

# Sustainable Fibre Strategies



**Company: Zalando**

**Project: ECAP**

**Sector: Apparel and Textiles**

**Company size: 15,000**

## Highlights:

- Teams are now more aware of sustainable fibre choices and feel empowered to work with our suppliers to improve our fibre sourcing decisions.
- Working towards 30% BCI by end of 2019.
- The emotional connections of making more sustainable fibre choices shouldn't be underestimated.

Key facts

Ambition

Achievements  
and Learnings

Impact and  
Reflections

Case study 

# Ambition

## What was your motivation to start sourcing more sustainable fibres and, as part of that, join ECAP?

We were aware of the environmental impacts of our fibre sourcing decisions and were looking for a programme that could help us further understand those impacts and take action to address them.

At the start of this project, we were very much at the beginning of this journey and so the structured programme offered by ECAP was attractive to us. In addition, a colleague in the team had previously worked with the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan (SCAP) in the UK, so we were able to make an informed decision on the benefits of the ECAP programme from her experience.

## What are your targets and priorities in relation to more sustainable fibres?

Our first fibre footprint analysis showed that cotton was the fibre we used the most, followed by polyester and then viscose. As a result, we created our strategy to focus on these three main fibres.

We joined the Better Cotton Initiative in 2017 and pledged our support to CanopyStyle in 2018, which focuses on sustainable viscose sourcing. We are also increasing the amount of recycled polyester in our products.

## What impact are you aiming to achieve through your sustainable fibre strategy?

Overall, decrease our environmental impact across the three key measures of carbon, water and waste.

However, as a result of engagement in the programme we were able to understand how we can reduce the overall footprint of our products and address social impacts of fibre sourcing, such as supporting cotton farmers through the Better Cotton Initiative.

We also wanted to better understand the part played by our private labels in our overall Zalando carbon footprint and were able to use the ECAP footprinting tool to do this.

“Engage with the senior management team as early as possible. We needed their support to shift mindsets and change behaviour within the business. We needed to talk about sustainable fibre choices in every meeting as an agenda item.”

Beth Greenaway, Senior Manager,  
Ethical Trade & Sustainability, Zalando SE

Key facts

Ambition

Achievements  
and Learnings

Impact and  
Reflections



# Achievements and Learnings

## What are the key achievements or breakthroughs celebrated so far on your journey to source fibres more sustainably?

- Our first results back from BCI – 7% in our first year - felt like a huge achievement, especially as this was concentrated in the second half of the year. Since then we have significantly improved year on year and are working towards 30% by the end of 2019.
- Teams are now more aware of sustainable fibre choices and feel empowered to work with our suppliers to improve our fibre profile and make better decisions.

## If you were starting your sustainable fibre sourcing journey again, what would you do differently?

- Engage with the senior management team as early as possible. We needed their support to shift mindsets and change behaviour within the business. We needed to talk about sustainable fibre choices in every meeting to ensure it was a standard agenda item.
- Allow more time to plan and work out existing internal processes and connections, to understand the varied impact of the changes we wanted to make.
- Have more awareness of the commercial strategy for the business early on and how this is changing, so that our sustainability strategy and business strategy are aligned.

## Key learnings as a result of being part of the ECAP programme?

- We didn't fully appreciate the time needed to prepare and adapt internal processes, before we were able to start placing orders.
  - Initiatives such as BCI are set up so they should be cost neutral – so the business case is relatively simple. However the change process for internal systems and teams required a clear message from senior management, to communicate the business decision.
  - We also needed support from external stakeholders to educate our teams – this needed to be specific, so we sought additional workshop sessions for our procurement team to focus on *how* we were going to implement change and not just *why*.
- Sourcing recycled polyester has been a challenge, as it is still a small share of the market - we needed to source large quantities to achieve a reasonable cost. We found we needed to build better relationships with our mills in order to block buy at this tier to avoid more costly minimum orders at tier 1.
- The ability to make big impacts on our product footprint with even small amounts of change has been encouraging. As we started to use BCI we made a good reductions in our water footprint quite quickly.

Key facts

Ambition

Achievements  
and Learnings

Impact and  
Reflections



# Impact and Reflections

**Were there any surprising outcomes that you were not expecting, for example, in your wider business operations, amongst customers or within your supply chain?**

The KPIs of the programme are very environmental, but the social impacts of more sustainable fibre choices seemed to connect emotionally with a lot of people internally. This was a more effective driver for some individuals and so really drove interest in the programme. Connecting our fibre choices to wider global issues, such as using Econyl to help tackle ocean plastic waste, really helped ensure engagement internally.

**For others not yet sourcing more sustainable fibres, have you any advice for them regarding how they can get started on the topic and what steps they can take in the early days of their journey to source more sustainable fibre?**

- Really understand the business and what the business is sourcing to understand your baseline impact. Our first fibre baseline was key so we could understand the different impact areas and decide how to prioritise.
- Understand how sourcing connects to your business operations, but also to wider sustainability issues to support engagement of the business.
- Prioritising one or two key issues made the task much more manageable and we could therefore focus efforts to drive real change. The baseline helped to inform these priorities.

**What barriers from your perspective exist today in order for the textile sector to move to a more circular fibre system?**

- Understanding what materials and components are contained within a product and how it's been processed.
- Truly understanding how design decisions impact the overall footprint of the product.
- At end of life, being able to communicate to textile recyclers what is in a product so that your products can be recycled and can avoid disposal.

Zalando is looking at different solutions and has launched an app in Germany to help address the textiles circular economy challenge – 'Zalando Wardrobe'. Zalando Wardrobe encourages its users to resell their unwanted clothes to others on the platform or directly to Zalando in return for vouchers.

**What's next for you? What are you working on in 2019/20?**

We are continuing to increase our use of sustainable fibres, with BCI cotton as a primary focus. This year we are looking at how we can communicate with and educate consumers about sustainable fibres and make this a key part of our customer experience. As a result we aim to influence customer behaviour and make sustainable products more accessible.

Key facts

Ambition

Achievements  
and Learnings

Impact and  
Reflections



Project supported by LIFE funding

ECAP is €3.6 million EU LIFE funded project which aims to reduce clothing waste across Europe and embed a circular economy approach.

## **ECAP mission**

Cutting the environmental impact of clothing across the supply chain. Generating value for business through collaboration, measuring and sharing best practice

### Disclaimer

While we have tried to make sure this case study is accurate, we cannot accept responsibility or be held legally responsible for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading. This material is copyrighted. You can copy it free of charge as long as the material is accurate and not used in a misleading context. You must identify the source of the material and acknowledge our copyright.

You must not use the material to endorse or suggest we have endorsed a commercial product or service. For more details please see our terms and conditions on our website at [ecap.eu.com](http://ecap.eu.com)

Case studies were generated as a result of pilots carried out for ECAP by WRAP and the named organisations from 2016 to 2019.

---

**[ecap.eu.com](http://ecap.eu.com)    [@ecap\\_eu](https://twitter.com/ecap_eu)**