



Textile Recycling Association
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The Textile Recycling Association advocates best practice and the sale of good quality products onto the global markets.

- the Textile Recycling Association (TRA) is the UK trade association for reputable collector and processors of used clothing/textiles;
- TRA collectors and sorters are required to follow some of the most stringent requirements in the world; incl. fumigation of shipped items for the Kenyan market & physical inspection by an inspector at point of loading.
- This helps to ensure that only good quality re-useable clothing and textiles products are traded on the global markets and that overseas customers know that when they buy from TRA members they are not importing waste which needs to be landfilled.
- **The UK is no longer the significant source of used clothing in Kenya that it once was.**
- In 2021, 78,575 tonnes of used clothing going to Kenya, came from China (43% of all clothing). Whilst clothing from the UK totalled just 7,328 tonnes (only 4% of the market share).ⁱ
- Imports into Kenya rose from 129,600 tonnes in 2016 to 183,506 tonnes in 2021 – a rise of 42%, whilst at the same time imports from the UK fell from 16,207 tonnes (2016) to 7,328 tonnes (2021) – a fall of 55%.ⁱⁱ
- Almost 75% of all imports into Kenya come from the four biggest markets. This does not include the UK.ⁱⁱⁱ

The global clothing re-use industry is beneficial to the environment and employs tens of millions of people.

The clothing and textile industry is responsible for about 8 to 10% of all global greenhouse gas emissions. That is more than the aviation and maritime industry combined.^{iv}

Textile production is responsible for about 20% of all freshwater pollution incidents throughout the world.^v In China it is said that you can tell the colour of this season's fashion just by looking at the colours of the rivers.^{vi}

Around 10,000 to 20,000 litres of water is consumed to produce 1kg of cotton.^{vii}

Over-irrigation for cotton plantations is cited by many as the primary cause for the disappearance of the Aral Sea in Central Asia, one of the biggest environmental disasters in the world.^{viii}

However, the global used clothing industry is:

- 70 times better for the environment than the new clothing industry^{ix}
- Directly employs two million people in Kenya alone^x, with tens of millions employed globally and supporting many more employment positions in ancillary sectors



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And Textile Recycling Association members are leading the way in promoting sustainable practices that ensure good quality items are traded globally.

The Textile Recycling Association is the UK's trade association for collectors, sorters and processors of used clothing and textiles and leads the way in driving professional standards in the sector.

All members of the Textile Recycling Association are required to uphold the requirements of the Waste Framework Directive and Transfrontier Shipments of Wastes regulations

Used clothing and textiles collected in the UK, should go through a detailed sorting process and can be sorted typically into 130 plus re-use and recycling grades and sometimes this can be more than 200 grades.

In the sorting process each garment is picked up and individually assessed by highly trained experts. The good quality re-useable products are segregated from the recycling grades. The goods are selected for the end user markets based on specific requirements of said market and regular inspections are carried out by customers from those regions. The good quality items are sorted into the detailed grades before being put up for sale on the global markets. Then wholesalers throughout the world buy the goods from their selected and trusted UK (TRA) sorters. It is the buyers in these countries that dictate the flows of textiles and which import the goods into their countries.

The recycling grades that are separated here are then sold on to specialists manufacturers who can then use them in the manufacture of new products such as industrial wiping cloths, heat and sound insulation, impact insulation in motor vehicles, shoddy yarn (used to make blankets) and wool can be blended with virgin fibres to make brand new wool yarn.

Not all used clothing sales operate to the same specification.

Textile Recycling Association members in the UK are both collectors and sorters that operate under what are the probably the strictest regulations in the world when it comes to trading used clothing and textiles.'

Under the waste framework directive, TRA members are required to ensure that only good quality re-usable clothing products are sold onto countries in Africa and other non-OECD countries. Recycling grades and other non-textile/clothing items have to be removed.

The high standards instilled in this country is reflected in the UK's reputation as being the country that supplies the highest quality of clothing in the world. This also means that clothing from the UK attracts the highest prices on the global markets as our products are in more demand.

However, the majority of countries are not subject to the same tight restrictions on trading as the UK.. This is to the extent that some countries allow unsorted used textiles containing a complete mix of re-usable items, recycling grades and waste to be sold into African

countries as a product.

With less regulation surrounding these sales, they are able to command a lower price for their bales and in recent years there has been a rapid change in the market share of businesses outside the UK on the global stage.

Response to article in Daily Mail - [The REAL price of your throwaway fast fashion](#) – published 16th February 2023.

Claim - The UK is dumping 12 million items of 'junk plastic' clothing in Nairobi every year that are too dirty or damaged to be reused, an investigation has found.

Whilst it might be the case that Kenyan businesses import 12 million garments that originate from the UK that are made of polyester or other man-made fibres, what evidence has been provided to back the claims being made that this quantity of “junk plastic from the UK? The qualities of items originating from different countries is likely to vary significantly.

Claim - An M&S item with the label 'recycle with Oxfam' was photographed being burnt to roast peanuts.

Whilst it is unfortunate when ends up like this, it is one item and as the article points out they estimate that 36,640,890 items of used clothing shipped directly from the UK to Kenya each year, so one item is not indicative that there is a fundamental problem with the quality of clothing coming from the UK. We also don't know whether then the item became waste, it could have been damaged in transit or whilst in Kenya.

Claim - The investigators found that recycling firms listed as partnering with charity shops including Sue Ryder, Cancer Research, Barnardos, Marie Curie, the British Heart Foundation and British Red Cross were exporting their clothes to Kenya.

Yes, there are a number of British used clothing collectors and sorters which work with UK charities and export good quality clothing to Kenya. This statement does not say that investigators found evidence that these “recycling firms” are exporting waste. It is incorrect to describe the export of good quality re-useable clothing as recycling. Promoting re-use and extending the life of clothing is higher up the waste hierarchy. If the “investigators” have evidence that there is particular problem with clothing from the UK then please provide details

Where is the waste coming from?

There has been a seismic shift in the Kenyan market (and other African markets) in recent years in terms of where the Kenyans are buying their used clothing from.

HS (as reported) commodity codes

630900 - Clothing; worn, and other worn articles

All, Total, AG[X] or a valid code. Up to 20 may be selected. If you know the code number, e.g. 01 - Live animals, type 01. To search by description type a word, e.g. rice.

4. See the results

Get data > Download CSV Download More information about data

Issues opening CSV in Excel? See this Microsoft how-to.

5. Preview (6 records)

Show 25 entries

Period	Trade Flow	Reporter	Partner	Commodity Code	Trade Value (US\$)	Netweight (kg)	Qty Unit	Qty	Flag
2016	Import	Kenya	World	630900	\$126,669,281	129,617,890	Weight in kilograms	129,617,890	0
2016	Import	Kenya	China	630900	\$29,266,358	29,547,584	Weight in kilograms	29,547,584	0
2016	Import	Kenya	United Kingdom	630900	\$15,551,198	16,207,201	Weight in kilograms	16,207,201	0
2021	Import	Kenya	World	630900	\$172,668,229	183,505,631	Weight in kilograms	183,505,631	0
2021	Import	Kenya	China	630900	\$72,177,054	78,575,497	Weight in kilograms	78,575,497	0
2021	Import	Kenya	United Kingdom	630900	\$7,024,720	7,328,178	Weight in kilograms	7,328,178	0

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In 2016 Kenya imported 29,000 tonnes of used clothing from China (about 22% of the market). At the time the clothing from the UK accounted for 16,000 tonnes. By 2021 Kenya's total imports has risen to 183,500 tonne (42% rise on 2016) with 78,600 coming from China (a 266% rise on 2016 figures) whilst the UK's share dropped by about 55% to just 7,300 tonnes.

Kenyan's buy more than 10 times as much used clothing from China than they do from the UK.

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ⁱ UN Comtrade data

ⁱⁱ UN Comtrade data

ⁱⁱⁱ UN Comtrade data

^{iv} Fixing Fashion – 2019 – Environmental Audit Committee.

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^{vi} <https://www.ecowatch.com/fast-fashion-riverblue-2318389169.html>

^{vii} <https://www.commonobjective.co/article/the-issues-water>

^{viii} <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dry-tears-aral#:~:text=The%20world's%20fourth%20largest%20lake,new%20spirit%20in%20the%20region.>

^{ix} <https://www.euric-aisbl.eu/position-papers/item/644-press-release-clothing-reuse-has-a-70-times-lower-environmental-impact-reveals-new-study#:~:text=The%20environmental%20impact%20of%20reusing,quality%20clothing%20that%20is%20reused.>

^x <https://ieakenya.or.ke/download/the-state-of-second-hand-clothes-and-footwear-trade-in-kenya/>