

Foreword¹

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The textile sector, including the fashion industry, is one of the largest global sectors with immense impacts on the economy, culture and creativity, and the daily life of everyone - but at the same time it also has major effects on climate and the environment.

The continuous high consumption of textile products, and the rise of fast fashion, calls for a shift towards increased sustainability and circularity. This is not just a trend but a necessity and it requires a rethinking of how textile products are produced, consumed and ultimately disposed of. Prioritising sustainability at every stage of the fashion lifecycle and focusing on sustainability and circularity principles is a must – principles such as designing for longevity, minimising waste and maximising reuse and recycling paves the way for a more sustainable, circular and resilient fashion industry, meeting both greener consumer demand and enjoying, in time, greater security of supply from circular feedstock.

High demand for sustainable products is essential to support the move to more sustainable and circular production. Therefore, achieving a sustainable and circular textiles and fashion industry is a shared responsibility and thus, in addition to regulators, businesses, designers and consumers all have important roles to play.

The European Union has already taken significant steps towards a circular economy, including for the textiles ecosystem, starting with the

¹ The information and views set out in this foreword are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Institution.

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European Green Deal, followed by the Circular Economy Action Plan and its key implementing policy document for textiles, the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. The EU Textiles Strategy sets out a framework for increased circularity and sustainability, addressing every stage of the textile product lifecycle, from design to consumption to the end-of-life and recycling phase. It is currently being implemented through several initiatives, many of them regulatory, setting the stage for an environmentally friendly and still (technically and economically) feasible level playing field on which the new green (and digital) economy can flourish. Among these initiatives, the new Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, the revision of the Waste Framework Directive, the Directive on Empowering consumers for the green transition along with the proposed Green Claims Directive and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive take centre stage as the landmark proposals revolutionising EU product, consumer and global sustainability legislation for textiles. Other flanking regulations include the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the proposed Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market. All these new rules and regulations will certainly not come without implementation challenges, but with every challenge comes opportunity, and this new regulatory framework provides opportunities to become a pioneer in the emerging field of circular and sustainable fashion.

Ensuring the existence of adequate skills, and investing in up-and re-skilling, are other key elements and enabling conditions for the green, as well as the digital, transition. In view of this, the European Commission has supported the establishment of the EU Pact for Skills for the textiles ecosystem between industry, educational providers and public authorities. The aim of the Pact is to promote up-and re-skilling and the transfer of green and digital skills to companies in the sector by setting up skills partnerships at local level. Fostering innovation and investments in research and development to allow for new business models, digital technologies and processes that enable circularity are also a must. The European Commission has put forward a proposal for a European Partnership on textiles under Horizon Europe with the vision of the partnership being to work together with industry to define strategic priorities for funding and support companies in the sector to innovate and implement the new EU legislative provisions on sustainability and circularity impacting textiles.

This book exemplifies well many of the important aspects for a shift towards increased sustainability and circularity, both for the fashion industry and consumers, ranging from design of products to textile waste, social sustainability, greenwashing, innovation, traceability and transparency, and market surveillance. I believe this book can be an inspiration and driver towards a necessary change, not just for the textile and fashion industry but also to help consumers understand the impact of their choices and encourage more sustainable and circular decisions.

It is clear that the path to more sustainable and circular textiles, and fashion, requires the efforts and commitments of all stakeholders. Everyone has a role to play, so let's start today with ourselves, rethinking our actions and embracing more sustainable and circular choices.