secondly, the researchers used a simple grading system to assess garment quality. It remains unclear whether experienced professional textile sorters carried out these assessments. Quality, value and market demand are not interchangeable, and lower-grade garments may be desirable and reusable elsewhere.

Thirdly, trackers were visibly attached to garments, making them vulnerable to removal or damage during sorting and baling. A tracker ceasing transmission at a sorting facility or waste-management location does not necessarily mean the garment was disposed of there.

International markets must not be undermined

The TRA urges caution over the recommendation to reduce exports of lower-grade textiles to developing countries.

Pakistan and India are major centres of textile sorting and mechanical recycling expertise. Restricting access to these markets could undermine circularity rather than improve it.

Similarly, lower commercial value does not mean a garment cannot be reused. Where demand exists, keeping clothing in use for longer is preferable to premature recycling or disposal in Europe.

The TRA supports stronger transparency, quality standards and downstream accountability, but believes measures must reflect market demand and international processing capabilities.

Mr Wheeler concluded:

"The important question is not simply where used textiles travel, but what actually happens to them when they get there.

This report makes a useful contribution to our understanding. The next step should be closer collaboration with professional sorters, recyclers and traders in destination countries to establish actual outcomes and ensure policies support, rather than inadvertently disrupt, legitimate international trade."

ENDS

Notes to editors

About the research
Understanding Used and Waste Textiles Exports from the Nordics was published in November 2026 by Eunomia and Mepex - Read the full report (PDF)

About the Textile Recycling Association
The Textile Recycling Association (TRA) represents businesses involved in the collection, sorting, reuse and recycling of used textiles. It advocates for evidence-based policy supporting sustainable international trade and the circular textiles economy.

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