

EU flagship initiative on the garment sector

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The European Parliament adopted by 505 votes to 49, with 57 abstentions, a resolution on the EU flagship initiative on the garment sector.

Members recalled that 60 million people worldwide work in the textile and clothing sector, which creates many jobs, particularly in developing countries. However, textile manufacturers in developing countries are constantly exposed to aggressive purchasing practices by the international wholesale and retail trade, which is also due to fierce global competition. This state of affairs has led to **widespread labour rights violations**, including: poverty wages, forced labour and child labour, arbitrary dismissals, unsafe workplaces, violence against women, etc.

These practices are also detrimental to the European industry as they lead to **social dumping**.

In order to follow up on the flagship initiative which seeks to avoid disasters such as the Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013 in Bangladesh, Parliament presented a series of recommendations.

Due diligence obligations: Members noted with concern how the existing voluntary initiatives for the sustainability of the garment sector's global supply chain have fallen short of effectively addressing human rights and labour rights-related issues in the sector.

Therefore, the Commission is called upon to propose binding **legislation** on due diligence obligations for supply chains in the garment sector. This legislative proposal must be aligned with the **new OECD due diligence guidance** for responsible supply chains in the garment and footwear sector in line with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises which are importing into the European Union, the ILO resolution on decent work in supply chains and internationally agreed human rights, social and environmental standards.

This legislative proposal should include core standards, such as: (i) occupational health and safety, (ii) health standards, (iii) a living wage, (iv) freedom of association and collective bargaining, (v) the prevention of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace, (vi) the elimination of forced and child labour.

Members called for an **effective and compulsory reporting system and due diligence** for garment products entering the EU market with a view to ensure increased access to information on the conduct of enterprises.

The also recommended that further action be taken to **improve inspections and social audits** in the clothing and footwear supply chain.

Consumer information: Parliament called for consumers to be provided with clear, trustworthy information about sustainability in the garment sector, where products originate from and the extent to which workers' rights have been respected. It proposed, to this end, the development of **EU-wide labelling standards for "fair clothing"**, accessible to both multinational companies and SMEs, to assist customers in their purchasing decisions.

Trade preferences and sustainability: Members considered that sustainable development chapters of EU trade agreements should be mandatory and enforceable. They called on the Commission to introduce tariff preferences for **demonstrably proven sustainably produced textiles** in the forthcoming reform of the

GSP / GSP + rules and to promote the production of Fair Trade products through this instrument of tariff preferences.

The Commission is called upon to: (i) continue to include the ratification of core ILO standards, health and safety inspection, and freedom of association in discussions on continued preferential trade with countries linked to the global supply chain for the garment sector, and; (ii) strengthen human rights, labour and environmental conventions under the Generalised System of Preferences.