Innovation Forum
events and insight for sustainability

Sustainable Apparel and Textiles Conference

Redesigning the business case:

Where sustainability creates value, function by function and tier by tier

April 21-22 2027 | Amsterdam

The Sustainable Apparel and Textiles Conference brings together brand leaders, manufacturers, investors, policymakers and innovators for two days of practical debate in a broad variety of discussion formats.

Held behind closed doors, the agenda is designed to look candidly at where sustainability and commercial value overlap, where they pull in different directions, and how the industry can respond through regulatory engagement, collective action and internal buy-in.

PLEASE NOTE THIS AGENDA IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Overview:

The 2027 programme is structured around six pillars:

- circular systems and products
- climate action
- transparency and consumer trust
- governance and finance
- people and worker resilience
- supply chain security

Day 0 – Tuesday, 20th April

Afternoon: **Half-day hackathon**

The afternoon offers a hackathon-style session for 40 participants: deep thinking on one topic per table, paired with the chance to rotate through groups and get a broad view across a full value chain.

Held strictly under Chatham House Rule with a follow-up briefing shared to all participants.

17.30-18.30: **Early-registration networking drinks**

For more information or to get involved, please contact Niamh Campbell.

Day 1 | Wednesday, 21st April | The next 12 months

8.00-9.00 **Arrival, light breakfast and matchmaking**

9.00-9.25 **Redesigning the business case with the women who make apparel | Fireside chat** ● ●

Over 80% of garment workers are women (ILO), and they are usually the first to see where today's business case breaks down. For instance, heat stress showed up in worker experience long before it reached productivity figures or risk registers. That insight rarely reaches the people who set targets and budgets.

This opening fireside chat brings together women leading change on factory floors and at board level. They will share where worker input has changed sourcing and climate decisions, and what it took to make that input a routine part of governance.

9.25-10.10 **The cost of doing nothing: How to identify the ROI of resilience for the C-suite | Panel** ● ●

Resilience has become the boardroom's buzzword of choice in the global permacrisis. S&P 500 companies mentioned it around 600 times on earnings calls in a single quarter of 2026, up from under 100 a decade ago (Bloomberg). As the term stretches, it risks following the same fate as "ESG" and "circularity". A word that means everything and therefore nothing.

Made specific and quantified, resilience earns its place. Tariffs and energy price shocks have exposed the cost of fragile supply chains, while resale growth and greenwashing enforcement show where targeted investment can open revenue and reduce risk.

Yet 62% of chief sustainability officers cite uncertain cost-benefit assessments as a key constraint (WEF, 2026). Sustainability leaders have made the value case for a decade, yet businesses still price the cost of action more readily than the cost of inaction.

This session brings together C-suite voices to price what supply chain fragility actually costs, and set out the metrics that turn resilience from boardroom language into investment decisions.

10.10-10.45 **"How cheap can you make this?" Reprioritising the supplier scorecard | Interactive panel** ● ●

Clothing prices have defied inflation, staying cheap while almost everything else has got more expensive. A 2026 report by Public Eye and Clean Clothes Campaign found many buyers still source a standard cotton T-shirt for around USD 2–3, leaving suppliers to absorb rising operating costs.

Brands and suppliers are commercial partners, each with its own targets to meet, and those priorities will sometimes conflict.

Supplier scorecards can offer objective performance indicators but how do we choose the right metrics? This session looks at how scorecards can reward sustainability in buying decisions and support longer-term partnerships.

- Weighting: How much should sustainability performance count against price and service levels? What happens to sourcing decisions when it does?
- Incentives: How order volumes, contract length and better payment terms can give suppliers a commercial reason to invest in sustainability.

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- Red lines: Should a minimum threshold exist that excludes suppliers performing poorly on climate?
- A buyer scorecard: What channels exist so suppliers can give honest feedback to buyers without fear of losing orders?

10.45-11.30 **Break and speed networking**

11.30-12.15 **Regulatory updates with the European Commission: What we can expect from the ESPR textiles delegated act | Q&A** ● ●

At Innovation Forum's last Q&A with the European Commission, the room split almost evenly on whether EU regulation made their work significantly easier or significantly harder. Compliance has become both an anchor and pair of handcuffs for sustainability teams.

With clear guidance and comparable disclosure, regulation can reset the business case. That clarity is still pending, particularly around ESPR and how emerging regulation aligns with other regions' regulation. This live session will be informed by the audience from the beginning with a pre-event survey on the most important topics as well as Q&A on the day to ensure confidence when it comes to eco-modulation, enforcement, supplier requirements and global alignment.

12.15-12.35 **Collect once, use many times: How to build one product dataset to serve traceability demands | Case study** ● ●

Digital product passports, green claims under EmpCo and the EU Forced Labour Regulation all rely on verified data tied to individual products. This 20-minute session covers how to build one SKU-level dataset that serves across regulations, and what to have prepared now even before the delegated act for DPPs and other regulations are published.

12.35-12.45 **The elephants still in the room** ● ● ● ● ● ●

Add the issues the morning hasn't yet covered to Slido. Two provocateurs respond to the most-voted topics, then you can discuss what you think is the biggest elephant in the room before the afternoon breakouts.

12.45-13.45 **Lunch + optional lunchtime exercise**

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13.45-14.35 **| Breakout sessions**

** Join 'This house believes' for high-energy debates where participants are randomly assigned a side to argue. Limited to 15 participants.*

1. *Buying* – **Consolidate or diversify: How to align your supplier map with your sustainability goals** ● ●
    - Brands consolidating into fewer strategic suppliers: what has deeper partnership delivered on decarbonisation and worker programmes, and how is concentration risk managed?
    - Brands adding China+1 capacity: how can newer sourcing countries build the energy and social compliance capability that established hubs took decades to develop?
    - When a sourcing shift means leaving a supplier or region, what does responsible exit look like for workers and for the investments already made?

2. *Finance* – ***Super El Niño: What's working against extreme weather on the factory floor, and who pays for it?*** ● ●
    - Which heat measures, such as cooling retrofits and adjusted shift patterns, are proving effective, and how are brands, suppliers and adaptation finance sharing the cost where the ROI is harder to show?
    - How can an industry-aligned standard allow for locally informed responses to each site's climate risk, so it drives action beyond the compliance checklist?
    - After more than a decade of research on heat stress, where are the remaining gaps, and what would it take to bring flood preparedness to the same level?

3. *Design* – **Proving PFAS-free: Where alternatives perform and what testing shows** ● ●
    - Which PFAS-free finishes now match legacy finishes on water and stain repellency, and in which product categories do gaps remain?
    - What verified test data and cost evidence do brands need to prove PFAS-free claims to regulators and consumers?
    - How could legacy chemicals in existing textiles hold back recycled materials, and what screening keeps recycled feedstock within limits?

4. *Compliance* - **Seven months into EmpCo: The claims and labels brands can still rely on** ● ●
    - With generic terms such as "eco-friendly" banned and labels requiring certification or public authority backing, which claims have held up and what additional red flags are emerging?
    - A 2026 study finds 85% of consumers are concerned about sustainability, up from 79% last year with extreme weather events driving awareness. How can brands keep communicating progress through specific, substantiated claims?
    - How can point-of-sale information on durability and reparability build trust and set products apart?

5. *This house believes* - * **Living wages across apparel supply chains are achievable by 2037 |** ● ●

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Only 4% of major brands are making tangible progress on living wages (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2026). With forced labour still prevalent and climate migration set to deepen worker vulnerability, is a living wage by 2037 wishful thinking?

14.35-15.25 **Breakout sessions**

1. *Buying* – **Biodiversity calculations: How to measure product impact beyond carbon** ● ●
    - Which guidance and tools can brands use now to measure biodiversity impact at material and product level?
    - Nature data is complex and highly local: how can brands use it to prioritise action in sourcing regions?
    - Where do biodiversity and carbon goals align in material choices, and how should teams handle the trade-offs?
2. *Finance* – **Hard to abate or hard to fund? The financing models that can fund decarbonisation in smaller mills and dyehouses** ● ●
    - Which proven technologies, including heat pumps and thermal storage, deliver the fastest payback?
    - A brand's Scope 3 is a supplier's Scope 1 and 2: how can longer contracts and volume commitments lower the cost of capital for suppliers?
    - Which aggregation and blended finance models are unlocking opportunities for SME facilities commonly excluded, and what role can government and development finance play?
3. *Design* – **Circular design as default: Making it the easiest option for design teams** ● ●
    - What baseline rules can teams build into briefs and tech packs ahead of ESPR durability and recyclability requirements?
    - What have brands that formalised circular design learned since moving beyond pilots, and how have they refined their approach?
    - How to secure buy-in from buying and commercial teams, with KPIs and training that make the circular option the quickest route to sign-off?
4. *Compliance* - **The paradox of proof for the EU Forced Labour Regulation: How to ensure data counts as evidence** ● ●
    - Investigations open from 14 December 2027. Companies will have 30 working days to answer an information request and non-cooperation can count against them. What evidence base must be ready by then, and how far upstream?
    - Which evidence best refutes a substantiated concern, such as raw material traceability and documented remediation, and how should it be held for rapid retrieval?
    - How can one evidence base also serve the 17 existing national import bans including UFPLA, and due diligence laws including CSDDD and the German Supply Chain Act?
5. *This house believes** - **On-demand manufacturing just moves the stock risk onto suppliers** ● ●

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Made-to-order models promise an end to overproduction. In practice, suppliers facing unstable order books may build capacity early in the hope of repeat orders, absorbing higher unit costs and the labour risks of short-notice production. Who carries the risk, and what would a fair model look like?

15.25-16.10 **Networking break**

16.10-17.00 **Breakout sessions**

6. *Buying* – **Preventing accidents, paying when they happen: What binding brand commitments on worker safety should cover** ● ●
    - Which programmes are identifying and fixing safety risks before accidents happen, and what makes them work?
    - What does effective remediation look like when accidents occur, including compensation and income support for affected workers and families?
    - How can prevention and remediation commitments reinforce each other within binding brand agreements?
7. Finance – **Can T2T pay off? The economics of feedstock and offtake** ● ●
    - European used textile infrastructure is at a tipping point. In Germany alone, the share of collected textiles going to reuse fell from 62% to 44% in five years as quality dropped and sorting costs rose. What would make collection and sorting viable at commercial scale?
    - How can EPR fees and eco-modulation fund sorting capacity in Europe, and how do European collection systems connect to recycling capacity in Asia?
    - How are brands fitting multi-year offtake agreements into season-to-season buying, and what quality specifications and price premiums are they willing to commit to?
8. *Design* – **Trusting the score: What PEFCR and France's eco-score can prove about a garment's environmental impact** ● ●
    - PEFCR underpins ESPR, the DPP and green claims rules: where does it already give brands reliable product-level data, and which parts of the methodology need further refinement?
    - What has France's eco-score shown brands about using footprint data with customers and buyers, and is an EU-wide equivalent on the horizon?
    - What commercial value does third-party verification unlock, from stronger claims to retailer confidence in product data?
9. *Compliance* – **Trace forward from the fibre or back from Tier 1? Proving cotton origin** ● ●
    - When does tracing forward from the fibre outperform tracing back from Tier 1, and can combining both close the gaps?
    - With UFLPA in force and the FLR applying from December 2027, which red flags should trigger deeper checks, and how can continual verification become standard practice?
    - How can traceability reach farm level without excluding smallholders on the wrong side of the digital divide?

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10. *This house believes** - **A more sustainable industry isn't possible under the current rules of competition** •

    The industry rewards being first to market, with brands competing on speed and price while competition law limits how far rivals can coordinate on purchasing or shared investment. How can sustainability scale when every brand is racing to move first, and do any genuinely impactful initiatives disprove this?

17.00 – 18.00 **Networking drinks**

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Day 2 | Thursday, 22nd April | The next decade

8.00-9.00 **Arrival and light breakfast**

	Track 1: Discussion panels	**Track 2: Fishbowls** *A small cohort of speakers opens the conversation, with an empty chair that any participant can take to join in. People rotate out as others step in, so the room shapes the discussion.*	**Track 3: Learning groups** *Intimate sessions where experts guide 15 participants through a shared problem with case study insights for practical next steps.*
9.00–10.15	9.00–9.30 **AI won't be stopped, but can it be steered? Where AI could cut apparel's emissions and where it adds to them |** ● ●	**Lessons from different industries: Making circularity a genuine challenger to linear business models |** ● ●	**Cost per wear Cost per wear: Behavioural levers that make durable products the convenient choice |** ● ●
	9.30–10.15 **Aligning textiles EPR: How might a one-stop shop materialise? |** ● ●		
10.15–11.00	Networking break		
11.00–12.15	11.00–11.45 **Can we price out virgin polyester? What it would take for alternatives to compete |** ● ●	**DPPs: The visibility benefits vs increased data burden on suppliers |** ● ●	**Who's paying for Europe's clothes after they leave Europe? Building an equitable EPR model in the Global South |** ● ●
	11.45–12.15 **How can standardisation and local context work together to scale regenerative cotton? |** ● ●		

12.15-13.15 **Lunch**

13.15-13.45 **Sustainability without a CSO: Who owns the targets when the role disappears?** ●

As sustainability roles are cut or absorbed into buying, product and finance, who owns the targets? Sustainability shapes decisions 57% of the time when a cross-functional team owns it, and 13% when a single function does (MIT CTL, 2026). This Q&A asks what governance keeps sustainability accountable and commercially relevant, with or without a CSO.

13.45-15.15 **Scenario-based roundtables**

These scenarios are focused discussions for deeper engagement and collaborative problem-solving. Each table gets a real-world scenario and 40 minutes to work through it with peers and a facilitator. We'll run two rounds of each session for participants to join two different tables on a first-come, first-served basis.

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1. **SUPPLIER REALITY: How would you fare as a supplier? A simulation of the cost squeeze** ● ●

   - *Groups of three take roles at a supplier and make decisions under real capital and compliance pressure: a price cut, a certification deadline and a loan that needs refinancing.*

2. **OVERPRODUCTION: Your lead times are nine months, and a third of last season's range sold at markdown or didn't sell at all** ● ●

   - *Markdowns are eroding gross margin, and surplus exported through second-hand channels ends up in Global South markets with reputational risk. Decide what you change first in how you plan and order, and how you'll show the board the margin it recovers.*

3. **REPORTING: Your company is about to come into CSRD scope for the first time** ● ●

   - *The board sees a compliance cost. Finance, sourcing and risk already hold much of the data, each in a different format. Agree what you want the reporting to achieve for the business beyond compliance. Then decide which existing workflows, such as supplier onboarding or annual budgeting, could collect the data so it doesn't become a separate exercise.*

4. **CIRCULAR POLICY: Your government is initiating new tax incentives for circular products and services, and you've been invited onto the working group** ● ●

   - *The finance ministry is worried about lost revenue and fraud, while retailers want the rate to cover as much as possible. Agree what would make the biggest impact, imagining the right kind of policy to shift towards demand and market creation.*

5. **SOCIAL AUDITS: Your audit budget is up for renewal, and a certified supplier has been found employing migrant workers who paid recruitment fees** ● ●

   - *The fees were charged by agents in the workers' home country, outside anything the audit covered. Decide how you would split the budget across assurance methods to reach recruitment risk, and which evidence would hold up under the EU's Forced Labour Regulation.*

6. **WATER STRESS: Your key dyeing and finishing cluster faces water rationing within two years. What do you do?** ● ●

   - *Groundwater in the region is falling every year. Your largest wet-processing supplier handles 40% of your dyed and finished volume and warns that the local authority is preparing to cap industrial withdrawals. You have 18 months and no budget line. Decide whether you co-invest, diversify or exit.*

7. **GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS: A worker at a Tier 2 mill has posted online about unpaid overtime, and your grievance channel has never heard from that site** ● ●

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- *Three other brands source from the mill, and the owner denies the claims. Decide how you verify the complaint and protect the workers who raised it. Then redesign your mechanism so the next complaint reaches you first.*

8. **CLEAN HEAT: 150°C steam heat pumps are now commercially proven. Your key wet-processing hub has the technology but not the financing or the clean power to run it.** ● ●

   - *Your five largest dyehouses share one industrial zone, the grid runs mainly on coal and no local utility offers renewable PPAs. Four other brands buy from the same zone. Build a plan for joint financing and clean power that the mills, the other buyers and the utility would sign.*

9. **COLLABORATION: It's 2037, and this roundtable is meeting again** ● ● ● ● ● ●

   - *Imagine it's 10 years on and you're reflecting on the shared projects the industry called impossible in 2027. Discuss which projects succeeded, what changed to make them possible, whether in policy, finance, leadership or the terms of collaboration between competitors. Agree which of those changes could start this year.*

15.15-15.45 **Key takeaways and the elephants to take back to the office**