



Pushing the boundaries of EPR policy for textiles: USA factsheet



EPR Status

EPR for textiles	Other EPR schemes
 <p>State of California: SB707 Responsible Textile Recovery Act of 2024, Chaptered by Secretary of State: 28 September 2024¹</p> <p>Proposed in the State of New York: Senate Bill S6654, “An act to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to establishing extended producer responsibility for textiles”²</p>	 <p>There are currently 133 EPR laws across 19 product categories in 33 states³ Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington DC EPR law for single-use and rechargeable batteries (2021) • Connecticut tyre EPR bill (2023) • Maine & Oregon EPR law for packaging (2021)

Separate collection & sorting of discarded textiles

Separate collection rate ⁴	Share of discarded textiles sorted after collection
15% ⁵	80% ⁶

Destinations of used textiles collected in the USA

Reusable textiles ⁷	
Textiles considered reusable after sorting <i>Relative to the quantity of textiles sorted after collection</i>	45% ⁸
Reusable textiles sold on the national market <i>Relative to the quantity of textiles considered reusable after sorting</i>	9% ⁹
Reusable textiles exported internationally <i>Relative to the quantity of textiles considered reusable after sorting</i>	91% ¹⁰
Non-reusable ¹¹ and waste ¹² textiles	
Textiles considered non-reusable or waste after sorting <i>Relative to the quantity of textiles sorted after collection</i>	55% ¹³
Recycling and downcycling <i>Relative to the quantity of textiles sorted after collection</i>	Textile-to-textile recycling: <1% ¹⁴
	Downcycled into wiping cloths: 30% ¹⁵
	Downcycled into yarn and other products: 20% ¹⁶
Landfill and incineration <i>Relative to the quantity of textiles sorted after collection</i>	Landfill and incineration: 5% ¹⁷

EPR for textiles in the USA – gaining traction

There is growing awareness and policy debate in the USA around the scale and challenges of textile flows after use. “Textile waste in the U.S. has grown dramatically in recent decades, increasing 80% by weight between 2000 and 2018,” said U.S. Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine).



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Congresswoman Chellie Pingree

“The generation of textile waste in the U.S. is unsustainable and still growing. As the rate at which clothing is produced and discarded increases, particularly concerning is that only 15% of clothing in the U.S. is recycled or reused, with the rest either incinerated or sent to landfills for disposal,” Pingree continued, pointing to the environmental impact of this textile waste. “The fashion industry is responsible for a significant amount of global greenhouse gas emissions.”

Policymakers are aware of the shortcomings of the current system and the need for widespread action, including at an international level. “The constant cycle of production and disposal results in astounding mountains of discarded clothing, much of which ends up exported from the U.S. to other countries,” said Pingree. “Existing systems for collection of textile waste and reuse and recycling infrastructure are not well established and do not support consistent, convenient, and widespread collection of the quantity and quality of textiles needed to retain value and support economical reuse.”

Setting direction through policy

Congresswoman Pingree believes that policymakers have a role to play to set direction and drive innovation and investment. “We need policy intervention to make the economics work for textile reuse, repair, rewear, and recycling,” she argued. “In particular, extended producer responsibility (EPR) can offer an opportunity to do just that while also holding the textile industry responsible for its role in producing textiles.”

The USA has EPR schemes in place for a variety of products, across numerous states, but coordinated action has the potential to further scale their impact. “My home state of Maine has been a leader in EPR

programmes for other types of products, including packaging, and the U.S. has numerous EPR programmes for other types of products at the state level. I recognise, however, the important role the federal government can play in ensuring EPR requirements are consistent and harmonised at the national level. Other public policies, such as incentives for secondhand clothing purchases or participation in rental models, could also make it easier and more economical for companies and consumers to do the right thing for the environment.”

Beyond EPR: a circular economy for textiles

The circular economy is recognised as a key framework in combating the growing textile waste challenge. “A circular economy prevents products such as textiles from becoming waste and keeps materials in circulation by designing products that can be reused, repaired, and recycled,” emphasised Pingree. “There is a role for all stakeholders — including industry, state and local governments, civil society, and the federal government — in developing a circular economy for textiles. But I certainly believe that the federal government can and must do more to stop textile waste and pollution.”



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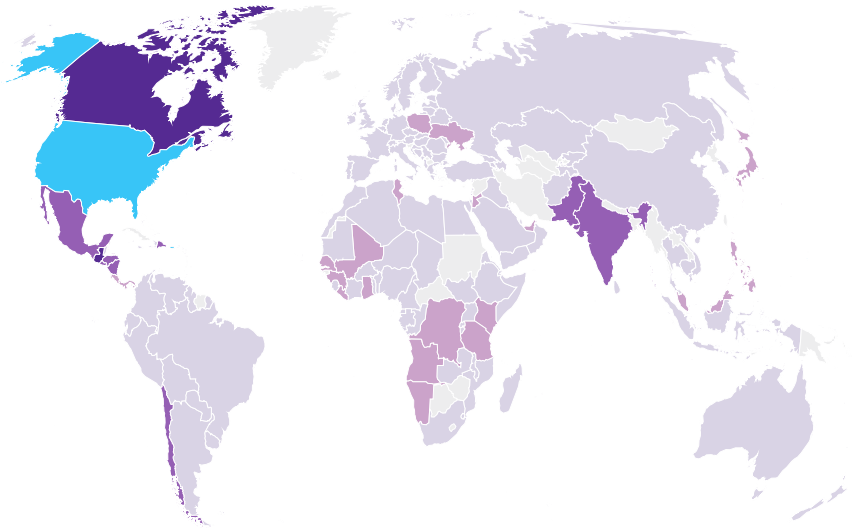
Congresswoman Chellie Pingree



The role of the USA in the used textiles trade

The USA is a net exporter of used textiles, and in 2021, was the largest exporter accounting for 15% of global exports. In that year, 45% of the USA's textile exports were sent to just four countries: Guatemala (16%), Canada (14%), Chile (8%) and India (7%).¹⁸

Global distribution of exports from the USA

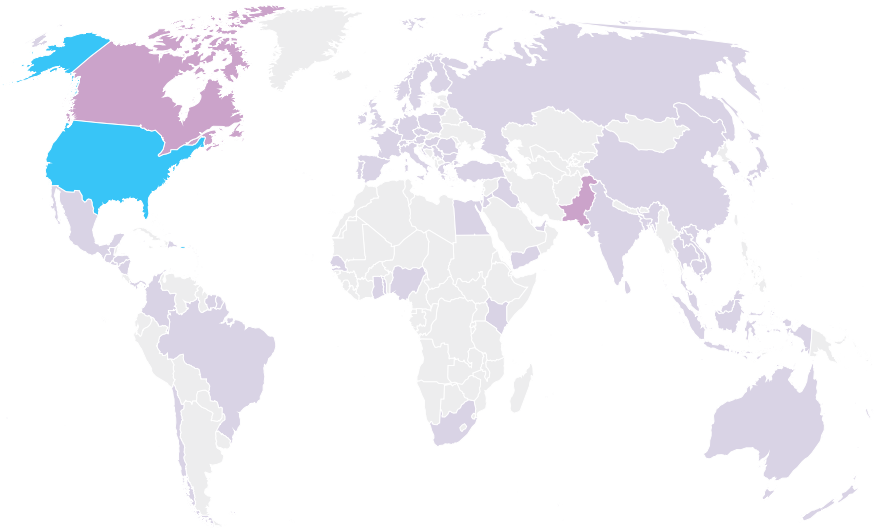


Annual used textile exports (2021): 725kT¹⁹



Quantity of used textiles (kT)

Global distribution of imports to the USA



Annual used textile imports (2021): 14kT²⁰



Quantity of used textiles (kT)

Acknowledgements

Core Team

Sophie Moggs
Lead Author

Valérie Boiten
Senior Policy Officer

Laura Collacott
Consultant Editor

Matteo Magnani
Senior Policy Analyst

Dacie Meng
Director of Policy, North America

External Contributions

The team would like to thank the following individuals for their extensive input and feedback.

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree
U.S. Congress

Lisa Pahel
Office of Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, U.S. Congress

Marisa Adler
Resource Recycling Systems

Wider Team

Jocelyn Blériot
Executive Lead, Policy and Institutions

Eline Boon
Senior Policy Manager

Sarah O'Carroll
Institutions Lead, Policy and Institutions

Lucy Dayman
Communications Executive

Sofia Voudouoglou
Communications Executive

Matt Barber
Graphic Designer

Georgia Walker
Designer - Digital

Neil Amos
Senior Product Manager - Digital

Sarah Butler
Social Media Content Creator

Endnotes

- 1 California Senate Bill, [*Responsible Textile Recovery Act of 2024*](#) (2024).
- 2 New York State Senate Bill, [*An act to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to establishing extended producer responsibility for textiles*](#) (2024)
- 3 Product Stewardship Institute, [*EPR by product, explained*](#) (2024)
- 4 This report recommends that EPR schemes measure the absolute volumes of textiles collected separately and set targets on the absolute increase of such volumes (as explained in Chapter 4 “EPR policy design: A common direction of travel”). However, in this table separate collection rates have been calculated as the percentage of collected textiles recovered from the municipal solid waste (MSW) stream. In addition to household textiles, this also includes commercial and industrial textile waste.
- 5 See Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [*Pushing the boundaries of EPR policy for textiles*](#) (2024), Appendix B
- 6 This mainly consists of rough sorting of unsold goods from thrift stores. Studies show only a few fine-grading sorters remain operational in the USA with the majority thought to be exported for further sorting and grading in Central and Latin America. Sources: NIST, [*Facilitating a circular economy for textiles*](#) (2022), p.14; Fashion For Good & Resource Recycling Systems, [*Sorting for Circularity USA: A commercial assessment of fibre to fibre recycling in the US*](#) (2024).
- 7 Textiles that, after sorting, are considered suitable for reuse and can be sold to reuse markets, either nationally or internationally.
- 8 See Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [*Pushing the boundaries of EPR policy for textiles*](#) (2024), Appendix C
- 9 Based on analysis of data from the National Institute of Standards and Technology, [*Facilitating a Circular Economy for Textiles Workshop Report*](#) (2022), Environmental Protection Agency, [*Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2018 Fact Sheet*](#) (2020) and UN Comtrade data (HS-6309) (See Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [*Pushing the boundaries of EPR policy for textiles*](#) (2024), Appendix D
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Textiles that, after sorting, are considered unsuitable for reuse due to them being worn out, damaged, or stained, but can be sold as feedstock for downcycling into lower-value applications, such as insulation material, wiping cloths, or mattress stuffing. Feedstock for textile-to-textile recycling has not been included as this process is not yet available at scale and there is currently no cost and revenue data available for this fraction.
- 12 Textiles that, after sorting, are considered unsuitable for reuse, recycling, and downcycling. These textiles are sent to disposal through landfill or incineration.
- 13 Ellen MacArthur Foundation analysis based on data from NIST, [*Facilitating a circular economy for textiles*](#) (2022), p.15
- 14 NIST, [*Facilitating a circular economy for textiles*](#) (2022), p.15.
- 15 *ibid.*
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 Based on analysis of the UN Comtrade data (HS-6309). See Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [*Pushing the boundaries of EPR policy for textiles*](#) (2024), Appendix D
- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 *ibid.*



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