

Green-Schools **LET'S FIX**
FASHION



Global Threads

The Journey of Fast Fashion

Irish and Kenyan students showcasing thrifted and upcycled clothes at the
'Let's Fix Fashion' catwalk event.
Photo by Diarmuid Greene

Table of Contents

Fast Fashion in Ireland.....	3
Where do Fast-Fashion Chains source their clothing?.....	4
Where are Raw Materials sourced?.....	5
Global Threads Map 1: The journey of raw materials to production lines.....	6
The Next Step - from Raw Material to Fast Fashion.....	7
Global Threads: The journey of Fast Fashion to Ireland.....	8
Global Threads Map 2: The journey of Fast Fashion to Ireland.....	9
Global Threads: The Final Journey.....	10
Global Threads Map 3: The Final Journey.....	13
Global Threads: The Final Destination.....	14
Sources.....	18



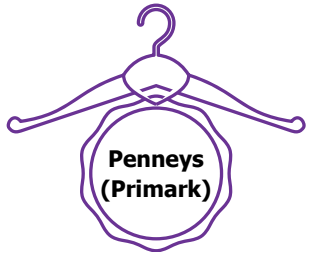
Fast Fashion in Ireland

In Ireland, the fast fashion market is dominated by several key players known for their large collections, regular updates and affordable prices. Some of the dominant fast fashion brands popular in Ireland include:

- **Penneys (Primark):** Penneys has a significant presence across Ireland. It is known for offering a wide collection of fashionable and budget-friendly clothing. Penney's appeal lies in its ability to quickly adapt to trends and provide low-cost options, making it a staple for many Irish consumers
- **Zara:** Part of the Inditex group, Zara is well-regarded for its ability to bring runway-inspired designs to the mass market quickly.
- **H&M:** Another major player, H&M offers a broad range of clothing for all ages, focusing on trendy yet affordable fashion.
- **New Look:** New Look is also popular in Ireland. They frequently update their inventory to keep up with current trends.
- **ASOS:** Although primarily an online retailer, ASOS has a strong market presence in Ireland. Known for its extensive range of fashion items and brands



Where do fast fashion chains source their clothing?



Primark sources its clothing from a wide range of countries, primarily focusing on regions with large-scale garment manufacturing industries. The main sourcing countries include:

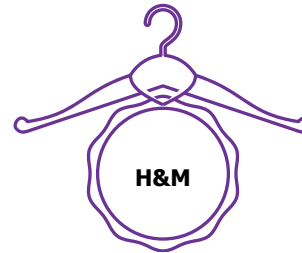
- Bangladesh
- China
- India
- Vietnam
- Turkey

Primark also source some of their clothing across Europe, including the UK and Ireland.



Zara, part of the Inditex group, sources its clothing from various countries, with a significant portion of its manufacturing done close to its headquarters in Spain. Key sourcing countries include:

- Spain
- Portugal
- Morocco
- Turkey
- China
- Bangladesh



H&M sources its clothing from many countries across Asia and Europe.

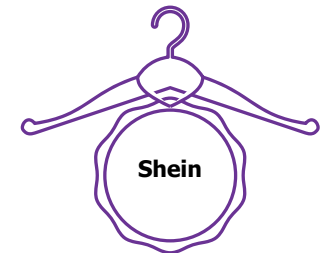
The main sourcing countries are;

- Bangladesh
- China
- India
- Turkey
- Vietnam
- Cambodia



New Look sources its clothing primarily from Asia, because of the manufacturing capabilities in these regions. Key sourcing countries include:

- China
- India
- Bangladesh
- Pakistan
- Cambodia



Shein sources its clothing from a broad range of countries around the world. The main sourcing regions include:

- China
- Bangladesh
- Vietnam
- India

These countries rely on global supply chains to procure the necessary raw materials for their textile and garment industries. This interconnectedness highlights the complexity and global nature of the fast fashion supply chain, where raw materials travel long distances before being transformed into finished products.

Where are raw materials sourced?

Fast fashion brands source materials from countries all over the world, primarily due to cost advantages and the availability of specific resources. Labour is cheaper in the Global South, allowing brands to maintain low production costs and maximise their profits. Different regions also specialise in different materials and processing techniques, making it efficient to source specific materials from places where they are most abundant or cheapest to produce.

Environmental Impact of Global Supply Chains

The environmental impact of sourcing materials globally and processing them in different countries is significant:

Carbon Footprint

Transporting raw materials and finished products across long distances increases the carbon footprint of each item. For example, cotton sourced in the U.S., processed into garments in Vietnam, and then shipped to the U.S. again involves multiple stages of transportation, each contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

Resource Use

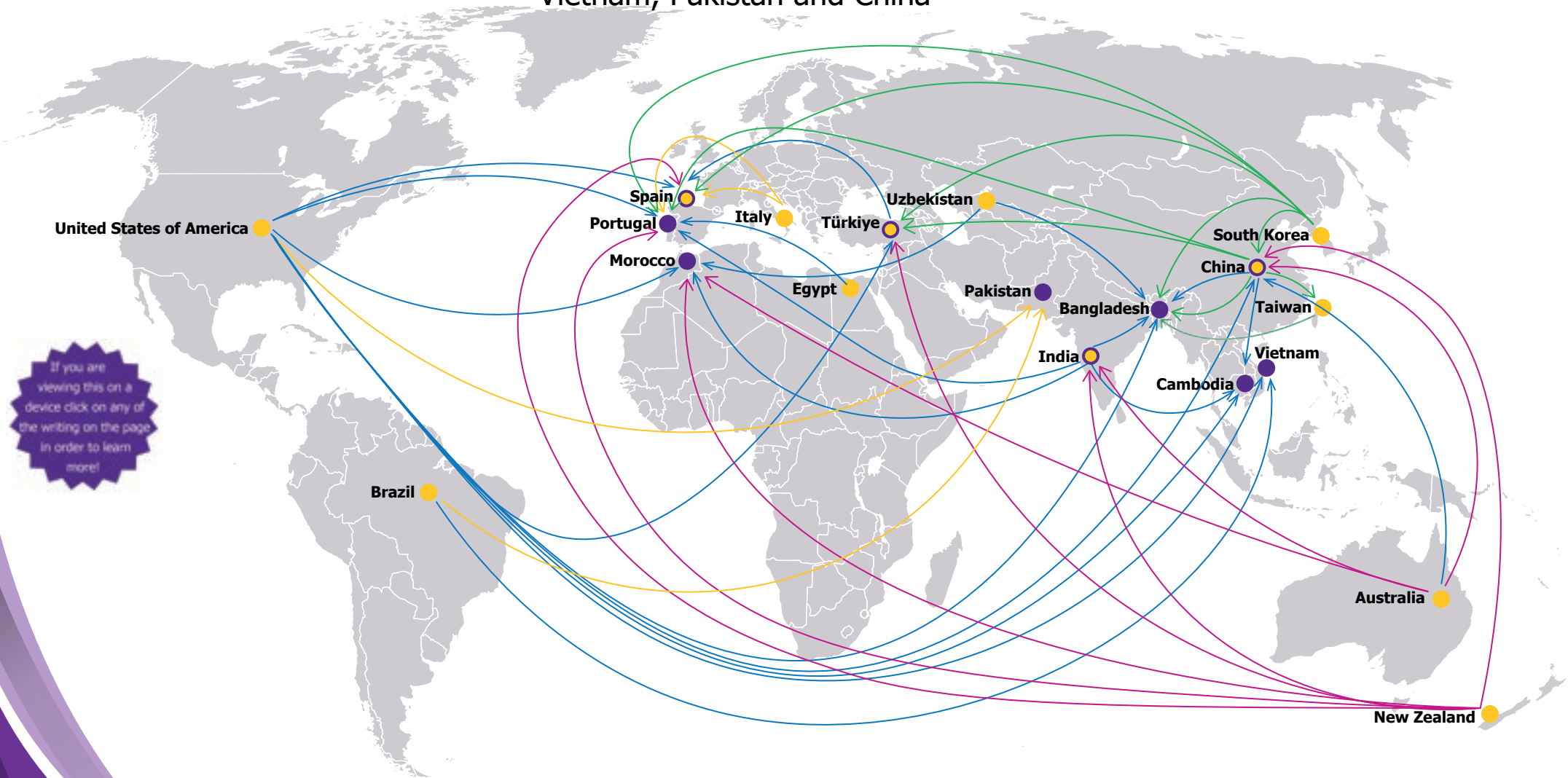
Each stage of production and transportation consumes huge amounts of energy and water, contributing to resource depletion and environmental stress in the regions involved.

Pollution

The production and processing of textiles involve chemicals that can lead to air and water pollution at multiple points along the supply chain.



Global Threads Map 1: The Journey of Raw Materials to production lines in Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Turkey, India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam, Pakistan and China



If you are viewing this on a device click on any of the writing on the page in order to learn more!

Legend

- = Countries where raw materials are sourced
- = Countries where fast-fashion clothing is produced
- = Leather export
- = Synthetics export
- = Wool export
- = Cotton export

The manufacturing process for fast fashion involves the preparation of raw materials before they are transformed into items of clothing that we see in Penneys or on Shein today.

Cotton

Synthetics

Wool

Leather

- **Ginning:** Raw cotton is first cleaned and processed to remove seeds and debris, a process known as ginning.
- **Spinning:** The cleaned cotton fibres are spun into yarns either through traditional spinning methods or modern automated spinning machines.
- **Extrusion:** Synthetic fibres are produced through a process called extrusion, where polymer materials are melted and forced through tiny holes to form continuous strands.
- **Drawing and Texturing:** After extrusion, the fibres undergo processes like drawing (to align molecules for strength) and texturing (to add bulk and softness).
- **Cleaning and Carding:** The wool fibres are then cleaned to remove impurities and carded to align the fibres into a continuous web.
- **Spinning:** Similar to cotton, wool fibres are spun into yarns for weaving or knitting.
- **Tanning:** Raw animal hides are treated through a tanning process to stabilise the collagen fibres and prevent decomposition. Tanning can be done using various methods including vegetable tanning or chrome tanning.
- **Cutting:** Once tanned, leather hides are cut into patterns suitable for garment construction.

During these preparation stages, each type of raw material undergoes specific treatments to enhance its properties and suitability for garment production. For example, cotton and wool may be blended with synthetics for added strength or stretch, and leather may undergo dyeing or finishing processes to achieve desired colours and textures.

It's important to note that these processes can have significant environmental impacts due to chemical use, water consumption, and waste generation.

Global Threads: The Journey of Fast Fashion to Ireland

As we have seen in the first Global Threads Map, clothes sold in Irish shops often begin their journey with raw materials sourced from countries like the United States, Brazil, Australia and China. These materials, such as cotton or synthetic fibres, are then transformed into garments through manufacturing processes as we have also learned in the previous section. Once made, the clothes are exported to Ireland and around the world for sale in shops.

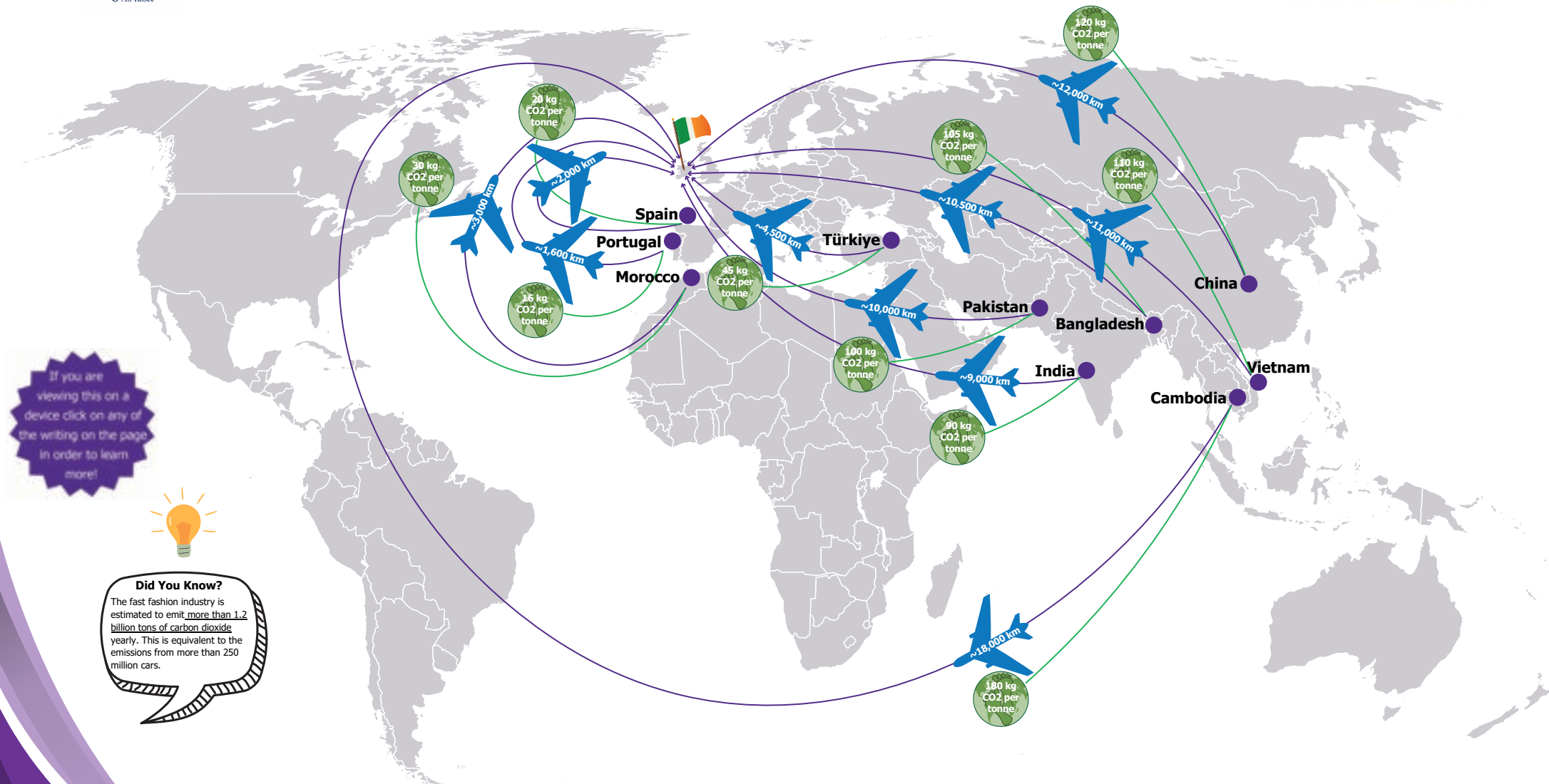
The environmental impact of this journey is significant. The production of raw materials can involve intensive water and pesticide use, impacting local ecosystems and biodiversity. Manufacturing processes often contribute to air and water pollution, while the transportation of goods across continents generates greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to climate change. The disposal of textile waste also poses further environmental challenges, as synthetic fibres take hundreds of years to degrade.

Understanding this supply chain helps us recognise our role as consumers in a global economy. By making informed choices about what we buy and supporting sustainable practices, we can reduce the environmental footprint of the clothes we wear and promote ethical manufacturing processes worldwide. This knowledge empowers us to advocate for a more sustainable and environmentally conscious fashion industry.

Making informed and responsible choices, directly responds to Global Goal 12!



Global Threads Map 2: The Journey of Fast Fashion to Ireland



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Did You Know?

The fast fashion industry is estimated to emit more than 1.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide yearly. This is equivalent to the emissions from more than 250 million cars.

Legend



Approximate distance from manufacturing sites to Ireland via land and sea



Carbon Footprint - approx kg CO2 per tonne

General Assumptions for calculation

Average CO2 Emissions: Approximately 10 grams of CO2 per tonne-kilometre for container ships (Clothes POD).

Average Distance: Calculated using direct sea routes and estimated distances.

Global Threads - The Final Journey

Many fast fashion clothing items are produced using inexpensive materials and labour as we have learned. These garments are often not designed for durability and are frequently discarded after only a few wears. Research indicates that an item of clothing is worn on average just **7 times**. When consumers are done with their clothing, there are several options for disposal.

Often, clothes are donated to charity shops where they are sorted and distributed to various outlets across the country if they are of high quality. Clothing can also be donated through clothing banks, where items are sorted and redistributed for reuse, waste management, recycling, and other purposes.

It is important to research which clothing banks ethically distribute the clothing in a sustainable way to ensure we are not contributing to landfill waste.

On the next page, you will learn about what happens when you donate your clothes to a clothing bank.



Global Threads - The Final Journey

There are a number of steps taken by Clothes Bank providers to recycle and reuse clothing:



Collection and sorting:

- **Local Collection:** Clothes placed in donation banks are collected by organisations such as the Irish Cancer Society, St. Vincent de Paul, or other charities and textile recycling companies.
- **Sorting Centres:** The collected items are transported to sorting centres where they are sorted based on their condition and type. Items are categorised into reusable clothing, textiles for recycling, and items that are unsuitable for either.



Reuse and Resale:

- **Charity Shops:** High-quality, wearable items are often sold in charity shops within Ireland.
- **Export for Resale:** Clothes that are still in good condition but not sold locally may be exported to second-hand markets in developing countries. These markets provide affordable clothing and support local economies. Unfortunately, this can also have a negative impact on the local environment and community. The influx of second-hand clothes can impact local textile industries and contribute to waste problems if the items are not sold and are eventually discarded.





Recycling:

- **Material Recovery:** Clothes that are not suitable for resale can be recycled into various products. For instance, cotton can be turned into cleaning rags, and other textiles might be processed into insulation materials or stuffing for furniture.
- **Downcycling:** Some textiles are downcycled, meaning they are broken down into fibres to produce lower-grade products. This helps divert waste from landfills but does not close the loop as effectively as true recycling.

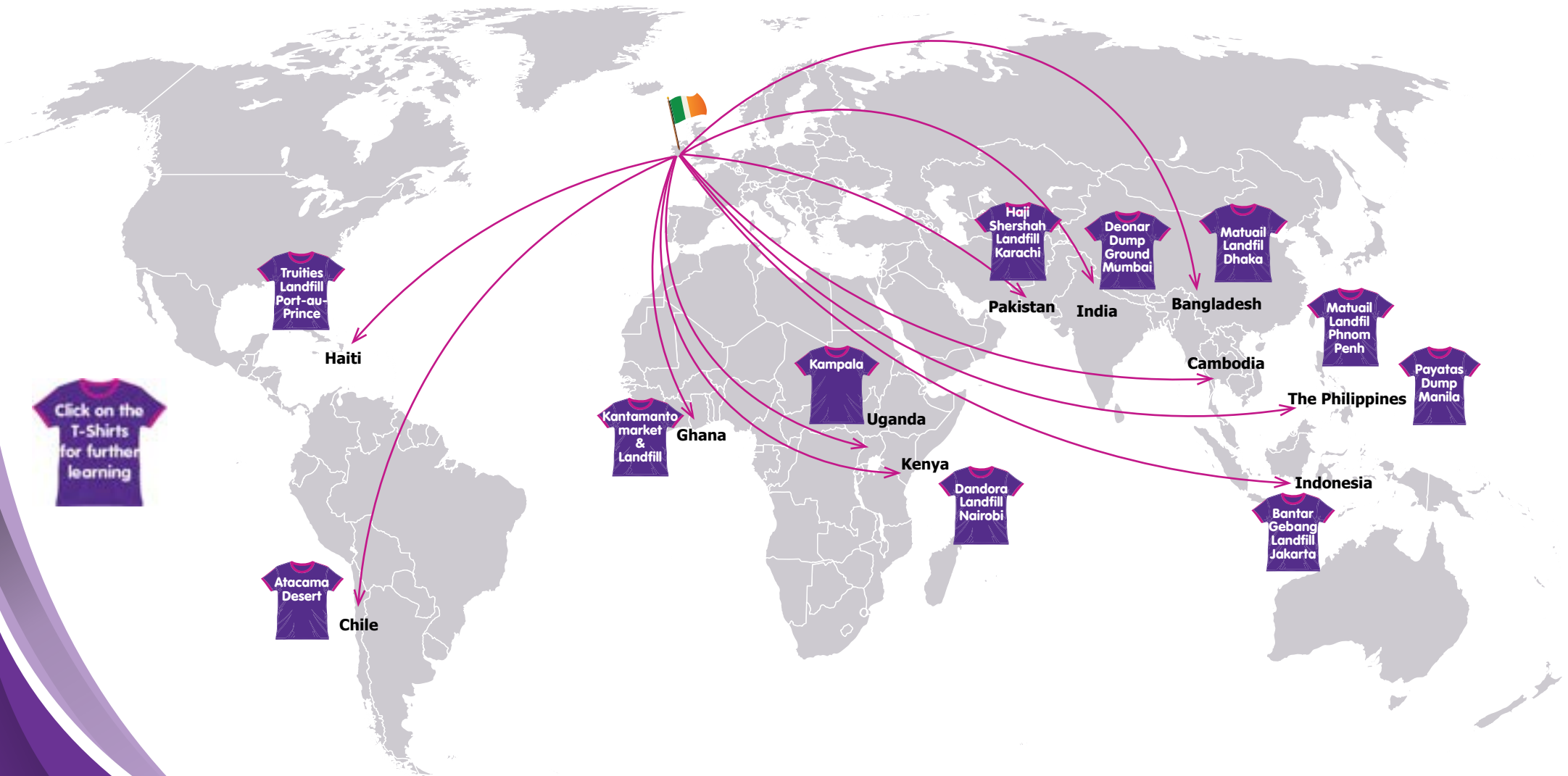


Waste Management:

- **Waste to Energy:** Items that cannot be reused or recycled may be incinerated in waste-to-energy plants. This process generates energy but also emits greenhouse gases and pollutants.
- **Landfill:** Unfortunately, some items still end up in landfills if they are too contaminated or damaged to be reused or recycled. This contributes to environmental pollution and waste management challenges.



Global Threads Map 3: The Final Journey



As we have learned, when clothing is discarded in Ireland, it often ends up in donation bins with the intention of being reused or recycled. However, a significant portion of this second-hand clothing is exported to developing countries, particularly in Africa. Countries like Kenya, Ghana, and Uganda are major destinations for these used garments. While it is difficult to track exactly where Irish clothing ultimately ends up, many countries around the world are facing the challenge of fast fashion filling their landfill. Read on for some examples.

Kenya

In Kenya, the imported second-hand clothing, known as "**mitumba**," often overwhelms local markets. Nairobi's Gikomba Market, one of the largest in East Africa, receives a large amount of these clothes. However, not all items can be sold. Between 30% to 40% of the clothing is in such poor condition that it is deemed unsellable and ends up as waste. This textile waste often gets dumped at the Dandora landfill, which has been full since 2001 but continues to receive waste. The environmental impact is severe, with textile waste contributing to land and water pollution as well as air pollution when burned, releasing toxic fumes harmful to human health and the environment.



Mitumba bales of clothing

Ghana

Ghana faces similar challenges. In the capital, Accra, the Kantamanto Market is a central hub for second-hand clothing. Much like Kenya, a significant portion of the imported clothing is unsellable and contributes to pollution problems. The waste often ends up in places like the Korle Lagoon, where it clogs waterways and creates significant environmental hazards.

Uganda

Uganda also imports large quantities of second-hand clothing, but unfortunately, Uganda struggles with similar waste management issues. The imported garments often end up in landfills or are illegally dumped, contributing to pollution and health risks for local communities.

Bangladesh

In Dhaka the Matuail Landfill is overwhelmed with waste, including textile scraps from the garment industry, leading to substantial pollution issues.



Clothing waste

India

In Mumbai, Deonar Dumping Ground deals with significant textile waste among other refuse, affecting local health and the environment.

Pakistan

Haji Shershah Landfill near Karachi receives textile waste from both local garment production and imported second-hand clothing, contributing to environmental pollution.

Chile

Atacama Desert: In the desert, particularly near the city of Iquique, massive piles of unsold and discarded clothing from Europe and the US have been found, creating serious environmental challenges.

Cambodia

Stung Meanchey Landfill: Previously the main dumpsite for Phnom Penh, it has been replaced by other sites that still struggle with textile waste from the garment industry.



Children playing among the litter in a slum in Mumbai

Indonesia

The Bantar Gebang Landfill in Jakarta, is one of the largest landfills in Southeast Asia and receives a considerable amount of textile waste, impacting the local environment.

Haiti

Truitier Landfill, near Port-au-Prince receives textile waste from imported second-hand clothing, causing pollution and health issues for nearby communities.

The Philippines

Payatas Dump in Manila has seen significant amounts of textile waste, impacting local communities and the environment.

The environmental impact of the fast-fashion journey is devastating. The transportation of these clothes from Ireland around the world has a considerable carbon footprint. In some countries, the unsellable clothes contribute to pollution through illegal dumping and burning. Microplastics from synthetic fabrics also pollute waterways, further harming marine ecosystems and human health.

To mitigate these issues, it is crucial to address the root cause by reducing the consumption of fast fashion, improving the quality and lifespan of garments, and ensuring better waste management practices both in the exporting and importing countries



Patayas Dump, Manila

General info

Clothes Pod: <https://www.clothespod.ie/>

SVP Ireland <https://www.svp.ie/clothingbanks/>

How Ireland got to lead the world in fast fashion addiction <https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/economy/arid-41392066.html>

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Raw Materials

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Where does Shein Get Their Clothes from: <https://bagglimpse.com/blogs/shein/where-does-shein-get-their-clothes-from>

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Supply Chain: Behind the Scenes of Fast Fashion's Global Network <https://fastercapital.com/content/Supply-chain--Behind-the-Scenes-of-Fast-Fashion-s-Global-Network.html#:~:text=Cotton%2C%20wool%2C%20silk%2C%20and,Bangladesh%2C%20Indonesia%2C%20and%20Vietnam.>

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How to Grow a Pair of Jeans <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/australian-cotton-the-world-s-finest-textile-australian-fashion-chamber/JQWx9L77xCPwIg?hl=en>

Textile School: Cotton Fibre Ginning <https://www.textileschool.com/366/cotton-fiber-ginning/>

Textile Exchange: Synthetics https://textileexchange.org/synthetics/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw-uK0BhC0ARIsANQtgGN1p5wAnzU9UiIVJ8JAdgg9EEPz-w0uuwF9jZbNaBq3l2XsRhIU1nYaAh8AEALw_wcB



The Journey of Fast Fashion

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Aspen Public Radio <https://www.aspenpublicradio.org/2023-11-26/where-does-donated-clothing-end-up-often-in-a-landfill-overseas>

Donated clothing worsening Kenya's plastic pollution

<https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/science-health/kenya-s-donated-clothes-plastic-waste-in-disguise-4125898>

How fast fashion is using the Global South as a dumping ground for textile waste

<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/53333/how-fast-fashion-is-using-global-south-as-dumping-ground-for-textile-waste/>

How fast fashion is fuelling the fashion waste crisis in Africa

<https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/blog/54589/how-fast-fashion-is-fuelling-the-fashion-waste-crisis-in-africa/>

We can't export our way out of our fast fashion addiction <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/opinion-fast-fashion-export-5591019-Nov2021/>

How Ghana became fast fashions dumping ground <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jun/05/yvette-yaa-konadu-tetteh-how-ghana-became-fast-fashions-dumping-ground>

Uganda's war on second hand clothing <https://edition.cnn.com/style/ugandas-war-on-second-hand-clothes-bof/index.html>

Cast offs to catwalk: Fashion Show shines light on vast Chile clothes dump from space

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/may/08/castoffs-to-catwalk-fashion-show-shines-light-on-vast-chile-clothes-dump-visible-from-space>

