

Sustainable Fibre Strategies



Company: Groupe Etam

Project: ECAP

Sector: Apparel and Textiles

Company Size: 6306*

*2018 workforce

Highlights:

- In the first year we have increased from 0% to 47% organic cotton in our UNDIZ brand; these collections will be on sale in Winter 2019.
- In 2019, only 4% of Etam brand products included sustainable fibres, but we are on track to meet 15% in 2020. Undiz is on track to increase from 13% to 30% by 2020. And Maison 123 is on track to increase from 4% to 25% sustainable fibres by 2020.
- We are educating our employees and customers, particularly to promote a circular economy way of thinking.
- We want to build networks with our suppliers to share best practice as we have seen regional differences in the education around sustainable fibres, especially on certification.

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?

It was becoming increasingly important for us to understand the impact of the materials we used, and our impact on the environment as a business. The ECAP programme gave us the tools to assess our fibres and support to learn more about our impact.

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

We have focused our sustainable fibre strategy on our key fibres – cotton, polyester and polyamides.

By 2025, we are aiming for:

80% organic or recycled cotton

80% recycled (or bio-based) synthetic fibres

Awareness raising is a key part of our new sustainability strategy. We aim to raise awareness internally, especially for our sourcing teams; but also amongst our supply chain, particularly in China and Europe.

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

The purpose of our sustainable fibre work is to:

- Cotton – save water and reduce pesticide use. Improve working and living conditions of farm and factory workers in our supply chain.
- Polyamide and Polyester – increase our use of recycled synthetics, to remove non-renewable resources from our value chain.
- Educate our employees and customers, particularly to promote a circular economy way of thinking.



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Achievements and Learnings

Key achievements or breakthroughs celebrated so far on your journey to source fibres more sustainably?

In first year we have increased from 0% to 47% organic cotton in our Undiz collections, which will be on sale in Winter 2019.

Etam Lingerie – in 2019, only 4% of our products included sustainable fibres, but we are on track to meet at least 15% in 2020.

In-store employee training:

In summer 2019, we are rolling out training to all of our instore employees, as well as internal teams.

We started by engaging our regional directors to learn how best to engage with the regional employees.

Our training department is now developing training modules and quizzes for to educate our employees in store. This will include the 3 pillars of our *WE CARE!* strategy:

- Transparency and Traceability
- Sustainable products
- Empowering our people

Main challenges faced whilst trying to switch to more sustainable fibres?

Cost of new sustainable fibres whilst trying to maintain margins – however, as availability increases (as we have seen with organic cotton) prices do fall slightly. Recycled fibres are currently challenging around cost.

Certification has been a real learning curve for us and we need to support our suppliers to understand certification and why it is important. In Bangladesh, it has been easier as many of our suppliers already know about GOTs, as they have been under such pressure publicly. The tougher challenge is in recycled fibre certification, especially in Europe and China. We are developing best practice guidance for our suppliers and are looking at our to bring them together in a network to improve standards. The certification guidance from ECAP has really helped us here.

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

Having targets and senior support has helped us address the issues around cost. If we set a target for increasing using of recycled fibres, for example, by a certain date we have to invest to meet the target.

That we should communicate more about the challenges we have faced in sourcing from different regions, with different levels of maturity in terms of sustainable fibres and certification, especially. We are looking into means by which we can bring them together to share best practice, with our guidance. We hope this will also builds trust in our supply chain and enhance relationships.

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

Employees were already very aware of the issues around sustainable fibres and sustainability in general and have been really engaged with the programme. They have committed to change practices, which has made things much easier internally.

We were surprised at how many different systems we had at our brands and how difficult it was to extract the data we needed to understand our fibre footprint. We want to adapt our tools and processes to be able to better trace sustainable fibres through our supply chain, in order to keep up with employee engagement, but we have found this has taken more time to get in place. We are now working more as a group, with more standardised ways of working which has not only benefitted our sustainability strategy, but also more widely.

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?

- Set targets.
- Have CEO or senior management support from the outset.
- Use a programme like ECAP to really understand what you currently use and the impact of that fibre mix as a baseline.
- Communicate with internal teams to understand how they work, and what things can be changed easily; and communicate with suppliers to also find any quick wins.

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

- The need for education of designers and buyers around the life cycle impacts of their decisions, especially for them to anticipate end of life of products.
- Need for designers and buyers to be aware of the potential limitations, but also opportunities, of recycled fibres (short length) and of sustainable fibres in general.
- Cost of recycled fibres, and sustainable fibres in general. is leading to slower uptake.
- Recycling infrastructure is not where it needs to be, but brands need to work with what is currently in place to offer realistic solutions to consumers. Need innovation and significant scaling up of recycling technology.
- Alternative business models, such as repair services and rental schemes, pose challenges in understanding how these models work commercially. Our brands are exploring re-sale platforms and rental services, and we have been inspired by H&M repair service offering.
- We are working with I:CO on a pilot in 2019/2020, so that they use our post-consumer waste to make new fibres.

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

- Traceability: want to have a better view of our supply chain, past Tier 1, and extend social audit coverage. We want to be able to communicate our entire value chain with our customers in a meaningful way.
- Reach targets on sustainable fibres – developing an environmental code of conduct for our suppliers, so that they can better understand their facilities impact.
- Develop our Tech Centre in France to be a hub for sustainable development, which uses university partnerships to drive innovation. This will be available to all our brands.

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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

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