

POLICY BRIEF

LATVIA, 2026

**SUSTAINABLE
ADVOCATES**

Encouraging Sustainable Choices
Among Young VET Learners



Sustainable Advocates

Policy Brief 1

From Knowledge to Action: Sustainable Fashion Consumption Skills in Vocational Education and Training

The Issue

Ultra-fast and fast fashion rely on high production volumes, low prices, and short garment lifespans. Globally, over 100 billion garments are produced annually, generating approximately 92 million tonnes of textile waste, while less than 1% of used textiles are recycled into new clothing. The fashion industry accounts for 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The issue is further compounded by e-commerce: around 30% of clothes bought online are returned, and many are never resold.

What We Learned

The Latvian 30-day **“No Fast Fashion”** Challenge involved 16 young people aged 18–25. The final survey was completed by 15 participants. The results show that practical learning can influence both knowledge and everyday habits.

- **Increased knowledge:** More than 86% of participants reported that, after the challenge, they had a better understanding of the link between clothing consumption, resource use, waste generation, and environmental impact. This shows that a practical topic can help young people better understand sustainability principles.
- **Practical learning changed behaviour:** During the challenge, participants significantly reduced the number of fast fashion purchases they made. 7 out of 15 participants made no fast fashion purchases at all, while 12 out of 15 made no more than one purchase. This shows that a specific practical task can help turn knowledge into action.
- **Increased confidence in their own choices:** After the challenge, 11 out of 15 participants felt more confident in their ability to resist impulse purchases. Most participants also tried at least one more sustainable alternative to buying new clothes. This suggests that experience-based learning can strengthen young people's ability to make more conscious decisions.

National Context

In Latvian vocational education, **green skills are already recognised as an important cross-cutting competence**, and national education policy promotes the integration of sustainability principles into both curricula and the learning environment.

This gives vocational education institutions an opportunity to teach sustainability not only in theory, but also by connecting it with young people's everyday decisions. Clothing consumption is a practical topic that can address resource use, waste reduction, consumer responsibility, and sustainable behaviour at the same time. The results of Latvia's 30-day challenge show that this approach can help strengthen both knowledge and practical skills.

Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate Sustainable Consumption into Existing Green Skills Curricula: VET institutions should embed sustainable fashion consumption as a practical green skills topic covering garment life cycles, textile labels, fast fashion impacts, e-commerce, impulse buying, and sustainable alternatives. The project's infographic series offers a ready-to-use learning resource.

2. Shift from Information Provision to Behaviour-Based Learning: Educators should adopt short challenges, wardrobe audits, purchase delay strategies, self-assessments, and reflection exercises. Challenge data shows that hands-on habit testing empowers learners to evaluate purchases mindfully and resist impulsive buying.

3. Make the Circular Economy Visible and Accessible on Campus: VET providers should host clothing swaps, repair workshops, and upcycling activities in collaboration with local sorting, second-hand, repair, and circular economy initiatives. This enables learners to acquire green skills in practice and consolidate sustainable routines.

Who Should Act?

VET school leadership, heads of study departments, educators, curators, and curriculum developers, in collaboration with municipalities and industry partners.

Sources

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Policy Brief 2

Reducing Impulsive Clothing Consumption Among Young People in the Digital Environment

The Issue

Clothing purchases are increasingly shifting to the digital environment, where social media algorithms, personalised marketing, aggressive discount campaigns, and constant promotion of “new collections” encourage impulsive and poorly considered purchases. Young people are highly aware of the environmental impact of fast fashion, but knowledge alone is not enough. Building sustainable consumption habits requires practical behavioural skills: the ability to recognise marketing triggers, critically assess whether a purchase is truly necessary, and consciously delay or reject spontaneous online purchasing decisions.

What We Learned

16 young people aged 18 to 25 participated in the Latvian **30-day "No Fast Fashion" challenge**, with 15 completing the final evaluation survey. The results demonstrate key shifts in youth habits and attitudes:

- **A real reduction in purchases:** During the challenge, 7 out of 15 participants made no fast fashion purchases at all, while 12 out of 15 made no more than one purchase. These behavioural changes demonstrate the effectiveness of conscious action.
- **Digital pressures and practical solutions:** Participants reported that the strongest pressure came from online shops, algorithm-driven discount notifications, and social media advertising. To resist these triggers, young people used practical strategies such as deleting mobile apps like Temu and Shein, turning off notifications, and consciously avoiding “new season” offers.
- **Greater confidence in resisting impulse purchases:** At the end of the challenge, 11 out of 15 participants rated their ability to resist impulsive fast fashion purchases influenced by advertising and sales at 4 or 5 out of 5, indicating a willingness to maintain these habits in the longer term.

National Context

E-commerce has become a dominant consumption channel in Latvia. According to 2024 data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB), 65% of residents aged 16–74 had shopped online, and clothing, footwear and accessories were the most popular product category across all age groups, purchased by 58% of online shoppers. The European Union's Digital Services Act limits manipulative digital design practices, or *dark patterns*, and introduces stricter requirements for advertising transparency. However, regulation alone cannot fully replace consumers' own digital literacy and their ability to recognise psychological persuasion techniques online.

Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate digital consumption literacy into green skills education:

Alongside general environmental education, vocational education curricula should include topics on the influence of digital marketing — recognising social media advertising, influencer marketing, the sense of urgency created by algorithms, and personalised offers.

2. Teach and practise specific purchase-delay techniques:

Introduce and test practical tools in the learning process, such as the 24–48 hour *wait-before-you-buy* rule, creating wish lists, reviewing one's wardrobe before making a purchase, keeping a purchase diary, and deleting high-pressure shopping apps or disabling their notifications.

3. Use practical behavioural experiments in the learning environment:

Encourage vocational schools to take part in short behavioural challenges, such as “no-buy” weeks or months, combined with self-assessment and reflection before and after the activity, to strengthen young people's awareness and ability to manage purchasing impulses.

Who Should Act?

Vocational education institution leaders, teachers, curators, and curriculum developers, in cooperation with the Consumer Rights Protection Centre, youth organisations, and digital literacy experts.

Sources

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Policy Brief 3

From Purchasing to Reuse: Strengthening Circular Fashion Habits Among Young People

The Issue

Sustainable clothing consumption does not simply mean buying fewer new items. An important part of the circular economy is extending the life of clothes already in use through repair, upcycling, borrowing, swapping, and purchasing second-hand items.

Although these alternatives can be both economically beneficial and more environmentally friendly, they are not always as convenient, accessible, or familiar to young people as buying new clothes. Information alone is therefore not enough — practical skills, hands-on experience, and an enabling environment are also needed to make reuse a natural part of everyday choices.

What We Learned

The results of the 30-day “No Fast Fashion” Challenge, implemented within the Erasmus+ project *Sustainable Advocates*, show that young people are willing to use different alternatives to buying new clothes when they are given the opportunity to consciously try them out in practice.

- **Borrowing was the most frequently used alternative:** During the challenge, 11 out of 15 survey respondents borrowed clothing instead of purchasing new items.
- **Second-hand shopping and swapping were also widely used:** 9 out of 15 participants bought second-hand clothing, and the same number took part in clothing or other item swaps.
- **Young people actively extended the life of clothes they already owned:** 8 out of 15 participants repaired clothing, while 6 upcycled or adapted existing garments for further use.

Participants also identified practical reuse strategies - these included reviewing their wardrobes, passing clothes on to family members, selling items on the second-hand market, borrowing, repairing, and upcycling. In some cases, participants repaired and adapted several existing garments during the challenge, extending their useful life and avoiding the need to buy new items.

National Context

In Latvia, a regulatory and practical framework for the separate collection and reuse of textiles is already in place. Since 2023, municipalities have been required to provide a separate collection system for textiles, while an extended producer responsibility system for textile products has been in operation since 2024.

However, the aim of the circular economy is not only to ensure proper textile sorting at the end of a product's life. Priority should also be given to extending the lifespan of clothing through repair, reuse, and passing garments on to other users.

This means that young people need not only knowledge about textile sorting, but also a practical understanding of the entire garment life cycle and the different ways in which clothing can be kept in circulation for as long as possible.

Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate repair, upcycling, and reuse into practical green skills education.

Vocational schools are encouraged to organise wardrobe reviews, clothing repair and upcycling workshops, clothing swaps, and other practical activities. This approach allows sustainable consumption to be learned not only in theory, but also through hands-on experience.

2. Build local cooperation networks for circular fashion activities.

Vocational schools and municipalities are encouraged to cooperate with second-hand shops, textile waste operators, sewing and repair service providers, social enterprises, and other local initiatives. This helps young people access real opportunities to repair, swap, sell, donate, or pass on clothing for reuse.

3. Strengthen the principle of “reuse before disposal”.

The learning process should clearly demonstrate the life cycle of clothing and the preferred sequence of choices: use it for longer, repair it, upcycle it, lend or swap it, sell or donate it, and only then place it in textile collection. This helps connect textile waste management with a broader understanding of the circular economy.

Who Should Act?

Vocational education institutions, teachers, and municipalities, in cooperation with textile waste operators, repair and second-hand sectors, social enterprises, and other local circular economy initiatives.

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