World Cleanup Day 2025
Textile and fashion waste

Key messages

- In 2020, the world generated 2.3 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste, with almost 40 per cent disposed of in uncontrolled sites, including open dumps.

- The world is off track to achieve SDG 11 targets on reducing the environmental impact of cities, especially in waste management and air quality.

- Fast fashion is making this worse and has come with a heavy cost: clothing production has more than doubled since 2000, creating piles of discarded textiles that overwhelm our cities.

- In many cities, microfibres from synthetic fabrics are washed into drains and waterways, polluting rivers and coasts.

- Textile dyeing and finishing account for about 20 per cent of global clean water pollution, while washing synthetic fabrics releases up to 700,000 microfibres per load – contaminating rivers, sewers, and oceans.

- High-income countries export millions of tonnes of used clothing to the Global South, placing heavy pressure on local waste systems and shifting environmental and social costs onto vulnerable communities.

- Informal workers, such as waste pickers, shoulder the burden of unmanaged textiles. An estimated 15 million people worldwide do the heavy lifting in waste recovery, often without protection, stable income, or recognition.

- Rapid urbanization is outpacing waste collection services, leaving discarded clothing to pile up in streets, drains, and public spaces.

- In informal settlements and slums, where collection points are scarce, residents bear the heaviest health and environmental burdens.

Key facts

- Every year, an estimated 92 million tonnes of textile waste are generated –enough to fill a garbage truck every second.

- Less than 15 per cent of global textiles are recycled, while more than 73 per cent are landfilled or incinerated.

- In rapidly growing cities, informal collectors handle up to 20 per cent of municipal waste, but most remain unregistered and unprotected.

- Coastal megacities discharge millions of microplastic fibres every day, harming marine ecosystems and fisheries.

- Large volumes of discarded clothing are exported to the Global South, where inadequate waste management often leads to dumping, open burning, and severe social and environmental consequences.

Spotlight: Community-led Textile Cleanups

- Neighbourhood "sew and swap" days bring residents together to repair, exchange, and extend the life of garments, cutting down on landfill waste.

- Pop-up textile drop-off points in markets and schools channel reusable fabrics to local recyclers and charities.

- Youth-led mapping of local "fashion dump" hotspots guides targeted clean-up teams on World Cleanup Day.

- Partnerships with waste pickers promote safe, dignified green jobs for cleaner and more equitable cities.

Recommendations

- Cities should adopt integrated textile waste action plans – setting up permanent drop-off points in public spaces, formally including waste pickers in municipal systems, and applying tools like UN-Habitat's Waste Wise Cities to track flows and co-create solutions with communities.

- Promote investments in waste management infrastructure to ensure the proper collection, treatment, and disposal of municipal solid waste.

- Mobilize city-wide "closet cleanups" led by volunteers, prioritizing underserved districts and working with local cooperatives.

- Integrate waste pickers into municipal systems with fair contracts, training, protective gear, and stable pay.

- Establish permanent textile drop-off points in markets, transit hubs, and municipal offices for easy community access.

- Promote circular design and local innovation, support tailors and designers to adopt take-back schemes and use recycled fibres in new garments.

- Use citizen-science apps to map hotspots, track cleanups, and inform city service planning.

- Advocate for city policies that set textile reduction targets and allocate funds for circular fashion initiatives.

- Apply UN-Habitat's Waste Wise Cities tool to assess waste flows, identify leakage points, and co-create solutions with communities.

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