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Circularity, Clothing & Craft Conversations: Out of Fashion Report

FASHION DECLARES!

selvedge

indilisi
artisanal fashion



Introduction

On 11 September 2026, **Fashion Declares!** brought together expert voices and put forward a bold new agenda covering how circularity and craft can transform our fashion industry and lead to a Just Transition.

Our trailblazer speakers in sustainable fashion and political justice shared honest and sharp conversations about what real systems-change looks like, and how we get there together.

This event was hosted by Fashion Declares, alongside Selvedge Magazine, Indilisi and Conway Hall, and held as part of London Textile Month 2026, ahead of London Fashion Week.

Fashion Declares! is a grassroots movement that promotes radical thinking and action, calling for radical change in the fashion industry, amidst the climate, ecological and social crises.

This report shares the conversations that we had with expert and audience perspectives across circularity and craft.

“We know we have the solutions.

What is missing is the will and the systems change to drive them.

We must redesign the industry to operate within planetary boundaries and create a Just Transition now.”

Safia Minney, MBE, Founder of Fashion Declares, REAL CIC and Indilisi



Circularity Conversations

For circularity to deliver meaningful change, it must do more than keep products in circulation. It must actively replace demand for new production, operate at a scale commensurate with the crises and be embedded within a fairer society that gives people the time, money, access and places to repair, swap and share. This was the clear consensus among our experts in circular thinking, design and business models who joined our discussion.

The Speakers



Safia Minney MBE
(Chair) Founder,
Fashion Declares,
REAL CIC & Indilisi



Gemma Metherringham
Circular Fashion
Advocate,
The Elephant
in my Wardrobe



Tansy Hoskins
Journalist &
Author, **Latest**
Book: Charity
Shop World



Amelia Twine
Founder,
Sustainable
Fashion Week, A
Single Thread CIC



Niki de Schryver
Founder,
COSH!,
Germany

Size of the Problem

The fashion industry makes approximately 150 billion new items every year or around 10 to 20 for every person on the planet. The spread of clothing is hugely uneven.

Research by ReLondon found that the average Londoner buys 48 new items of clothing a year, in the UK where the typical wardrobe holds 120 to 140 pieces. We are, in effect, buying a whole new wardrobe every three years, and the same Londoner gets rid of 44 items a year, with 40% ending up in the bin, where they are typically incinerated.

The Hot or Cool Institute report (2022), 'Unfit, Unfair, Unfashionable: Resizing Fashion for a Fair Consumption Space', instead recommends purchasing around five new apparel items a year (per person) to align consumption levels with the 1.5°C target.

Research by Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (2019), in Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan, calls for a 75 to 95% reduction in apparel production and consumption. This is the scale of the problem the industry must address and sets the context for the circularity conversations.

Closing the Loop



Second-Hand: A Good Thing, If It's *Instead*

Safia observed that vintage and pre-loved clothing is now seen as bigger than fast fashion, and asked whether bans on destroying unsold stock might simply push surplus into second-hand shops.

Gemma started her PhD research assuming second-hand clothing was simply good. While she still thinks it is the most sustainable choice an individual can make, there is a catch. She shares, "It's the *instead* that's the really important word", contending that the second-hand market needs to displace overproduction, rather than continue to drive overconsumption.

Academic research suggests people are buying more second-hand *and* more new clothing. Resale apps have normalised buying and reselling, and the research she is doing suggests this is speeding things up, not slowing them down.

Brands, meanwhile, are starting to use resale platforms to clear unsold stock, customer returns and faulty items, so shoppers cannot be sure what is really second-hand.

Fakes are also a growing problem in the second-hand market, with people co-opting the platform's use, meaning we need to make educated guesses as to whether or not an item is actually second-hand or a genuine product.

"We've got all these billions of secondhand clothes in the world. How can that start to be a lever that actually does reduce fashion production?"

Gemma Metheringham,
The Elephant in my Wardrobe



Take-back and Repair: Does It Scale?

Asked which initiatives work, Gemma praised Toast for free repairs and a swap rail where customers can attach a note telling the story of a garment, and said initiatives work best when they fit the brand, as with Patagonia, whose customers are typically environmentally conscious.

But as an advocate for circularity, she said, the problem she keeps meeting is scale. She described photographing the take-back bin in a four-floor Marks & Spencer in Stratford, London, smaller than a household wheelie bin. Brands should take responsibility for what they make, and if they were serious, she joked, the bin would be a skip.

Niki added a sobering detail. Journalists who put trackers in clothes left in take-back bins found that nothing was done with them and they ended up in landfill. But she also offered an encouraging Belgian example.

The country's three biggest retailers kept collecting items for two or three years, held them in stock, then jointly ran a giant second-hand sale, and 70% was resold.

Waiting, then selling en masse, was the first time she had seen take-back succeed at scale. Gemma said Finisterre does something similar, holding stock until it has a meaningful drop.

“There are people who are testing circular initiatives.

But how they scale to a point where it makes a huge impact is the question.”

Gemma Metherringham,
The Elephant in my Wardrobe



Charity Shops: The First Sorting Site for the World's Fashion Waste

Drawing on her extensive research and experience working behind the scenes in charity shops, Tansy highlighted how charity shops have become the de facto waste management system for the fashion industry. Never designed to handle the relentless flow of discarded clothing, they now contend with rising volumes and falling quality as consumers offload the excesses of fast fashion.

The work of sorting, managing and absorbing this waste is largely undertaken by women, mirroring the gendered labour patterns that underpin the industry itself. "Women clearing up the mess of the world" is how she put it, and the pattern repeats overseas, where market traders in countries such as Ghana and Kenya, often women who go into debt, deal with the waste of the Global North, countries like the UK, Europe, China and America. The UK, she said, is the fourth-largest exporter of worn clothes, after China, the US and the European Union.

Big brands that create mass production are subsidising the infrastructure to process it. Tansy believes fashion cannot be fixed in a vacuum; we need a cultural shift, as well as policy. People consume so much, she argued, because it has become a way to "medicate yourself", amidst a despondent societal and political environment. Charity shops now keep hospices and homeless centres running, work which is the government's responsibility.

Tansy highlighted work she did with War on Want, in which the team calculated that the clothing coming into the EU takes up a land area the size of Britain, and 4.5 million years of human working hours every year.

Safia picked up the second figure, noting that making fewer garments, but with more hours of skilled work each, could provide dignified jobs and a slower-paced industry.

Tansy shared a line of Syrian poetry that she believes is representative of the injustices happening at a global scale: "They gave us shoes and took away the paths."



Tansy's new book, Charity Shop World, is now available to purchase.

Reaching Beyond the Usual Crowd

A recurring concern was that the same people keep turning up to changemaking spaces, including at Fashion Declares' own events. Amelia said Sustainable Fashion Week had noticed its audience was very similar: the same gender, age group and income bracket.

To broaden it, A Single Thread now runs a second event each spring, Future Citizen, for young people from as young as 11 up to around 23. It works with schools, universities and colleges, because gathering people in the same room for workshops on repair and circularity is challenging. Her conversations with young people had left her struck by how scared and hopeless many feel, unable to see a viable pathway for their actions.

Safia called for young people to sit on the boards of fashion companies and of the charities that serve the sector. She attested that including the next generation's voice is key to changemaking. Niki recognised the same problem in Amsterdam, one of the city's COSH! works within.

Instead of one sustainable fashion week, it now runs an events calendar all year round, with more than 1,000 events listed per year.

To reach Gen Z, COSH! commissioned a photo shoot with Rambler Studio, which gives creative work to young people who are homeless or struggling with their identities, and placed out-of-home advertising. It also took big swap events out of the city centre and into different neighbourhoods, bringing solutions to where people already meet.

Amelia stressed that most people are exhausted. They donate to charity shops not to help, but to clear overflowing homes, and "wealth" should be understood as time as well as money. Solutions therefore need to come from communities, not simply top down approaches. A Single Thread CIC, alongside Bath Spa University, have just launched "Restitch the Future", a four-year programme aiming to provide high street hubs that give communities a space to design local solutions, mapped to regional resources and barriers.



Data, Labels & Policy

The panel was candid that voluntary action is not enough. Niki described around 20 new pieces of legislation coming under the European Green Deal for textiles, including the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, which will require products to be more repairable and long-lasting.

She warned that a database assessing fibre life cycles from raw material to uncoloured yarn can make polyester look best and wool worst, because it ignores dyeing, sewing and wear. "We all know that's rubbish," Safia agreed.

COSH! has responded with articles and a digital wardrobe app, where users photograph their clothes and an AI stylist helps them re-wear what they own. Niki said most people wear only 20% of their wardrobes.

By logging wears, the app builds anonymised, GDPR-compliant data on 7,000 brands. On average, she said, Shein is worn three times before it stops being worn, H&M and Zara five or six, and well-made leather handbags up to 500. She hopes to use the data to lobby for rules that value longevity and repair and to link it to the EU's digital product passports, so that a repair could be stamped on a garment's record.

On labelling, Gemma wanted a food-style framework that lets shoppers choose quickly, as they do between organic, free-range and factory-farmed eggs, and noted that second-hand scores for understandability because people know it is better and often cheaper. Amelia cautioned that even with food labels, most people cannot say what "organic" means, so the answer must be as easy as possible.

Tansy raised an objection to the app: she does not believe there is such a thing as an AI stylist, and creative jobs should instead be prioritised by humans.

Safia brought the UK policy angle. Fashion Declares, Threadneedle Collaboration and Bates Wells, along with dozens of organisations, sent an open letter in October 2026, urging the Government to bring forward the abolition of the £135 de minimis customs duty relief for low-value imports and to announce its expedited removal in the Autumn Budget 2026, rather than waiting until October 2028, to curb the flow of low-cost, fast-moving imports and level the playing field for UK retailers. They also published a White Paper on the topic, "The Future of Fashion Regulation".

[Read the full letter and The Future of Fashion Regulation White Paper.](#)

14th October 2026

Dear Chancellor

Urgent request to abolish £135 De Minimis Customs Duty Exemption at Autumn Budget 2026

We, the signatories to this letter and representatives of a larger stakeholder base, write to urge the Government to bring forward the abolition of the £135 de minimis customs duty relief for low-value imports and to announce its expedited removal in the Autumn Budget 2026.

UK retailers have consistently raised concerns regarding the unfairness of the current position. Organisations including the British Retail Consortium and major UK businesses have argued that domestic retailers, which employ UK workers, pay business rates and comply with domestic regulatory obligations, should not be required to compete against importers benefiting from a complete customs duty exemption on low-value consignments.

You will be aware that the policy decision to abolish the exemption has already been taken in principle – the remaining issue is timing. Continued delay until October 2028 imposes unnecessary and growing costs on UK retailers, consumers, domestic

Craft Conversations

Craft can offer dignified livelihoods if fashion production creates the necessary reduction needed to stay within planetary boundaries, but only if makers control their prices, regulation supports small producers and consumers learn to value what they buy. The evening had already brought a number that is hard to forget: science says fashion production must be cut by between 75 and 95%.

If we make far less, how do we create a Just Transition for the roughly 60 million people who work in fashion and textile supply chains? Craft is a key way forward.

The Speakers



Safia Minney MBE
(Chair) Founder,
Fashion Declares,
REAL CIC & Indilisi



Sujaya Mahesh
Founder,
Sameeksha Studio
School of Embroidery



Polly Leonard
Founder & Editor,
Selvedge
Magazine

Why Craft & Why Now?

If production is cut, the people who lose work need decent, dignified alternatives, with human and labour rights at the centre. Craft is one of the strongest options, and Safia said the case is stronger today than when she started People Tree.

Markets need not be in the UK and EU alone. South–South trade matters, and she pointed to the slow-fashion shops of Bengaluru, and to the way shoppers who could not travel during COVID turned to high-quality, locally made products.

There is also momentum. Polly agreed that craft is trending, with everyone, it seems, stitching and repairing, and after twenty years of banging her head against a wall she was glad someone had listened.

Sujaya, asked whether cutting fast fashion would take jobs from India, said artisans would keep their work if the focus shifts to quality. They would make fewer pieces, but better ones, with less time pressure.

Stitching a Just Transition



Beyond Trends: Working Towards Independence

Polly was quick to point out what can lie beneath a trend. Most craft production at scale still happens in the Global South. A large brand arrives with a major order, local businesses grow around it, and the cluster becomes dependent. When trends shift and the brand moves on, livelihoods can be left vulnerable. Instead, she argued for craft clusters with their own market routes and diverse products that can outlast trends.

She pointed to Anou in Morocco, founded by Dan Driscoll, as an example. Previously, women rug-makers received only around 4% of a rug's sale price, with most of the value captured by middlemen. Driscoll created a pictogram-based online platform that enables women to photograph and price their own rugs, manage shipping and keep the income. The women now run the organisation independently and collectively invest 10% of earnings in community projects such as schools and healthcare.

Safia likened it to the best of the fair trade movement, where producers set prices and decide what they can supply and when.

If dependency is the risk, closeness between designers and makers is part of the answer. Polly described the National Institute of Design in India, where in the 1970s Martand Singh began sending students to live in craft clusters for six weeks. Over three decades it produced designers who know makers personally and have built partnerships with them, something she said the UK lacks.

Safia recognised the pattern from her own years working with producers. When you spend time side by side, she said, you find solutions together, and you go back to your team ready to change the critical path and the working capital so that wages can be paid on time. She called this the "kitchen side of fashion".

Sujaya added the view from the workshop. Fast fashion puts artisans under time pressure, and brand designs are often not viable to make by hand. By giving makers time and training they will produce better work. Artisans need skills development to meet what brands ask for.



Rewriting Economics

The panel kept returning to who gets paid. Safia explained that in her own pricing, labour can make up 30 to 40% of the cost of a handmade product, against perhaps 3% in a factory. A garment costs more, but if people buy five items a year instead of 48, it becomes accessible for the buyer and the value flows back to the farmer, the weaver and the embroiderer and so on.

Safia argued that pushing a price down by 30% when it leaves a maker below a living wage is a human rights violation. Her closing ask was small and concrete: a hand-weaving group in southern India told her that if every brand bought just 1% of its clothing from hand-weavers, daily earnings could rise from about US\$1.50 to close to US\$3.50.

The Danger of Fossil Fuels & Lost Skills

Polly argued that when polyester, acrylic and nylon, fossil-fuel fibres, arrived clothing prices plummeted and we lost our connection to textiles. They use enormous amounts of energy, shed microplastics when worn and washed, and have never biodegraded. She would favour a government ban, though she conceded that might be extreme, and at the very least clear labelling that says when a garment is made from petroleum.

With the fibres went the knowledge. Polly blamed high rents, the postwar appetite for cheap clothing and a lost textile literacy: "Our grandmothers would have known cashmere by how it felt."

Sujaya said online shopping removes the feel of fabric, and few people ask who made a garment, from what, or how. Her practical answer was to teach everyone to sew on a button and mend a hem, because the repair shops of earlier generations have disappeared.

Sujaya also offered a gentler explanation for why so many people choose synthetics: busy lives, little time to hand wash and money to spend. Whatever regulation arrives, she said, mindsets will have to change, and people must think long term about their health, the environment and the dignity of the people who make their clothes. Polly's own advice was to save up, buy beautiful clothes, look after them, and have a lifelong relationship with them.

When asked how *Selvage* guides readers into conversations about craft and the climate crisis, Polly said the climate crisis has little shelf appeal, so she seduces them first with beautiful images and human stories, then slips in harder subjects such as water treatment.



How Do We Know It's Fair?

One question ran through the whole evening: how can a shopper know a handmade piece really paid its maker fairly? Safia put it plainly, saying that buying something handcrafted is no guarantee.

Sujaya described the markers used in India. The GI (Geographical Indication) tag shows that a product comes from a particular region and tradition, while Silk Mark is issued through government agencies and Craft Mark is run by a not-for-profit. Organisations in Kutch, including Kala Raksha, also train artisans about wages and their rights. Safia observed that while the GI tag authenticates tradition, which stops products being passed off as craft, it does not measure pay.

Polly said she knows of no one who has yet cracked the problem entirely, and mentioned We Are Legacy, which is working on a scannable digital tag showing a garment's history but is not complete yet.

Safia raised a huge challenge. The World Fair Trade Organization's guarantee system, she said, has been told it may have to spend around US\$200,000 on external verification to qualify under extended producer responsibility.

She described organic cotton farmers in Gujarat who have given up certification as rules tightened, even as extreme heat forces them to plant tall crops among their cotton for shade. Regulation, she argued, can become a stick for beating the most marginalised producers when it should enable them.

Safia said fair trade is absolutely possible to achieve, but called for an international trading system and regulatory system that allows for craft producers to be able to afford that certification and have a robustness and transparency about it.

“Everybody has to think in the longer range, how it is going to affect the environment, how it's going to affect me, and how it's going to sustain a farmer or a weaver or an artisan.”

Sujaya Mahesh
Founder, Sameeksha Studio
School of Embroidery

Questions from the Audience

Audience Question: Should we turn off the tap with trade agreements, and bring back garment quotas?

Tansy said no: quotas and tariffs have caused chaos, and a Just Transition must protect the 60 million people who work in fashion. She still wants serious degrowth, which will likely need legislation. Safia pointed to wartime rationing and the Hot or Cool five-item figure, and said the mechanism matters, not just awareness.

The challenge remains: how can we cut production by 75 to 95% without harming workers, and ensure a Just Transition?

Audience Question: Why only target Gen Z when we could start in primary school?

All agreed. Niki described a Belgian project to put the app and class data sets into schools from age 15. Amelia said Future Citizen starts from 11. Gemma noted uniform swaps in schools, and that older generations may be more resistant to second-hand. They also agreed we need to reach older generations, just as much as younger generations.

Audience Question: Can communities work together on textile waste, for instance through asset mapping?

Tansy described a school uniform clothing bank in Accrington, in a shopping centre, with no registration or referral needed. Amelia described the high street hubs and regional mapping. Funding and the ability to replicate projects are key to success.

Audience Question: Vintage shops mark up prices. How do people access sustainable fashion without money, time or a sewing machine?

Tansy argued second-hand clothing is a community resource that should stay in the community, through free shops, swap shops and clothing libraries without profit. Amelia said hubs should address barriers locally.

We need to make sustainable fashion attractive and accessible, particularly for people on low incomes.

Audience Question: How do we reconnect people with how clothes are made?

Teach repair, rebuild textile knowledge and make provenance visible. Polly argued fossil-fuel fibres drove the disconnect, and called for clear labelling. The challenge is reaching people who shop online and have little time or don't yet see the value in connecting with their clothing.

Audience Question: How can artisans resist customers who squeeze prices?

Safia called bargaining below a living wage a rights violation, and linked it to the long devaluation of clothing.



What We're Taking Forward



Key Takeaways from our Circularity Conversations

- Make second-hand replace new purchases, and not add to them.
- Scale take-back, for instance by holding stock and selling it in large drops, and ask brands to take responsibility for what they make.
- Support charity shops and community projects, including free swap shops, clothing libraries and uniform banks, as a public resource.
- Introduce simple, trustworthy labelling and fibre assessments that reflect how clothes are really made and worn.
- Use policy, including changes to De Minimis rules, to slow the flow of ultra-fast fashion while protecting workers.
- Give young people a real role in decision-making, and start education early.
- Create the access and spaces people need to repair, swap and share.

Key Takeaways from our Craft Conversations

- Treat craft as part of the Just Transition, as a source of dignified work and not as a niche or a trend.
- Encourage brands to start with a modest, long-term commitment to handmade sourcing, such as the 1% ask.
- Support artisan-led ownership of pricing, distribution, branding and organisational management.
- Make sure certification and regulation do not price out small producers.
- Find credible ways to show that handcrafted products pay their makers fairly.
- Rebuild repair and artisanal textiles skills and knowledge, starting in schools.

FASHION DECLARES!

[Watch the Event & Conversations on YouTube.](#)

Report created by Safia Minney and Hannah Riley at [Fashion Declares](#).

Front page image credit: Photo by Tim Mitchell, "Cast-off woolen clothing is sorted again in large warehouses in Panipat, now into basic colour groups, where it's new value lies."
Part of Mitchell's '[Clothing Recycled](#)' photography series.

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