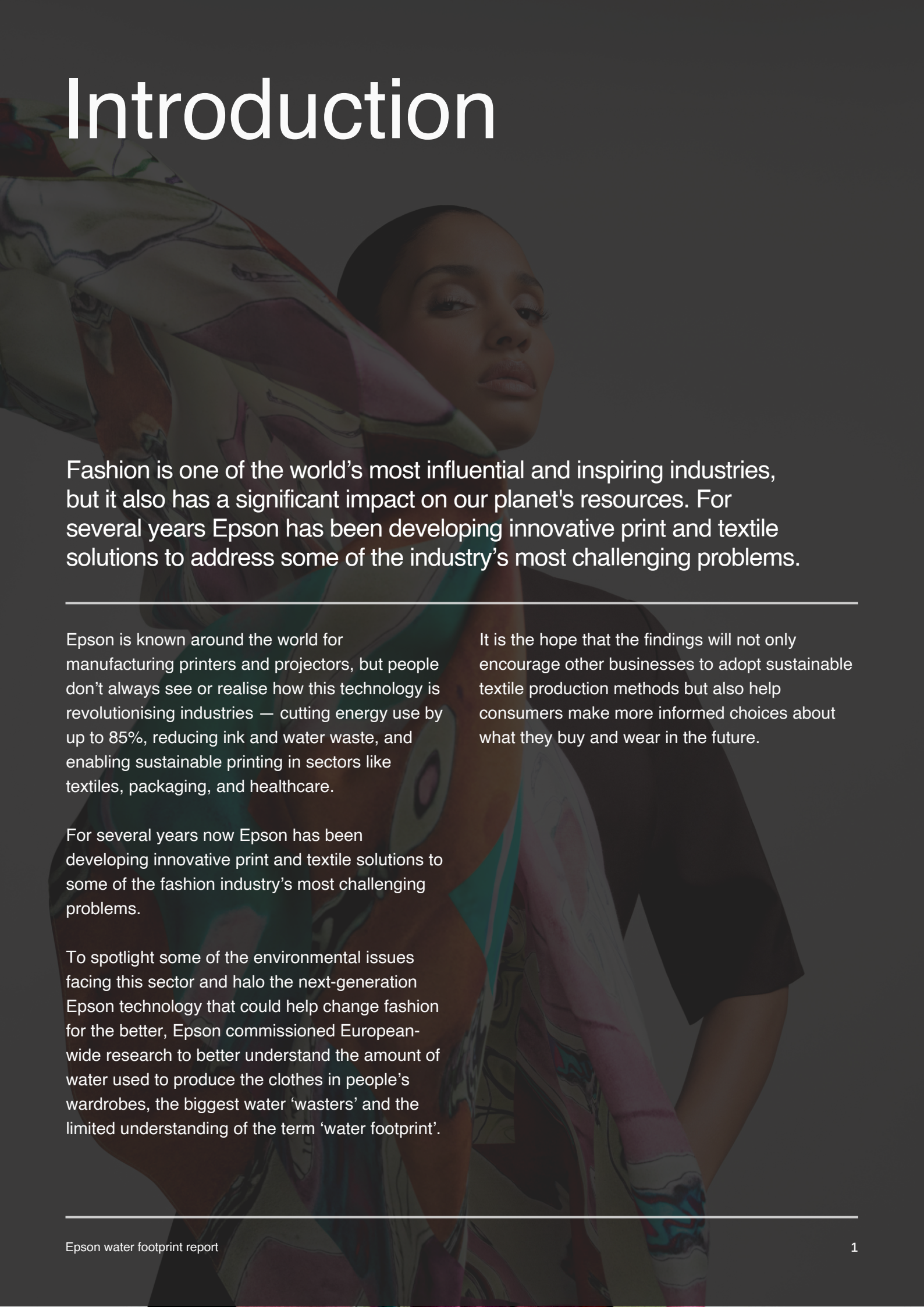


The Epson water footprint report

February 2025

Introduction



Fashion is one of the world's most influential and inspiring industries, but it also has a significant impact on our planet's resources. For several years Epson has been developing innovative print and textile solutions to address some of the industry's most challenging problems.

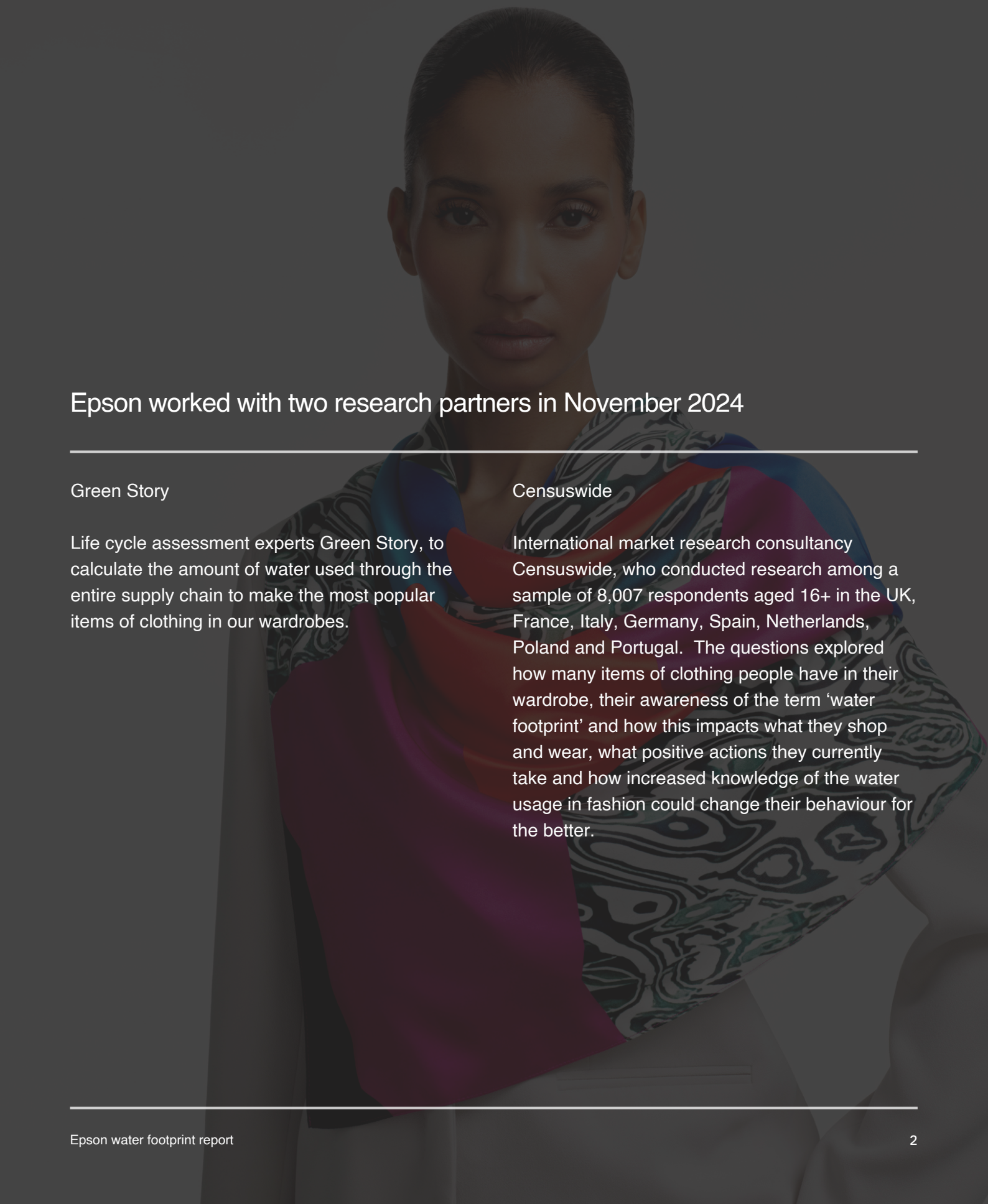
Epson is known around the world for manufacturing printers and projectors, but people don't always see or realise how this technology is revolutionising industries — cutting energy use by up to 85%, reducing ink and water waste, and enabling sustainable printing in sectors like textiles, packaging, and healthcare.

For several years now Epson has been developing innovative print and textile solutions to some of the fashion industry's most challenging problems.

To spotlight some of the environmental issues facing this sector and halo the next-generation Epson technology that could help change fashion for the better, Epson commissioned European-wide research to better understand the amount of water used to produce the clothes in people's wardrobes, the biggest water 'wasters' and the limited understanding of the term 'water footprint'.

It is the hope that the findings will not only encourage other businesses to adopt sustainable textile production methods but also help consumers make more informed choices about what they buy and wear in the future.

Methodology



Epson worked with two research partners in November 2024

Green Story

Life cycle assessment experts Green Story, to calculate the amount of water used through the entire supply chain to make the most popular items of clothing in our wardrobes.

Censuswide

International market research consultancy Censuswide, who conducted research among a sample of 8,007 respondents aged 16+ in the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Poland and Portugal. The questions explored how many items of clothing people have in their wardrobe, their awareness of the term ‘water footprint’ and how this impacts what they shop and wear, what positive actions they currently take and how increased knowledge of the water usage in fashion could change their behaviour for the better.

The water footprint of our clothes

To calculate the water footprint of individual items of clothing, Green Story analysed water usage across the entire supply chain specifically: fibre dyeing, yarn production, yarn dyeing, fabric production, finishing, inner transport, distribution, 'cut and sew', washing, fabric dyeing and printing.

The average amount of water usage by item of clothing	
T-shirts	5,665
Shirts and blouses	12,863
Sweaters	13,933
Mid-layers	11,672
Jackets	7,678
Coats	5,906
Trousers	6,917
Jeans	18,528
Shorts	3,748
Dresses	5,658
Skirts	6,517
Leggings/tights	5,357
Hoodies	14,364
Underpants/knickers	2,804
Pairs of socks	935

What's in our wardrobes

The average number of garments in individual wardrobes by country

Highest number for each item is highlighted

	UK	France	Spain	Portugal	Germany	Italy	Poland	Netherlands
T-shirts	10.23	10.3	10.68	12.29	12.76	11.76	10.92	11.62
Shirts and blouses	6.55	5.58	7.46	9.35	6.47	7.46	8.97	6.36
Sweaters	5.86	6.51	6.84	9.92	7.6	8.63	5.6	7.01
Mid-layers	4.19	2.81	4.07	6.44	3.33	1.97	5.82	2.15
Jackets	3.96	3.95	4.79	5.02	5.36	4.97	4.32	3.18
Coats	3.92	3.19	3.95	6.69	2.08	3.04	2.37	2.24
Trousers	5.78	5.83	6.85	7.5	6.54	8.01	6.54	6.51
Jeans	4.59	4.83	5.45	6.37	5.66	6.05	5.29	5.72
Shorts	4.14	3.91	5.03	5.38	4.63	5.45	4.61	4.59
Dresses/ Jumpsuits	3.88	3.62	3.88	4.42	3.39	5.94	4.32	3.77
Skirts	2.48	2.42	2.57	2.59	2.05	2.74	2.88	2.23
Leggings/ tights	3.21	2.98	3.1	3.55	3.3	2.98	3.79	3.16
Hoodies	3.58	2.88	3.85	3.24	4.5	4.44	4.65	3.84
Underpants/ knickers	12.33	11.58	11.84	14.17	14.1	12.67	11.65	14.21
Pairs of socks	12	11.13	11.86	14.35	14.41	12.77	13.09	14.27

The water footprint of our wardrobes

The water footprint of individual items of clothing was combined with Censuswide findings to reveal how wet our wardrobes really are

Highest individual water footprint by country:	
1. Portugal	817,131 litres
2. Italy	723,744 litres
3. Poland	715,266 litres
4. Germany	696,074 litres
5. Spain	678,963 litres
6. Netherlands	640,742 litres
7. UK	634,510 litres
8. France	602,698 litres

The wider impact of fashion

Understanding of the issue and views on the wider environmental impact of fashion

Censuswide findings revealed that:

53% of respondents have never heard of the term ‘water footprint’

30% of respondents are unaware of the impact that water use in the production of clothes has on the environment

84% of respondents were shocked to discover that it takes 43 litres of water (equivalent to 22 days of drinking water) to dye just one cotton t-shirt

65% of respondents didn't realise the amount of water that's needed to dye clothes

53% of respondents feel worried about the environmental impact of the fashion industry

64% of respondents agree more needs to be done to make people aware of the impact producing clothes has on the environment

52% of respondents said they’d be inclined to purchase more sustainable clothes if they carried labels highlighting how 'green' they are (similar to traffic light system on food)



Notable country comparisons

The Portuguese are most likely to have heard of the term ‘water footprint’ – 59% vs just 30% of Brits (the lowest of all countries surveyed)

UK citizens are also least likely to have thought about the ‘water footprint’ of their wardrobe – only 16%

Germans are most likely to say individuals should take responsibility for reducing the impact clothes production has on the environment – 28% vs 14% of Brits

Italians are most likely to consider themselves environmentally conscious – 38% vs 25% of Brits

The Dutch are least likely to think about the environmental impact of their clothes when buying them (51%) followed by Brits (48%)

The Portuguese feel most worried about the environmental impact of the fashion industry – 64%. Netherlands and France are least worried – 47%

Portuguese and French people are most likely to think it’s hard to make ‘sustainable’ choices when buying clothes – 58%

The Portuguese are most likely to think government should intervene on fashion’s environmental impact, like they have with electric cars – 69%

Research findings by country

France

- Only 30% have heard of the term water footprint
- 80% have never thought about how much water is used to produce their clothes
- 85% were shocked to learn that it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt, and this has left 75% concerned
- 50% think fashion brands should take the main responsibility
- 38% don’t usually think about the environmental impact of producing clothes when buying them
- 50% say they have no idea what to look to make more conscious choices
- 55% think the government should intervene
- 55% have never thought about how clothes get their colour

Research findings by country

Germany

- 77% have never thought about the water footprint of their wardrobe
- 82% were shocked to learn that it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt, and this has left 76% concerned
- 43% think fashion brands should take the main responsibility
- 52% say they buy clothes based on what they look like and not their environmental impact
- BUT nearly the same percentage 48% feel worried about the impact of the fashion industry on the environment
- 50% don’t know which materials are better for the environment
- 67% didn’t realise the amount of water it takes to dye their clothes

Research findings by country

Italy

- 72% have never thought about the water footprint of their wardrobe
- 87% were shocked to learn that it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt, and this has left 79% concerned
- 70% think more should be done to make people aware of the environmental impact of clothes
- 69% think fashion brands and stores should do more to educate people on the impact their clothes can have on the environment
- 64% think the government should intervene
- 55% have never thought about how clothes get their colour

Research findings by country

Netherlands

77% have never thought about the water footprint of their wardrobe

78% were shocked to learn that it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt, and this has left 66% concerned

55% think more needs to be done to make people aware of the environmental impact of producing clothes

57% buy clothes based on what they look like and not their environmental impact

54% have no idea what to look for in stores or on the label to make more environmentally conscious choices

55% never thought about the amount of water it takes to dye clothing

Research findings by country

Poland

- 67% have never thought about the water footprint of their wardrobe
- 80% were shocked to learn that it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt, and this has left 73% concerned
- 58% think fashion brands should do more to help people understand he impact of the clothes they sell
- 51% feel worried about the environmental impact of the fashion industry
- 49% think it’s hard to make sustainable choices when it comes to clothes shopping
- 49% agree that clothing should carry a sustainability rating

Research findings by country

Spain

- Only 41% have heard of the term water footprint
- 72% have never thought about the amount of water used to produce clothes
- 89% were shocked to learn it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt. 53% were extremely shocked to learn this, and this has left 80% concerned
- 64% think more needs to be done to educate people of the impact producing clothes has on the environment
- 58% admit to not knowing which materials are better for the environment
- 60% think governments should intervene

Research findings by country

Portugal

59% have heard of the term water footprint

69% have never thought about the water footprint of their wardrobe

93% were shocked to learn that it takes 43 litres of water to dye one t-shirt, and this has left 89% concerned

73% think more needs to be done to make people aware of the environmental impact of clothing production

72% think fashion brands should do more to make people understand the impact of clothing production on the environment

64% feel worried about the impact of the fashion industry on the environment

60% agree that if clothing had labels with sustainability ratings this would impact buying decisions with more inclined to make more sustainable purchases

Research findings by country

UK

- Only 30% have heard of the term ‘water footprint’
- 8 in 10 (80%) Brits admit they’ve never considered the amount of water that is needed to produce our clothes, and the same number (82%) were shocked to learn that dyeing a single cotton t-shirt requires 43 litres of water – equivalent to 22 days of drinking water
- A quarter (25%) consider themselves environmentally conscious
- 45% admit they’re unaware of the impact water use in the production of clothes has on the environment
- Over half (55%) admit they have no idea what to look for when it comes to making more sustainable clothing choices
- 58% don’t know which clothes materials are better or worse for the environment
- 6 in 10 (62%) have never thought about how their clothes actually get their colour
- Most respondents (72%) felt concerned after being presented with the impact each garment in our wardrobes has on the planet
- A quarter (24%) prefer to buy pre-owned clothes
- 6 in 10 (57%) believe fashion brands or stores should take the main responsibility for driving change
- Half (53%) believe the government should intervene in a similar vein to pledges on electric vehicles

Want to know more?



This report provides a short summary of the findings but if you do want to learn more about fashion's water footprint and attitudes and actions relating to this issue and fashion purchases, please contact:

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