SUSTAINABLE
ADVOCATES

Co-funded by
the European Union

POLICY BRIEF

SWEDEN, 2026

SUSTAINABLE ADVOCATES

Encouraging Sustainable Choices
Among Young VET Learners

Sustainable Advocates

Co-funded by
the European Union

Policy Brief 1

Integrating Sustainable Fashion Consumption into Swedish VET & Green Skills Curricula

The Issue

Fast fashion overconsumption among young people directly conflicts with European climate targets and circular economy priorities. While young generations express high environmental awareness, affordability, digital advertising, and social trends frequently lead to impulse fast-fashion purchases. Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions require practical educational frameworks to bridge the gap between young learners' climate values and their daily consumer habits.

What We Learned

A total of 10 participants in Sweden aged 18 to 45 across diverse vocational and academic disciplines - including fashion design, urban planning, forensic science, economics, human-computer interaction and rural development - participated in the **30-day "No Fast Fashion" Challenge:**

- During the challenge month, **6 out of 10 Swedish participants made zero fast fashion purchases,** while others substantially reduced their typical monthly clothing intake.
- Participants reported that undertaking structured, **actionable steps helped them reframe their consumer narrative,** align purchasing decisions with their personal values, and gain confidence in resisting commercial buying triggers.
- Learners successfully collected between **2 and 27 actionable ticks from the 30-step challenge methodology,** demonstrating that experiential learning drives real behavioral changes.

National Context

In Sweden, **green skills and climate action are central priorities** overseen by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), which emphasizes integrating sustainability into upper secondary and vocational training curricula.

Concurrently, Sweden maintains **high digital commerce adoption,** with clothing and footwear remaining among the most frequently purchased online product categories.

While theoretical environmental education is present in schools, practical consumer literacy - such as understanding garment lifecycles, evaluating cost-per-wear, and navigating digital marketing pressure - **is not yet systematically embedded** into vocational learning modules.

Aligning VET green skills with everyday consumer habits **supports Sweden's national climate goals** and the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles.

Policy Recommendations

1. Embed Practical Consumer Sustainability Modules in VET Curricula.
Integrate structured learning units into VET courses covering clothing lifecycles, microplastic pollution, synthetic material impacts, and cost-per-wear formulas, utilizing the Sustainable Advocates visual infographic series as ready-to-use teaching material.

2. Implement Experiential Behavioral Challenges in Schools.
Encourage VET institutions to adopt short behavioral experiments, such as 30-day zero-spend or slow-fashion challenges, combined with pre- and post-activity self-assessments to build long-term conscious consumer habits.

3. Align Vocational Competencies with Circular Industry Needs.
Ensure that VET students in retail, business, design, and technical fields develop practical green competencies in circular business models, ethical supply chains, and garment life extension.

Who Should Act?

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), VET school leaders (Yrkeshögskolan and gymnasieskolor), curriculum developers, and VET educators, in cooperation with VET development or NEET youth work focused NGOs and regional circular economy networks.

Sources

1. **Sustainable Advocates (2026).** *30-Day "No Fast Fashion Challenge" – Results of the Final Survey in Sweden.* Internal project data, 10 respondents.

2. **Sustainable Advocates Educational Methodology (2026).** https://developvalmiera.lv/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/For-sharing_Method_The-No-Fast-Fashion-Challenge.pdf

3. **European Commission (2022).** *EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles.* https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/textiles-strategy_en

4. **United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP (2025).** *Minimizing fashion's environmental footprint.* https://www.unep.org/annualreport/2025/stories/minimizing-fashions-environmental-footprint

5. **Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket). Curriculum for Upper Secondary and Vocational Education (2025).** https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/gymnasieskolan/program-och-amnen-i-gymnasieskolan/hitta-program-och-amnen-i-gymnasieskolan-gy25

6. **Sustainable Advocates (2026).** *Infographic Series: Sustainable Fashion and Responsible Clothing Consumption.*

7. **Swedish Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket, 2026).** *Environmental Claims: Rules for Businesses.* https://www.konsumentverket.se/marknadsratt-foretag/miljopastaenden-regler-for-foretag/

SUSTAINABLE
ADVOCATES

Co-funded by the European Union

Policy Brief 2

Tackling Digital Marketing Triggers, Transparency, and Market Regulation in Fast Fashion

The Issue

Aggressive online advertising, algorithm-driven discount notifications, and social media influencers create constant psychological pressure on young consumers to buy cheap, short-lived clothing. Without clear product transparency regarding environmental footprints, synthetic plastic composition, and labor practices, young people struggle to make informed, ethical choices at the point of sale.

What We Learned

A total of 10 participants in Sweden aged 18 to 45 across diverse vocational and academic disciplines - including fashion design, urban planning, forensic science, economics, human-computer interaction and rural development - participated in the **30-day "No Fast Fashion" Challenge:**

- Challenge respondents strongly recommended **making it mandatory for retailers to display environmental impact data directly on product labels** - specifically printing the garment's carbon footprint, country of origin, and percentage of synthetic plastic fibers (e.g., polyester) using bold visual warnings similar to those on tobacco or snus packaging.
- Participants recommended introducing a standardized, universal color-coding or tagging system across retail platforms **to make sustainable garments instantly recognizable** to shoppers.
- Learners urged policymakers **to restrict major fast fashion platforms from selling unethically produced items and to enforce stricter trade rules** that curb ultra-fast fashion availability while ensuring ethical alternatives remain affordable.

National Context

E-commerce is a dominant shopping channel in Sweden, where digital marketing tactics (such as dark patterns, countdown timers, and personalized ad targeting) heavily influence youth consumption behavior. The EU Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Swedish Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket) provide legal frameworks against manipulative commercial practices. However, current retail labeling standards still fail to disclose comprehensive synthetic plastic ratios or full supply-chain carbon footprints to consumers prior to purchase.

Policy Recommendations

1. Mandate Standardized Environmental & Synthetic Material Labels.
Advocate for national and EU-level labeling regulations requiring garment pricing tags to disclose synthetic plastic content (%) and estimated carbon/water footprints in a clear, standardized format.

2. Integrate Digital Marketing Literacy into VET Programs.
Train VET learners to recognize digital dark patterns, algorithm-driven advertisement loops, and impulsive shopping triggers, equipping them with practical impulse-control strategies (e.g., app deletion, 24–48 hour wait rules, and wardrobe inventories).

3. Enforce Stricter E-Commerce Transparency & Ethical Import Standards.
Support regulatory policies that hold ultra-fast e-commerce platforms accountable to environmental and labor standards, reducing market prevalence of low-quality, disposable textiles.

Who Should Act?

The Swedish Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket), Ministry of Climate and Enterprise (Klimat- och näringslivsdepartementet), digital literacy experts, VET providers, and consumer advocacy organizations.

Sources

1. **Sustainable Advocates (2026).** *30-Day "No Fast Fashion Challenge" – Results of the Final Survey in Sweden*. Internal project data, 10 respondents.

2. **Swedish Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket, 2026).** *Misleading Website Design (Dark Patterns).* https://www.konsumentverket.se/konsumentratt/vilseledande-webbdesign/

3. **Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket, 2026).** *Extended Producer Responsibility for Textiles – Upcoming Rules.* https://www.naturvardsverket.se/vagledning-och-stod/producentansvar/producentansvar-for-textil--kommande-regler/

4. **Government Offices of Sweden (Regeringskansliet), Ministry of Climate and Enterprise (2025).** *Assignment to Implement Extended Producer Responsibility for Textiles.* https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2025/12/uppdrag-att-genomfora-producentansvaret-for-textil/

5. **European Commission (2022).** *EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles.* https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/textiles-strategy_en

6. **European Commission.** *The Digital Services Act.* https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act

7. **Sustainable Advocates (2026).** *Infographic Series: Sustainable Fashion and Responsible Clothing Consumption.*

Co-funded by
the European Union

Policy Brief 3

From Purchasing to Reuse: Scaling Repair, Upcycling, and Clothing Swaps in Sweden

The Issue

A fully circular fashion system requires extending the lifespan of garments already produced through repair, upcycling, second-hand purchasing, and community swapping. Although Sweden possesses advanced recycling infrastructure, linear purchasing habits persist because reuse and repair alternatives are not always as accessible, cheap, or convenient as ordering new fast-fashion items online.

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. When provided with structured challenge frameworks, Swedish young people actively embraced circular fashion practices.

- 8 out of 10 Swedish respondents actively **repaired existing garments** (sewing, patching, or fixing shoes) during the challenge.
- 7 out of 10 participants purchased second-hand items physically or online, while 6 out of 10 **upcycled old clothes into new garments** or accessories.
- Participants reported that organizing their closets, setting up jewelry displays, and searching for styling inspiration online (e.g., Pinterest) enabled them to **"shop their own closets"** and wear nearly every piece of clothing they owned.
- Challengers engaged in clothing swaps with family members and friends, noting that **organized youth swap events would greatly increase peer engagement** with sustainable fashion.

National Context

Sweden is a European leader in waste management and circular economy policy. Municipalities operate textile collection systems, and Sweden offers reduced Value Added Tax (VAT) rates on repair services for clothing and household textiles to encourage life extension.

Furthermore, Sweden is preparing for broader extended producer responsibility (producentansvar för textil) under European directives. However, achieving true circularity requires prioritizing repair, upcycling, and garment reuse over end-of-life recycling or disposal.

Policy Recommendations

1. Promote 'Reuse First' Infrastructure in VET Schools and Communities.
Support educational institutions and local municipalities to host regular clothing swap events, pop-up second-hand markets, and closet-audit initiatives to make garment exchange normal and accessible for youth.

2. Integrate Practical Repair & Upcycling Workshops.
Provide hands-on training in basic sewing, garment alteration, and upcycling within VET facilities and youth hubs, raising awareness of existing Swedish tax deductions for repair services.

3. Incentivize Affordable Second-Hand and Local Repair Alternatives.
Encourage local government subsidies and policy support for local thrift shops, repair cafes, and youth-led circular startups to ensure sustainable alternatives remain cheaper than fast fashion.

Who Should Act?

Swedish Municipalities (Kommuner), Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket), VET providers, second-hand social enterprises (e.g., Erikshjälpen, Myrorna), and local circular economy hubs.

Sources

1. **Sustainable Advocates (2026).** *30-Day "No Fast Fashion Challenge" – Results of the Final Survey in Sweden*. Internal project data, 10 respondents.

2. **Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket, 2026).** *Extended Producer Responsibility for Textiles – Upcoming Rules.* https://www.naturvardsverket.se/vagledning-och-stod/producentansvar/producentansvar-for-textil--kommande-regler/

3. **Government Offices of Sweden (Regeringskansliet), Ministry of Climate and Enterprise (2025).** *Assignment to Implement Extended Producer Responsibility for Textiles.* https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2025/12/uppdrag-att-genomfora-producentansvaret-for-textil/

4. **European Environment Agency (2024).** *Management of Used and Waste Textiles in Europe's Circular Economy.* https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/management-of-used-and-waste-textiles-in-europes-circular-economy

5. **European Commission (2022).** *EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles.* https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/textiles-strategy_en

6. **Sustainable Advocates (2026).** *Infographic Series: Sustainable Fashion and Responsible Clothing Consumption.*

7. **Sustainable Advocates Educational Methodology (2026).** https://developvalmiera.lv/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/For-sharing_Method_The-No-Fast-Fashion-Challenge.pdf

Co-funded by
the European Union

SUSTAINABLE ADVOCATES

Encouraging Sustainable Choices
Among Young VET Learners

Sustainable Advocates

VALMIERA
DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY

WeLearn

Sustainability
InnoCenter

Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or The State Education Development Agency (hereinafter – VIAA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority (VIAA) can be held responsible for them.
Project Number: 2025-1-LV01-KA210-VET-000355287